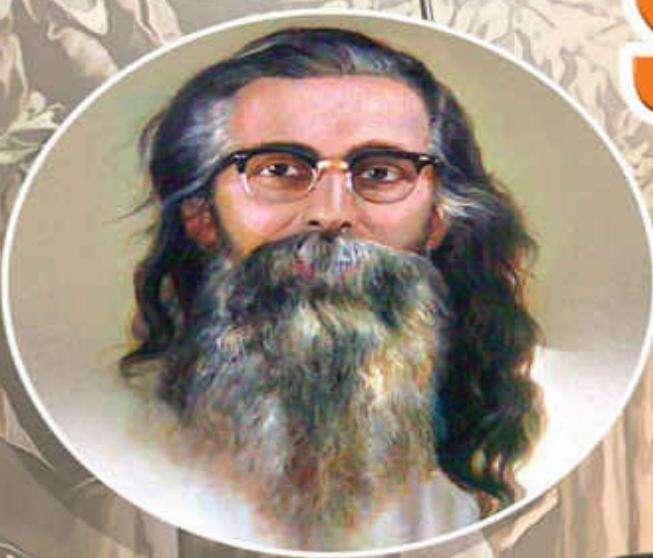


A peerless organization in the world

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh



Rameshbhai Mehta



A peerless organization in the world

Foreword

I am neither a swayamsevak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh nor its partisan. What then gives me the right, to write a foreword to this work, one may well ask.

As a matter of fact, I have been steadfast to the opinion of not associating with any political party, political organization, political forum, political movement or even with an organization, that might have anything at all to do with a political party; and by the grace of the Mother Jagadamba, my practice has at all times aligned perfectly with this opinion.

However, even as a child I watched closely, the Shakha sessions of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in progress; and their discipline, their tidy clarity of thought were, no doubt, points of attraction for me.

Then as a young boy and later, even as a grown-up, by virtue of both my profession and my wide-spread friend circle, opportunities of witnessing many a marvellous work of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, came my way.

I never had personal contact with any worker of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or with any of their pracharaks, who dedicate their life, their all to the Sangh. None whatsoever! But one day, as a matter of sheer coincidence, a book shedding light on Pujya Shri Golwalkar Guruji's thoughts, fell into my hands and that too, while on a train journey. I got reading and the Mumbai-Pune journey was over even before I knew it.

The thoughts expressed in the book were clear and precise. I happened to have read several books by political and social leaders but Pujya Guruji's thoughts had not an iota of hollow pretence or of spuriousness; and ended up appealing strongly to both my intellect and my heart.

So then, I did a quiet reading of whatever literature illustrating Pujya Golwalkar Guruji's thoughts I could lay my hands on. I also read his biography. The respect I felt for him, inspired me to study in turn, the life and

thoughts of Dr. Hedgewar.

However, the articles published in some newspapers and the speeches and writings of a few political leaders, social workers and those of certain self-proclaimed intellectuals tended to give rise to a peculiar kind of image of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the minds of many and that admittedly set me thinking.

That no human is perfect; and so no human organization can be perfect and 100% flawless either, is a fact I totally accept. But why not give appreciation where it is justifiably due? That is a valid expectation and would certainly not count as unreasonable, would it?

I do not hate any religion or any religious work either. The Mother Jagadamba has not given to me, the right to criticize any religious work. It is only the Brahmarshi, who holds this right and I am not one. Leave alone a Maharshi or a Rishi, I am not even a sadhak of a high order. I am but a simple bhakta of the Mother Jagadamba and of Dattaguru (They are both one).

I have nothing against followers of any religion. But the fact remains, that I take ardent and resplendent pride in being a follower of the Sanatan Vaidic Dharma (call it Hindu if you will).

I am more than certain that my dharma, my motherland and my Bharatiya culture are the best in the world; and even if the whole of mankind ever voted against this, I for one would stand firm by my view. Absolutely unshakeable!

The Bharatiya culture and the Bharatiya mindset much more so, is on the one hand, so lucid, so simple, so plain and on the other, so very complex, intricate and perplexing.

Conducting a ten-year study of some temple, making documentaries on the Kumbha Mela, reading books on the Bharatiya culture or studying the Bharatiya festivals, is not the way to know and understand the Bharatiya culture. What can really acquaint us with the Bharatiya culture and what it is all about, is not the erudition of a scholarly thinker with a PhD degree to his credit; but it is the Bharatiya common man in the village, found commonly

across the country, who can do it. It is he, who can really reveal the essence of the Bharatiya culture.

Standing before the Ganpati idol and singing aartis addressed to all the gods and goddesses; be it Mahakali, Mahasaraswati, be it Annapurna or be it Santoshi Mata, who suddenly shot to fame a mere 50 years ago, offering worship to all of these, individually during their respective festivals or collectively during the Navratri, solely by means of the Chandipath; accepting all - right from the 'Matsya' to Shreekrishna - equally as Mahavishnu; finding the irascible Shivashankar as acceptable as 'Bholenath' as He is in the form of the Mahadev, who, free of all ties is seated in the Himalayas and yet falls in love with the Aparna Parvati, also has two sons with Her, is what the uneducated Bharatiya too accepts without any reservations and in fact, as values, making them an integral part of his life.

In Bharat, we have a multitude of languages, a multitude of deities, of castes, of temples and 'Maths', of sects and schools of thought and yet the Bharatiya mindset is, in essence one; - homogenized so to say.

But the homogenized Bharatiya mindset has, somehow, not been able to come together in an organized manner, not really; and that is one regret, that has always tugged at my heart. But Pujya Golwalkar Guriji's thinking - clean, clear-cut and precise as it was, together with the network of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Shakhas, systematized by discipline and regulations, a network that was a result of his continual lifelong touring of Bharat, was engaged in precisely this mission, viz. that of organizing the people; and that is the reason why, I feel affinity for this work and respect for both Dr. Hedgewar and Guriji.

Shri Rameshbhai Mehta has been in contact with me since a very long time. A very loving person and pure at heart indeed! Most importantly, not the kind to indulge in hollow big talk or to make any extreme statements either! So, when I felt that the common man ought to know the true character of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the one name that occurred to me for this series to appear in the Dainik Pratyaksha, was Rameshbhai's. He accepted this assignment very lovingly indeed and saw it through, with sincere commitment and with the discipline of a swayamsevak. I appreciate and congratulate both Rameshbhai and his wife Sou. Kirtida Mehta.

I do not at all wish to suggest, that on reading this book, people ought to join the Shakha of the Sangh; and I make no claim that they will either. In a democracy, that is to say in a free human society, differences in opinion are bound to be and in fact they ought to be. There cannot be progress without opposition.

As for the thrashing that the Sangh constantly takes by way of false allegations, Rameshbhai's pen, I am sure has the capacity to ward off their possible influence on the Bharatiya common man's psyche. Also, the nation-wide work of the Sangh, speaks for itself in any case.

Balasaheb Deoras, who became Sarsanghachalak after Pujya Dr. Hedgewar and Pujya Shri Golwalkar Guruji, put a complete stop to the deification of all the subsequent Sarsanghachalaks and that precisely proved to be a big strength of the Sangh.

But all because we cherish the good and wish to protect it, we do apply that tiny little black spot to ward off the evil eye, do we not? Hence an opinion on my part: Some few swayamsevaks go around making extreme statements and attract public attention, which is what oftentimes leads to misconstructions. Considering the stupendous and sublime work it has behind it, the Sangh ought to put together a filter system, that would sift out clean, all those, who make mindless statements, be they out of good will for the Sangh's motives.

So long as the Brahmashris and the Maharshis were not under an obligation to the ruler, they could put the reins to his ruling powers when the need arose (the Ramayan era). However, no sooner did the Maharshis get a seat in the royal court and fell limp before Dhrutarashtra, than the Mahabharat happened. That was when it happened.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is a 'Brahmarshi'. That it always walk in the footsteps of Agastya and of Vasishtha, is my prayer at the Feet of Sadguru Dattatreya and of the Mother Mahishasurmardini.

Dr. Aniruddha Dhairyadhar Joshi MD Medicine, Mumbai - Nair

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Introduction – Chalta Bolta Itihas (A living history)

The Rashtriya



Swayamsevak Sangh

The 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' was founded in the year 1925. The seed that Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar sowed ninety years back, has now grown into a huge Banyan tree – A 'vatavriksha' of immense expanse and stature. So, just how many branches and how many leaves this vast 'Vatavriksha' might have, is not in the least easy to keep count of. The fact remains all the same, that this organization stands erect – tall and competent, its roots embedded very deep in the Bharatiya mind and mindset; and is developing at the pace and on the lines of the 'Vatavriksha' – an expansive Banyan tree indeed. Not limiting itself to this country, the Sangh is active in every such country, that the Bharatiya finds himself in. The 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' is in fact, not merely an organization, it has become a tradition, a tradition that bonds firm, the Bharatiya living abroad, with his motherland, with his culture.

There are ever so many, who pledge allegiance to the ideology of the Sangh with its intense and ardent patriotism,



its fervent faith and commitment to the dharma and its advocacy of the original Bharatiya culture and values. Moreover, the organizational skill of the Sangh, its style of work as much as its mission to rise and rush to the need of the nation ranging from times of foreign invasion to those of natural disaster all remain by far, matchless. It was only a few weeks ago, at the time of the earthquake in Nepal that many could experience for themselves, this dedication to the cause. Yet there were others, not quite aware of the Sangh and its mission, who were taken aback at the helping hand that the swayamsevaks of the Sangh extended to the victims of this earthquake, because what they had heard and read about the Sangh, did not quite match

with what they saw. The image that they had been carrying of the Sangh too was altogether different.

The reason why this happens is that just like there are plenty in the country, who have firm faith in the Sangh and are associated with it, there happen to be others, who look at it with suspicion. As a matter of fact, the bearing and stance of those, who stand in vehement opposition to the Sangh, are invariably very aggressive. People, who do not align with the thought, the philosophy of the Sangh are in fact avid about a vociferous expression of their disagreement. That is how it has been and that is how it is even today. But for the Sangh, all of this does not matter and makes no difference at all. It is very rare that the Sangh replies to criticism coming its way. Fully committed and faithful to its thought and its mission, the Sangh keeps journeying on or alternatively allows its work to speak for itself and take care of the reply to the anti propaganda. This again, may we know, is part of the tradition of the Sangh.

The reason why the Sangh is not in the least interested in promoting and propagating its work or talking about it, is also the reason why it is not interested in wasting time answering its opponents. To quote those, who have profound trust in the Sangh, "all that is penned against the Sangh is nothing but 'comedy' and has nothing to do with the truth!" The swayamsevak, who, harbouring this sort of an attitude to criticism, keeps walking his path, confident and undaunted, has come to be the distinctive identity of the Sangh. Besides, those, who have made firm faith in the ideology and in the tradition of the Sangh, an inseparable part of life, can never be deterred by criticism against the Sangh – that, one would never get to see.

However the two streams of thought do admittedly end up surprising the common man: Through decades the Bharatiya common man has been witnessing on the one hand, a huge multitude associating with the Sangh and on the other, many people, who launch vehement attacks and dish out nasty flak against the Sangh's ideology. Though the Sangh has no interest in the country's politics, two of its Swayamsevaks have adorned the post of Prime Minister of this country. 'It was the Sangh that gave direction and purpose to their life which was why they could achieve the highest position, asserted with pride, both Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Shri Narendra Modi, both of

whom, though from ordinary families, have attained the honour of becoming the Prime Minister of the country. But then the objection and the opposition directed towards the Sangh can be traced as much to a perception tainted by prejudice as to a misconception. There have been so many instances of people, who, despite having been staunch opponents, express respect for the Sangh once the misapprehension clears.

And yet, for all the serious allegations and the extreme resistance that the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh', the 'RSS' has been subjected to, it wears at one and the same time, an aura of awe and that of doubt; and therefore also one of mystery, an aura that quite defies verbal description. The media that beam breaking news at every passing minute, only make the aura more dense and more mystifying. Moreover, the ideological differences between those, who align with the Sangh and those, who do not, are so very sharp that the situation has only given rise to new misconceptions as to what the Sangh is about, its objectives, its policies and about the path that the Sangh adopts to fulfil its aims. Thus, in the light of these circumstances, the generation of today wonders why the Sangh should hold back from presenting its side or why it does not much care to do so. Therefore, the number of those associating with the Sangh is increasing - yes it is, but then so is the number that is left wondering why the Sangh does not reply or respond to the anti propaganda, in the present political and social circumstances.

Hence the need to understand the Sangh! It would be advisable to understand objectively, the ideology of the Sangh, its contribution right from its inception until today and of course its significance. To accept a certain ideology or to reject it, is indeed a matter of individual choice; but even the wise do not decline the idea of being open to understanding a given concept before opting to accept or even reject it. And what better means to do so than a dialogue? This very dialogue about the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is the series that Dainik Pratyaksha begins today – 'Chalta Bolta Itihaas' (A living history).

Rameshbhai Mehta, who has been associated with the Sangh since his childhood and who has dedicated his life to the Sangh, will be presenting its history before us. Born in the pre-independence era in a wealthy family, Rameshbhai was still a child when he first stepped into the 'Shakha' of the

Sangha. Then on, at every step in life, he was guided by the Sangha and so it is even today. At 73, Rameshbhai exudes a zeal that would put youth half his age to shame. A student of history, he has a special perspective of history and that becomes so very apparent in the course of talks with him. As a student, he had asked why the uprising of 1857 was called a 'rebellion' and this one instance should suffice to illustrate the above point.

Imbibing the thoughts and beliefs of the Sangh in his own life, Rameshbhai has all his life kept inspiring others as well. Very studious and well-read, learned and well-informed, Rameshbhai has given himself to the mission of the Sangh, not just in the country but outside it too. Striving to keep alive the bond of the Bharatiya with his motherland, is an important mission he engages in even today with ceaseless enthusiasm. 'May the Bharatiya go to bed in any country on the face of the earth, at his first waking moment, he is in Bharat!' – and that is Rameshbhai's experience and conviction. To convey to their motherland, the earnest and heartfelt concern of the Bharatiya living abroad, and to convey to the needy, the help that the Bharatiya abroad sends back home during times of calamity, is another task that Rameshbhai has been fulfilling very sincerely.

Rameshbhai has made it a habit, a regular practice of discharging remarkably well any and every responsibility that the Sangh entrusts him with. The Sanghachalak of Parlanagar, the President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Mumbai city, the co-ordinator of the 'Vishwa Vibhag' (overseas wing) of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad are some of the important posts that he has adorned. Currently, Rameshbhai works as the national President of the 'Sewa International', an organization inspired by and working under the aegis of the Sangh and operating in 18 countries including ours.

Rameshbhai is a lover of art. He plays the accordion and has even worked as a music director. He entered his family business and exhibited enterprise by lifting the business to new heights. His love of music, films and theatre prompted him to start his own production house. A conversation with him easily yields so many references to Marathi theatre. He has even acted in Gujarati plays. Though engaged in all these activities, never for a moment did he lose sight of his commitment to the mission of the Sangh; in fact the moment he sensed the possibility that some of these activities could stand in

the way of his purpose and mission, he turned away from them.

And so Rameshbhai, who strives for the sake of the Sangh and by means of the Sangh, for the sake of the society, the culture and the progress and welfare of his dharma, is himself, 'A Living History', not only of the Rashtriya Sangh but also of many events of consequence in the post independence era. We are going to be in conversation with History itself – live for us to listen to and this exactly, is bound to be our experience for sure!

Editor – Jitendra Rangankar The Daily 'Pratyaksha', 09 June 2015

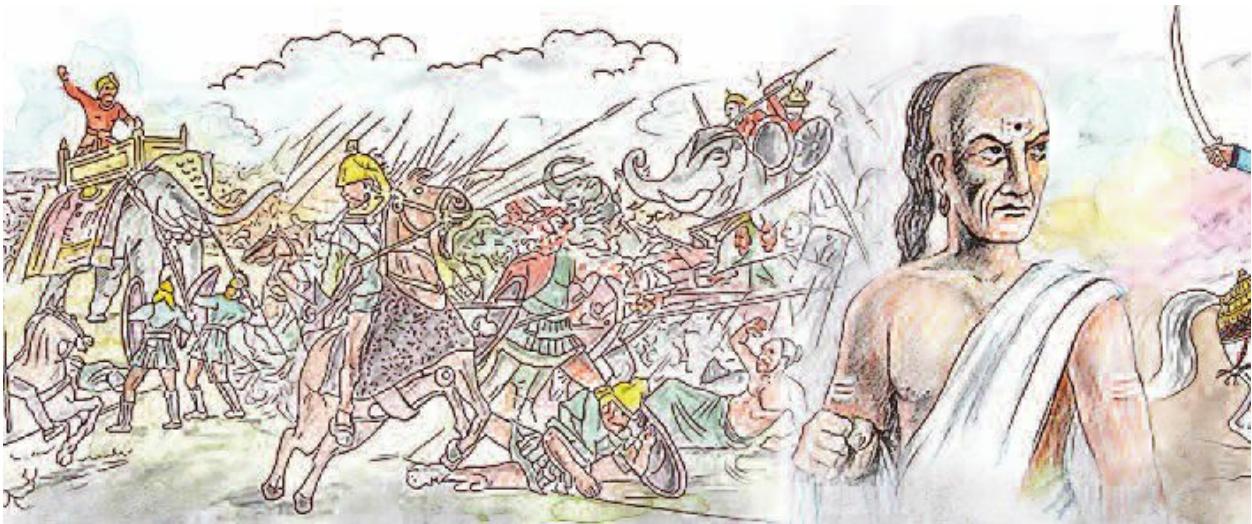


Our essence, our distinction

Before we go on to the history of the Sangh, what we must understand is, why an ancient and cultured nation like Bharat should feel the need for the institution of the Sangh at all! So, to begin with, we will have to acquaint ourselves with the actual, the true history of Bharat. The answer to the question why a nation with a Hindu majority in its population would even require this kind of an organization, could well be an exhaustive and elaborate one but ought to be understood all the same, I feel.

The world is well aware of the ancient tradition, the culture and the wealth of our civilization. Bharat has given so much to the world and yet has the potential to give so much more, even now. It is in this country that Prabhu Shreeram took birth, it is here that Bhagwan Shreekrishna took birth; Bhagwan Buddha and Bhagwan Mahavir too were born in this land. This land of great thinkers like Chanakya and valiant warriors like Chandragupta Maurya took many a foreign invasion but braved them all, giving them a more than befitting reply. Moreover, the invasions were not all military; there were cultural invasions too but the children of this soil proved adequate, in fact more than a match for them.

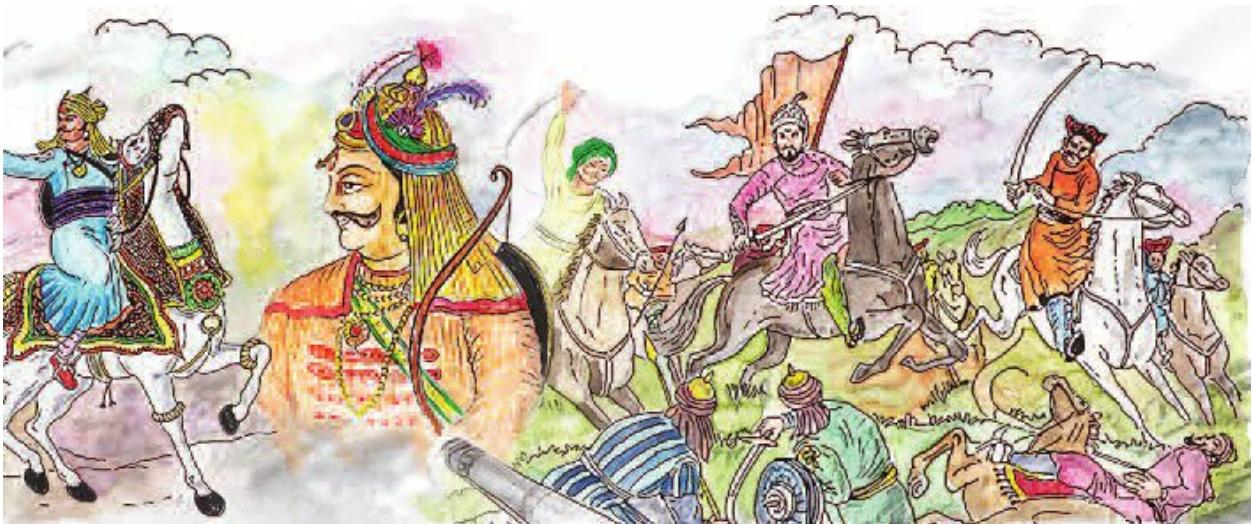
Alexander, the invincible warrior, who nursed a burning aspiration to conquer the world, had to suffer defeat at the hands of King Pauras, who ruled a modest kingdom. What we read in history books however, is that it was King Pauras, who was beaten and then impressed by his unflinching self-respect, Alexander treated him with honour. Actually speaking, this happens to be the projection of foreign historians and downright false at that. In fact, the kind of fight that the army of King Pauras put up, terrified Alexander and his army. If that was the kind of resistance he had to put up with from a kingdom as tiny as that of King Pauras, conquering the mighty kingdoms of Bharat, was going to prove an impossibility indeed, so it dawned on Alexander. That was precisely why he returned but under the pretext that his troops were yearning to go back home.



In the times that followed, Seleucus, Alexander's infantry general, had to suffer defeat at the hands of Emperor Chandragupta, to whom he later gave his daughter in marriage. Making use of his immense wisdom and sagacity Chanakya eventually founded a powerful nation.

A long period thereafter saw no foreign invasion or alternatively, shall we say that the Bharatiyas successfully thwarted any attempts made by foreign aggressors. The invasions by the Shak, the Huns and those by the Kushans were some such. Not only did these invasions receive befitting replies in military terms but the aggressors too were taught an astounding lesson by the Bharatiya culture. Impressed by the culture, the lifestyle here, it was this very country that these aggressors decided to settle down and blend their lives with.

So, any of us could be a Shak, a Hun or perhaps a Kushan. But this identity or distinction as such, has dissolved, we are all now but Bharatiyas! However, the first foreign invasion suffered by the province of Sind is illustrative of the extent of ruin and devastation foreign invasions can leave behind, should they succeed. Muhammed Bin Qasim attacked Raja Dahir, who despite his dazzling valour, died in the war as



a result of which there was absolute mayhem in his kingdom. Apart from the horrific plunder that followed, both the princesses of Raja Dahir were carried off to Turkey as part of the booty.

Distraught and ravaged, the queen of Raja Dahir travelled all the way to Mewar from Sind to seek justice. It was in Mewar that she heard of Bappa Rawal, who, though a great warrior of unusual bravery, had at the time turned an ascetic. She narrated her saga to him; and abandoning his austerities, this great warrior reached out for his weapons. He urged the society to come together to fight the foreign invasion; and himself, stood as the leader of this united society.

What followed, are pages in history that most of us are totally in the dark about because the writings on these, are usually not told to us. The fact is however, that the lesson that Bappa Rawal taught the foreign invaders, deterred them to the extent that they did not dare to turn their gaze to Bharat for a good three hundred years, a lesson that generations down the line could not wipe from their memory. After all, Bappa Rawal had chased these invaders right up to Turkey and so these episodes in history, every Bharatiya just has to be aware of.

So, such were the sons of this soil, brave and valiant like Bappa Rawal. Then there were Maharana Sanga, Maharana Pratap, Maharana Rajsingh too and so many more. We have Shivaji Maharaj, whose life has inspired generation after generation and will continue to do so. We have the brave Bajirao

Peshwa, who was victorious in every war he fought. In the Bharatvarsha the lion-hearted have taken birth in every field, have served the nation and enhanced its glory. There was a time, when the saffron flag fluttering proud, high in the mountain ranges of the Hindukush stood testimony to the fact; and proclaimed, that it was here, that the greatest, the most eminent of civilizations flourished. It was for this reason, that students from the world over came here to pursue studies. The civilization, the culture and the values here left them amazed.

So, if we glance over the history of the world, what is it that we see? In many different eras there came to be powerful and mighty giants of nations, that flourished while achieving enormous expansions of their empires. However, once conquered by invaders, a few years were enough to wipe out their identity. All that remains of these giant states, is their reference in the pages of history. Our history sheds light on these giant states. But Bharat has been a different case altogether. Yes, it took invasions and ever so many! the Bharatiya culture took horrendous assaults but retained intact, its identity. No ordinary thing that, may we know. We do not value this matter, which is as a matter of fact worthy great importance. We ought to be aware of and understand our cultural heritage and strength.

Taking into account the records that history has made of empires that were effaced in the course of time, the fact that Bharat retained and maintained its identity, is bound to astonish one and all. Its matchless cultural endurance and constancy notwithstanding, time did keep dishing out ever new challenges for Bharat to face.....



The history of invasions

Time, in its course, kept presenting ever new challenges that Bharat had to face – a distinct possibility that a nation blessed with a prolonged life, must invariably reckon with, from time to time. That is how history moves on. The Shunga dynasty ruled after the Maurya regime which in turn was followed by the reign of the Gupta dynasty. This is believed to be the Golden Era of Bharat's own history. However, it did not mean that all was well or that the times were devoid of foreign invasion. Not at all! On the contrary it was in this very period that foreign aggressors went all out to seize this country. Gangs of the Huns launched frequent attacks on Bharat. The last of the Gupta rulers was Skandagupta and do you know how he got the name? This emperor had to keep fighting foreign invaders and could hardly get any rest. So, whenever there was respite he rested his head on his own shoulder and napped. That was why he came to be known as Skandagupta (skanda=shoulder).

Regimes of different rulers were spread over different regions of the country and each of these had established an ideal lifestyle per say. Southern India too saw the rule of certain competent and powerful rulers. The Cholas, the Chalukyas and the Pandiyas had spread the Bharatiya culture right up to what today are South-east Asian countries. They gave to their subjects a benevolent rule. Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand as we know them now, bear a clear mark of the Bharatiya culture – indelible even today. In Indonesia as a matter of fact, the Hindu values of life are not rare at all. In Bali, the stories from the Ramayan and the Mahabharat are staged in theatres even today leaving amazed, tourists the world over.

The coronation of the King of Malaysia is done in keeping with the Vedic rites. The government of Malaysia grants special status to the resident Malay Hindus. It is in Cambodia (Kambuj) that the world's largest temple of Bhagwan Vishnu stands. When Vietnam, Cambodia's neighbour, was at war with the United States, the Vietnamese troops for their safety, took refuge in the premises of this very Vishnu temple as there, they were not attacked. The extent to which the Bharatiya culture is ingrained, deep-rooted in the South-

East Asian countries, is just astounding!



The Vishnu Temple at Cambodia

Three or four years ago, I was in Thailand. While roaming the city of Bangkok, I noticed the idols of the Devimata (Mother Goddess) and of Ganeshji on display in several shops. In one of these shops, I even heard a Hindi Bhajan. Taken aback, I asked the shopkeeper, "Do you follow the language?" He replied, "No, not the language. I follow the sentiment." In Indonesia and in Bali especially, the people receive the Bharatiya with much love. "Please do not forget us" they urge. "We are yours, one of you. The Bharatiyas are our elder brothers." And this, they on their part, do not forget to say.

Indonesia and Malaysia share the same language which is known as 'Bahasa Indonesia' (Bhasha Indonesia) and 'Bahasa Malaysia' (Bhasha Malaysia) in the respective countries. The term 'bhasha' is not translated, it has been handed down as it is. Besides, this language has many Sanskrit words. In Indonesia, they welcome with 'Om swasti astu' and 'Om shanti om' are the good wishes for farewell. The Indonesian Airline is called 'Garuda Indonesia'. I recall seeing a huge hoarding with a picture of Shreekrishna telling the Geeta to Arjun, as I stepped out of the airport at Bali, the capital. Also, the 'chapha' (champa) flower is of special importance to the Indonesian culture and is considered very auspicious.

Dr. Oka Punyatmadja is a prominent leader of the Hindus in Indonesia. It was owing to the impact of his lectures, that many returned to the dharma, they originally belonged to. The name of the last king of Malaysia was 'Parameswara'. I have met with the saintly and the revered in Japan and in China. 'It was way back two thousand years ago, that the Bharatiyas triumphed over us – not politically but spiritually speaking" they admit very affectionately. We ought to make note of the spread of the Hindu culture in this part of the world; for it only makes us aware of how, braving challenges that came its way at different periods in time, our culture progressed, prospered and spread and that too so extensively.

So, coming back to the rulers, the last of the Hindu rulers of Delhi was 'Prithviraj Chauhan'.

Prithviraj Chauhan was extremely courageous, valiant and at the same time one, who adhered firm to the warrior's code of ethics. Mohammed Ghori attacked him several times and faced repeated defeat at his hands. However, every time that Ghori surrendered and pleaded for mercy, Prithviraj Chauhan granted it to him. But Ghori kept waging attacks. On one occasion Ghori did succeed in beating Prithviraj Chauhan but by deceit. Yet Prithviraj Chauhan's arrow took flight precisely in the



Prithviraj Chauhan

direction of Ghori's voice. Then tracking down and locating Ghori, the arrow

hit and killed him. Aggressors of foreign descent kept invading Bharat as much as those of foreign religion did. These invaders effaced the identity of the monuments built by the Hindu kings and attached their own names to them. The Qutub Minar, originally called the Vishalstambha, was built by Prithviraj Chauhan's maternal grand-father, Maharaja Vishaldev. In those days, every ruler got a special monument or edifice built and then named after himself. The idea was to leave behind one's special mark for posterity. How unfortunate, that today it is by the name



'Qutub Minar', that we know and recognize this monument! We can clearly see even today, the Sanskrit shlokas etched on this monument though!

That an invader like Ghori was able to defeat an unusually brave and valiant warrior like Prithviraj Chauhan, can be traced back to the support that other local rulers gave to Ghori. Certain kings, possessed by ambition and by vested selfish motives, joined hands with foreigners more often than with their own lot; and extending support to the foreign invaders, ended up betraying and harming their own country. Aggressors of foreign descent and those of foreign religion fought each other also on the Bharatiya soil. In this conflict for power it was our land, this land of Bharat that was left

bloodsoaked. In these wars, the foreign invaders obviously did not pause to give a thought to the religion of their enemy before striking him with a weapon. For them, all the Bharatiyas were the same. All massacres were mindless and neither religion nor any other consideration was entertained at the time of these killings.

Taimur Lang launched an attack on Delhi and stayed there for all of six days. In these six days he butchered two hundred thousand people. He could not stay in Delhi any longer than that. The stench of the piles of dead bodies was unbearable for Taimur. When he left from here, he took with him two hundred thousand women as slaves. This is but a horrific instance of the dire consequences a country has to face, if foreign invaders become victors.

Invasions by aggressors of foreign descent and of foreign religion continued on this country. The country did fight back, did resist them from time to time. But then the Bharatiya folk were not organized and so despite displaying extra-ordinary bravery and valour, they failed to salvage fully, their land and society.



History – A lesson to learn



Aggressors of foreign descent and those of foreign religion fought one another in several battles with the purpose of establishing sway over Bharat. In this conflict for power, it was the land of Bharat that kept bathing in blood and for no good reason at that. Had we, in such times, put up a united and organized front to counter these forces, the foreign invaders would never have been able to establish their supremacy over this country. But there have of course been instances where our rulers did come together to fight foreign invaders and could successfully foil their schemes and wiles. Mohammed Gazni's invasion of Somnath was one such.

That Gazni completely plundered the place and met with no resistance, is the prevalent belief. But that is not the truth. Gazni did attack and butcher and plunder, yes he did! But then Rana Bhimdev, who ruled Gujrat at the time, appealed to all the kings of the country saying Somnath did not belong to Gujrat alone, Somnath belonged to the whole of Bharatvarsha. Why not all come together to protect this temple? Rana Bhimdev's earnest call received a positive response from different regions of Bharatvarsha and many kings despatched their troops as part of the mission to protect the Somnath temple.

But then Gazni struck before the troops could reach Somnath and that was the reason a timely counter attack could not be executed. However, the fact remains that though he plundered and massacred, it was by no means a walkover for Gazni. His army had to combat powerful attacks and even had to suffer considerable loss of lives. Never again did Gazni muster the courage to wage an invasion. Much before the attack at Somnath, he had met with strong resistance and his army was successfully routed with Gazni even having to flee the battlefield, which fact is not widely known though. As a matter of fact, the attack in which Gazni is believed to have ended victorious had also ended in Gazni fleeing from the troops of the rulers of Bharatvarsha.

However, granting pardon and impunity to the fleeing enemy was an ethical norm of the Bharatiya warriors' culture. To chase the fleeing enemy and to ensure that he bite the dust was not one of their values. For our rulers, it more than sufficed that the enemy fled, had had to beat the retreat and his army routed. For them, that equalled an accomplished mission. Moreover, that they allowed the enemy to escape alive, had another reason. Our rulers had enormous confidence in their own valour but the ethical norm that they observed proved to be a drawback for them in the long run and one that cost us dear in any case.

The enemy, who fled but managed to escape alive would at any rate go home with a sound estimation of the capacities of the Bharatiya forces. He would be wiser than before in chalking out a strategy for the next attack. In fact this was precisely how the foreign invaders became aware of the vulnerabilities of the Bharatiyas. The enemy's subsequent attacks would always end up better equipped than the earlier ones that they had had to lose.

'Foreign invaders marched into Bharat, waged war and defeating the local

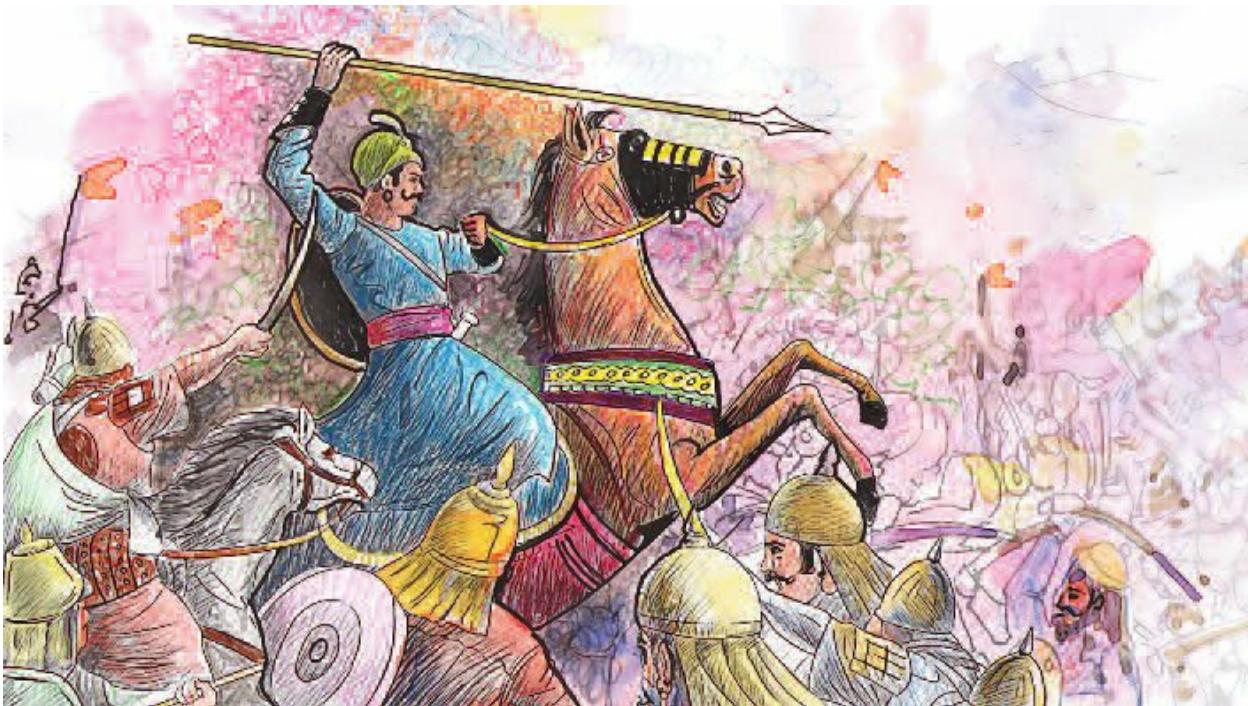
kings, established their sway', is what we have come to believe. But details about the resistance that these invaders had to face and about their eventual defeat have not really come to light or are atleast not as widely known as they ought to be, let us say. Babar's invasion of 1526 is a very pointed example of this situation. At the time Babar launched this attack, Delhi was ruled by Ibrahim Lodi. The war between Babar and Ibrahim Lodi is known to history, as the first war of Panipat. May we note that both Lodi and Babar were foreign aggressors and were fighting for the throne of Delhi.

This war ended in Babar's victory and heralded the beginning of the Moghul era, so we have been told. However, fact is, Babar had faced defeat at the hands of the rulers of Bharatvarsha and that too within a year of his victory against Lodi.

This defeat Babar owed to Maharana Sanga of Mewad. Babar had to literally take flee in this war of 1527. The rulers of Bharatvarsha were not inclined to chase the enemy and finish him; that was just not part of their ethical code. So Babar escaped alive and landed an opportunity to build up his military strength, an opportunity he made very good use of. As for Maharana Sanga, he brought together other kings but at a huge cost in terms of time and of physical and mental effort.

The 80 year old Maharana Sanga was a great warrior. It was said that he sported as many scars of wounds on his body as his age in years. He had lost an eye in war and yet this brave warrior displayed unmatched valour in every war he fought. But the dispute over 'who would sit on the throne of Delhi' should Babar be defeated, actually ended up turning the tables in Babar's favour. A victory that was in fact certain and that the Bharatiya rulers had almost bagged, had to slip from their hands. Besides, the defection at the eleventh hour, of a few self-serving kings, who left taking their army with them, caused a rift in the side and spelt defeat for Maharana Sanga, who died fighting on the battlefield – he died the death of a gallant hero.

Maharana Sanga



So then, to whom ought we to attribute Babar's victory? Of course to the selfish kings, who favoured him by withdrawing from war at the last moment! These were some, who, possessed by personal ambition, used the circumstances of foreign invasions as a means to their own selfish ends. For them, their individual selfish interest was much larger and much more compelling than the interest of the nation. In actual fact, setting aside differences and putting up an organized front in the face of an invading foreign force, ought to be the only priority, for only then would the nation survive and only if the nation survives would individual ambition have any meaning at all. Sadly the petty minds did not harbour this large thought. But then great souls, who loved and revered the nation also took birth in this land and it is thanks to the inspiration they lent, that our nation stands towering in illustrious and proud glory despite the assaults the invaders dealt it.

Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar



Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, had reflected deeply over the history of the country. Our country is blessed with a great heritage of valour. In this land of Shreeram and Shreekrishna were born great men like Chanakya-Chandragupta, Bappa Rawal, Maharana Pratap, Shivaji Maharaj and Guru Govindsinh. So then why despite this did the nation have to suffer unfortunate circumstances? Dr. Hedgewar after much profound contemplation on the above, inferred, that **this country did not learn a lesson from its history. Rectifying in the present, the blunders of the past, is what it means to learn a lesson from history; and that is the only way of ensuring a bright future for the country**, he thought. Also, it was as a result of these deliberations that Dr. Hedgewar felt the need of an organization like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh that could unite the society. The Sangh, founded in 1925, was a result of this thought. It was necessary to rouse the memories of the glorious history of this country, that foreign rulers had buried in slumber. It was necessary to be alert and prudent so as to not repeat the mistakes we made. **Culturally**

speaking Bharat has always been one nation, although socially and politically speaking, Bharat did not quite come together per say. It was in this lack of unity that lay the secret of the success of foreign invasions. Our valour though unmatched, proved inadequate to protect us from the brunt of those foreign invasions, all because we lacked unity and integrity and this one lesson that history has taught us, we just cannot afford to forget.



The history of retaliations

Babur pioneered the regime of the Mughal dynasty in this country. During the times of his successors, viz. Humayun and then Akbar, the Mughal rule attained stability and even spread out its limbs. Akbar was crowned emperor at a very young age. He was very well aware of the bravery of the Rajputs and he devised a shrewd plan to use them as much for the stability of his regime as for his imperialistic ambitions. He even made a remarkable success of the plan. One by one he won over the kings of Rajasthan, to the sole exception of the king of Mewad, who was able to see through Akbar's scheme. The King of Mewad kept opposing Akbar's moves. Maharana Udaysinghji put up a solid resistance against Akbar. Later on, his son, Maharana Pratap continued the fight and all through his life he was in conflict with Akbar.

The brave Rajputs failed to see through the strategy of Akbar and taken in by his assurances, they reposed trust in him. Akbar had successfully created a tolerant and large-hearted image of himself and resorting to all sorts of clever tricks, he managed to impress this image on them, convincing them of it. As a matter of fact, that is exactly the image that the country has of Akbar even today. Those, who have been able to understand Akbar's political strategies, laud nonetheless, his political astuteness more than his image. It was by virtue of this shrewd judgement that he succeeded in winning over to his side, all the Rajput kings except for Maharana Pratap. This king of Mewad however, saw through Akbar's political game and fought him. Maharana Pratap in fact spent his entire life fighting against Akbar.

The pages of history inscribe volumes on Akbar's life and we get to read a lesson or so, on Maharana Pratap in the text books of history. But nowhere do records in history tell us in so many words, why there was friction between Maharana Pratap and Akbar. That is a point we have to understand for ourselves. The fact is, unable to bear the fervent patriotism of Maharana Pratap, Akbar staked all his might to wipe out Maharana Pratap's kingdom and in the process even stooped very low. And yet he could not defeat Maharana Pratap. He waged war several times but persistent defeat was what

Akbar ended up with. The 'Bhilla', tribals of this region were also patriots and they supported Maharana Pratap willingly putting their lives on the line. As a matter of fact many patriotic Muslims of Mewad fought for Maharana Pratap and against Akbar. They too shed their blood in these battles and that, we are bound to acknowledge and share.

We may also note that directing his younger brother Shakti Sinh to seek refuge and service of Akbar, Maharana Pratap had exhibited tact and diplomacy that had scored over Akbar's strategy. History tells us that it was overcome by jealousy for Maharana Pratap, who succeeded to the throne, that Shakti Sinh joined hands with Akbar. In reality although, all of this was Maharana Pratap's own design, which fact history has kept no record of. But Maharana Pratap was always tipped off ahead of time about Akbar's plans and so ended up one step ahead of him in battles. Therefore despite its immense wealth and resources, the Mughal army could never defeat Maharana Pratap. The battle of Haldighati was Akbar's lastditch attempt at subjugating Maharana Pratap.

Nobody ever takes into account the impact of the battle of 'Haldighati'. It was after this event, that Akbar was convinced that he could not defeat Maharana Pratap on the battlefield. Having had to beat the retreat after the thumping defeat in this battle, Akbar never so much as cast his eyes on Mewad. Given that battles hinge on a whole range of factors, the fact remains that warriors backed solidly by morality and by purity of purpose, can never be beaten in wars, however powerful the enemy! A country as small as Vietnam compelled a huge super power like the United States to bite the dust; and it is but to the ardent patriotism of the Vietnamese people, that this victory ought to be attributed. Maharana Pratap and his army displayed stupendous valour in the battle of Haldighati and for that, they remain unsurpassed in history. But then as one contemplates over this battle, it is this one thought that persistently crops up in the mind:

If only the other Rajput kings had stood by Maharana Pratap.....
.....the history of Bharat would have had quite another story to tell.
But these kings really did not have the kind of foresight needed in the circumstances.
'Bada'uni', a historian in Akbar's court, recorded events. All he did was sing

Akbar's praises. Even he was unable to give an account of the Haldighati battle in Akbar's favour! Need we say more?

After Akbar, the Mughal Sultanate passed over to Jahangir. It was in this period that Maharana Amarsinh, the son of Maharana Pratap, conquered Chittor and fulfilled his father's dream. However the failures of Jahangir's father had taught him many a lesson and so he exhibited the wisdom of avoiding a conflict with Maharana Amarsinh. Shahjahan, who succeeded Jahangir following the same line of thought, chose not to ruffle the feathers of the kingdom of Mewad. Then it was Aurangzeb, who sat on the throne, imprisoning his father Shahjahan and ruthlessly killing all his brothers. His was a long regime. Under his rule, the face of the Mughal Sultanate that the world saw, was exceedingly cruel and one blinded by religious fanaticism. Aurangzeb was responsible for the extensive conversion of Hindus and the demolition of several temples. During his regime, the Hindus even had to pay the Jizya tax.

That Shivaji Maharaj and Guru Govingsinh fought Aurangzeb in battles, is a well-known fact and need not be repeated. But do we happen to know that Maharana Rajsingh, the great grandson of Maharana Amarsinh defeated Aurangzeb? History makes no mention of this event at all! Maharana Rajsingh had not known defeat in any of the battles he fought. He locked in on Aurangzeb in the Aravali hills and left him no escape. Aurangzeb was forced to make peace to save himself. Surrendering and acknowledging defeat, he had to assure on pledge that he would never attack Mewar. Only then was he let free.

The history that we are taught makes no reference to such instances. So the historical accounts that we are usually presented invariably depict the Bharatiyas going down on their knees, bowing before foreign aggressors. However, that is most certainly not true. The fact, that the Bharatiya culture has survived not only the many invasions of aggressors over a thousand years, but also the times during which these aggressors actually established their regime in the country, bears testimony to this affirmation. Let us not lose sight of the instances in the history of the world, that are testimony to foreign invasions having caused complete effacement of cultures of certain countries in a matter of a decade or two. As against these, the Bharatiya culture has indeed proved an exception. The reason behind it is however, not the generosity or the indulgence of the foreign invaders, not at all. The Bharatiyas with their fervent pride of their nation and of their dharma

countered the foreign powers and that was what kept protecting the culture of this country.

The European countries gained entry into this country when the Mughals were in power. Now the Bharatiyas were faced with a very conniving and crafty enemy. Initially these European nations pretended to have arrived for trade. Under the garb of traders, they did a deep and comprehensive study of the political and social circumstances of the country. What with the Mughal regime already on its last legs so to say and Bharat disintegrated into tiny kingdoms and princely states, they could easily seize power using a clever plan, so the Europeans realized. They then cautiously set about preparations to act on this thought. In fact the European nations were all vying for this same target but the British happened to score over the others in the competition.

Trade alone was not what had brought the British to Bharat. Their true intent was totally different and the country was fortunate that Shivaji Maharaj, the great visionary king, who saw through this pretence took birth here. He constructed forts at Khanderi, Underi and Colaba to keep an eye on the British. He even built his own naval force. Granted that the kingdom of Shivaji Maharaj was not as large as that of the Mughals but the fact remains that unlike him and despite their huge kingdoms, the Mughals never thought of building their own naval fleet. So they always had to obtain permits from foreign rulers to travel to foreign land. Shivaji Maharaj on the other hand had displayed foresight in building his own naval force.



The first war of independence!

The consideration and concern of Shivaji Maharaj was not restricted to his own kingdom. His view, his vision was wide-ranging. Apart from other kings he was an inspiration for Chhatrasaal, Veer Durgadas, Maharana Rajsinh, all in fact, his contemporaries. Taking into account the inspiration he provided to Bharatvarsha, matters like 'how wide-spread a kingdom he ruled over' or 'how long he ruled at all', seem of little consequence.



In him, was the confluence of the political insight of Chanakya and the valour of Chandragupta Maurya. It is the ruler of integrity, of noble and righteous character with a strong backing of his subjects, who alone proves all-powerful in the long run, so said Acharya Chanakya. And sure enough the subjects of Shivaji Maharaj stood by him, supported him and they had complete faith in him. It is precisely for this reason that Shivaji Maharaj emerges as the most powerfully influential of all kings. He was after all, the king of the people and for the people - a king, who ruled the kingdom, but also the heart.

Shivaji Maharaj and some other kings inspired by him, ravaged the Mughal power. Bajirao I carried on the good work of Shivaji Maharaj and in the times that followed the Mughals were subdued once and for all. However, around the same time the European countries had already begun to eye Bharat. They wished to make this rich country, a part of their empire, and the resources here had them licking their lips. Consequently the English, the French and the Portuguese began vying for supremacy over Bharat. They even made use of the local kings to meet this purpose. However, the British emerged as the final winners. They had a meticulous study of the conditions, the society and of the way of life behind them and they made clever use of traitors in order to establish their sway.

The British knew very well that rulers of foreign descent felt no fondness for this country, which fact made it fairly easy for them to gradually finish these rulers. The battle of Plassey fought in 1757, earned Mir Jafar the 'fruit' of the support he had lent to the British. Initially they did allow him status and power but eventually chucked him out. This, may we know, was not a solitary instance; the country had many such 'Mir Jafars' whom the British made use of, to fulfil their imperialistic aspirations. At the time the British empire was spreading its limbs, the country lacked an able ruler. Had Bajirao Peshwa and Madhavrao Peshwa not met untimely deaths, the history of this country would have been quite another. But that was not to be! And all that was to be, ended up ironing out the path of the British, weeding out all obstacles of its own accord.

Following the battle of Plassey, the British established themselves and settled comfortably in Bharat. Most importantly, they succeeded in influencing some

Bharatiya. Yet, 'what was the reason that the political success of the East India Company fell far short of general expectations', was the question repeatedly asked in the British Parliament. The answer to this was sought by many. It was around this time that a British diplomat by the name Lord Macaulay did a profound study of Bharat. He had even travelled around the country for the purpose. His observations would, even today, prove to be pointers of the true identity of this country of Bharat.

"In Bharat there is no conflict, no discord. People live in a congenial atmosphere, with a fraternal fellow feeling. There is prosperity, no dearth. People help each other and live in harmony. Despite the multitude of languages spoken here, all follow the same set of norms, the same way of life. The country is truly rich. If we wish to gain political ground and power in a country like this one, we will have to change the mindset, the temperament of the Bharatiyas and to achieve this, we will have to induct a new education system into the country" said Lord Macaulay. So the motive behind the education system that Macaulay introduced in India was very obvious. In this education system was a conspiracy to obscure the glorious tradition of Bharat. The historical accounts were actually misrepresentations of the truth. This system was an out and out effort at wiping out completely the Sanskrit language – this all time great, perfect language that belonged to our culture. We are admittedly suffering the consequences of this design even today.

When I appeared for the B.A. examination, one of the questions to be answered was, 'The mutiny of 1857 – Explain in detail'. I was shocked to read it! Despite living in independent Bharat today, we call the uprising of 1857, a 'mutiny' meaning a rebellion? Is that what we are taught even today? I just could not bear it. I hit out in the very first sentence of my answer. 'The question is flawed in the first place!' I wrote. I was running a big risk, I knew but I did not care. 'The revolution of 1857 was in fact the first battle for independence' - I reproduced these words of Veer Savarkar and then went on to give the details. In all probability, the examiner was a true patriot because I got fairly good marks in this paper. Talking of the 1857 uprising always takes me back to this incident.

Had the entire country participated in the battle of independence of 1857, had

all the people looked at Nanasaheb Peshwa as their leader, the situation would have changed completely. The British would have had to flee this country 90 years before they actually quit the country. However, these 90 years were by no means a rule of smooth sailing for the British and they had to face many big challenges. Revolutionaries from all over the country, from Maharashtra and Bengal for the most part, challenged the British. Lokmanya Tilak awakened not just Maharashtra but the entire nation. His editorials in the 'Kesri' used to send shock waves to the British government shaken. Tilak also inspired the youth to dedicate themselves to the cause of the nation. The great patriot and the Grandfather of the revolutionaries, Pandit Shyamji Krishna Verma established the 'India House' in London which granted scholarships to the Bharatiya students. We must bear in mind, that it was on the recommendation of Lokmanya Tilak, that a student by the name 'Vinayak Damodar Savarkar' was granted scholarship. While on the one hand Tilak was on this mission, Lala Lajpat Rai inflamed the hearts of the people of Punjab. It was Lala Lajpat Rai, who was the ideal of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and other patriots.

We are aware of the above historical facts. However, whenever we talk of Bharat under British rule, we so casually say that they ruled us a hundred and fifty years. Historically speaking, this statement is not valid because it does not recognize and acknowledge the significance of the battle of independence of 1857. That was the first battle that the Bharatiya fought to overthrow the British regime. Chapters dedicated to the bravery and the valour of Nanasaheb Peshwa, of Tatya Tope, of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, of Kunwar Singh are all integral parts of this history. The Bharatiya must undoubtedly revere the memory of these great souls. That they were invariably going to rule this country generation after generation, was a presumption the British had formed for themselves. But then they had to wind up and leave, lock stock and barrel in all of 90 years. The Bharatiyas had succeeded in compelling the most powerful country of those times to retreat from their soil. **Moreover, even today if the Bharatiya unite, no power in the world can harm them or impede their progress.** A study of history would endorse this fact that has, in any case, been proved time and again. Before he founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, it was this very truth in the history of Bharatvarsha, that kept drawing Dr. Hedgewar to it.



The awakening after the first war of independence

The battle of 1857 was, in fact, a war of independence that the Bharatiyas had waged against the British for the first time. Granted that the British were not beaten in this war, but what the war achieved was a wide-spread awakening among the Bharatiya folk. The sacrifice of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, Tatya Tope, Raja Kunwarsinh and that of many other valiant warriors could surely have not been in vain. Nana saheb Peshwa successfully eluded the British. It is largely

believed that he took refuge in Nepal where he breathed his last. But that is not true. No doubt he spent some time in Nepal, but eventually moved to Sihor, a village near Bhavnagar in Saurashtra of the state of Gujrat. He lived in the garb of an ascetic in a local Shiv temple and that was where he lived right till the end of his life.



Nanasaheb Peshwa

The British had put a price of a hundred thousand on Nanasaheb's head and yet they could not lay their hands on him. The priest (pujari) of the Shiv temple had two sons, both of whom were in Nanasaheb's army; and had even fought the battle against the British. The two brothers served till his last, Nanasaheb, who lived in disguise as an ascetic. Come to think of it, history has not acknowledged Nanasaheb's contribution to the battle of 1857, at least not to the extent it ought to have done. The flames of the uprising against the British that spread like wild fire burned in the hearts of Rani Laxmibai, Tatya Tope and several others, who had Nanasaheb for their leader. History does not record, that for years Nanasaheb Peshwa lived in Sihor, disguised as an ascetic, though a few locals were undoubtedly aware of it.

Jhaverbhai Patel, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's father was a high ranking officer in Nanasaheb Peshwa's army. Besides, the food arrangements of Nanasaheb's army, apart from nursing the wounded soldiers, was Jhaverbhai Patel's responsibility. Swami Vivekanandji, during his tour of the country, visited the Shiv temple in Shihor and had even met with Nanasaheb, who was dressed as an ascetic then. That the British would now rule India, upset Nanasaheb. This worthy son of the Mother Bharat, left for his heavenly

abode in 1901 in Shihor. The impact of the battle of 1857 began to be felt across the country. There began a sort of churning on all the planes. Vivekanandji successfully brought about an awakening among the youth of the country and even today his words can awaken them. That is the kind of power packed in his words!

While the British were finding their feet in this country, the deliberation about the reason behind the then prevalent disturbing social situation, began taking root in some minds. Social reformers convinced that the society needed reform and upliftment, went all out on this mission. While on the one hand, the country saw the rise of the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj, on the other, revolutionaries convinced that the country was not going to see any progress and upliftment unless the British were shown the door, kept posing challenges to the British. Revolutionaries like Vasudev Balwant Phadke and Bagha Jatin are our source of inspiration even today. However, at the time, there was yet another trend of thinkers, who contemplated over why foreign invasions had been hitting the country over the thousand years that had passed; and why despite being so powerful, our society had succumbed to foreign sway.

Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar



was one of these. He too thought *Vasudev Balwant Phadke* on these lines.

The nation was fighting for its independence. The National Congress was founded in 1885. The masses were waking up. The youth, fired up by the one purpose of the country's independence, had begun to challenge the British in more than one way. Dr. Hedgewar also became a member of the National Congress and gave himself to the task of national welfare. His deliberations and reflections however, persisted. There are many, who read history and retain it. But there are some, who do not just read it, they ponder deeply over it, understand it. Then there are yet others, who go much beyond a mere understanding of history, they look to seek the deeper reality. 'It is not quite right to delight in the reminiscence of history. It is pointless', so say many around us. It is, in any case, not at all for nostalgic entertainment but to avert in the present, the mistakes of the past, that history is to be studied.

Alongside this, history has got to be studied to understand our glorious past, to become aware of the essential strength of our society and most importantly to negate the distortion that foreign powers wreaked with selfish intent on our history. Dr. Hedgewar studied and understood the history of this country. Even today this country holds tremendous strength, which due to the lack of unity and organization, is ultimately wasted; and that, Dr. Hedgewar had

realized very early. Why the caste, the hierarchy, the discrimination in our society? The question made him restless. It is these vices that were responsible for the decline of Bharat. Selfish personal gain, ego, excessive and unreasonable ambition and a lax and slipshod attitude together made us easy prey to a mere handful of foreign rulers. It was against their own nation of Bharat, that the foreign rulers used the valour of the Bharatiyas. This had been the story through a thousand years; and yet our kings and our people kept napping. From time to time this country did indeed stare down at foreign invaders but did not rally up together and ended up paying a horrendous price for it.

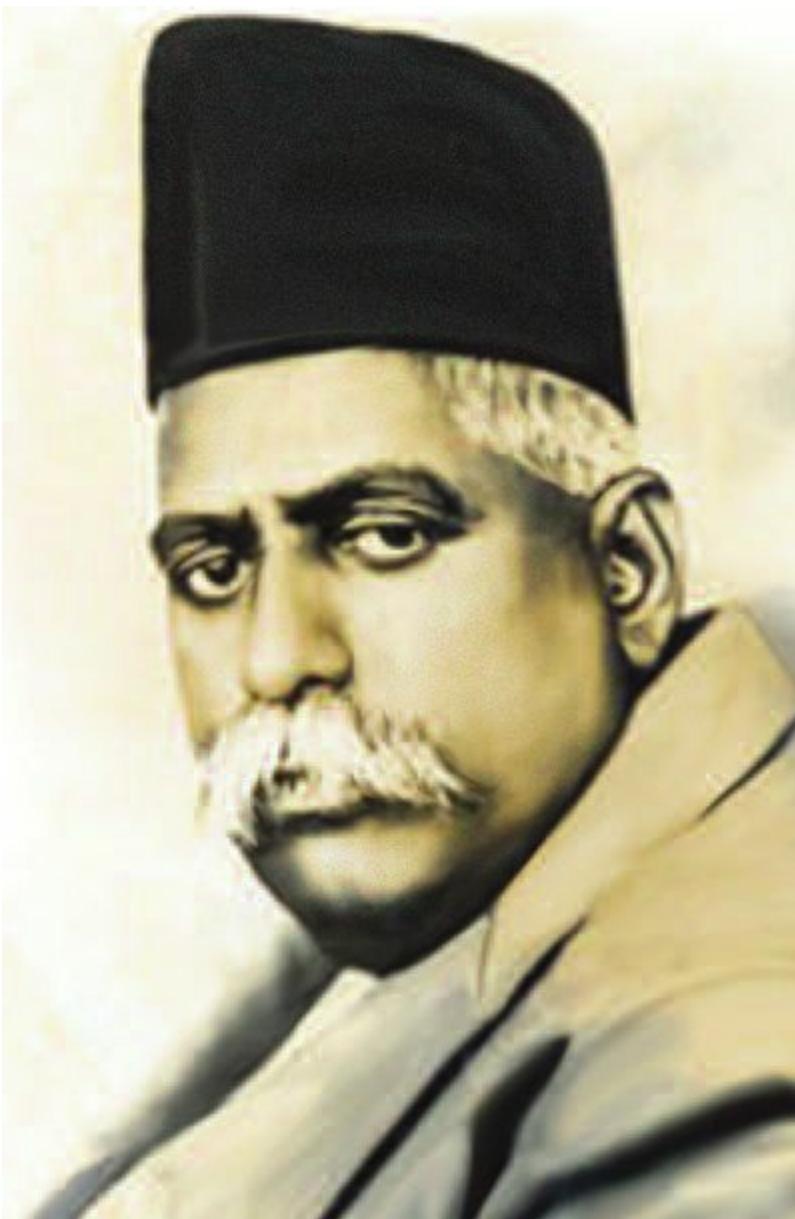
No country has so glorious, so rich a tradition and so great a cultural heritage as does Bharat. Ours is a multi-lingual nation, in other words, many different languages adorn the culture of this nation. They are the wealth of Bharat. These languages that stem from Sanskrit are like siblings – offsprings of the same parent. In the ancient times Bharat was believed to be the 'land of knowledge' (Dnyan-bhumi) and it served as a source of guidance to the entire world. Several branches of knowledge had reached the zenith of development in this country. This was because our scientists were our sages (rishi-muni). Students, who sought knowledge the world, over travelled to Bharat for their studies. However, this great heritage was gradually fading into oblivion and this precisely was Dr. Hedgewar's regret.

All evils gained access into our social fabric merely because we were not united and organized. Every such time that great souls brought our society together, it became strong and this very united and organized society chased the foreign invaders out of the country. Hence the need for an organization capable of rousing the strength of this nation! Moreover, an organization that, setting aside personal selfish interests, places national interest in supreme position, is alone the one, that is capable of uniting the nation. This Dr. Hedgewar was so very convinced of!

He was 35 when he founded the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh'. But his reflections date back further than that, in fact to his childhood. We must bear in mind one thing about great personalities: Their childhood is usually not normal and so they grow up precocious. So it was with Dr. Hedgewar as well. It was as early as in his childhood, that he was given to reflections.



Keshav – a heroic saga



Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar

At different points in time, great souls took birth in our country. Our Motherland, this Mother holds in her womb, a mine of gems – these great souls; and reminiscing over their lives does prove to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration and their study, an eternal guidance. Let us pay tribute

to one such great soul, who heralded a new era. On 1st April 1889, the auspicious day of the Gudhi Padwa a son, was born to Baliram and Rewatibai Hedgewar. He was their fifth child. This child born on the very day that marked Prabhu Ramchandra's return to Ayodhya as also the day when the Shaka invaders were made to beat the final retreat at the hands of Emperor Shalivahan, was going to accomplish a great mission in his life. This baby was named 'Keshav'.

It was about a hundred and fifty or two hundred years then, that from Andhra Pradesh the Hedgewar family had migrated to Nagpur and settled there. The Hedgewar family was very pious and righteous. The pooja, the recitation of sacred stotras and bhajans was very much a regular feature with them. Little Keshav received and kept absorbing these sacred religious values. His eldest brother Mahadev, Seetaram, the middle one and his three sisters were all extremely fond of Keshav and loved him dearly. A little later but still at a tender age, Keshav recited the Ramraksha. The family was astonished! Nobody had ever really taught it to him. In fond appreciation, his father asked him, "Where did you learn the Ramraksha?" "You recite the Ramraksha everyday don't you? I listen to it. That's how I learnt it" was Keshav's reply. Balirampant was delighted at his son's unusual grasping power and retention capacity.

Keshav's mother Rewatibai had taught him a few bhajans. His uncle Aaba Hedgewar told him stories from the life of Shivaji Maharaj and Keshav listened to them intently. All of this together had a powerful impact on Keshav and so when he saw the saffron flag flutter in the procession of the royal family of Nagpur, the Bhosles, Keshav's heart filled with pride. Little did he know at the time, that the kings of his country were mere titular rulers and the real power rested with the British!

On 22nd June 1897 sweets were distributed in the 'Neel City' school, where Keshav was studying. It was 60 years since Queen Victoria's coronation and the British had ordered celebration in all the countries under their rule. The distribution of sweets was meant to mark this event. Keshav refused the sweets. The teachers forcibly stuffed some in his hand. Keshav threw them in the bin. His friends were at a loss to understand why he might have done it. Keshav explained in plain words, "The sweets stink of slavery." That was

little Keshav's very first expression of angry patriotic fervour. He even drove home the point to his friends. "What did you really gain eating these sweets? This is a conspiracy of the British. They feed us these things and in return build in us the mind set of slavery." The children were convinced and their leadership automatically came to Keshav's lot. While we are still on this story, I would like to narrate an incident that happened at a later point in time. It was the year 1901 and the coronation of Edward VII was being celebrated in Britain and in many parts of Bharat too. There was light and festivity everywhere. Nagpur was also gearing up for the event. Keshav along with friends, who aligned with his thoughts, visited many sites to voice protests. How can this be a cause for us to celebrate? As a matter of fact we ought to be ashamed, he pointed out to people.

Nagpur was hit by the plague. Keshav was still a young boy then. The plague was claiming lives on a large scale. Keshav's parents too fell prey to the epidemic and he lost them both to the disease and that too on one and the same day. It was a big blow to the Hedgewar family. There were many others as well, who died of the plague.

The country was, at the time, struck by many calamities; and in fact much graver than the plague. The British were taking precise, well-directed though gradual steps in order to further reinforce their regime. They stepped up their schemes of dividing the people on the basis of caste, of sects and even of language, all meant to prevent the Bharatiya society from coming together and standing united. Lord Curzon, relied on this very thought as a ploy to partition Bengal. But the entire nation of Bharat rallied together against this move.

Keshav too, along with his friends, staged a demonstration protesting against the partition of Bengal. Bengal is an integral part of Bharat, our motherland. 'We will never allow a division of Bengal!' so Keshav had stated emphatically. During this demonstration, Keshav himself sang 'Vande Mataram' written by Bankimchandra, a song that he knew by heart and a song that left his colleagues much impressed. Then on, whenever these friends met, it was with 'Vande Mataram' that they greeted each other. 'Vande Mataram' resonated in many places like a rebellious war cry and that upset the British for sure.

When he was 14 and still a student of the 'Neel City High School, Keshav decided to greet the British supervisor visiting the school, with 'Vande Mataram' and even prepared other students for it. The supervisor stepped into the class and all present exclaimed in one voice, 'Vande Mataram'! Soon the entire school was resounding with zealous proclamations of 'Vande Mataram'. Angered by this, the British supervisor shot out orders that the instigator be identified and severely punished. Though none of the students would take his name, Keshav, bold and dauntless, came forward and owned up to the act. He was then rusticated from the school. Keshav's uncle Abaji Hedgewar was in 'Rampayli'. So Keshav came to live with him to pursue further studies. "Stop 'all of this' and focus on your studies" was the advice his uncle's friends gave him. Saddened by these words, Keshav thought to himself, "Really speaking, it is 'all of them', who ought to be doing 'all of this'!" Unfazed, Keshav announced his resolve: "I will not pursue my studies in a school founded by the British. It is through these institutions that they make slaves of us." These firm and resolute words on his part were enough to deter any kind of advice or instruction from coming his way.

Moreover, in Rampayli too, Keshav was far from idle. One night it so happened that a bomb was dropped on a local police station. Keshav had done it. When Abaji Hedgewar got to know of this, he packed Keshav back to Nagpur but Keshav did not reach his home in Nagpur at all. He met with Dr. Munje

– a great patriot, the founder of the 'Hindu Mahasabha' and also that of the 'Bhosla Military School' where the youth received military training. Keshav opened up to Dr. Munje and revealed his problems. Dr. Munje, extremely fond of Keshav, handed him a letter of recommendation and sent him to Yavatmal, where the learned Babasaheb Paranjpe ran the 'Vidyagruha'.

The 'Vidyagruha' was not any ordinary school that imparted academics to students, it was dedicated to a mission and its primary objective was to arouse patriotism in students. A large number of persons influenced and inspired by Lokmanya Tilak were to be found in Yavatmal and Babasaheb Paranjpe too was one such follower whose life was dedicated in service to a mission. It was in this 'Vidyagruha' that Keshav found an opportunity, wholesome in every way, to develop his personality.

Keshav put in tremendous physical work and effort to attain a hefty, well-built physique. It goes without saying of course that his intellectual and mental capacities too achieved ample progress. The teachers of the 'Vidyagruha' worked voluntarily and the students were not charged any fee. Education here was gratuitous and the atmosphere, charged with patriotic fervour was committed to service. The 'Kesri' of Lokmanya Tilak and the 'Kaal' of Shivrampant Paranjpe were the newspapers that were not just read regularly but studied and discussed as well. This was precisely the atmosphere that Keshav expected and so he began to present and express his thoughts very effectively, leading naturally to him being accepted as the leader of the young students. Along with the youth, the elderly too regarded Keshav with respect and he was now referred to as 'Keshavrao'.

The British kept a close watch on the Vidyagruha, so charged with patriotism. Time and again the police raided it and eventually it had to close down. Following Dr. Munje's advice, Keshavrao then went to Pune where he came into contact with great leaders of the time. Completing his studies in Pune, he returned home, to Nagpur. The family was facing adire financial situation at the time. Keshavrao took to teaching and even gave private tuitions. With the income, he helped the family tide over the crisis and even managed to save for his own further education. Keshavrao wished so much to become a doctor and serve the society. For his medical studies he wanted to travel to Bengal, a land he felt a tremendous pull for, mainly because it was the land of Gaurang Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the great Bhagwat-bhakta and it was the land that worshipped the Mahishasurmardini Kaalimata.

Dr. Munje sent Keshavrao to Kolkata handing him a letter of recommendation. And what did Keshavrao do the moment he set foot on the soil of Kolkata? With utmost respect he smeared some on his forehead. With deep reverence in his heart, he took the darshan of Gangamata. Within a very short time, he established command over the Bengali language and surprised everybody with his speeches in fluent and flawless Bengali. While he was awakening the masses with his patriotic speeches, he had in no way lost focus of his academic pursuits. Given his scanty financial resources, he could hardly afford to have his own books. So he borrowed them from his fellow students, studied from them during the night and returned them the next morning. This was how he completed his medical studies. It was around this

time that he began to frequent the home of prestigious and reputed families of Bengal, like those of Prafulchandra Ganguly, Shyamsunder Chakrawarty and Bipinchandra Pal, to name a few. Courteous and humble, Keshavrao soon became very popular. 'I belong to Maharashtra. What have I got to do with the lifestyle, the language and the culture of Bengal?' was a thought too petty for Keshavrao and so it never crossed his mind. So he participated whole-heartedly in the service organized by the Ramkrishna Ashram for the victims of the flood.

It was around this very period that he became a swayamsevak and guide in the 'Swadeshi Pradarshini' of Netaji Subhashchandra Bose. It was here that he came into contact with the revolutionaries of Bengal.



The resolve

Though in Kolkata for studies, Keshavrao would often visit Dakshineshwar, the Belur math and the Shantiniketan. He felt very happy in these places. While on the topic, I cannot resist the temptation to share an astonishing incident that happened around the same time. There was a public meeting under way in Kolkata and the speaker on the dais began speaking against Lokmanya Tilak. Keshavrao just could not bear this. He marched straight on to the dais and gave the speaker a tight slap in the face! At that, the speaker's supporters jolted towards him in assault. But then Keshavrao was more than a match for them as well. At that very moment, there was this person, who came up to Keshavrao, patted him on the back and said, "Well done! You are a true follower of Lokmanya Tilak indeed! And that you have adequately proved."



The pat on Keshavrao's back had come from none other than Maulana Liyaqat Hussain – an ardent patriot and a dedicated follower of Tilak! This one instance was enough to raise Keshavrao in Muanaji's eyes. So then in the times that followed, Keshavrao and his friends bearing the saffron flag on their shoulders walked in the fore of every demonstration and protest march that Maulana Liyaqat Hussain organized against the British.

After he came in contact with the revolutionaries of Bengal, Keshavrao pledged to participate in the revolution. At this point it would be very pertinent to acquaint ourselves with the atmosphere prevalent in the country at the time. Prior to the First World War, a wave of anger directed against the British had swept the nation. Plots were being hatched and strategies chalked out with the aim of ousting the British from power or banishing them from the country. Revolutionaries reached out for weapons to intimidate the British, instil dread in them and compel them to return to their homeland. Armed with this purpose, revolutionaries across the country set about networking with one another and those from Maharashtra, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and from Punjab were among the forerunners. Although these states were focal centres of the revolutionary movement there were of course revolutionaries from other states of the country, who were ready to give their everything and take the plunge in the mission.

While on the one hand, the mission of the revolutionaries was in full swing, the Bharatiya leaders, through their movements, posed a challenge to the British on the other. 'Lal', 'Bal', 'Pal' i.e. Lala Lajpatrai also known as 'Punjab Kesari', had set Punjab on fire and the public sentiment was inflamed against the British; Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak had caused an awakening not just in Maharashtra but in the entire nation and the huge contribution of Bipinchandra Pal towards rousing the masses of Bengal against the British was indeed remarkable. It was in this time period, that Keshavrao, now Dr. Keshavrao Baliram Hedgewar, with a full-fledged medical degree, returned home to Nagpur from Kolkata. Dr. Keshavrao, now a dedicated part of the revolutionary work, had the one heart-felt wish – the country had to gain independence and he was prepared to make any kind of sacrifice for this purpose and this is exactly what his participation in the movement illustrates. However, Dr. Keshavrao was at the same time, engaged in deep

contemplation about the society at large.

On his return home to Nagpur, Dr. Keshavrao's reflections became all the more intense, all the more profound. In the process of his keen observation of the country's situation there was this one point he kept wondering about:

The ardent and singular loyalty of the revolutionaries along with their readiness to sacrifice their lives had overwhelmed Dr. Keshavrao. The movements and protests all over the nation, directed against the British had struck awe in him. And yet, despite all of this, how does it happen, that a handful of British wield power in our nation? He just could not wipe out this question from his mind. If the entire nation came together, how long would the British really be able to hold on and sustain in power? But then this just did not seem to happen.

The executors of the British governmental machinery, in fact fellow Bharatiyas, were the ones committing atrocities on other citizens and strengthening the British rule. That exactly was the story during the rule of the Mughals, who arrived here before the British but were as much foreign to the country as the British were. Some Bharatiyas were ready to put their life on the line resisting foreign rule and there were others, who extended all possible support to the rulers. While Dr. Hedgewar pondered deep over the history of the country, stretching over thousands of years, he became acutely aware of the fact that the British were not to blame for the situation, nor were the Mughals. The fault lay, if at all, with the mindset of our fractioned society that accepted their rule and them as rulers. That precisely proves to be a weakness on the part of our society. It is not that those, who rule over us are more powerful than we are, it is our feebleness that they capitalize on, to exercise control over us. Therefore Dr. Hedgewar was convinced that organizing and uniting our society was the one pressing need of the hour and blaming the British or the Mughals was, in a way, superfluous.

He knew beyond doubt that once the society was united, was righteous and the citizen was dedicated to the nation, leave alone the British, no foreign power would be able to rule our country. 'May the efforts for independence continue but at the same time the mission to unite the country had to be initiated – it was time that the foundation to this great task be laid and right away', Dr. Hedgewar began voicing this opinion to several people he came in

contact with. Every one of them agreed but how was one to go about it? Would it even be possible? were their questions. Would the Hindus ever come together in an organized manner? Most replied to this question in the negative. 'An impossibility indeed', opined some pointing to instances in history. Above all, 'who would undertake this task?' was an important question they all asked. There were no easy answers. But then somebody just had to take on this Herculean task. Dr. Hedgewar offered to do so. 'If somebody has to take on the task, it will be me' he pledged. He travelled to many places in Nagpur, spoke to one and all, right from the bigwigs to the common persons. As he had dialogues with grownups, he struck a chord in the heart of children as well. The communication with children, he felt, was more important because in them he saw the future of the country.

Meanwhile as a 'worker of the National Congress', Dr. Hedgewar received instructions to participate in many agitations and in response to one such in 1921, he zealously participated in the 'Non Co-operation Movement'. He toured extensively and spoke aggressively in speeches. He was arrested for these and had to face legal proceedings. He was sentenced to a year of imprisonment. The story of this case will surely make interesting reading. 'Would you confess to the wrong you did?', the judge asked. Pat came Dr. Hedgewar's audacious reply, 'Not at all! That I am compelled to do all of this in my country, is what you ought to be ashamed of! It is you, who is actually the criminal, not I!' His reply to the judge was bold and defiant. Had he accepted his doing as wrong and confessed so, the judge would have let him off the hook. The others, who had taken part in the agitation did it. Dr. Hedgewar flatly refused.

During the year in prison his deep contemplation continued. He studied the history of his country and keenly observed it so to say. The dharma, the tradition, and the culture of the country were the best in the world, they were supreme. There was no other society as ethical, as gifted and accomplished and as valiant as the Bharatiya society. We have a huge population and yet we become slaves of a handful of aggressors for the simple reason that we lack organization and discipline. The aggressors noted these very vices and making use of precisely these, they kept ruling us. So it follows that our society must inevitably become self-respecting, selfdependant and well-organized. The answers to questions like 'Who will take up this task?' just has

to be 'I will' or 'We will' and no other! However, he would dedicate himself completely to this one task, putting aside all others, he vowed while serving the sentence in prison. He chalked out a blue print of what he would be doing then on.

Once out of jail, he set about organizing the children and the youth. Apparently easy and fairly simple, Dr. Hedgewar kept at the task consistently. The sight of this man playing with little children, mingling with them like he was one of them, this man, who was a doctor, who had spent a year in jail for the independence of the country, left many dumbstruck! They were at a total loss to understand what was going on. However, Dr. Hedgewar was very clear about his purpose. This simple little thing was capable of changing the future of the country, a fact he was now aware of. Large tasks do not necessarily have large beginnings. Take the seed of the Banyan tree. It is so very tiny but holds within itself, the whole of the vast banyan tree, not to mention its seeds as well. As far as this apparently small task of Dr. Hedgewar was concerned, that was exactly how it was.

At last in 1925, on the auspicious day of the Vijayadashmi, Dr. Hedgewar founded the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' and embarked on the realization of his resolve, his purpose.





The appeal

'Sir, if we wish that the circumstances in our country change for the better, that the country achieve progress, thousands of youth like you and I must offer ourselves, their everything to this cause. So much needs to be done and so much work awaits us in the cities, in the villages and in the forest areas too. I have therefore resolved to dedicate myself to this mission, abstaining from marriage and from taking up service for livelihood. I need your blessings for the realization of this mission.'

The above was the appeal that Keshav Baliram Hedgewar made before he founded the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh'.

On his return to Nagpur, Dr. Hedgewar announced this resolve of his life in the course of his talk with reputable citizens and youth. All agreed with his line of thinking. That our dharma, our culture, our tradition are the most eminent in the world and that there is no match for the ethical, the valiant and the talented Bharatiya, goes without saying. Moreover, the population of Bharat is huge. Yet a handful of Mughals or of the British manage to exercise power over us. How come? Simply because certain drawbacks, certain flaws have found their way in our society and that is the reason why the foremost requirement is an organized society. Social unity has got to be nurtured. While we uproot our vices, self-respect and organization is what we ought to imbibe as values. Everybody concurred fully with these views that Dr. Hedgewar voiced, but...

... But who in the world would actually take on this mission? To organize a society that had lived years and years of disorganized existence was not at all an easy task to say the least. Through centuries, evils like caste, creed, other hierarchies and disparity at all had split society, debilitated it and made it selfish. They had spread their limbs and in fact struck deep roots in society holding it firmly in their grip. To liberate the society from their clutches was no mean task. Who would accomplish this Herculean task? That this was an important task was clear. There were no two ways about that. They were all stuck on just the one point. Who would do it? 'Well, if the task is important

and someone or the other is going to have to come forward and take the initiative, 'I will. May it be me! I will put aside all else and will give my life for this cause', were Dr. Hedgewar's words.

Finally on the occasion of the Vijayadashmi of 1925 Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar founded the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh'. But then what next? Dr. Hedgewar had chalked out his action plan well in advance and immense thought and reflection had gone into its realization. Having participated in the non co-operation movement, he had had to spend a year in prison. It was during this period that with great fortitude he had worked on the blue print of his action plan. The sequence of jobs if determined before hand, facilitates their execution. Having accomplished all of this in advance, it was within no time after the foundation of the Sangh that Dr. Hedgewar found himself engaging in extensive discussions as much with respected and reputable persons in Nagpur as with the common people.

To every person he came in contact with, Dr. Hedgewar gave the example of Shivaji Maharaj. He had after all, established a kingdom in totally adverse circumstances. The society was his greatest support. Shivaji Maharaj had fulfilled his great mission, awakening the youth and the great strength they represented. We ought to learn from this exemplary personality, Dr. Hedgewar always said. Vivekananda too awakened the youth of this country and filled them with inspiration in a very short time. This again is a lesson for us, Dr. Hedgewar would make it a point to say many a time.

If the organization has to grow, if the mission has to be taken forward, meetings would have to be regular and reflection, discussions too would have to be a consistent feature, so believed Dr. Hedgewar and there happened to be many, who agreed with him. Initially it was decided that all would meet once a week and discuss the national and the social situation. Dr. Hedgewar was an extremely powerful orator. His words stemmed from sincere, heartfelt sentiment. They were honest and so in a very short time he had won the trust of the youth. He analysed the events of the moment and most importantly, he presented and share his reflections over history. That a society as valiant, as brave as ours, should repeatedly find itself in the clutches of foreign rulers, was his deep regret and he expressed it in earnest words.

The country had had to bear a terrible brunt of deep rooted evils like

misconceptions, wrong customs, unfair social distinctions and these were exactly the main hurdles that prevented the organization of the society. To eradicate these evils, these flaws from the social fabric and recreate a united, organized society and of course a nation wealthy in every sense, was the objective that Dr. Hedgewar gave to the youth. He also made it a point to draw their attention to the fact that no distinctions whatsoever existed originally in our culture.

However, Dr. Hedgewar, who held both social progress and freedom so dear and in esteem, had set himself an entirely different goal at the time of the foundation of the Sangh. This goal contained the quintessence, the core of all of his contemplation. He avoided projecting an extreme stand on social and political issues from the platform of the Sangh but hardly a few may be aware that at the personal level, he did continue being part of the independence movement after the establishment of the Sangh though.

At this point, an incident that occurred at a later date in time, deserves mention for its pertinence. In 1930 an agitation against the atrocious laws of the British had swept the nation. On 22nd July 1930, Dr. Hedgewar began the 'Jungle Satyagraha' in the Yavatmal district and so had to endure nine months of rigorous imprisonment. During these months too he continued the Sangha work and as a result many inmates in jail prepared themselves as swayamsevaks.

With the intention to inspire them, Dr. Hedgewar met with the youth regularly on a weekly basis, after the formation of the Sangh. These youth then could hardly wait to meet Dr. Hedgewar. The week seemed too long! Why could they not meet every day, asked the youth and very soon their wish was fulfilled. A year after the formation of the Sangh, i.e. in 1926, the Sangh had its first Shakha. Initially it was in the 'wada' (a sort of mansion) of Salubai Mohite of Nagpur, that the first branch of the Sangh became operational and carried forward the mission. The number of swayamsevaks was swelling. If work required any of the swayamsevaks to shift to other places, they would start a Shakha in that place too. The mission of the Sangh was thus picking up pace, gradually but definitively.

Swayamsevaks, who travelled outside for education advocated the principles of the Sangh and took the lead to set up Shakhas. They began getting an

encouraging response from fellow students.

Although the unwritten rule of not openly expressing hostility or disapproval of the British was meticulously followed at the branches of the Sangh, the Sangh was in fact extending as much help as possible to the revolutionaries. Only, it was the firm resolve of the Sangh not to do this openly or even speak about it to others. Let me share a few instances in this regard. Rajguru, the revolutionary shot John Saunders, who was responsible for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai. Bhaiyyaji Dani had given refuge to Rajguru in Umred near Nagpur. Bhaiyyaji Dani later went on to become the Sarkaryawah of the Sangh. In 1928 Bhagatsingh had come to Nagpur to meet with Dr. Hedgewar. This sort of secret activity did not stand in the way of the Sangh's work and so the Sangh began to spread its limbs now at a good pace.

The Bharatiya society loves festivity and celebrations. At any given moment, the country is found celebrating some festival or the other. The Sangh picked out six festivals that represented the Bharatiya culture. These include Gudhi Padwa, the Hindu Samrajya day i.e. the day of the coronation of Shivaji Maharaj, the Gurupournima, Raksha Bandhan, the Makarsankrant and the Vijayadashmi. Why it was these that the Sangh opted for, we will talk about a little later.

In the Sangh's branch the programme it is with a pranam to the revered and sacred saffron flag, that programmes begin and even end. The saffron flag holds utmost significance in the Sangh. It is this saffron flag that holds within, the entire history of the Bharatvarsha. From ancient times the Bharatiya kings have had saffron flags and the Bharatiya culture, the dharma and the tradition are connected with it. This flag has stood witness to ups and downs of the country's history. This flag has seen the country at its zenith of progress, prosperity and well being and faced the most adverse of circumstances as well. This country never faced a dearth of hands eager and committed to keeping this flag fluttering high and proud and that, is precisely why despite the mighty blows it had to take, even today the saffron flag flutters proud and resilient.





The submission to the sacred saffron flag

The Sangh now founded, Dr. Hedgewar consulted with swayamsevaks about how the mission of the Sangh had to be carried forward. It was the Swayamsevaks, who insisted that they ought to meet every day and not once a week. But where exactly were they to meet and how would they go about it, how would the programme be conducted were the issues they mulled over then. At the outset the Swayamsevaks assembled in Dr. Hedgewar's home. If a few of these travelled to other places for studies or other purposes, there too they picked up and carried on the work of the Sangh.

Appaji Joshi was one such Swayamsevak, who carried forward the mission of the Sangh in this manner. On 18th February 1926 Appaji launched the first Shakha of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in Wardha. It was in 1925 that Dr. Hedgewar founded the Sangh in Nagpur and a mere year later the organization had its first Shakha in Wardha, which only underlines his obvious organizational expertise.

Dr. Hedgewar congratulated Appaji and his message to the swayamsevaks was, "That is exactly how we are going to move forward with the mission of the Sangh!" Before the Sangh was created, Dr. Hedgewar tended to be austere and quite harsh. The Dr. Hedgewar, who did not think twice before he slapped in public, a person, who spoke against Lokmanya Tilak, had somehow mellowed down after the institution of the Sangh. He became very gentle. With his affectionate and endearing ways he won the heart of every person that came in contact with him. He reached out with love not just to the reputable in society, but also to little children, teenagers and to the youth. Dr. Hedgewar had become popular by far and that went on to prove very conducive to the growth of the Sangh.

Every organization has its own flag, that is representative of its aim and purpose, its policies, its philosophy. The Shakha of the Sangh was already operational but the decision about the Sangh's flag had yet to be reached. Dr.

Hedgewar discussed with one and all. He was interested in the views of one and all. Some expressed that the vermillion flag hoisted on top of 'Math' and temples ought to be the flag of the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh'. After all it was the 'Math' and the temples they thought, that had preserved our dharma, our pride and glory from ancient times and so it would be appropriate for the Sangh to adopt that flag. Others opined that the Sangh ought to opt for the 'Jari-patka' hoisted in the times of the Swarajya of Shivaji Maharaj. Then there were yet others, who suggested that the saffron flag, so dear to Maharana Pratap was the right choice. Dr. Hedgewar listened very carefully to everybody and then presented his view. The saffron flag holds within, the radiance of the sun. The colour saffron is a symbol of sacrifice, valour and spirituality. It was a saffron flag that fluttered atop Arjun's chariot that Bhagwan Shreekrishna steered. Bearing in mind all these facts, it was the saffron flag, the most sacred and the purest of all that they ought to adopt, suggested Dr. Hedgewar. His view received unanimous acceptance.

With the intention of intensive spread and growth of the mission of the Sangh, Dr. Hedgewar constituted a machinery or a system (vyavastha) so to say for grooming pracharaks. 'Give your life, dedicate yourself to the Sangh in other words for the nation and for the purpose relinquish your worldly life, was his appeal to the youth and the primary condition for qualifying as the pracharak of the Sangh. Dr. Hedgewar's appeal was followed by several youth offering themselves for the work of propagation. All they knew was they would go where Dr. Hedgewar sent them and accomplish the jobs he instructed them to. Around this time Dr. Hedgewar travelled along with several youth through many states of the country. This journey was for the guidance of the youth, it was meant to give them a firsthand experience of the prevalent circumstances and prove to them and highlight with actual instances, the need to organize the Hindu community.

As the Sangh moved on and progressed with its mission, it encountered many difficulties on its way. How to raise funds for the mission of the Sangh, was indeed a tough question to deal with. Dr. Hedgewar presented a solution. 'On the day of Gurupournima every year, let us bow before our guru and offer as a symbol of our submission, whatever may be best possible for us – each as per his capacity! This will help to keep the work going. Know well, that we do not intend taking from society. On the contrary we wish to give to it.' All

the swayamsevaks heartily agreed with these thoughts of Dr. Hedgewar. So in keeping with this idea, in 1928 the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh began celebrating the 'Gurupoojan' and the 'Gurudakshina' Utsav (festival).

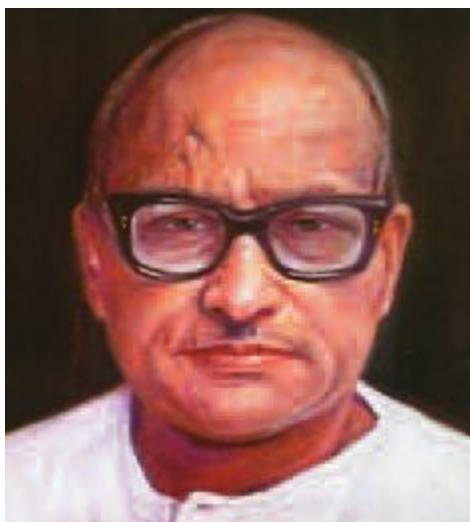
This festival is an important one from among the six that the Sangh celebrates. It is as their Guru that the swayamsevaks look up to Dr. Hedgewar, the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. We ought to be worshipping Dr. Hedgewar, the swayamsevaks felt and he deserved it in every way of course, so they believed! On the eve of the festival Dr. Hedgewar announced to the swayamsevaks that the Guru-poojan (worship) would be offered the next day. The day dawned and the swayamsevaks arrived. 'As the 'Sarsangha-chalak' I am going to be the first to offer the Gurupoojan and you are going to do the same', he announced. We would offer worship to Dr. Hedgewar, who is indeed our Guru but then, who would he be worshipping? Who indeed was his Guru? were the questions that cropped up in the Swayamsevak's minds.

Still curious as they watched on, Dr. Hedgewar, calm and collected, rose from his seat, walked up to the sacred saffron flag, bowed before it (offered his pranam) and offered his worship to it. Then drawing out an envelope from his pocket, he respectfully offered it with his right hand before the saffron flag. That was the first Gurudakshina! He then joined his hands together, in obeisance and bowing once again to the saffron flag, he returned to his seat. 'Do worship our Guru like I did. It is this very sacred saffron flag that is our Guru, the Guru of all swayamsevaks', he said. Quite taken aback by the happening yet enthused, the swayamsevaks followed suit, worshipped the saffron flag and made Gurudakshina offerings as per their capacities.

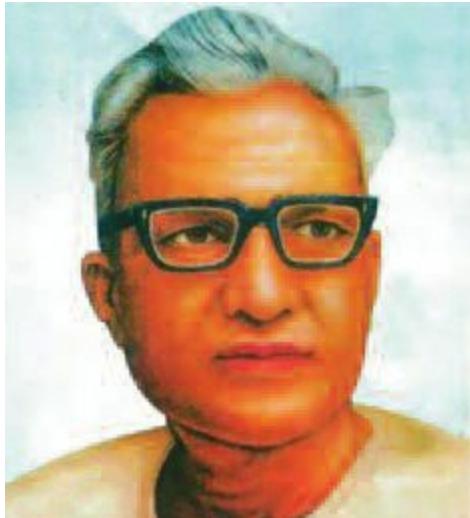
In the talk that followed, Dr. Hedgewar shed light on the stance and outlook that the Sangh would adopt. 'We are going to have to offer the Gurudakshina once in the year and using it as resource, we will meet the expenses that the mission of the Sangh entails. As for the amount to be given in Gurudakshina, it would be a personal decision. Should the amount be enough to make you stretch just that extra, inch to make ends meet on the home front, the Gurudakshina would have stemmed from the sentiment of sacrifice, so Dr. Hedgewar believed. His message was that the set up and scope of the Sangh was eventually and surely going to expand. Bearing this in mind and relying

on their conscience, the swayamsevaks ought to submit their physical, mental and financial resources for the cause.

'It is this very sacred saffron flag that is our Guru. Instead of putting a person on a pedestal and adulating him, let us accept and revere this saffron flag as our Guru, the flag that is an emblem, an image since times unknown, as much of our dharma, our culture, our tradition, as of sacrifice and dispassionate pursuance of virtue. The saffron flag will be our source of supreme inspiration, Dr. Hedgewar said. Persons come and go but this flag has prevailed, persisted as an incessant source of inspiration for the Bharatwarsha and this



Madhavrao Mule



Bhauraao Deoras

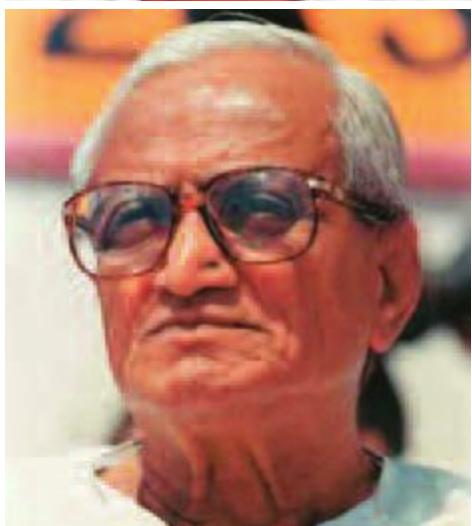
Puri



Rajpal



Eknathji Ranade



Dattopant Thengdi

saffron flag, will for sure, keep inspiring this nation of the Bharatwarsha in the coming times as well! And that was the firm trust, the conviction of Dr. Hedgewar.

This one single incident is sufficient to establish fully before us, the towering height of the personality that was Dr. Hedgewar. He founded the Sangh and revering him as their Guru, the swayamsevaks were forever prepared to fulfil tasks in keeping with his instructions. However, it was the sacred saffron flag that was and had to be the swayamsevaks' Guru, so Dr. Hedgewar had announced and he had very obviously had in mind, the tradition of the dharma and the culture of the nation, cherished since ancient times. Placing the saffron flag in the position of the Guru, he had achieved more than one objective in a single move. This one saffron flag manifested multiple values –

the aims and policies of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the philosophy and nationalism.

Setting the pracharak machinery into action, Dr. Hedgewar began delegating swayamsevaks to different places in the country. He had an important instruction for all those, whom he dispatched on the propagation mission: 'You have your mother tongue, yes fine! But every language spoken in this country equals your mother tongue. So accept the one spoken in the region you live in, as your own mother tongue and blend with the local lifestyle.' The swayamsevaks followed these words to the T. Madhavrao Mule, born and brought up in the Konkan was sent to Lahore and Rajpal Puri, who hailed from the Punjab was delegated to the Sindh province. Balasaheb Deoras, originally from Nagpur, was sent to Bengal and his younger brother Bhaurao Deoras, to Lucknow. To Yadavrao Joshi of Maharashtra Dr. Hedgewar assigned the responsibility of the southern regions of the country.

Thus several pracharaks began work in different fields. These included many names like Eknathji Ranade, Dattopant Thengdi, Bhaskarrao Kalambi, Laxmanrao Bhide, Laxmanrao Inamdar, Moropant Ingle, Vasantrao Oak, to name a few from Maharashtra. In the times that followed so many others from other states also came forward to join the mission. Even today tears well up in my eyes as I think of all these great souls, who gave their lives for the cause of the Sangh, in fact the cause of the nation. The direct personal guidance and affection that I received from all these personalities is, I believe, the single most priceless gift of my life.

And as work continued, Dr. Hedgewar once happened to run into 'Madhav' and he said to him, 'Oh Madhav! When did you come? I have been waiting for you since a long time.' "It is only today that I have come. My mother is unwell and I have come to see her." replied Madhav. "But you are going to be around for some time, are you not? I have so much to talk to you! Do come to the Shakha in the evening. Let us go to my place after we are done with the Shakha work."

Madhav agreed. This incident was to go on to assume immense importance in the history of the Sangh for it was then on that second, i.e. the next era of the expansion and progress of the Sangh would begin.





Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar



The organization

Madhav visited the Shakha as decided. Dr. Hedgewar was waiting. The Shakha routine done with, he came home bringing Madhav with him and then they got talking. "I hear you have quit your job as professor at the Banaras Hindu University. But you are not here in Nagpur either. What are you up to then these days?" Dr. Hedgewar asked.

"I have become a sanyasi and at the moment am put up in an ashram in Bengal. It was there that I got to know about my mother's ill health. So I am here to see her. I plan to return once she recovers" replied Madhav. "This land, our motherland is a mother, it is our mother! She is not keeping good health either. What about her? Do keep dropping by as long as you are here. There is just so much to be done!" Madhav had always held Dr. Hedgewar in high regard. He began to meet with him regularly.

Consequent to his participation in the Jungle Satyagraha in 1930, Dr. Hedgewar had been sentenced to nine months of imprisonment during which period also the mission of the Sangha had continued. Moreover, it was at this time that he came in contact with Babu Padmaraj Jain and Mahamana Pandit Madanmohan Malaviya. On hearing about the work that Dr. Hedgewar was shouldering, both of them offered financial help. Dr. Hedgewar declined it saying, "I do not want money. I want youth for the work of the organization."

He believed that more than funds, the need of the hour was youth, who could dedicate their life, their everything to the cause of the nation and so he was making very earnest efforts to connect inspired, ingenious and brilliant young men like Madhav with the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha'. Around this time Swantantryaveer Savarkar was freed from the jail at Andaman and was interned in Ratnagiri. Dr. Hedgewar travelled to Ratnagiri to see him and shared all information about the Sangh and its work. Swantantryaveer Savarkar was extremely impressed with what he heard.

Dr. Hedgewar travelled across the country for the expansion and progress of the Sangh. It was the year 1934 and the 'Hemant Shibir' of the Sangh was

underway in Wardha. Mahatma Gandhi too was in Wardha at the time. His secretary Mahadevbhai Desai insisted that they visit this Shibir and Gandhiji did. Dr. Hedgewar and the swayamsevaks extended to him, a very sincere and warm welcome. In the evening, at the gathering that took place at the Jamnalal Bajaj Ground, Dr. Hedgewar requested Gandhiji to address the swayamsevaks.

Gandhiji asked one of the swayamsevaks his name and his caste. The swayamsevak gave his name, said he was a Hindu and stopped at that. "Yes I gathered you are a Hindu but which caste do you belong to?" "I am a Hindu and that is it!" the swayamsevak persisted. Gandhiji then went on to ask another swayamsevak the same question. His reply was exactly the same. "I am a Hindu" he said. He asked this same question to two more swayamsevaks one of whom said, "Whoever lives in this country is a Hindu and this is a country of Hindus."

Gandhiji was very impressed again. "What you have done here, is incredible!" he said and very open-heartedly praised Dr. Hedgewar. "For years I have been trying to wipe out caste distinctions and such disparities. I see here that you have accomplished it. What I witness here, is social harmony and integrity and the experience leaves me truly fulfilled" Gandhiji said and he even went on to make a mention of this in his memoirs.

The fight for independence had intensified during the time. Programmes of political parties, mass campaigns and the struggle of the revolutionaries were in full swing too. Dr. Hedgewar kept waking up the swayamsevaks to the fact, that while they carried on the work of the Sangh, they had also to uphold the task of independence and join in the fight for the country's independence.

After Netaji Subhashchandra Bose stepped out of the Congress party, he had a meeting with Dr. Hedgewar and expressed satisfaction at the way the youth had been groomed at the Sangh. "What is your mission all about and what exactly is your intent?" "To organize the Hindu community of Bharatvarsha, groom it instilling righteous values and dedicate it to the cause of the nation, is our goal" was Dr. Hedgewar's reply. At that Netaji asked, "Why only the Hindu community? Why do you not include the others?" Dr. Hedgewar's reply was bang on apt yet very touching.

"The upsetting circumstances prevalent in the country today can be traced to one main fact viz. the lack of organization among the Hindus. That is why a handful of foreigners were able to establish sway over this country and that is also why the task of organizing the Hindus assumes considerable importance. The day the Hindu community in this country organizes itself, will be the day that will have written off all its problems. I am therefore engaging myself in uniting the Hindus and erasing all distinctions and disparities including those of the caste. It is only after I accomplish this mission, that I will give a thought to the organization of the others." Dr. Hedgewar told Netaji, who, appearing to have had reservations on this issue, left the scene. Madhav was present at this meeting Netaji had with Dr. Hedgewar.

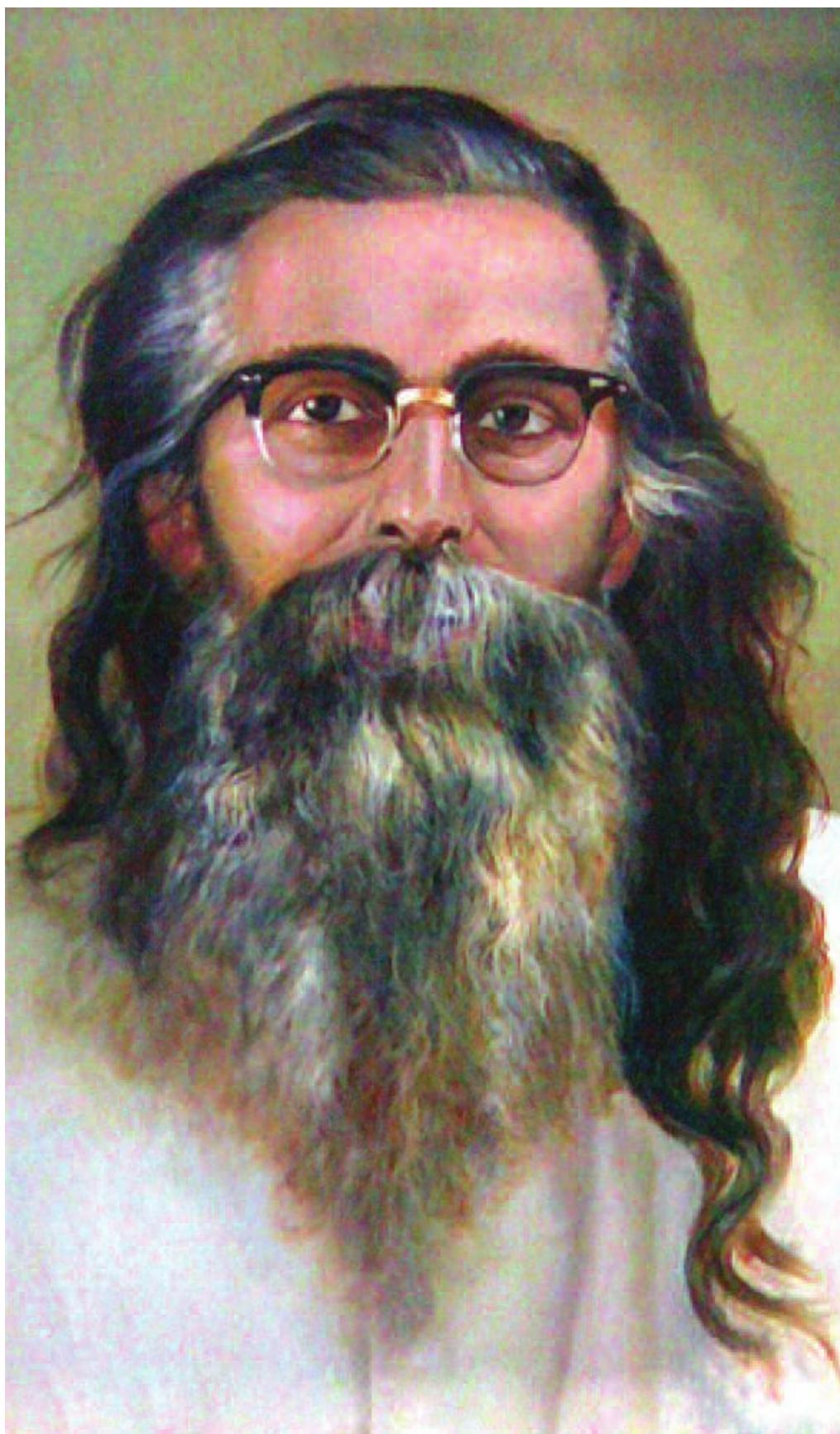
During his stay in Nagpur, Madhav continued to assist Dr. Hedgewar but all the same longed to return to the ashram. Dr. Hedgewar however, kept assigning jobs to him and detaining him. One day he assigned to Madhav the responsibility of chalking out a plan of the "Akhil Bharatiya Baithak" of the Sangh. Madhav would also have to conduct the meeting. Madhav executed the given task in a commendable manner. But now Madhav began asking Dr. Hedgewar's permission to take leave and return to the ashram. "My mother is fine now. I must return." Madhav said.

"You may leave if you wish; but only after you have listened to what I have to say. Back in the ashram or in the mountains, you intend to do the sadhana, do you not? So then? What do you stand to gain? You will attain liberation. But bear in mind that it is the progress, the upliftment of the Hindu community that has to be our foremost concern and it is only then, that this country will be saved. Like you live in and as part of the society, and work for the Sangh, you can live in the society and live a dispassionate life of a sanyasi, an ascetic. Are we not to hold ourselves responsible for the condition our country finds itself in? We must recognize and accept our responsibility and discharge our duties. That is the reason why I need you Madhav... for the sake of the society and for the sake of the nation...."

These words made Madhav halt right there and they triggered a dilemma in his mind. On the one hand was the call of the life of a sanyasi that he had already committed himself to and on the other was that of Dr. Hedgewar's appeal for the sake of the society and of the nation. Ultimately however, it

was Dr. Hedgewar's view that won him over and convinced him and 'Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar' dedicated himself fully to the Sangh and its mission.





Golwalkar Guruji

O Guruwarya!

So 'Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar' decided to dedicate himself to the mission of the Sangh and that pleased Pujya Dr. Hedgewar immensely. For the Sangh, that was a divine boon, he felt. He began to feel confident that the Sangh would now spread its wings and that its scope would widen. With great enthusiasm, he set about chalking out plans. He had instructed swayamsevaks, who travelled for purposes of work, to set up a Shakha in the place they shifted to. This move began to show positive effects. The Sangh began to flourish in Vidarbha, in Central Bharat and in Maharashtra. Madhav however, had to stay in Nagpur and be responsible for the organizational work of the Sangha. Madhav executed this task working shoulder to shoulder with Dr. Hedgewar.

A professor at the 'Banaras Hindu University', some students addressed him as 'Guruji'. His beard especially was a feature greatly admired by students. It was they in fact, who urged him to keep the beard. 'Your beard impresses. Do not shave it off' was the affectionate request of the students. That made Professor Madhavrao laugh heartily and he kept a beard all through his life. It suited his personality well. Eventually everybody began addressing him as 'Guruji'.

The Sarsanghachalak, Pujya Dr. Hedgewar, made a request to Swatantryaveer Savarkar: "Should the two of us travel to different places, the mission of the Sangh would receive a boost." Savarkar agreed and along with Dr. Hedgewar and other swayamsevaks of the Sangh of course, he travelled across Maharashtra and Central India. This brought about considerable awakening and the Sangh too benefitted from the decision. After a while Swatantryaveer Savarkar was invited to the Nagpur Shakha. We are talking here of the year 1937. Savarkar spoke his mind, shared his thoughts and wishes and addressing the swayamsevaks at the Shakha, he said, "Our motherland is in a an utterly pitiable state and whatever strife it may cost us, whatever be the effort required to lift our motherland out of this dire condition, the swayamsevaks of the Sangh will not back out or be deterred. In these swayamsevaks I see the bright future of Hindustan. Should we come together,

no power in the world would be able to subdue us." These were the words that Swantatryaveer Savarkar had uttered at the time.

The caste, the creed and the hierarchical social distinctions caused tremendous damage to our nation. Aggressors of foreign descent and of foreign religion took undue advantage of the circumstances though. But at the Shakha of the Sangha, I see a different scene. All rally together without any distinctions whatsoever and that makes me extremely happy. That is exactly what I want to see in the society at large, said Swatantryaveer lauding the Sangh.

The 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' is a vast ocean. So many different rivers and streams merge into the ocean. The ocean embraces them all but without allowing the dissolution of its own uniqueness, (preserving its own uniqueness). That is how it is with the Sangh. Mahatma Gandhi visited the Shakha of the Sangh, so did Netaji Subhashchandra Bose and Vitthalbhai Patel, a leader of the Congress and Sardar Patel's elder brother. Each of these great leaders had his own social and political ideology, each differed from the other and yet the work of the Sangh was what each praised very heartily. Gandhiji and Savarkarji both believed that the work accomplished by the Sangh for the purpose of social equality and harmony was especially significant and this point we ought to make note of.

Everyday in the Shakha of the Sangh, a pranam is offered to the sacred saffron flag before the prayer is recited. The prayer recited initially, was different.

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Explanation:

I bow and pray to the motherland, where I was born I bow and pray to the Arya-land, where I grew up I bow and pray to this land, where I fulfil my dharma To the cause of this land, may I give my life – the land I always bow to ||1||

O dear Guru! O messenger of Shreeram! Grant us the values, the disposition and the morality,

And with these virtues, may we become Hindu, in the real sense of the term. Do grant that it may happen soon. Give us refuge, we surrender to You. May we walk the path of Shreeram

Grant us that we become pure in intent and firm in restraint, that we become protectors of the dharma; may valour be our vow, our commitment||2||

||BharatMata ki Jay||

This prayer was invariably recited in every place that the Shakha operated. The first four lines of the prayer are in Marathi and the remaining four, in Hindi. Initially, orders on the grounds of the military, were given during programmes. The swayamsevaks, it was already decided, would wear a uniform. Khaki shorts, a white shirt, a belt, a black cap, shoes, pattis and pungani is the uniform of the Sangh and the swayamsevaks have to spend from their own pockets to acquire it. With time the uniform did see changes and now the cloth belt and a different sort of shoes have been made part of the uniform mainly to avoid the leather belt, pattis and pungani.

While furthering the cause of the Sangh, it was made sure that the swayamsevaks walked the path of Samartha Ramdas Swami, Shivaji Maharaj, Maharana Pratap and Guru Govindsinh, their ideals. In 1939 a special meeting was called in Sindi in the Wardha district. Pujya Dr. Hedgewar, Pujya Guriji, Balasaheb Deoras, Appaji Joshi, Vitthalrao Patki, Nanasheb Talatule, Tatyarao Telang, Babaji Salodkar and Krishnarao Moharir were among those, who attended it. In this meeting it was decided that all orders in the Sangh would be phrased in Sanskrit. Also, a prayer to be recited in the Sangh, was to be composed in Sanskrit and a decision to the effect was taken in this meeting.

The Sanskrit prayer was composed in 1939 and to date, that is the one recited in the Shakha of the Sangh eversince. Even those, who have had nominal

contact with the Sangh are familiar with the prayer 'Namaste Sadvatsale Matrubhume' (We bow to you O Motherland! O affectionate and righteous mother!).

Another important decision marked this same meeting held in 1939 at Sindi, viz. that a 'pracharak' machinery to bolster the work and mission of the Sangh would be created all through the country. In the initial phases, swayamsevaks, who travelled to other regions of the country, created Shakhas in their respective regions of residence. The 'pracharak' machinery however, was going to be quite different. The swayamsevaks, who, forsaking their families, showed willingness to dedicate themselves all through their lives to the Sangh, were alone appointed as pracharaks. While Dr. Hedgewar served as the Sarsanghachalak, Dadarao Parmarth, Babasaheb Apte, Balasaheb Deoras and Bhaurao Deoras began serving as pracharaks in different places in the country.

To unite the Hindu community scattered due to the divisions of castes and creed, was not at all an easy task, to say the least. It was no less than a stiff challenge in fact, to eradicate certain customs and conventions ingrained very deep in the social psyche. Dr. Hedgewar however, trusted that though very tough, the task was by no means impossible. Not only did he give his life to this cause but inspired others to do so. He worked day and night for the Sangh. The tireless strife that he put in, not giving a thought to his health produced wonderful effects.

The Sangh was spreading its limbs in various states in the country and the 'Sangh training classes' too were now held there as well. In the summer vacation every year, the swayamsevaks organize training classes for which the funds are drawn from their own pockets. These are the 'Sangh Shiksha Classes' (Sangh Training classes). It is here that the personality of the swayamsevak is moulded and in a way that the sentiment to dedicate oneself to one's nation, one's dharma and to the society, strikes deep roots in the mind.

Hundreds of swayamsevaks began attending these training sessions spending their own personal funds. The progress achieved by the Sangh, truly impressed many. The work of the Sangh picked up pace at Lahore, Karachi, Delhi, Lucknow, Patna, Kolkata, Pune, Mumbai, Ahmadabad, Jaipur and

Chennai(Madras). Working tirelessly during this period, Dr. Hedgewar's health declined. Nevertheless, the expansion of the Sangh pleased him immensely. He was confident that the Sangh was now going to keep growing, there was no looking back. 'My departure from this world too will not affect the work of the Sangh. The Sangh is just going to keep growing' he felt and the thought was reassuring and heartening. Gazing at the sacred saffron flag and praying to it, he asked for blessings. 'O Guruwarya! May this work that I initiated keep expanding, growing with every passing day. May the Hindu community keep receiving guidance from You!'



Pranam! A million times over!

Those days Dr. Hedgewar was not keeping very good health; in fact his health was declining. But he would, in no way, allow it to stand in the way of his daily routine. He persisted in travelling to places on the bicycle or by the bus or the train. He held talks with people and thereby communicated all about the Sangh to the society at large. He urged earnestly that the reputed, who commanded respect in society, ought to accept the responsibility of the Sanghchalak. Moreover, the post of the 'Sanghchalak' had been instituted with a special intent. The swayamsevaks visiting the Shakha were, for the most part, the youth and children. Offering guidance to them and in a way, accepting to parent them per se, became necessary. Connecting the youth with the society, forging such a bond, is the job of the Sanghchalak. Should the respected and reputed members of society take this task upon themselves, it would surely serve to bind the Sangh and the society at large, in a firm bond, not to mention the guidance that the youth would undoubtedly receive, so trusted Dr. Hedgewar. And that exactly, was the reason why he explained even to those, who humbly turned down the offer under the pretext of inadequate information about the Sangh, the purpose that the post was looking to achieve. But his talk did manage to convince many a person of repute, who eventually associated with the Sangh.

Constantly engaged in travel and tireless work, Dr. Hedgewar ended up neglecting his health, though a medical person in his own right. But his body could not escape the ill effects of the neglect. Very frequently he ran a fever. This, he gauged, was an indication that he did not have too much time on his hands, though there remained a mountainous task to be accomplished yet. And so, he set about the work, with ever more intensity and ever more pace. This again was going to affect his health adversely and so it did. He became very ill owing to the tireless hard work. In 1940 the annual 'Sangh training classes' were held as usual, but it was the first time that Dr. Hedgewar could not attend. He craved so much to meet the swayamsevaks and his longing made him restless. Looking at his condition and his intense sentiments, the treating doctor was compelled to permit the Sarsanghachalak to attend the session.

In the early hours of the morning of 9th June 1940, Dr. Hedgewar, sitting in his chair, gazed intently and lovingly at all the swayamsevaks. His body, though weary and feeble with fever, made him slightly drowsy; yet heartfelt feelings eager to be expressed, kept surging in his mind. In that very state of debility, he began to speak.

"My dear swayamsevak brothers! This moment, as I experience it now, is a blessed moment! What I see before me, is the image of a Hindu nation, complete in the true sense. Do forgive me that I could not meet you and serve you. But today, looking at you to my heart's content, fills me with an overwhelming desire to say a few words to you. What is the love and affection that we share, all about? What is the reason behind it? What is it, that binds our hearts in a bond, despite all our differences? That is the magic of the Sangh, the marvel it works. That is the fellow feeling, the brotherhood that the Sangh blossoms in us.

In the world around, even real brothers engage in squabbles and fights with each other. We do not. Never lose sight of the fact, that we are moving steadily towards our destination, the fulfilment of the mission that we became aware of, as part of the Sangh. Resolve firmly that you will not ever forget the Sangh, not until your last breath. Let this be your pledge. Every night, ask yourself what and how much you could offer and accomplish that day, for the cause of the Sangh. Make sure that never in your life do you have to utter words like 'Once upon a time, I used to be a swayamsevak!'...Never! We have before us, the task of organizing, bringing together, all the Hindu brothers of the entire nation. The day this nation of Bharat embraces the Sangh with its ideology, the day the Sangh and the nation merge values, no country in the world will dare to cast an evil eye on it and that will be the day, the day that will spell the end of all possible difficulty."

This speech of Dr. Hedgewar, though brief, was very powerful. None of those, who were present at the time, could forget his last address. To deliver this talk he had summoned all his physical energies or whatever was left of them. After the talk, he passed into unconsciousness. His health then kept declining. All the top doctors of Nagpur put in their best possible efforts for his treatment and swayamsevaks toiled day and night to serve the Sarsanghchalak. Ultimately, he was admitted to the Mayo hospital and later

was brought to the bungalow of Ghatateji, the Sanghchalak of Nagpur. Dr. Hedgewar was conscious but only off and on. At the time, he had placed the responsibility of the Sangh on Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar's i.e. on Guruji's shoulders. Among the hundreds of committed, staunchly loyal, proficient swayamsevaks, ready to sacrifice everything for the cause of the Sangh that Dr. Hedgewar had trained, Guruji was the topmost.

One afternoon when Dr. Hedgewar was not conscious, Guruji sat beside him. Sudden and unexpected, Netaji Subhashchandra Bose arrived. He was shocked to see Dr. Hedgewar's condition. He was pained. He spoke to Guruji to enquire about Dr. Hedgewar's health. Netaji had met Dr. Hedgewar a long time before and had even asked why the Sangh was organizing only the Hindus. Dr. Hedgewar's reply at the time had been: 'I have, at the outset, taken up the task of organizing the Hindus. That done, the country will be rid of all troubles. We could then give a thought to organizing the others.'

It was a very long time since this meeting. Netaji had now come back to see Dr. Hedgewar because he had begun to feel that the youth that Dr. Hedgewar had prepared and trained, could be of great and effective use for the cause of the nation. He expressed this sentiment and then standing by the window behind Dr. Hedgewar's bed, he began to watch the swayamsevaks' drill, rhythmic and co-ordinated. "Whatever state I may be in life, please make sure that the sound of the work related to the Sangh falls on my ears. If I hear the sound, it will for sure reach my heart, regardless of the condition I am in." These were the instructions that Dr. Hedgewar had given much before he actually took ill. So in keeping with them, he was kept in a room from where he could receive the sounds, the hustle bustle of the Sangh training session while it was in progress. Besides, the window of this room overlooked the ground where the swayamsevaks performed their drill.

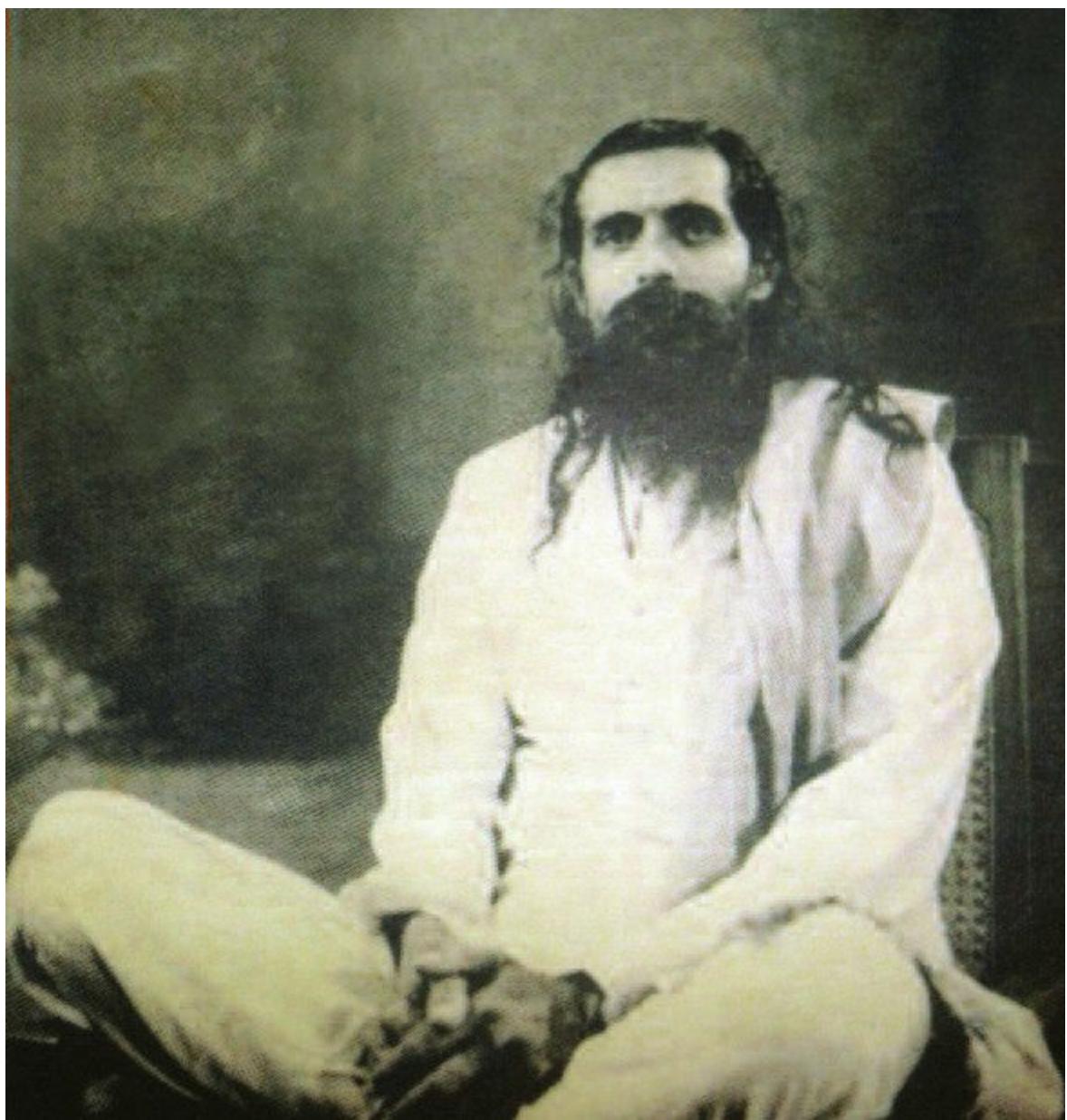
It was by this window that Netaji stood watching the drill. 'These are the kind of youth that I am looking for. In them I see the future of our country. It is they, who will make the country independent and prosperous' Netaji had said, expressing his trust to Guruji. Dr. Hedgewar was still unconscious then. He did not come round for a long time after that and so no talk at all could happen between Netaji and Dr. Hedgewar. Finally with a heavy heart, Netaji took leave of Guruji and left.

However, if a talk between Netaji and Dr. Hedgewar had happened, the history of this country could have been quite another or alternatively had Netaji discussed the issue with Guruji, the country might have seen changes in its fate. This is the feeling that keeps tugging at the heart of a swayamsevak like me.

Dr. Hedgewar's health was just not improving. All were beginning to lose hope. On Friday 21st June 1940 at 9.27 in the morning, the body of Dr. Hedgewar fell silent, forever. It is the body that is subjected to birth and death. Thoughts can have no death and the thought that Dr. Hedgewar gave to society, the nonpareil work he accomplished remains today pristine and immortal and will be so forever. The 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' founded by Dr. Hedgewar stands tall and proud before the world today, as the one supreme organization of patriots.

I have not had the good fortune of meeting or seeing Dr. Hedgewar in person. But I certainly have seen and met the swayamsevaks he prepared and trained. Listening to incidents and stories about him is no less than 'shravan-bhakti' and attempting to understand his personality. (shravan-bhakti = (which is listening to the glories and praises of this blessed soul and connecting evermore deeply, with their virtue and mission). Interacting with the swayamsevaks he trained, convinces of how lofty yet how profound a being this person, who groomed pracharaks willing to give their entire life for the society and the nation, was. As I study Dr. Hedgewar's personality, my eyes keep brimming over with tears. My pranam a million times over, to this great human being, who expended his body, his being, all his life, to the point of wearing himself out, all for the sublime cause of the nation and of the dharma!





ShreeGuruji

At the age of fifty years, the very first Sarsanghachalak breathed his last. It was a mere fifteen years after the creation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh that Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar departed from this world. These fifteen years did carry the Sangh to the national level, but with reference to the vast sub continent that Bharat is, the Sangh would have to be called a fairly tiny setup yet. The swayamsevaks that Dr. Hedgewar had trained, were also young. The country and in fact the entire world, was undergoing a lot of turmoil and losing the Sarsanghachalak at such a time, had put the Sangh face to face with an onerous challenge.

So the responsibility of expanding the scope and reach of the Sangh and doing so surmounting all challenges, had now fallen on the shoulders of the second Sarsanghachalak, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, i.e. Pujya Guruji, who was all of 35 years then. When Dr. Hedgewar founded the Sangh, he too was 35 and that is an amazing coincidence to say the least. Starting work in 1940, Guruji held office until 1973 and during his term of 33 years, the Sangh soared to the international scene receiving acclaim on the national scene as well. When Guruji assumed the post of Sarsanghachalak, the Second World War had already broken out. The British ruled our country and the movement and the struggle for independence were becoming more intense with every passing day. The Sangh along with its swayamsevaks, took part in the independence movement in more than one ways.

Those were times that seemed to put to test, the leadership qualities of all the leaders of Bharat. It was in these tough times that Guruji, with his unflinching commitment and loyalty, his undaunted and unrelenting resolve, tireless labour and sharp intellect; and very importantly with his tender affection, succeeded in generating an ever new will, a sort of sustained motivation and trust among all the swayamsevaks. All this, a radiant and exhilarating history, has manifested and unfolded for the world to witness, in the form of the expansion of the Sangh. Who is ShreeGuruji, this man under whose leadership the Sangh achieved large dimensions, this man who, fighting all odds and challenges achieved immense growth for the Sangh and that too

with admirable facility? Who indeed is ShreeGuruji? Let us get to know him in brief. What we are already aware of, is how Dr. Hedgewar coaxed him into joining the Sangh although ShreeGuruji had resolved to live the life of a sanyasi (an ascetic).

Guruji's father, Sadashivrao Golwalkar lived in Nagpur. As a child, Guruji was called 'Madhu', which was his pet name. His parents had, until then, lost eight children and Madhav was the only one, who had survived. In those days, Nagpur used to be part of today's Madhya Pradesh. Guruji's father, Sadashivrao, a professor, was often transferred to Hindi-speaking regions. Thus Madhav had a good command over Hindi apart from Marathi, his mother tongue. Madhav went to a Christian Missionary school and as a result, he was proficient in English as well. The atmosphere in his home was very virtuous, pure and pious.

When Madhav was a child, it was singing sacred hymns and verses that his mother woke him up in the morning. Guruji had imbibed sacred spiritual values and they had had an indelible impact on his personality. Even as a grown man, time and again, he recalled these verses that his mother sang. Madhav's sharp intellect had made its mark when he was still a student. Mr. Gardner, the principal of his college, was once teaching a chapter of the Bible to the class. Madhav had pointed out that a reference he had quoted was wrong. He even cited offhand and accurately to which verse of the Bible the reference could be traced. Mr. Gardner checked it out and realized that Madhav was right. After class, Madhav got a pat of appreciation on the back from Mr. Gardner. This incident is indicative not only of Madhav's sharp intellect but also of his fearless and forthright outspokenness.

Having completed his education upto Inter Science in Nagpur, Madhavji took admission to the renowned 'Banaras Hindu University' to study for the BSc or the Bachelor of Science degree. The huge library of this University, it seemed, was waiting for Madhav, a student with so unmatched an intellect and a hunger so insatiable for knowledge. Madhavrao began reading voraciously; he read one book after another and so it went on. One day as he was reading, he was stung on the toe by a scorpion. But Madhavrao was calm as usual, totally unfazed. He slit the toe that had been stung and allowed it to bleed. He then kept the foot immersed in a solution of Potassium

Permanganate and very soon he too was immersed in his studies. Completely stunned by all this, a friend asked, "How can you study when you are in excruciating pain Madhav?" Madhav's reply was simple and easy: "I have been stung on the foot not on the head!" And Madhav returned to his books and continued studying. Life ahead had tremendous physical strife and labour in store and those too Guruji bore with a smile on his face. Many would stand testimony to it.

Madhavrao secured a first class at the MSc examination held at the Banaras Hindu University and in August 1931 began teaching in this same university. It was during this time, that many different aspects of his personality came to light and shone bright before the world. Guruji, who loved his students from the heart, who went out of his way and took extra pains to explain what his students had trouble grasping, became popular within a short time. He would spend most of his salary on buying books for poor students and that gave him plenty of satisfaction. He would come forward to help all students, whether they were studying his subject or some other. He would himself study and understand the subject before offering help to students studying other subjects.

His extra-ordinary talent and ingenuousness apart from the influence he had on students, won the heart and the appreciation of Pandit Madanmohan Malaviya, the founder of the Banaras Hindu University. It was here that ShreeGuruji first came in contact with Bhaiyyaji Dani, a swayamsevak sent by Dr. Hedgewar from Nagpur, for the completion of his studies. Moreover, it was through Bhaiyyaji Dani that Guruji came in contact with the Sangh and became the Sanghchalak of the local Shakha. In the February of 1933, his education complete, Guruji returned to Nagpur and by 1935 he had studied law.



The divine indication

Madhav completed his study of law in 1935 and his family began talking about wedding plans. His parents would broach the topic off and on. Madhav always remained quiet, he did not voice any protest though. His silence was an indication that he had something totally different on the cards and his parents realized it. So, confronting him, they put across



their point directly. 'If you do not get married and start a family, the Golwalkar family will have no successors, it will be finished.' Calm as usual, Madhav replied, "The successors of the Golwalkar family line is not my cause of worry. It is the entire nation that I am worried about." To hear their only surviving child say this, was a bolt from the blue for Madhav's parents. They just did not know what to do, what with Madhav turning them down in plain words! Madhav however stood very firm by his refusal.

Right from his childhood Madhav was spiritually inclined. Asceticism (sanyas) was for him a very strong pull and it continued to be so, in his youth as well. Though he mulled over this possibility, there was no denying that the pathetic and dire state of the nation and of the Hindu community, upset him very much. He could not bear it. He very earnestly wanted to do something about it too. This was the dilemma that made him restless. A simultaneous spiritual inspiration, a sort of intrinsic pull would not permit him any restful moments either. It was around this time, that Madhav began frequent meetings with Swami Bhaskarshwarananda, the head of the Ramkrishna Ashram at Nagpur. Amitabh Maharaj in the ashram became his friend. It was from him, that Madhav came to know that Swami Akhandanandaji, the disciple of Ramkrishna Paramhans and the Gurubandhu of Vivekananda, had his ashram in Saragachhi in Bengal.

In 1936 Madhav landed in Saragachhi, in search of his Sadguru. He had not breathed a word about this to anybody. Where had Madhav just gone away without informing anybody? His parents wondered and worried about him. Dr. Hedgewar, an acquaintance of the Golwalkar family also heard that Madhav had left home and nobody knew where he was. In Saragachhi Madhav realized that his parents must be very anxious and so he wrote to them informing about his whereabouts, his intentions and also that he was doing fine. Life at the ashram at Saragachhi unearthed several aspects of Madhav's personality. Swami Akhandanandaji was very old and was not keeping well. Day and night Madhav served him. He in fact completely devoted himself to this service. When Akhandanandaji was unwell, Madhav used keep awake and take care of him through the night.

Madhav made repeated requests to Akhandanandaji that he be initiated into sanyas. Akhandanandaji agreed. On 13th January 1937, on the auspicious day of Makarsankranti, Madhav received initiation. When this moment actually came, Madhav was very overwhelmed, he felt deeply moved. He said to Akhandanandaji, "I have been bestowed with this blessing, this good fortune that one hopes to receive once perhaps in innumerable births. The initiation has proved an exhilarating moment." Madhav became aware that the initiation had brought about very fundamental changes in his personality. Blessing him, Swami Akhandanandaji said, "All that is good in me, I am giving to you and you give to me, all that is undesirable in you." Then on this

very day, Swami Akhandanandaji sat Madhav and Amitabh Maharaj by his side and talking to them until as late into the night as 3.30, he unravelled to them many spiritual mysteries.

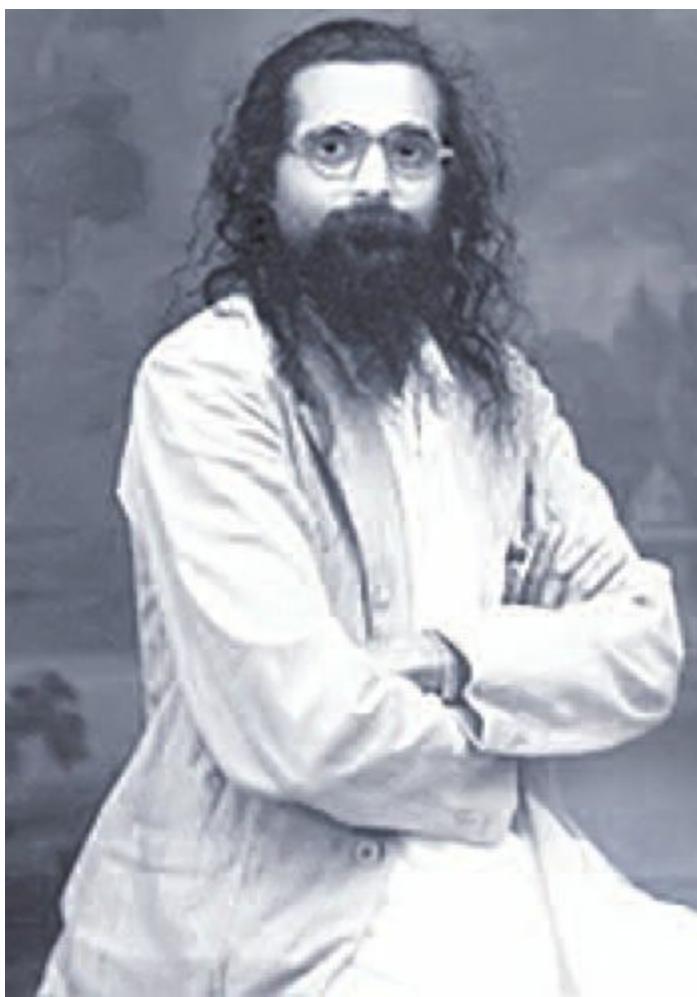
For Madhav, that was it! He was decided! Life was not going to head any other way. However, what Swami Akhandanandaji predicted in the course of his talk with Amitabh Maharaj, was completely different. 'Madhav is going to work with Dr. Hedgewar, he is not going to be here', he said. In a few days, he received a letter from his mother. She wrote that she was unwell and wished to see him. The letter made Madhav perplexed. His mother was unwell but then he was already initiated! What was he to do? He turned to Swami Akhandanandaji for guidance. Before Madhav could even utter a word, on his own Akhandanandaji said, "You have received a letter from your mother, haven't you? You must go." Madhav returned to Nagpur. In February 1937 Swami Akhandanandaji departed from this world.

Madhav arrived home. It was his mother, who welcomed him. Pleasantly surprised to see her in good health, Madhav asked her about it. "You are my medicine and you are my doctor. When I got to know that you were coming, I was cured" his mother explained. In Nagpur, Madhav happened to meet Dr. Hedgewar. "Now that you have come, it feels like a big load off my chest" were Dr. Hedgewar's suggestive words, loaded with meaning. At the time, Madhav was not quite clear about what exactly Dr. Hedgewar meant. In 1937 the Sangh was twelve years old and was spreading its limbs. Dr. Hedgewar however was not keeping good health. To whom ought he to assign his responsibilities, he wondered. It was therefore that he looked at Madhav's return to Nagpur and their meeting, as a divine indication, a sort of god sent signpost so to say. It was therefore but natural that Madhav became the focus of attention for Dr. Hedgewar. In 1939, in Shindi, a village in the vicinity of Nagpur, prominent swayamsevaks were engaged in deliberations over the progress of the Sangh, matters like instructions to be issued, the prayer, etc. through a period of eight days. Following the discussion on a certain topic, Dr. Hedgewar would pronounce his decision which was always unanimously accepted. Guruji would table his studied and profound opinion to each and every subject, which confirmed and reinforced further, the trust Dr. Hedgewar had felt for Guruji. The self-restraint that Guruji always exhibited, together with his total devotion and dedication to the work, filled everyone

with admiration. They were all very impressed. Thus everybody began to trust that Guruji would prove a competent successor to Dr. Hedgewar. In 1939 ShreeGuruji was appointed the 'Sarkaryawaah' of the Sangh.

At the third 'Sangh training session' organized in Nagpur in 1940, Dr. Hedgewar, owing to his failing health, had hardly been able to say a few words. But these few words went on to prove a priceless and eternal source of inspiration for the swayamsevaks. 'I see before my eyes, a miniature version of the Hindu nation. All I wish to say to you, is make the work of the Sangh, your foremost and chief mission in life. Do not ever allow the unfortunate moment in life, where you have to say that you were once a Sangh swayamsevak.'

Dr.Hedgewar's health was deteriorating when he once sent for Guruji and said to him, "It is now time you took on the responsibility of the Sangh work." He then departed from his tired and worn body on 21st June 1940. Dr.Hedgewar's last rites over, all returned to the Sangh office and his letters were read out in the presence of all swayamsevaks. "After me, it will be Guruji, who will take charge and responsibility as the 'Sarsanghachalak'" so Dr. Hedgewar had written very clearly in his letter. Guruji was all of 35 years at the time!



The throne of Vikramaditya – the seat of righteous act

Guruji was all of 35 years when the responsibility of the post of the Sarsanghachalak fell on his shoulders. In comparison with certain senior swayamsevaks of the Sangh, Guruji was fairly a new comer. Neither were swayamsevaks scattered all over the country familiar with him nor had Guruji undertaken any extensive travelling until then. So, under the circumstances, it was indeed natural, that a few well wishers should wonder how the Sangh would progress under Guruji's leadership. On assuming the post of the Sarsanghachalak, Guruji called a meeting of the senior swayamsevaks of the Sangh. On this occasion he opened his mind to them. "In Dr. Hedgewar, was the confluence of the mother's tender affection, the father's authority and the guru's guidance. The responsibility he has entrusted me with, is extremely difficult and exigent and I too am wondering how I am going to be able to live up to it. Dr. Hedgewar has left behind the throne of Vikramaditya i.e. the seat of righteous decision and righteous decision alone! To sit in his seat and run the Sangh ably, I require co-operation from all of you. Besides, I am sure I will receive your support and guidance to fulfil this purpose. Our organization is an unassailable, invincible fortress! The vultures pecking at it, will end up with their beaks ripped off!"

The swayamsevaks' zeal swelled up listening to Guruji's words that brimmed over with confidence. For Guruji, the mission of the Sangh was the sole purpose of his life. He strived relentlessly to imbibe in his personality, all that he felt could favour the mission. It was his resolve that his daily routine, his lifestyle and his temperament had to be concordant with the Sangh. A Hindu nation was what Dr. Hedgewar had always dreamt of and Guruji began toiling hard towards the realization of this dream, which was now the sole goal, he had set himself.

As the Sarsanghachalak, he travelled the length and the breadth of the country. The Sangh too, had begun to gather fair strength by then. By means of the swayamsevak network, Guruji kept tirelessly at organizing and uniting

the society. In the course of his travel he learnt about several incidents in the country. The 'Quit India' movement was well underway and quite a few of the Sangh swayamsevaks were part of it. Independence was quite imminent on the horizon and the British had gauged that they were going to have to leave the country. However, they were not going to let go so easily, at least not unless they had caused rifts in the Bharatiya society, a task they had long since begun.

That was the time when the prominent political parties in the country, viz. the Congress, the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha were all vociferous about their political views and even gained notable public response. The Muslim League however, aggressively pushed for dividing the country. The Hindu community was at the receiving end of attacks from various levels. Grudge and rancour on religious grounds brewed on, threatening to widen the rift. The Congress, the chief political party too was totally at a loss to know what to do in the given circumstances. They were at their wits' end. It was precisely at this time, that the Second World War began and the British seemed to be taking a beating all over the world.

In these trying times, the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' was the only social organization that had a countrywide reach. Though the Sangh had never been a participant in the country's politics per se, it had all along encouraged its swayamsevaks to be part of the struggle for country's independence. It had also vehemently opposed all that could prove detrimental to the interest of the society and that of the nation. Critics of the Sangh always tend to overlook this fact and that is how it has been, right from its inception. However, this has also been the reason why this injudicious critique failed to make any impression and the Sangh kept growing, regardless.

Still on his journey through the country, Guruji got to know of a horrifying conspiracy. Certain extremely aggressive groups in the country were all set to kill leaders, who they thought were feeble. Had this plot of killing the most eminent leaders of the country ever been executed, anarchy was the one certain consequence to reckon with and the Sangh would never have approved of it. The swayamsevaks have always placed national interest above all else, even their life. If it ever came to that, for the swayamsevaks, it is always 'the nation before the organization' and it is for the sake of the nation

that the organization exists and about this there are no two ways in their mind. Guruji communicated all about this plot to the leaders concerned and busted the plot thus averting the probable threat of anarchy and instability.

Those, who spew venom at the Sangh are unaware of this historical fact and even if they were aware of it, they would not give up making all those baseless allegations, would they? Anyway, I just thought I should share this information since it came up for me in the course of the chain of events. So, coming back to where we left, those possessed by the communist ideology, had, at the time, set about triggering unrest everywhere. .

On 16th August 1946, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who had all along insisted on a separate state of Pakistan, handed to his supporters, the violent message of 'direct action'. The fire that had already engulfed western Punjab and Sind, began spreading through the country. Suhrawardy, Jinnah's supporter in East Bengal began brutal violence and carnage. Jinnah and his supporters in fact seemed to be posing a very pointed question: "Concede the demand of Pakistan or the carnage continues! The choice is yours!" Many an instance that would prove a stigma on humanity kept happening and so very obviously evoked reaction. The Hindu community too was seething with anger.

The pracharaks and the swayamsevaks of the Sangh were sincerely doing their bit. They were ready even to put their life on the line for the welfare of the society. Many even did so though history might not have taken note of it. ShreeGuruji, who had assumed the leadership of the Sangh in these times, gave to the pracharaks and the swayamsevaks, clear instructions that no price was too dear to pay, for the protection of our society. Come what may, they were not to back out of this mission. The swayamsevaks too, followed Guruji's words and staked their lives. The society, in all probability, is oblivious of their sacrifice. But those, who witnessed the bloodshed during the partition are surely aware of it and they will stand testimony to the matchless contribution of the Sangh in those times. The Sangh however, has never believed in blowing its own trumpet. The fact remains although, that this was exactly why the unique role and contribution of the Sangh never received as much acclaim as it rightfully ought to have done. For me, this series of articles, serves as a platform to narrate 'history'.

Finally, the country was partitioned. The political leadership of the time had

neither the guts nor the mindset to prevent it. At the stroke of midnight, on 14th August 1947, Pakistan came into being. The river Sindhu, we revered all through the thousands of years of the nation's history, very much ours and part of our culture and civilization, shed tears because she parted from us. Our society had to come to terms with the bitter truth that the Sindhu River, on whose banks the Vedas were composed, was not part of independent Bharat. The Bharatiyas are well aware of the significance of the Sindhu River. To quote Swatantryaveer Savarkar, "Had it not been for the Sindhu, where would the Hindus come from?"

A little before the country became independent, Guruji was travelling through Sind and western Punjab, now part of Pakistan. The regions were suffering ghastly bloodshed and plunder; and despite the situation, the Shakhas were very much functional in Karachi, Hyderabad and Shikarpur of the Sind and in Lahore, Rawalpindi and other places in western Punjab, their flag hoisted high and fluttering fearlessly. Respected Guruji visited these Shakhas and boosted the morale of the Hindus. In those days, stepping into these regions was like entering into the jaws of death and hoping to return alive! But ShreeGuruji was not the one to be daunted. He travelled – at times in a goods train and at others, even in the engine wagon and that too without any personal security arrangements apart from a few swayamsevaks who accompanied him.

Anyway, the partition happened after all and independence did come our way but with a breach. Post independence Guruji took to travelling the country. The Hindus, running for their lives, were fleeing Pakistan. 'Do whatever possible for their safety and rehabilitation; and assist the government also in these matters', were Guruji's instructions to the swayamsevaks. Arranging for food, water, shelter for the hundreds of thousands of Hindu brothers and sisters streaming into the country from Pakistan, was a challenge the nation, still young, was faced with. The Sangh took the plunge in this service. Recently released, the movie 'Bhag Milkha bhag' depicts the times of the partition. The movie also portrays the swayamsevaks of the Sangh extending help to our Hindu and our Sikh brothers, crossing over from Pakistan.

The swayamsevaks of the Sangh had worked hard, literally toiled tirelessly in

this service that they dedicatedly offered at the time. This contribution on the Sangh's part, revealed its sensitive and humane side. However, that 'the partition was the unalterable and final truth', was something Guruji never accepted. The cleft image of my motherland must re-integrate into one unbroken whole and that exactly ought to be the dream every citizen nurtures in his heart! This was what Guruji longed for and ever so ardently!



ShreeGuruji's appeal

The country became independent. Despite the raw and bleeding wound of the partition, people rejoiced in the country's independence and celebrated it. Yet at the time, there were a handful, who had sunk into despair. Swantantryaveer Savarkar was overwhelmingly saddened by the partition. Patriots like Savarkar and ShreeGuruji were of the opinion that this geographical divide was unnatural because Pakistan, who wanted to be a separate nation, shared common forefathers with us. If not now, at some point in time, they would surely have been able to live in co-existence with us. Had the efforts towards the unity and the integrity of the nation been more resolute and more strong-willed, they would have certainly met with success, so patriots like Savarkar and ShreeGuruji felt. But that was not to be. Be it in a split condition, the country was indeed independent. But the British had not gifted freedom on a platter after all. A price of many a lives had been paid. So before we go on, let us pay tribute to those, who offered sacrifice, who gave their lives to free the country from the clutches, first of the Mughals and then of the British.

Post independence, ShreeGuruji started to travel in the country. His speeches were breathing life and fire in people. Politics had taken off too and scoring over one another as political contenders was a compelling part of the game. So, politically speaking, appreciating a rival's good work is bound to prove dangerous. Leave alone those in the political game for power, those advocating a certain ideology do not indulge in it either. They, in fact, keep picking faults in their contender's work. The Sangh stood apart from all of this. It was never caught in this sort of political play and this, it owed to the values and norms that Dr. Hedgewar and Guruji had laid down. Guruji, as a matter of fact, had no foe in the world. He harboured no enmity at all for anybody. The mission of the Sangh is the mission of God and must necessarily be devoted to the welfare of the nation and that of the society at large. At the same time, any other entity working in the interest of the nation, deserves to be appreciated as well, was another one of the values that he had taught.

The swayamsevaks imbibed ShreeGuruji's ideals of not harbouring enmity in

the mind, of being soft-spoken and of practising these preached ideals. Addressing a huge public meeting on 14th January 1948, ShreeGuruji gave the message of social harmony. Literature and songs advocating the Sangh's ideology were published on a large scale and the public's response to these was very overwhelming and encouraging. Seeing the growing strength and popularity of the Sangh, political parties were getting the jitters and the fear that they could be faced with a new rival, was eating into them. Like we spoke about earlier, after independence, politics that took root in the country had just the two considerations: it was self-centered and party-centric. As a result, the nation, no more the primary consideration, was relegated to the back-seat. In the given circumstances, nobody would want an organization as popular as the Sangh, as a competitor, would they? This kind of insecurity of those in the political circles, only brought an innocent child's smile to ShreeGuruji's face. 'We vie neither for politics nor for power. Organizing society, giving it good values, grooming it and rousing confidence in people, is all that we aim at' reiterated Guruji. But the fear of the Sangh just would not decline.

Maharashtra was supposed to host a huge Shibir of the Sangh in the year 1948. More than a hundred thousand swayamsevaks were expected to attend it. The government of the times, refused permission to this event, which fact is adequate to prove the grudge that the contemporary political powers held against the Sangh. They in fact, were looking for an opportunity to ban the Sangh. Gandhiji was assassinated on 30th January 1948. Guruji was deeply shocked. Actually scheduled to travel at the time, he cancelled his trip and reached Nagpur. Through a telegraphic message, he conveyed his grief to the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru and to the Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. His message was a whole-hearted admiration of Gandhiji's unique personality along with an expression of intense grief over the assassination.

To think that Guruji was arrested on the night of 1st February 1948! On 4th February the government declared that the Sangh would be banned. Guruji wrote to the Prime Minister and to the Home Minister from his prison cell, asking them, on what basis the decision was taken.

Till date, I remember the day so clearly! On 5th February 1948, as usual I

went to the Shakha for children. I saw our teacher standing there. The scene however, was not like it always used to be. The teacher explained that the Shakha would not assemble for some time. We would be intimated about when it would resume. Until then we were to meet regularly at the Samartha Vyayam Mandir premises. All of this unfolded at my birth place – the village of Amreli in Saurashtra.

I was born on 26th May 1942. My father, Harilal Jethalal Mehta was an active member of the Congress and had great regard for Lokmanya Tilak. It was my father, who sent me to the Shakha of the Sangh. 'Do not play all by yourself. Learn to play with others' was what he told me, while admitting me to the Shakha for children. In those days, attending the Shakha for children was playing Kho Kho, hopping, Hututu, singing patriotic songs in chorus with other children and then ending the session with prayers. That was all it meant for me then. I was too young to understand the ideology of the Sangh. But the values that the Sangh imbibed in us, did have an effect on my mind and at that tender age I wondered why the Shakha was not going to be held.

That Gandhiji's assassination was the reason why the Sangh was banned, was what I learnt only later. But what did these two occurrences have to do with one another? To this question, I had no answer as a child and I do not have it today either since it was the Sangh that had exposed the plot of Gandhiji's assassination. Yet the Sangh had to face charges of his assassination and even today some prejudiced minds link the Sangh with Gandhiji's assassination. It would therefore not be an overstatement to say that either they are not aware of history or they do not want to acknowledge the truth contained in it.

Swayamsevaks of the Sangh then started a satyagraha against the injustice. 'Four or five thousand persons would stage a protest for a few days and then forget about it' thought some in the government. Well! 77090 swayamsevaks got themselves voluntarily arrested in protest against the ban and against Guruji's arrest. But exercising self-restraint, they did not resort to violence while staging the protest. Families of several swayamsevaks had to endure terrible hardships during the time; and yet, not once did they stray from restraint nor even from their chosen path of protest.

Still in prison, respected Guruji appealed to them, "This is a conflict; a fight of the dharma against the adharma, justice against injustice, liberal broad-

mindedness against pettymindedness as also goodwill against ill will. In this conflict, victory is certainly going to be ours, as God and ultimate glorious victory always go with the 'dharma' (truth, nobility). So now, rise! May the war cry of victory surging from the profundities of the heart, fill and resonate in the skies, the ethers of the universe! Rise to proclaim victory and carry the mission to fulfilment!

BharatMata ki Jay!



BharatMata ki Jay!

The Sangh was banned and the Sarsanghachalak ShreeGuruji was jailed. In protest the swayamsevaks did stage the satyagraha and even agitations but none of them gave in to acts that could have been detrimental to national interest. The management and the discipline of the Sangh were after all unremitting. During the time that ShreeGuruji, the Sarsanghachalak was in jail, Shree Bhaiyyaji Dani, the Sarkaryawah then, discharged the responsibility of guiding the swayamsevaks. He instructed the swayamsevaks to observe restraint in demonstrating their protest and none of them exceeded the respectable limit. Guruji too on his part, kept writing to the ruling government, expressing his disapproval of the unjust ban on the Sangh. 'The Sangh had nothing at all to do with Gandhiji's assassination and so making false allegations on the Sangh and imposing a ban on it, was, as a matter of fact, an injustice against the society at large for the Sangh was after all, an integral part of society', a fact Guruji tried to draw the government's attention to. At the same time, he appealed to the public, to oppose the allegations against the Sangh.

Guruji's appeal gradually began to show its effect and the public became convinced that the Sangh was indeed innocent. That the ban had to be lifted and efforts towards it needed to be taken, was the feeling, even those not connected with the Sangh but committed to the truth, also began to have. Moreover, the society was aware of the tremendously trying times that the swayamsevaks faced during the ban and it also made note of how, rooted firm to their unshakable stance despite their distress, the swayamsevaks did not indulge in any national or social harm. These facts did, in their own way, build a favourable public opinion. Reputed leaders like Shree G. V. Ketkar of Maharashtra and Shree T. V. R. Venkatram Shasrty of Tamilnadu demanded that the ban on the Sangh be lifted. Along with that of Sardar Patel, the Home Minister then, the view of some others in the cabinet too tilted in favour of lifting the ban.

The government insisted that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh draw out a constitution so to say, defining its objectives and policies. Neither itss

objectives nor its policies, contained anything meant to be kept under wraps and so the Sangh was perfectly agreeable on the issue. Respected Guruji too accepted the government's demand and the constitution of the Sangh was drawn out. On 12th July 1949, an announcement declaring that the ban on the Sangh had been lifted, was made on the 'Akashwani' (radio). The ban had been lifted unconditionally and following this decision, the Home Minister, Sardar Patel personally wrote to Guruji congratulating him and conveying his best wishes to the mission of the Sangh. On 13th July 1949 Guruji stepped out of the Baitul jail. He headed straight for Nagpur where he arrived around afternoon. Thousands were waiting in eagerness. The moment he arrived, loud slogans of 'Bharatmata ki jay!' reverberated in the air and filled the skies. Having successfully withstood the gruelling test of time, the son of the land, of the people had returned home unscathed despite the blaze of the challenges, in fact ever more radiant and ever more luminous! He received the hearty and warm welcome he so deserved!

Following a four or five day stay in Nagpur, Guruji arrived in Madras (Chennai), met with Shree T. V. R. Venkatram Shastry and expressed his gratitude. After the ban was lifted Shastryji had sent him a telegram that said, "All is well that ends well!" This meeting was followed by another one with Shree G. V. Ketkar. Guruji had to thank him too. After travelling to Pune and to Mumbai from Madras (Chennai), Guruji returned to Nagpur. The six months spanning August 1949 to January 1950, Guruji spent travelling across the country. He received a very enthusiastic welcome from people wherever he went. It was during this tour that he became aware of how much love people felt for the Sangh and for him personally too. Around the time, he learnt that Sardar Patel was not keeping too well and so he went to Mumbai to see him. Sardar Patel received him with love and respect. What he said then, is of extreme importance:

"I wanted meet you and express my feelings in person. I am well aware of the sacrifice, that the swayamsevaks made, at the time of the partition, while bringing safely to their homeland, the Hindus of Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Hyderabad and other regions of Pakistan. Besides, I also know, that it was only after all were safely transported here, that the swayamsevaks left from there" voicing his sentiments, Sardar Patel said. However, Sardar Patel also shared with Guruji, the cause of his concern: "There are so many

waiting to take undue advantage of the distinctions of caste, the untouchability and the inappropriate hierarchy in our country. If their sly schemes have to be foiled, our society will have to be strengthened and this, you can make happen. I earnestly trust that you will" said Sardar Patel. "It is the Sangh's efforts towards resolving the Kashmir issue, that have bolstered the confidence that it can indeed do it" he added further.

That the very first Home Minister of the country, should laud as exemplary, the efforts made by the Sangh towards resolution of the Kashmir issue, might baffle the present day generation. But then there are many, who are totally ignorant about this segment of history. The Kashmir issue remains unresolved even today and the world fears that Bharat and Pakistan might fight a war over it. Every day Pakistan makes threats to the effect. However, to whom we really owe the part of Kashmir that is in our possession today and who sacrificed their lives for this purpose, is indeed a vital part of history that is never revealed to the people of this country. Should we study and understand this part, even today we could be rid of many a problem the country is faced with. Moreover, it could also go a long way in giving people a fair idea of the commitment and the staunch loyalty that the Sangh feels for the nation apart from the influence of the Sangh and the trust reposed in it. It is mainly for this reason that I wish to present this segment of history before you.

In the third week of October 1947 the Pakistani army barged into Kashmir. We have to bear in mind, that it was not even ten weeks that they were independent; and Pakistan was already revealing its true colours! Several large and small princely states had merged into the nation of Bharat but Harisingh, the king of Kashmir was still reluctant to follow suit. His point was, 'though a part of Europe, if Switzerland could retain its separate identity and exist as a separate entity, what was wrong if Kashmir, located between Bharat and Pakistan, did the same? Why could it not exist as an independent state? That was his argument. But he was merely being naive.

The Pakistani soldiers, who had entered Kashmir disguised as gangsters, had created havoc all over. All they aimed at, was to take over Kashmir, by hook or by crook. They were not here to promote humanitarian causes, no way! The army of the princely state of Kashmir was not in a position to counter the

Pakistani army. Also, the army of state of Kashmir even had a few personnel, who supported Pakistan and were in its favour. Harisingh was even then adamant about not merging Kashmir into Bharat and so Bharat had no choice but to watch Kashmir slowly slip into Pakistani hands. But Sardar Patel was not the one to sit back and be a helpless spectator to the crisis. He exhibited intelligent diplomacy at this critical hour, as he had foreseen this danger much beforehand. But he just was not making any headway with Harisingh, who had adopted a stubborn stance. So, Sardar Patel turned to ShreeGuruji for help.

"You alone are capable of convincing Raja Harisingh, that Kashmir can count on a future, only if it merges with Bharat" said Sardar Patel in a personal appeal to ShreeGuruji. The Pakistani army was already gnawing at Kashmir's land and even in such a situation, Raja Harisingh was not coming to a decision about Kashmir's merger with Bharat. It was at this time that in response to Sardar Patel's appeal, ShreeGuruji arrived in Kashmir. He met with Raja Harisingh and his queen Maharani Taradevi. The two extended a warm and loving welcome to ShreeGuruji and presented him with a Kashmiri shawl. The meeting happened on 18th October 1947. At the outset, Guruji gave a quiet hearing to what Raja Harisingh had to say and then went on to warn him about the impending danger.

"Switzerland could remain an independent entity because it did not have a country like Pakistan for its neighbour or even in the vicinity for that matter! In the event that Kashmir, located between Bharat and Pakistan, remained independent, it faced no danger from Bharat. But can you say the same of Pakistan? Can you be sure of that country?" The answer was obviously in the negative. Pakistan had revealed its true colours and intentions within a matter of few days of its independence. "Besides, the Kashmir army that counters Pakistan, has several personnel, who favour Pakistan and are loyal to it. What about them? Kashmir cannot fight Pakistan all by itself. If Kashmir wishes to remain safe and secure, it just has to merge with Bharat. Even after the merger Kashmir would receive its due respect and honour just like other princely states have" assured ShreeGuruji. His words had the desired effect and Raja Harisingh despatched his PrimeMinister, Meherchand Mahajan to Delhi, with documents of merger bearing his signature.

This mission successfully executed, ShreeGuruji returned to Delhi where a huge crowd had assembled to welcome him. At this point, I would rather share the details of a report that BBC broadcast than narrate my account of the event for then it would really be needless for me to say more. In its newsreport the BBC had said, "ShreeGuruji, the Sarsanghachalak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has accomplished what the government of Bharat could not. Guruji is the luminous star rising on the horizon of Bharat!"



For the sake of Kashmir...

Sardar Patel's trust in Guruji was well-grounded and the events that unfolded only validated it. The moment Sardar Patel received documents of the merger, he dispatched Bharat's army to Kashmir. He was in fact already all set. In those days, Bharat had only the Dakota passenger aircrafts. The seats in these aircrafts were ripped off and the resulting space was loaded with military equipment to transport to Kashmir along with the soldiers. However, the area where the Pakistani army had forced in, happened to have no runway. But on receiving the message that the aircraft was to arrive, a runway was constructed overnight. Do we even know, who did the job?

It was the swayamsevaks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, who did it under Shree Balraj Madhok, apracharak. The young and the old both had contributed to this work, thanks to which the Dakota aircraft could land. At the same time, the attack on Srinagar had caused total failure of electric power. A hundred and fifty swayamsevaks of the Sangh reached out for guns, battled the Pakistani aggressors through three days and ultimately saved Srinagar. They were not trained soldiers. But they were willing to do anything, just anything for the sake of the motherland. Many of these lost their lives in this war but they did not cede the land of their dear country to the enemy.

The Dakota planes landed in Kashmir and under the leadership of Major Somnath Sharma the Bharatiya army faced the attacking army of Pakistan, much larger than them in number. On one side was Bharat's army fighting to protect its motherland and on the other, the Pakistani army that had infiltrated into our land with the motive of plunder and atrocities. And of course the Pakistani aggressors proved no match for our valiant Bharatiya army. Within no time the Pak army was clobbered, totally smashed. The defeated Pakistani soldiers had to beat the retreat, in fact run for their lives. Bharat's army chased them right upto Kargil.

The scene in Kashmir on its mountains as tall as 14 thousand feet was one to be proud of! General Thimayya had the Bharatiya tanks run up the lofty

mountain! Never until then had anybody accomplished a task so courageous! This was a golden chance to acquire the land that the country had to let go of, owing to the partition, so Sardar Patel felt. The opinion of the Sarsanghachalak ShreeGuruji too had coincided with that of Sardar Patel during their talk. Our army had instructions from Sardar Patel, to take custody of the land of the Punjab in custody Pakistan, that had extensive wheat fields. Lahore, originally known as 'Lavpur' was ruled by 'Lav', Prabhu ShreeRamchandra's son. And since we are on the topic, let me add that the 'Hindukush' range of mountains have been named after 'Kush', the other son of Prabhu ShreeRamchandra. So it is very obvious, is it not, that this entire region was part of Bharatwarsha!

The Bharatiya army was advancing to reclaim Lahore and Sindh. On an insolent and audacious high about winning Kashmir, Pakistan actually handed Bharat, the opportunity to do so. The Bharatiyas would not really last out considering our bravery, was the delusive presumption the Pakistanis were going by. But then the kind of beating they took from the Bharat's army, made the aggressors wonder if Pakistan was going to last in their hands, leave alone Kashmir!

And just when this golden opportunity was knocking at our door, we were dealt a calamitous blow! Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru approached the United Nations with the Kashmir issue. The United Nations declared an immediate and urgent ceasefire. Bharat's army, already up on the Kargil mountains, received the orders of ceasefire just as they were all set to advance. Actually speaking, there was no need at all to approach the United Nations on this issue, as it was not Bharat that had initiated the war. It was Pakistan that had done so, launching an attack on Bharat's land. Thus, turning to the United Nations and following their orders was actually out of the question. So, we bear even today, the brunt of the horrific consequences of this blunder committed way back then.

Bharat's army was willing to take any decision whatsoever, in the national interest, if it came to that. However, it so happened that a military officer had to voice his regret saying, 'our political leadership lost in negotiations, what we won in war!' Such words of despair might have fallen on our ears after every war against Pakistan. I too have heard first hand, this regret from

military officers.

Sardar Patel was against tabling the issue at the United Nations. On the one hand, we lost the opportunity to reclaim the land we had lost due to the partition and on the other, gauging that despite its attack, Bharat was not really going all out to strike back, Pakistan shed its apprehension. This country has all along, right from the past, been conspiring against Bharat and has not stopped even today. The war in Kashmir drew to an end but Pakistan could retain a large part of Kashmir. Losing this region has meant immense losses to the country in the past and it spells a damage of vast magnitude even today.

The resolution of the Kashmir issue will iron out all differences between Bharat and Pakistan, so Pakistan has consistently claimed. A few 'naive' ones among us even trust them on this. However, the fact is, neither are they aware of history nor are they in touch with the present. Even if the Kashmir issue is solved, Pakistan is not going to stop its antiBharat activity, mainly because ruling over the whole of Bharat is Pakistan's dream. Once upon a time, this country was under the Mughal rule and the rulers of Pakistan have set themselves the goal of recreating the same kind of scene. However, do note that my comment is about the 'rulers of Pakistan'. I have no grudge against the general public of Pakistan. I know several Pakistani citizens, who disagree with their country's policies and there happen to be others, who even feel that 'crossing over to Pakistan was in itself, a big mistake'. Anyway, that is quite another matter. But in the course of this series, I will for sure, share stories of a few Pakistanis I came in contact with.

The war in Kashmir over, Pakistan hatched a fresh plot. Among those, who voiced the demand of the division of Bharat; and consequently that of an independent Pakistan, there were some, who did not go to Pakistan at all. They stayed back here in Bharat and very obviously to plot against it. Taking help of such agents, Pakistan set about working on a horrible conspiracy. The plan was to launch an attack on the parliament, wipe out the political leadership and create anarchy in the country. The next phase of the plan was to attack Bharat taking advantage of the turmoil generated by the anarchy. Those living here but loyal to Pakistan were going to support the plan. The Sangh came to know of this plot. All its relevant details were communicated

to the Home Minister, Sardar Patel.

Alert at all times and ever prompt about the interest and welfare of the nation, Sardar Patel was not the one to ignore the news. He took help of the Sangh to foil this plot. Two swayamsevaks assuming false names made an entry into the conspiracy as participants. They convinced the Pakistan loyalists of their hostility towards Bharat. All details of the conspiracy could thus reach the Sangh and through it, the Home Minister.

To acknowledge the capacity of Sardar Patel, no applause or admiration would be enough! Matchless that he was, he decided to catch the criminals red handed and not go for action right away. So, the day before the parliament was to be attacked, as the preparations for this act were in full swing, the police raided the spot. All of the people, who were engaged in the conspiracy against Bharat could be caught at one time. These included of course, the two swayamsevaks, who staked their lives for the sake of the nation. This plot unearthed and busted, Sardar Patel's faith in the Sangh became stronger than ever. Information about this conspiracy was not revealed to the public, which in the given times, would not have proved prudent.

The year 2001 witnessed an attack by Pakistan-backed terrorists on Bharat's Parliament. We read that a similar plot was hatched several years before this one, which points not only to Pakistan's mindset but also to the danger that it potentially means for Bharat. The Sangh was opposed to the idea of the creation of Pakistan in the first place, because the assumption that peace would prevail in Bharat following the creation of Pakistan, was itself based on an erroneous conception. Lending order and organization as well as strength and competence to society, is the one stately and smooth path to establishing peace.

As on date, Bharat is galloping on the path of progress. Bharat's satellite has entered the orbit of Mars and Pakistan is trying to gain stealthy entry into Bharat. What, other conclusion may we draw from Pakistan's activities on the Jammu-Kashmir Line of Control?



A programme organized by the Sangh after the Kargil war

Hyderabad and Junagadh

In 1948 annexing Kashmir was no big deal for Bharat's army. The Pakistani army that had waged war against Bharat had beaten the retreat. Eventually going on to take over the whole of Kashmir, would not have called for extraordinary effort on the part of the Bharatiya army. But Prime Minister Nehru approached the United Nations over the Kashmir issue and they issued the ceasefire instruction. Bharat imposed on itself, the obligation to implement the orders of the UN and allowed the land that it had almost won over, to slip into Pakistan's hands. And over this very issue today, Pakistan turns around and threatens to bomb Bharat. Bharat, of course, need not bother to respond to this sort of a childish threat. When it is time, Pakistan will, for sure, receive a befitting reply from Bharat. 'The part of Kashmir that Pakistan occupies today, is in actual fact ours; and one day or the other, we have to retrieve it', is a fact that must be impressed on every Bharatiya mind.

Leave alone Kashmir, all of the land that Pakistan stretches across within its borders, is actually speaking ours. A part of the intelligentsia in Pakistan openly admits that the history and the culture of their country and that of Bharat, is one. However, those, who do so, are just about a handful and that, they end up being accused of treason, must admittedly be termed as Pakistan's misfortune. Since we are on the topic, let me share an incident. My brother Mahesh and I were on a train from Ahmadabad to Jodhpur. We were speaking Gujarati and the person sitting next to us began talking to us in Gujarati and even offered us some sweets. I made general enquiries about him and learnt that though he had settled in Karachi, he hailed from Gujrat.

He said he was here on a visit and without our asking him any further questions, began to tell us about his country. He was a goldsmith and had a jewellery shop in Karachi. As long as Hindus were in the majority in Karachi, his business and in fact that of others too flourished. However, after the partition, the Hindus, who belonged here, returned to Bharat and his family had to turn to a new profession. So bad were the times! There were many families, who were totally devastated in the circumstances, he said. 'In Pakistan, it was just not possible to be honest and pursue a means of

livelihood. On the contrary, the more you indulge in illicit activity, the more secure your life', he alleged!

In Pakistan lies and false propaganda had reached the pinnacle. All along in the wars of 1965 and 1971, the Pakistani government had hoodwinked the masses. In 1965 the Pakistani government proclaimed, "Our army will take over Amritsar to begin with; and then go on to seize Delhi. In fact, Delhi is where the Pakistani army is going to have dinner!" The country's common population was fully taken in by the sham. But within no time, it was in for a terrible shock as the Bharatiya army had barged in upto Lahore. It was the person from Karachi, who told us all this. He expressed, that he felt good moving around in Bharat and appreciated the progress that this nation was making though he wondered when Pakistan was going to achieve that kind of progress and even said so in so many words. "I feel like staying back and settling here but that will not be possible" were his words of regret.

The above instance dates back to 1978. If we look at the picture today, the rift between Bharat and Pakistan has widened even further. Anyway! That was an incidental narration. Let us pick up where we left. Kashmir merged with the country but the princely states of Junagadh and Hyderabad remained adamant and resisted integration. What Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel did in the situation, is what must be aware of. All said and done, we are talking of the history of the nation. What has the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh got to do with it, one may well ask! But if we study and understand history, the question will not cross our mind at all.

Hyderabad was a large princely state of the country. Not only did this wealthy state have its own army but it had a private militia called the 'Razakars' functioning on the lines of the 'Gestapo', Hitler's special force, that he possessed apart from his army. The Razakars committed gruesome atrocities on the Hindu population, so much so that the womenfolk were frightened to step out of their homes in the evening. The Nizam's cronies even spoke of launching an attack on New Delhi. 'If the East Bengal surrounded by Bharat, could become part of Pakistan, why could the state of Hyderabad not do so?' was the Nizam's rationale. The issue of the princely state of Hyderabad, therefore spelt a threat to the security of Bharat.

The Sangh was active in Hyderabad. The Shakhas here, functioned braving

the oppression of the Razakars. They were the one ray of hope for the Hindu community in the state. The Sangh conveyed to the Home Minister, Sardar Patel, all about the prevailing circumstances in Hyderabad. 'Unless immediate steps for the safety and protection of the people there were taken, the situation would go completely out of control', was the message communicated clearly to Sardar Patel.

The world then witnessed Sardar Patel's tough leadership in these challenging times. He sent Kanhaiyalal Munshi to Hyderabad, assigning to him, the task of negotiating with the Nizam. Munshiji kept the Nizam engaged in talks while Sardar Patel began intensive preparations to take over Hyderabad. He chalked out a plan to surround Hyderabad from three sides and Major General J. N. Chaudhari, of the Bharatiya army was entrusted the responsibility of taking over Hyderabad. The Nizam was to be kept totally in the dark and nobody else had got a whiff of what was going on either. The Bharatiya army annexed Hyderabad overnight and not a single gunshot had had to be fired.

Like the wise and very significant words of Chanakya go, 'bearing a weapon is a special art in itself. Master this art and you will not need to use the weapon. The sheer awe and the dread that you inspire, will have the enemy on his knees.' That was precisely what happened with the Nizam. The courage and preparedness of the Bharatiya army frightened the Nizam out of his wits and he signed the papers, acceding his princely state to Bharat. The Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru got to know of this, only when he read it in the newspapers the next day. So that gives us an idea of the kind of secrecy that Sardar Patel had maintained in the matter. However, this upset Nehru. He just could not imagine, who could have done it. He landed up at Sardar Patel's residence and expressing his annoyance, began questioning him on the Hyderabad development. Sardar Patel's answer was, "All that happens, happens for the best!" With his clear and candid words he closed the topic.

The story of the merger of the princely state of Junagadh however, is much different. The Nawab of Junagadh was all set to cede his state to Pakistan. Shamaldas Gandhi, a relative of Mahatma Gandhi, was in touch with Sardar Patel at the time. He went to Delhi and informed Sardar Patel about the situation in Junagadh. A few armed soldiers, but in civilian clothes, were

required to be dispatched to Junagadh. It would obviously not have proved appropriate to dispatch soldiers and weapons officially and so Sardar Patel resorted to a very different option. The princely state of Rajkot was not very far from Junagadh and it was Sardar Patel, who had sealed the armoury of Rajkot.

Shamaldas Gandhi approached the officer responsible for the armoury and connected him with Sardar Patel on telephone. Although the conversation the two had is unknown to history, the next day, the newspapers carried news that the weapons there, had been stolen and that investigations were underway.

All these weapons reached the soldiers, who had already entered Junagadh in civilian clothes. The Nawab of Junagadh obviously stood no chance and was compelled to accede his princely state to Bharat. He however, fled to Pakistan. But the picture portrayed to the world has been, that there was an armed uprising of the subjects of Junagadh, who forced the Nawab to merge the state. Be it so many years since the incident, the truth has to be revealed and hence the narration of this chain of events. The Bharatiya soldiers, who entered Junagadh, had received total co-operation and support of the Sangh swayamsevaks, which fact has to be made note of. The action that Sardar Patel took in Junagadh, is known as 'Aarzi Hukumat' – 'the people's rebellion'. My elder brother Madhusudan Mehta too, was part of it.

Sardar Patel had to take a firm stand and tough decisions to bring about the merger of certain princely states; but then there were patriotic princes, who willingly allowed the merger of their states into Bharat. Speaking of such instances, we have to pay tribute right at the outset to 'Shree Krishnakumar Sinh', the prince of Bhavnagar. Shree Krishnakumarji was a great 'Go-bhakta', he worshipped the sacred Go-mata, i.e. the cow. He had done a profound study of the Gir breed of cows. He had several articles on the topic to his credit, of which one was translated from English to Portuguese. Mr. Sid, a progressive farmer in Brazil, happened to lay his hands on it. He read it and was so impressed that he began corresponding with Krishnakumarji and even expressed a request for a personal meeting.

Mr. Sid travelled all the way to Bhavnagar and met with Krishnakumarji. He visited the 'Go-shala' (the cow stable) and learnt about the research that had

been done. He returned to Brazil taking with him some Gir cattle. As of today, Brazil has about three million cows of the Gir breed and the slaughter of the Gir cows is banned in this country, which explains of course, the increase in their number, not to mention the benefits that the dairy industry reaps from them. In the capital of Brazil, a street has been named after Shree Krishnakumar Sinh, which must make the Bharatiya's chest swell up with pride, must it not? The Bharatiya government had, at the time, honoured Shree Krishnakumar Sinh, by appointing him the first Governor of the 'Madras Presidency'

Raje Pratapsinh Gaikwad, the son of HH Sayajirao Gaikwad was the prince of Baroda. Pratapsinh continued with all the projects for the welfare and progress of the people that Sayajirao had initiated. A special mention has to be made, of the stress he laid on education and of his facility of compulsory and free education, that went on to set a new ideal for the nation. It was Sayajirao Gaikwad, who pioneered and helped realize the concept of the 'library' in this country.

Thus were some princes – patriots and ever committed to the welfare of the subjects! If only all were as patriotic as they were, it would have been possible to rout the British out of our country much before they actually left it.



After independence...

Merging the princely states was by no means an easy task. It was all thanks to the tough leadership of Sardar Patel, that this arduous and complex process became easy; and the nation became one. The nation was whole. The difficulties that the nation was faced with, were however, still unresolved. The Hindus believed that they would be able to stay on in that land even after the creation of Pakistan and they did have reason to do so, due to an assurance to the effect from Mohammed Ali Jinnah. But it turned out that it was no more than eyewash. That he did not mean to keep his word, was proved in but a short while. The creation of Pakistan had in no way curtailed blind, mindless religious fanaticism. In the East Bengal, now a part of Pakistan, 15 million Hindus were suffering appalling atrocities and were left with no choice but to migrate to Bharat. So the protection and security of these Hindu brethren was the responsibility of the Bharatiya government. However, the government appeared to display extreme apathy and the Hindus streaming into the West Bengal were labelled 'infiltrators' by the government.

How unfortunate! Once the partition was agreed upon, the government of Bharat ought to have accepted complete responsibility of the security of the life and the property of both the Hindu and the Sikh brothers living on the land that was now part of Pakistan. But that was not to be. What happened on the contrary, was totally inane! These people crossing over from Pakistan were considered 'infiltrators' and scorned at. The Sangh just would not tolerate that. 'These people, our brothers, were 'refugees' and not 'infiltrators'. They had to be respected and their right to reside in Bharat, had to be recognized; for, after all, they did have the right to do so', was respected Guruji's demand. For the benefit of these refugees from the East Bengal, the Sangh formed the 'Vastuharaa Sahayata Samiti'. This was a committee that made available, substantial support to the refugees, who had arrived in West Bengal. The help extended to them included arrangements for accommodation and support to earn livelihood. The Sangh appealed to the society too, to come forward and join in the endeavour.

Thus, it was not only before the partition but also after it, that the Sangh

battled every single challenge that society was faced with. It was just that as was customary with the Sangh, it did not indulge in any publicity of its work. As for the swayamsevaks, they offered service out of the selfless sentiment that, they were merely doing their duty towards the society and the nation. They did not feel the need for credit. But then there happened to be some, who eyed this as a chance and grounds as well, to question the contribution of the Sangh, during the partition times. But to that, the Sangh did not feel the need to reply.

In 1950 as Guruji was travelling, he came to know that Sardar Patel's failing health. Guruji rushed to meet him. Saying that 'he did not have much time on his hands', Sardar Patel expressed hope that 'Guruji's organization would keep producing patriots to serve the nation'. Later in the same year, Sardar Patel passed away. This great leader had meticulously maintained accounts of the party's funds at the time. He had instructed his daughter Maniben to hand over this amount of Rs. 20 lakh 70 thousand (Rs 2.7 million) to Jawaharlal Nehru. Two days after the death of Sardar Patel, Maniben did exactly that. There is yet another point about Sardar Patel, that we must make a mention of. Sardar Patel's son, 'Dahyabhai', had strict instructions from his father, to not set foot in Delhi as long as his father was the Home Minister, lest there arise an opportunity for allegation that he favoured his son in a given matter. Sardar Patel was very cautious on that score.

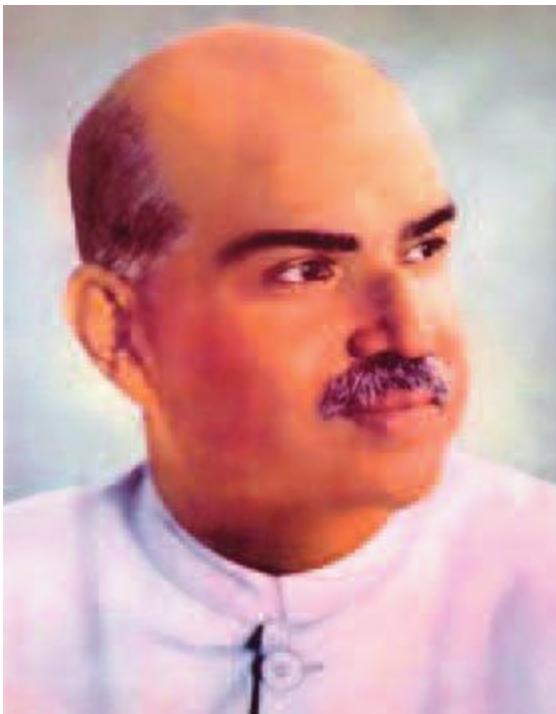
Maniben Patel lived with her father only to help him and to take care of him. While we are on this subject, let me share a few instances. This dutiful and noble daughter, who was so lovingly committed to serving this great leader of the nation, her father, received but neglect and disregard after his demise and that is the reality! That the administrative powers and machinery should ignore and treat with disdain, families, who strove for the nation, is indeed regrettable.

The passing away of Sardar Patel, a leader ever vigilant about the welfare of the nation, had left a very large void on the political scene and that all ardent patriots did recognize. At the time, Dr. Shama Prasad Mukherji met with Guruji in Nagpur and shared the concern. He was a member of the cabinet ministry then and was looking to establish a political party whose highest priority would be the interest of the nation. He sought Guruji's help in the

matter. The Sangh had nothing whatsoever, to do with Gandhiji's assassination. In fact it was the Sangh that in 1942, had helped to thwart the plot to kill Gandhiji. And yet, the Sangh had no representation in the Parliament or anybody to present their side of the story either, which perturbed everyone. Politics never fascinated the Sangh, neither then nor today. The Sangh was definitely of the conviction that someone had to come forward to present the truth, for that would only reinforce democracy.

Guruji assured ShamaPrasad Mukherji of support and handed over to him, Pandit Dindayal Upadhyay, Atalbihari Vajpayee, Balraj Madhok and Lal Krishna Advani among others, who were then senior swayamsevaks of the Sangh. The Bharatiya Jansangh was formed in Delhi on 21st October 1951 and ShamaPrasad Mukherji became its first President but also won the elections held in 1952. In 1980, the Jansangh was dissolved and reconvened to form the 'Bharatiya Janata Party'. The above instances are connected with history down the line, which makes it necessary to mention them.

Had a leader of the stature of ShamaPrasad Mukherji lived longer, the nation stood much to gain. This ardent nationalist and a skilled parliamentarian, had on many occasions, rebuked the government on issues of national interest. He strongly disapproved of the government's wishywashy stance on the Kashmir issue. Article 370 was, an invitation to trouble, Mukherji had warned in no uncertain terms. It might have faded in our memory by now, but in those days Kashmir had its own separate flag, its own national



Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherji

anthem and its own Prime Minister as well. This meant that in this one nation of Bharat, there existed two Prime Ministers, two national anthems and two flags at one and the same time! The citizens of Bharat needed a permit to enter Kashmir.

Shamaprasad Mukherji just did not approve of this and crossing the Ravi River, he entered Kashmir without a permit. 'Why should there be a need for a permit to travel within the boundaries of one's own country?' was his question and also the reason for which he was

arrested. It was then declared that he died while in prison. 'Was it natural death or was it murder', is a question that is asked even today for it has not met with a satisfactory answer. Shamaprasad Mukherji gave his life for the country and his sacrifice was not in vain. Later, Lal Bahadur Shastri became the Prime Minister and for the first time he had the premiership of Kashmir, its flag and its national anthem annulled. Kashmir was to be a state in the nation of Bharat. Article 370 that segregates Kashmir however, still prevails. If only this article had been rescinded, Jammu & Kashmir would be better secured and would have had a flourishing economy.

Even today, we pay the price of blunders that the political leadership of Bharat committed from time to time. To start with, we became the architects of our own trouble by carrying the Kashmir issue to the United Nations. The British warned about China but we ignored the warning. Bharat had its military post in Tibet. The British, while granting independence, had not only advised against withdrawing it but recommended strengthening the squad. Our government of the time did not heed this piece of advice. ShreeGuruji had warned the government about China's imperialist tendencies. He even tried to point out to the government, that China had an eye on Arunachal Pradesh. While travelling in the Purvanchal, he had information that China was covertly trying to build roads through the borders of independent Bharat, which was why he attempted to draw the government's attention to the fact.

The brunt of the horrible consequences of the blunder, viz. that of withdrawing the military post in Tibet, is being felt. 'It is high time the government acted and it must!' was the demand that began to be voiced in the periodicals of the Sangh. But Prime Minister Nehru went on to welcome his Chinese counterpart Chau En-Lai to India. China successfully convinced Nehru, that it was Bharat's friend and won his trust. The rest is history. 64 thousand sq km of land that actually belongs to Bharat, is now under China's sway.

China gulped this land that belonged to Bharat. Nehru was deeply shocked. He had to take a lot of flak from all quarters. In the parliament however, he tried to cover up by saying that 'the land was not fertile, it was unproductive'. Retorting sharply to Nehru's words, Mahavir Tyagi, a fellow congressman, said, "The land may be barren for all we know! How does that matter? What matters is that it belonged to our country!"

Be it the Sangh or any other entity, if it happens to caution the government in the nation's interest, the government must give it due serious consideration and arrive at a decision that best serves the purpose of national interest. The Sangh had, very often, cautioned the government of independent Bharat but happily oblivious in its naive and utopic world, the government chose to disregard the warnings. However, the redeeming factor was that Nehru admitted his mistake. In 1962 when China betrayed Nehru's trust and invaded our country, the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' rushed to the aid of our

army. The swayamsevaks' service ranged right from making arrangements for the soldiers' food to donating blood for the injured ones. Our country did not possess any sophisticated facilities then. But in the prevailing circumstances, it was important that aid reached the soldiers and their morale along with that of the civilians living in the border areas be boosted. The Sangh accepted this responsibility and the swayamsevaks dedicated themselves to this work.

Nehru did acknowledge the significance of this task of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Three thousand swayamsevaks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh were awarded the honour of participating in the Republic Day Parade of 1963. The disciplined and rhythmic parade of the swayamsevaks, was the special attraction of the Republic Day that year.



Nepal's indignation

In the war of 1962, Bharat had to accept defeat at the hands of China. That Bharat actually was not a willing participant in the war; and that it was China, who stabbed in the back and annexed land that belonged to Bharat, could qualify at the most as a likely mitigation, but as for how far-reaching the repercussions of this defeat that Bharat suffered were, we have no clear idea, not yet. China defeated Bharat and gulped down the whole of Tibet. As a result, Nepal, Tibet's neighbour, got the jitters. Actually speaking, with an ally like Bharat on its side, Nepal need not have feared China's imperialism. But since Bharat had not been able to save its own land from China's clutches or protect Tibet either, King Mahendra of Nepal, felt he had reason to be insecure and apprehensive Bharat's capacities of supporting his country.

He would have to be on good terms with China, accept their upper hand, so King Mahendra felt and resigning to the situation, began thinking on those lines. Had this actually occurred, Bharat would have only ended up more insecure. In order that Nepal not turn to China, not go over to China's side and remain firmly connected with Bharat, ShreeGuruji took special efforts. Not many happen to be aware of this segment of history. Considering its strategic and cultural significance Nepal expected to be granted special status in the policies of the government of Bharat. But Nepal was irked that it had been overlooked and the whole affair left the King of Nepal miffed, which ShreeGuruji came to know of. Whether anybody else realized the importance of Nepal or not, Guruji, ever alert about the nation's welfare, was well aware of it. He recognized the gravity of the situation.

On 26th January 1963, the auspicious day of Shivaratri, ShreeGuruji went to Nepal to seek the darshan of Bhagwan Pashupatinath. King Mahendra of Nepal received him with warmth and sincere respect. The Prime Minister of Nepal, Tulsigiri too was present on the occasion. 'The common man in Nepal had, all along been favourably disposed towards Bharat; and that was how it was till date. However, it was solely to protect itself from China, that had already defeated Bharat, that Nepal's leadership was compelled to resort to a policy accepting China's upper hand' was the regret King Mahendra

expressed to Guruji. 'From Bharat I want an assurance of Nepal's safety and protection', King Mahendra said. He was perturbed, lest Nepal meet with the fate that Tibet did. Guruji could well understand the restlessness of King Mahendra.

Reposing undue trust in China, Bharat remained unwatchful and was caught completely off guard by China's attack. Bharat was not in the least equipped for war. What our army had, was the 303 Rifle used for drills. I personally, have done the military training and even fired shots with the 303 rifle. It was with these outdated weapons that the Bharatiya army countered the sophisticated Chinese equipment. But then think of the valour and the courage of our soldiers! They fought the Chinese army, undaunted by death, that loomed large on them all time. Leave alone other supplies and provisions, our soldiers did not even have adequate warm clothes for protection against the chilling Himalayan winters.

The Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai had the Bharatiya political leadership on a high of thick friendship. Our leadership had their head in the clouds so to say, as far as our relations with China were concerned. The warnings of our military officers went completely unheeded. No prizes then for guessing what the consequences were! But this humiliation that Bharat suffered also caused it to lose the confidence of its natural ally Nepal, which we must bear in mind. Here was a classic case of being a victim of one's own lack of vigilance on the foreign policy front and giving undue importance to issues not worthy of attention instead of prioritizing the nation's security.

Guruji well understood the insecurity that the Nepal Naresh might have felt and reassured him. 'Bharat had been gullible about China and had not seen its true colours. The policy adopted in the case of Tibet was also wrong. But this mistake would not be repeated in the case of Nepal. The people of Bharat would always stand firm by Nepal.' Guruji gave his word to the Nepal Naresh and assured him also that the government of Bharat would not repeat its mistake and that he personally would go all out to ensure it. These words made the desired impact on the King of Nepal. Guruji too, on his part, set about efforts to implement the promise. On returning to Bharat, he wrote to Prime Minister Nehru about the matter and sent a copy of his letter to Lal Bahadur Shastri as well.

The letter was a crisp representation of the Nepal's apprehension and the problems likely to ensue from it. The betrayal by China had compelled Prime Minister Nehru to see the real face of that country and so he confirmed the views expressed in the letter, which was no small mercy to thank god for. Moreover, this confirmation was not oral. Nehru wrote so in a letter to Guruji, mentioning clearly that there would be no more mistakes as far as Nepal was concerned. A few months later, Nehru passed away. The betrayal by China was a shock and had the first Prime Minister of the country totally disheartened. It ate into him and as most observers say, it was in this distress that he met his end.

Lal Bahadur Shastri succeeded Nehru as Prime Minister. He set about work with rapid steps towards bolstering defence. He decided to pay a visit to Nepal. He had talks with Atal Bihari Vajpayee before he left. It was Guruji, who had done 75% of the spade work that led to the success of the Nepal visit, so Shastriji himself acknowledged. And since we are on the subject, I cannot resist sharing a memory. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh celebrates six festivals in the year, of which the Makar Sankranti is one. In 1965, Guruji invited the Nepal Naresh to attend the Makar Sankranti celebrations. The Nepal Naresh was happy to accept the invitation to the festivities that were to take place in Nagpur. But that was not to be.

The government of Bharat was of the view that his attendance at the festival celebrations tended to transmit the wrong message. This hurt the Nepal Naresh. But all the same he sent an inspirational message befitting the festive occasion. The incident invited criticism from some newspapers, which expressed that the government's stand was indeed wrong in light of the fact that the relations between the two countries were improving. At the same time, the newspapers appreciated the role of the Sangh that had contributed to the betterment of the relations with Nepal.

It is now fifty years since then and we are in 2015. A terrible earthquake hit Nepal and that country just slumped in the face of this calamitous blow. Bharat was the first to rush to Nepal's aid. The swayamsevaks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh toiled day and night for the victims hit by the calamity in Nepal. The people of Nepal expressed earnest gratitude for this service. Moreover, I realized that those, who had not much of an idea about

the Sangh or even those, who had only heard slanderous talk about the Sangh, happened to be as much in shock and dismay due to the service rendered by the Sangh, as by the earthquake! We have to bear in mind all the same, that the work done by the Sangh in the past had built the background and basis for the creation of this positive ambience.

Even today the 'Ekal Vidyalay' established by the Sangh operates in villages on a large scale in Nepal. Sadhvi Ritambhara had travelled across Nepal to boost the morale of the victims of the earthquake, helping especially the womenfolk to recover from the traumatic experience. The Sangh even arranged to despatch from our country, experts from various fields to help in the re-building of Nepal. Let me share an extraordinary and interesting piece as we end this segment: The earthquake that hit Nepal was by all standards literally earth shattering. Yet the building housing the headquarters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was seen standing erect and intact! Gripping the ground firm! Not a single crack on the structure! Need we say anything at all then about the distinction of the Sangh?

To the people of Nepal, disheartened and distraught by the earthquake, the swayamsevaks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh gave an explicit and forthright assurance: "Nepal is as much ours as is Bharat!" The Maoist leader 'Prachanda' generously praised the aid extended by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh when Nepal was facing disaster. The appreciation voiced by 'Prachanda' is especially significant since he is known for his anti-Bharat views.

The passage of time witnesses vicissitudes in the relations between any two nations. Bharat and Nepal cannot be an exception to this phenomenon. However, on assuming the post of Prime Minister, that Shri Narendra Modi should first visit Nepal, was not at all chance occurrence. The visit has great strategic and historic value, which fact we cannot afford to lose sight of.



The liberation of Goa

Ever new challenges kept coming independent Bharat's way and going all out, the Sangh kept confronting them and serving society. On 15th August 1950 a horrible earthquake struck Assam, changing the course of the river Brahmaputra. Thousands lost their lives and property worth millions was destroyed. The Sangh urgently formed a committee for the aid of the earthquake victims and ShreeGuruji rushed to Assam. The Sangh set about its service. At this hour, Guruji had a message for the nation. 'Instances of natural disaster cannot be ruled out in this large nation of ours. But if we remain organized, show the willingness to help one another and be disciplined, we will surely surmount such challenges.'

In 1952 Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and certain regions of Maharashtra suffered a terrible drought. ShreeGuruji toured these places. 'We must be self-reliant. It is wrong to keep asking of others. We must not get into this habit', addressing the people, Guruji stated emphatically. Though the Sangh does rush to extend a helping hand when the country or the society faces a crisis, it is not in favour of keeping people in the role of pleaders. Swayamsevaks never lose sight of the fact that the Sangh means to strengthen society, not to disable it. It is precisely for this reason that as part of the rehabilitation of the migrants and of the refugees, what the Sangh always prioritizes, is making available to them, a source of livelihood.

Many resolutions were passed in the 'Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha' (the national level meet of the delegates) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh held in the September of 1952. The demand for the ban on cow slaughter was one of these. Cattle breeding is, no doubt, of economic importance to this country but its importance in the religious and cultural context outweighs any other. The protection of the cow represents the faith and the integrity of our society. The swayamsevaks of the Sangh organized programmes in several places to create an awakening among the people. The Sangh took upon itself, the campaign to awaken people and table before the government, the demand for the ban on cow slaughter. A letter to the effect was signed by about 2.5 crore (25 million) people and served to bring them together in large numbers.

Rising above distinctions of caste, language, region etc. they all stood firm for the demand. All acknowledged the sanctity of the cow and revered it as the 'Go Mata' – the Mother. Yet the government's stand continued to be ambiguous and that was indeed regrettable.

A sporadic organization or two was not going to be adequate to achieve the progress and the development of a country as vast as Bharat, almost a continent in itself. What would be required for the purpose, was a number of organizations making constructive contributions in various fields. Dr. Hedgewar formed the Sangh to bring the whole nation together under a common umbrella. Moreover, he was convinced that the imperative need of the hour, was positive work undertaken independently in multiple domains. It was for this reason that in Dr. Hedgewar's times, i.e. in 1936, the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' for women was established. Initially the 'Samiti' received guidance from Dr. Hedgewar and later from ShreeGuruji, who succeeded him. It was during Guruji's tenure as Sarsanghachalak, that organizations like the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the Bharatiya Jansangh, the Hindustan Samachar, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the Vivekananda Kendra and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had been established and the task of service to the society along with that of strengthening the nation, were both well underway. We will in due course, devote time to talking exclusively about the inspiration and purpose behind each of these and about their objectives and policies too. However, while all this work continued, the Sangh insisted that the nation be fully and completely independent, which fact needs to be reiterated here.

'The British wound up from our country and that means Bharat became fully independent', so goes the common belief. However, even after the British left, the Portuguese ruled Diu, Daman and Goa which meant though the country had become independent, Goa, a part of this country, was still under foreign sway then. While the rest of the country reverberated with the joyous cries of 'Vande Mataram', the Goan people were compelled to sing songs praising the Portuguese and that did tug at the heart of the common man in the country. I personally stand testimony to this.

I was studying in the Wilson College those days. To travel there and pursue studies in this college, the students from Goa, Diu and Daman required a

permit from Portuguese government. What kind of misfortune was that! The country became independent in 1947 but students hailing from a certain region of this very country could enter Mumbai but with a permit from the Portuguese. Some of these, my fellow students, often expressed their indignance at the situation. 'When after all, are we going to be independent?' was their question and it made me uneasy. So addressing the students of the college hostel, I often gave fiery and vociferous talks that Goa-Diu-Daman be liberated from the Portuguese sway.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh had made repeated demands to the government for the liberation of Goa-DamanDiu. ShreeGuruji himself made several appeals to the effect. All of these fell on deaf ears, it seemed. Actually speaking, a mere few hours was the maximum that the Portuguese could have lasted it out against independent Bharat. But for some reason the government was exhibiting tremendous apathy in the matter. In the light of the government's inaction in the matter, the Sangh began the Satyagraha for the liberation of Goa. Jagannathrao Joshi and Sudhir Phadke were among those, who spearheaded the movement. Sudhir Phadke, none other than Maharashtra's beloved music composer, better known as Babuji, had worked as the 'pracharak' of the Sangh.

At last, the government woke up from its slumber and in 1961 our army was given orders to seize Goa, Diu and Daman. Battalions of our army left from Mumbai Central and Victoria Terminus (Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus) armed with the mission to send the Portuguese packing. A vast sea of people had gathered to cheer them and see them off. The skies thundered with roars of 'Bharatmata ki Jay'. I was among the many students, who were all fired up and shouting the slogan. 'Gen J. N. Chaudhari' was the chief of operations of this mission. He acted so very swiftly, that by the time the Government of Portugal got to know that Goa had been taken over by the Bharatiya army, Goa was already liberated and under Bharat's governance. So, there was nothing at all that Portugal could do. To think that it took the Bharatiya government all these years to order and execute this operation of a mere few hours! The government's apathy had, by then, become a cause of public fury. Anyway, the people of Goa-DiuDaman had been freed from the clutches of foreign rule. And the way my fellow students had rejoiced and celebrated the event! The moment has been etched in my memory forever! Students hailing

from these regions shared their feelings. "When we left home, we were under foreign rule. But when we return and set foot on our homeland, we will be breathing free, we will see our homeland free!" Saying these words, they celebrated their joy.

A very sad event marked the year 1962 in Guruji's life. His mother Laxmibai passed away. Guruji's father had expired much before. His mother had had a great influence on him. The Kanchi Kamkoti Peethadhisthan Shankaracharya Paramacharyaji sent a message of condolence to Guruji, a message that consoled him. In the message, Paramacharyaji had said, "You lost your mother and so it is but natural to be grieved. However, you have offered your self, your everything to and for the sake of the Mahamangalmayi Bharatmata (Bharat, the Mother, who brings great well-being) who, since times unknown is the actual Mother, the giver and the sustainer of life for millions of her sons just like you. You are at all times immersed in the service of the Mother - Bharat. Leave alone grief, you will not suffer separation from your Mother, not you!"



In the war of 1965....

China's treacherous ploy and then the attack in 1962, led Bharat to suffer noxious and dire consequences, not to mention the loss of land that China bit into and gulped down. Besides, unable to stand the shock of the betrayal that ate into him, the first Prime Minister of Bharat met his end, while he had still not fully recovered from it. It became so evident that China could not have cared less about the 'Panchasheel' that Nehru doted on, making it absolutely urgent and imperative that Bharat alter its defence policies.

China's attack had, in a way, sounded the alarm bell, making it clear for Bharat, that liberating Goa from the rule of the Portuguese in 1961, was not the same as facing a country as powerful as China on the frontiers. It was a completely different ball game. Prior to China's attack there were a few 'smart alecks', who had questioned the need to spend big funds on defence. China had directly provided them the answer.

The sun set on the great empire of the Mauryas owing to the policy of 'non violence' adopted by emperor Ashok. The policy that Nehru had resorted to, reposing trust in China proved equally damaging. Lal bahadur Shastri succeeded Nehru after the latter's death. A close associate of Nehru, Shastriji was soft-spoken, mild-mannered and of small built. Would such a person be able to give Bharat the competent leadership that the challenging times called for, wondered Ayub Khan, the dictator, who had only just assumed power in Pakistan. He regarded the moment as a golden opportunity to subjugate Bharat.

He had even tested Shastriji's government by infiltrating Pakistani forces in the Kutch. Now it was an opportune moment to seize Kashmir from Bharat, thought Ayub Khan and he launched an attack on Kashmir in 1965. General J. N. Chaudhari was the Chief of Army then. Gen. Chaudhari and Ayub Khan were both colleagues at the British Military School. They had been friends and Ayub Khan had even congratulated Gen. Chaudhari when he led the operation to liberate Goa-Diu-Daman. The war of 1965 however, brought these two friends face to face in conflict. The aggression on Kashmir was

Ayub Khan's biggest blunder. Besides, construing Lal Bahadur Shastri to be fragile and vulnerable had cost him dear.

The war underway, Shastriji called for an urgent all party meeting in New Delhi. The 'Sarsanghachalak, ShreeGuruji' was a special invitee. Guruji was actually on tour at the time, but Shastriji deputed a plane and arranged for him to attend the meeting. As the meeting proceeded, a socialist leader expressed surprise at Guruji's presence. "What in the world brings this person here?" the leader asked. Shastriji's gave a memorable reply, a reply to be cherished forever. "This person is capable of playing an extremely influential role and in the trying times that prevail, he will prove useful in maintaining stability in the country" were Shastriji's words that not only served to open the leader's eyes to reality but also to quell all the questions posed by those, who constantly denounced the Rashtrita Swayamsevak Sangh.

Shastriji then said to Guruji, "In the present circumstances, we seek your guidance." What Guruji said in reply, proved historic. "The partition of 1947 was, in itself, a big mistake. It is to our weakness that the birth of Pakistan is to be attributed. It is a country born of hatred for Bharat and it will never allow Bharat to live in peace. Bharat, therefore, must take strict action against it. The Sangh pledges to be in the forefront as an active participant in whatever action be deemed necessary for the purpose. The Sangh was very much in the foreground and actively involved in the Kashmir war of 1948; and so it will be today, in this conflict that we face in the present moment." The words stunned all present.

The meeting was attended by police officers as well. In times of war, the responsibility of the police force increases manifold. So, if they were to be relieved of the responsibility of managing the traffic, they could focus on other things. The responsibility of managing the traffic of the whole of New Delhi thus came to the swayamsevaks of the Sangh, who shouldered it with remarkable success. At the same time, the swayamsevaks all through the country had Guruji's standing instructions, 'to be ready to co-operate in every possible way with the army'.

In times of war, soldiers are willing to put their lives on the line. Providing them with food and other basic necessities, is vital. The times of war tend to be extremely unstable; and the extra-ordinary effort to maintain stability and

order that they call for, cannot be realized without the co-operation of the people. It is this very fact, that Prime Minister Shastri's words about Guruji highlight. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh could make a very significant contribution towards maintaining stability in the country, so Shastriji had learnt through experience; and the Sangh on its part, fully validated his trust.

In 1965, while in the times of war, every office of the Sangh had received instructions from Guruji that every moment, swayamsevaks ought to be in a state of preparedness. How these preparations actually helped in the war and how the country benefitted from them, is what I wish to share with you, citing instances. Moreover, I feel every one of us ought to acknowledge them. A fierce battle was on at the Pathankot sector. Pakistan had pooled in all its strength to make headway here and barge in. The Bharatiya army countered with a powerful fight back and blocked them. It became a critical and urgent need of the hour, that ammunition reach our soldiers very soon. For the purpose, military officers called the collector and asked for 250 men, who would do the job.

Who indeed would come forward and offer to do this job especially while the war was already on? The collector was in a fix. But he gave the officers the telephone number of the Sangh office. He personally contacted the Sangh office. Twice the number of swayamsevaks required, came forward and offered to carry out this task. Every single one of these swayamsevaks wanted to go there and do their humble bit for the nation. This takes me to the instance in history, when Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj met with Afzal Khan. As was the plan, only five persons could have accompanied Shivaji Maharaj as his bodyguards. And there were five hundred gladly willing to do it. Every one of these five hundred, wanted so ardently to go along with Maharaj and protect him. That exactly was the sentiment of the swayamsevaks at Pathankot; and that exactly, the intensity of their sentiment.

These swayamsevaks carried all the ammunition and weapons to our soldiers following which, the Bharatiya army completely crushed the Pakistani forces. Let me narrate also what unfolded on the Rajsathan front in this same war. Here too, the Pakistani army had waged a fierce and aggressive attack. The Bharatiya army on its part, went all tooth and nail too. 21 swayamsevaks belonging to this region went right upto the border. Our soldiers asked them,

"What brings you here?" "There ought to be some or the other fitting service for us, we thought; and that is why we are here" the swayamsevaks replied.

Crouched in trenches, our soldiers were firing at the Pakistani army. Our soldiers needed water to drink and there was a well nearby. One of them rose to go and fetch water. At that the swayamsevaks offered on their own, to take on the responsibility of fetching water. 'Your life is very precious. Allow us to bring you water. We will do it', they said. Amid cross fire of rifles and torrents of cannons that were being sprayed from either side, the swayamsevaks literally crept on the ground to get to the well, dragging themselves by the belly; and that was how they fetched drinking water for our soldiers.

14 of these 21 swayamsevaks were martyred while doing this service. But selfless and committed service does not stop does it? And so it did not. The parents of these martyred swayamsevaks had no regret. 'That was about all that we had to offer to the nation. Had we any more, we would offer that as well', the parents had said. As I recall these words, tears well up in my eyes even today.

What does the Sangh do for the nation, is a question very often asked. The above instance could be a reply in itself. The Sangh however, never publicized its work dedicated to the nation's cause. What the swayamsevaks did, was indeed a part of their duty, so the Sangh believes. This is the reason why the service of the Sangh did not gain as much public acknowledgement and acclaim as it deserved. Well anyway, that was just incidental. Coming back to the topic, ShreeGuruji was of the opinion, that 'the land that the Bharatiya army seized from Pakistan, ought not to be returned to them. It ought to be in Bharat's custody forever' he felt. This war that Pakistan initiated and waged, was, in Guruji's view, the supreme chance to make amends for the historic blunder that was the partition. But then....



An opportunity wasted

This war that Pakistan initiated and waged was, in Guruji's view, the supreme chance to make amends for the historic blunder that was the partition. But then....

.... Although Pakistan had to suffer defeat at Bharat's hands, this did not quite amount to the proverbial slap in the face so to say, which was precisely the reason why, despite its defeat in the war of 1965, Pakistan dared to wage war one more time in 1971. In the war of 1965, Bharat's army barged in right up to Lahore. The Bharatiya army retrieved most of the land in Pakistan's occupancy and this included the 'Haji Pir Pass', a site of vital strategic importance. Our army had won it over going all tooth and nail for it, putting up a valiant fight. The Pakistani army was not prepared for this and was completely routed. Our soldiers were jubilant on having won Haji Pir Pass. But what we won in war, we lost in negotiation and Haji Pir Pass was back in Pakistan's custody. Giving in to international pressure however, a suspension of hostilities was called. But what kind of a ceasefire was this in actual fact?

If the land that thousands of soldiers had given their lives to retrieve, had to be ultimately relinquished to Pakistan, what was the point in fighting the war at all? But our Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, who had taken up an unrelenting stand in the war, somehow ended up making this very blunder. In 1947 the whole of Kashmir would have been ours but Nehru wasted this opportunity and when the opportunity knocked our doors again in 1965, Shastriji did not usher it in either. Had 'Haji Pir Pass' been in our custody, the Kashmir issue would have long reached a resolution and that too in our favour because 'Haji Pir Pass', once bagged, Bharat could have very easily conquered all the rest of Kashmir.

The plan of the Bharatiya army actually was to depart from Lahore and Sind only after seizing the whole of Kashmir. But the ceasefire prevented the realization of this plan. The one thing that I have always observed and felt about international pressure is, that it always keeps mounting on those, who submit to it. On the other hand, it proves ineffective in case of the countries,

who stick to their guns, refusing to be bogged down by it. China, Israel and Russia have proved this point more than once. 'Though you retrieved land that was in actual fact yours and so had legitimate right to, you must relinquish it to establish peace!' That was the thought behind the cessation of hostilities. But the question is, did peace really ever come? Did Pakistan ever stop whipping up trouble? So then even if henceforth Bharat shows the readiness to walk on the path of peace, is Pakistan ever going to give up its path of terror and leave Bharat in peace? Certainly not!

All that Pakistan understands, is the language of power. Therefore, not utilizing every opportunity that comes our way, to get even with Pakistan, is what would really prove a threat to peace. If Pakistan is not made to learn a lesson, its confidence swells up and translates into attempts to inflict atrocities and debilitate Bharat. The attack on Kashmir in 1948, the war that Pakistan triggered in 1965, the attack on Bharat again in 1971 and the Kargil conflict of 1999 are adequate illustration of 'what Pakistan feels about Bharat and how it looks at Bharat'. We ought not to forget also, the terrorist activity it incited in Bharat; and the bloodshed that resulted from it.

The 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' hates Pakistan, so slam the critics always. Honestly speaking, the Sangh does not teach hatred, not for anybody at all. But the interest of the nation overrides all other consideration; and that is intrinsic to the Sangh. The swayamsevaks imbibe it as a value. So then if Pakistan is found to constantly indulge in activity that threatens the interest of our nation or is in any way detrimental to it, expecting that the Sangh shower praises on Pakistan, would be unreasonable. Also, this issue does not limit itself to the Sangh, does it? It concerns every person, who loves the country. Reposing blind faith in Pakistan, has earned us nothing but betrayal and there is nothing else ever to be expected either. A policy advocating perpetual caution and alertness vis-à-vis Pakistan, a practical business-like stand, that is not the gullible friendly type, cannot qualify as war mongering can it?

Pakistan was born of resentment for Bharat and thus its very existence was bound to be a nuisance and a menace for our nation, so Guruji felt and therefore he was of the opinion that Bharat ought not to miss out on the opportunity to teach Pakistan a lesson for life. He had, in fact, tabled these very views very candidly and clearly at the meeting called by Prime Minister

Shastriji during the war of 1965. There is, however, no reason to presume that these were ShreeGuruji's thoughts or the views of the Sangh. Many a patriot felt the same; and was in favour of 'teaching Pakistan a lesson'.

There is yet another thing I would like to share about the war of 1965. It was around this time that Swatantryaveer Savarkar's health was failing.

Everybody was concerned and anxious. The attack that China launched in 1962 had caused the Swatantryaveer extreme anguish. The nation's borders were not secure; and time and again, he had cautioned on this score. But nobody had paid any heed. The nation had had to bear the brunt of the negligence. With Pakistan's attack in 1965, the Swatantryaveer's health deteriorated even further. The President, Dr. Sarwapalli Radhakrishnan called to enquire about his health and learnt that the Swatantryaveer was very eager to know, what the situation was, on the war front.

Dr. Radhakrishnan then had arrangements made to keep the Swatantryaveer abreast of the developments in the war. What followed was merely a wonder! The news that the Bharatiya army was giving the Pakistani army a thrashing, was enough to improve this great patriot's health. He had, in any case, long since sounded a warning, that Pakistan and China were both going to be permanent threats to Bharat. 'Give land and guns to the youth living alongside the borders of our country. Tilling the land could earn them their livelihood and with the guns they could fight for the nation, should the enemy attack', the Swatantryaveer had said. That 'politics become in essence Hindu and the Hindu, in essence, a soldier' was his belief. Needless to say that the valour of the Bharatiya army rejuvenated and enthused him.

The Bharatiya army had made Pakistan bite the dust. But the United Nations mandated ceasefire, while our army was successfully subduing Pakistan's army. When, after 22 days, Bharat had got the whip hand, the war was called off. Pakistan might have lost the war but it did win by means of negotiations, so we may say. In the talks held in Tashkent in Russia, Bharat lost the land that it had conquered in war. It probably dawned on Prime Minister Shastriji, that he had committed a grave mistake and the massive stress consequent to this realization, in all probability, proved unbearable for this great leader, who met his end when still in agony. The resolve and leadership that Shastriji exhibited in times of the war, were matchless. We will never have admired

him enough for that. However, that the leaders of Bharat should compromise on the point of national interest, feeling bogged down by international pressure, was indeed our country's misfortune.

The nation's interest must take precedence over all else, the Sangh has time and again reiterated. Individuals come and go, it is the nation that persists, it stays. The Sangh has stood firm by its stand of 'no compromise whatsoever on the nation's interest.' The Sangh then naturally felt hurt that conquered land was returned to Pakistan. Despite our victory in the war of 1965, Pakistan retrieved the land that we had seized; and that precisely was what came as a huge shock to Swatantryaveer Savarkar.

In the very first place, the creation of Pakistan was the biggest mistake ever. Then we not only waste the opportunity of making amends for it but go to the extent of returning conquered land to Pakistan! That was something an ardent and passionate patriot like Swatantryaveer Savarkar was never going to be able to accept. But there really was no choice, was there? One had to come to terms with the truth. Following this occurrence, Savarkar's health was much on the decline. During his last days, he gave up food and medicine. He seemed to be inviting death.

Tears used to be streaming down his eyes in his last days. Pained to see this, his near ones asked him his last wish. Summoning every trace of strength left in his frail and near lifeless body, he said, "The lost Punjab and Sind have to be retrieved. My Hindustan is incomplete without them. Promise me this land will be regained. I want your word!" All present pledged to put in all effort to fulfil the promise and then this great patriot left his body. It was visualizing a whole, complete and integrated Bharat before his eyes, that the Swatantryaveer had breathed his last.

He had a special affinity for ShreeGuruji. He had complete faith that Guruji would carry forward the mission of Dr. Hedgewar and prepare the ground for the Bharat of Dr. Hedgewar's dreams. Whenever Guruji visited Swatantryaveer at his residence, Savarkar would wait at the door to welcome him with a garland. Guruji never for a moment, lost sight of the Swatantryaveer's dream of a whole, complete Bharat. But the Sangh too, on its part, is never going to give up its purpose and goal of making Bharat whole...one... one complete whole!



Guruji's love

The war of 1965 was followed by the demise of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. This was an extremely sad occurrence. He had committed the blunder of returning to Pakistan, the land conquered in this war. To the exception of this one instance of failure on the strategic front, Shastriji had achieved much for the nation in his tenure of a few months. We probably are not aware, but Kashmir once had its own separate Prime Minister, a separate flag and a separate national anthem as well. It was Shastriji, who on assuming his post, had repealed all of these. He had taken the decision to take essential measures to boost defence and buy defence equipment. At the same time, he was well aware that the nation had to be self-sufficient in food grains, which in turn necessitated the capability and the self-reliance of the country's farmer. Shastriji, who gave the slogan 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan' was indeed a Prime Minister with both vision and foresight.

His simple living and his clean, unblemished character had left a profound and positive impression on the public mind. To save on food grains, Shastriji had appealed to the people to refrain from the evening meal every Monday. Everybody observed this instruction illustrating the kind of respect and trust people had for Shastriji. This leader of small stature, had a lofty personality that towered high as far as achievement and ability were concerned. His death had pained Guruji and he had visited Lalitadevi, Shastriji's wife to offer condolences.

After the war of 1965, Guruji took to touring the country. He travelled to every single state and met with those, who had lost their dear ones – it might have been a son, a husband, a brother, a father. Guruji had instructed the Shakhas of the Sangh to obtain information about the families of the martyrs of war in their respective regions. 'Meet with them, offer your condolences and console them. Most importantly do make it a point to assure their families that we are all with them. We stand by them', he had told the swayamsevaks, who followed his words to the T. Moreover, Guruji on his part too, had visited the families of the martyrs, as was possible in the course of his tours. Some swayamsevaks of the Sangh had joined the army and a few

of them were martyrs of the war of 1965.

Every single person associated with the Sangh felt affection and fondness for Guruji. That he visit their home, was every person's cherished wish. Guruji too felt very much at home with the swayamsevaks and believed that every swayamsevak's home was an office of the Sangh per se. Now at this point, I just cannot resist sharing an incident that happened in a village in Karnatak while Guruji was touring the southern states of the nation.

There was this swayamsevak from a small village in Karnatak, who attended the Shakha session every day. He often spoke to his mother about Guruji. Though she knew very little about Guruji, this loving mother had told her son that she would like to have over, this person about whom her son never tired of speaking. Guruji was to visit the area and very soon, the swayamsevak learnt. He made up his mind to invite Guruji home. The swayamsevak in question, was a man of very modest means but not even for a moment, did he wonder whether at all Guruji would visit a place, as ordinary as his. That is the point worth noting.

The swayamsevak invited Guruji to his home and accepting the invitation, Guruji dropped by. The home was more or less a small hut. The mother was beside herself with joy that Guruji had actually come to her home along with other swayamsevaks. She insisted that he have tea. She even made it but then how was she going to strain it? She had no strainer. This warm and loving mother strained it with the end of the sari she was wearing; and served the tea to the guests. Seeing this, one of the swayamsevaks declared that he did not drink tea. He had of course bluffed. Another one kept quiet; but actually was not keen on drinking it either. However, Guruji told them off. All had to drink the tea.

Guruji drank the tea, very warmly exchanged pleasantries and left. The swayamsevaks, who had gone along, 'could not wait to get out of that place'; and the moment they did, one of them threw up. He just did not want to hold in his stomach, the tea that had been strained with a soiled sari cloth. Guruji said to him, "Was the soiled sari all that you saw and retained in your mind? Did you not notice the love of the mother? I too drank the tea, didn't I? How come I did not feel sick or throw up then? You know what.. the dirt was not in the tea. It is in your mind!" explained Guruji and cleaned the

swayamsevak's mind of all possible 'muck'.

All those, who work for the Sangh, are invariably taught this value. While working and moving around in society, you just cannot obstinately insist that things be done the way you like. It is the swayamsevak's duty to bind people with love and for the purpose, to respect their sentiments. The Sangh does not believe in discriminations of rich and poor, big and small. Guruji had practiced what was being preached and so had even driven home the value to the swayamsevaks, by means of his own conduct.

The Sangh certainly possesses the skill of organization and this, even its opponents acknowledge. In fact, the Sangh can achieve much falling back on its organizational skill, they say, but scornfully. However, the Sangh has not developed this skill as a game plan or as part of strategic design. It is, we must understand, the swayamsevaks' love and affinity for the entire society that the skill stems from. It is not only with a fellow swayamsevak that a swayamsevak speaks with warmth; he does so, while speaking to anybody and everybody and the sentiment is sincere, it is from the heart. It is by no means put on.

For Guruji, discipline was of utmost importance. He insisted that the swayamsevak necessarily attend the Shakha session every single day and was of the opinion that listening attentively to the discourse at the Shakha went a long way in moulding the swayamsevak and in imbibing values. Once it so happened that while he gave the discourse, Guruji noticed that a swayamsevak was not paying attention. It could not have escaped his sharp eye but he went ahead with discourse in any case. The swayamsevak was in actual fact making Guruji's sketch and so naturally could not pay much attention to the discourse. Around the time the discourse ended, he happened to be done with the sketch, which he handed over to the officers present. He wanted Guruji to autograph it. Guruji had a look at the sketch and sent for the swayamsevak.

"Have you been able to retain anything at all of the discourse I just gave?" Guruji asked him. "No Guruji! I was busy making your sketch." "Your sketch is indeed wonderful" Guruji exclaimed in appreciation, "But you have chosen the wrong time. If you wanted to sketch, that was what I would have assigned to you. But you did it while the discourse was in progress. You could have

sketched some other time but you did it instead of listening to the discourse and chose the wrong time for it. Swayamsevaks just have to be aware of the significance of the discourse." Sheepish on hearing Guruji's words, "I am sorry Guruji. This will not happen ever again" he said admitting his mistake.

Guruji had a remarkable memory. He only had to meet a swayamsevak once and after years he could recognize him and that too with his name. Many would be left awe struck. Also, Guruji respected the swayamsevaks' sentiment. Once, when Guruji was on the way to Indore from Ajmer, the train was to halt at Ratlam for a couple of hours. The local swayamsevaks decided to make the fullest use of this time and arranged for a programme at the station. The schedule was a casual talk with the swayamsevaks and then a meal with them. However, the train was delayed; and at Ratlam station there was very little time at their disposal. Guruji declared that he would surely talk with the swayamsevaks but would skip the meal for there was not enough time. A swayamsevak named Gopalrao had come with food that he had himself cooked. That Guruji should have to leave from Ratlam, Gopalrao's homeland, without eating food, made Gopalrao sad. Tears began to stream down his face. Many swayamsevaks were heartbroken.

"I am first of all a swayamsevak. Would I not read your mind? On my way back I will certainly come to Ratlam and eat at Gopalrao's place" said Guruji giving them his word. Gopalrao was absolutely elated. Guruji actually ate once a day and so normally did not have dinner. But he offered to eat at Gopalrao's place just to honour the swayamsevaks' wish; and because he knew it would make them happy.

In the Hedgewar Bhavan of Nagpur, there was a cook called 'Mangalprasad'. He lost his brother and on hearing the sad news, he left for his home. When he reached home, he received a letter of condolence from Guruji that began with 'Dear Mangalprasad, my friend...' Bearing the sorrow with fortitude and courage, Mangalprasad, who had not allowed himself to weep after his brother's death, could not hold back his tears on reading the words that began the letter. To think that Guruji referred to a 'swayamsevak' like him as his 'dear friend'! Mangalprasad was moved to tears. On his return, he shared all about Guruji's letter with everybody.

Guruji, with his affection and warmth, won the hearts of one and all.



Guruji's dwelling place

"Guruji, where do you live?" someone asked. "In the railway compartment!" was Guruji's spontaneous and unpretentious reply. This was by no standards, a joke. Guruji did, for a fact, spend a large part of his life in travel. Very frequently touring the country, he was either to be found in a railway compartment or a bus or at times in a car. He very willingly and enthusiastically bore the exertion of the journeys. The strain kept telling on his health but he never once complained. During his journeys, he gave little thought to food, which again took a heavy toll on his health. But Guruji bore it all with a smile; and so stoically, that nobody had a clue about it.

Dr. Hedgewar founded the Sangh and literally put in blood, sweat and tears as the saying goes, for the growth and expansion of the Sangh. Guruji had a longer life than Dr. Hedgewar did; and he spent every living moment, for the cause of the Sangh. His body was taking immense wear and tear; but Guruji was not to be deterred by it. He continued his tours and his public contact. 33 years of continuous travel was no mean feat! He cheerfully kept on with his journeys, though his body was enduring the unbearable strain. Come rain, come shine, be it any other calamity or may he be suffering ill health; nothing, just nothing stood in the way of his travel. He kept touring and he kept inspiring swayamsevaks. That was how the Sangh grew. There have been so many instances of staunch opponents, who ended up completely transformed, after their contact with Guruji.

Striving relentlessly in order that Bharat, our Motherland, attain the highest glory, had become Guruji's second nature. The realization of this purpose required, that the Sangh became increasingly capable and powerful which in turn meant that contact with the general public was inevitable, so Guruji believed. 'The Sangh has experienced a ban and even emerged safe out of it. Do not ever worry about a ban. As long as two people have the freedom to talk to each other, no ban will ever affect the Sangh!' This had been Guruji's message to the swayamsevaks, which drives home the point that public contact has been the greatest strength of the Sangh.

In today's times sophisticated means of communication and contact enable us to share our thoughts with others. There is a whole spectrum of media available to talk, to increase interaction and dialogue. But the Sangh has been growing since the pre-independence era, when there were no such media of communication available; and the reason behind this has been the vast public contact web of the Sangh. Dr. Hedgewar and Guruji inculcated this as a value in the swayamsevaks. Granted that we have several means of communication available today, but the Sangh trusts that direct, personal contact has no alternative.

Ever since it was founded in 1925, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh created several organizations that offer service unto the nation in all walks of life. We are aware that these organizations achieved success in a very short period. The success has to be attributed to Guruji's guidance together with the tireless effort of the swayamsevaks. 'Organizing' is the primary and core principle of the mission of the Sangh. The oath of the Sangh contains its objectives. The Sangh considers it its duty, to safeguard the culture and the society; and bring about their overall progress. Besides, it is one of the Sangh's teachings, that serving the nation ought not to be considered an act of pretension and that has got to be every swayamsevak's sentiment.

We know the story of the King Manu, do we not? The King Manu happened to save a tiny fish and it was this same fish that later went on to assume an immense form and rescued from the Great Deluge, the whole of mankind including King Manu. It was this same fish that safeguarded the seeds of creation. In the same manner, the Sangh too, safeguarding humanity, is trying to illuminate the entire universe with the radiant energy of the quintessence of Bharat that is not just a nation but a principle, a value and a belief system.

Guruji insisted that the Sangh serve in all the spheres of society and thereby carry forward, the cause and mission of the nation. It was for this reason that he formed various organizations that operated independent of the Sangh, remaining affiliated to it though. In the times that followed, these organizations saw huge expansion and progress.

There was a need for periodicals that would advocate the objectives and policies of the Sangh and at the same time, would in a fearless and forthright manner, express all that was essential in national interest. So then

newspapers, weeklies, monthlies were published all over the country and in different languages. 'Organiser', 'Panchajanya', 'Vivek', 'Rashtradharma', 'Kesri', 'Jagruti', 'Swastik', 'Alok' and 'Vikram' were among the periodicals that saw the light of day. The public could thus lay their hands on reports covering students as much as those covering the tribal areas. The workers' domain was dominated by the communist ideology. However, by virtue of the work done by the Sangh in this domain, the saffron flag took on the red flag of the communists and affirmed its significance and value.

The 'Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh', an organization owing inspiration to the Sangh, gave to the workers of the world, a message that aimed at achieving harmony and positivity. Instead of the old 'Workers of the world unite!' it was 'Workers! Unite the world!'. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad began work in the religious sphere. The society thus received religious vim and zest and the tutors of the different sects of the Hindu dharma along with the 'Sant-Mahanta' came together under a common umbrella and began mingling with people and working for them. Although it was the Sangh that had originally initiated the mission, it remained aloof and distant from these organizations that it had created. Even today the Sangh does not interfere in any way with the work of these organizations.

The 14th hymn (shlok) of the 13th chapter of the Bhagwadgeeta, we could say, contains the real meaning of the work and mission of the Sangh, right from its Shakha sessions to its work in various fields. This hymn speaking of the Parmeshwar, the Almighty, says: The One, who is complete and equipped with the knowledge of all the perceptive faculties but is beyond them; the One, who assumes and nourishes but is Himself beyond desire or yearning; the One, who enjoys all attributes but is Himself beyond them all. The Sangh created various organizations and these have now taken wing. On the lines of the hymn discussed above, the Sangh however, remains detached from them. 'Sewa hai yadnyakunda, samidha sam hum jale' (Selfless service unto the given cause is the vessel that receives the sacred fire and may we, like the offerings of wood, burn and be spent to the last, for the sacred purpose) in other words 'Rashtraya swaha, Rashtraya idam na mama' (I offer all I have to the cause of the nation. Nothing is mine) was Guruji's favourite sentence. He recited it very often. Since these words were a value that the Sangh observed, it did not tend towards dominating or controlling any of the organizations

even though it was responsible for their creation. The Sangh gave total freedom to these organizations although it guides and helps them if so required.

Looking at the vast expanse of the Sangh and the organizations affiliated to it, what one becomes aware of predominantly, is Guruji's hard work that went into their creation and their growth. But the tireless hard work did tell on his health, which declined by his age of sixty. In May 1970, Guruji was found to have a lump in the chest which was diagnosed as cancerous. In those days, the diagnosis of cancer invariably left the patient shattered and completely dejected. Guruji's reaction was different. Dr. Praful Desai operated on him in the Tata Cancer Hospital, Mumbai. The tumour was removed.

Dr. Desai had nothing to do with the Sangh as such. But he was very impressed by Guruji's personality. He wondered if Guruji's body, feeble with age, would be able to withstand the cancer surgery. The courage and composure that Guruji displayed, the co-operation he gave, with the smile never leaving his face as he went through the procedure were indeed amazing, Dr. Desai had said. What left everybody astonished was the fact that Guruji, on his feet the very next day of the surgery, was seen up and about.

Following the surgery, Guruji asked Dr. Desai, "How long do I expect to live?" Dr. Desai's reply seemed to please him. "Oh that's great! I have plenty of time then!" exclaimed Guruji leaving the Dr. dumbfounded. Actually speaking the time that Dr. Desai had estimated was not really long. But then Guruji set about work more rigorously than before. His regular routine of the Shakha session, his correspondence and his travel continued like always. A few months after, the war broke out in 1971. Guruji had been of the view that had Pakistan been taught a lesson in the war of 1965, it would not have dared to wage war ever again. His words came true in a mere six years and in 1971 Pakistan waged war on Bharat.

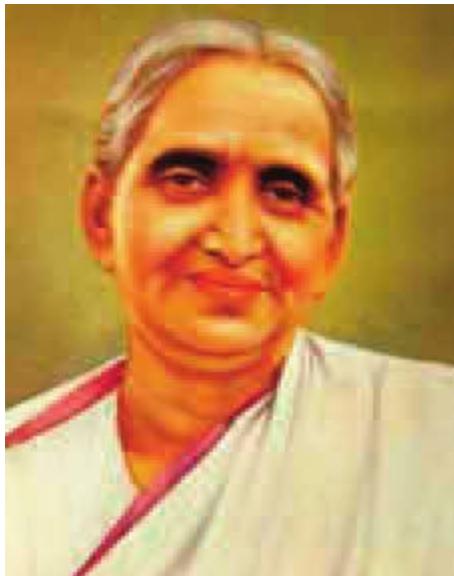
"The attack has been launched on the nation, not on the government. The nation has to put up a united front to face it and we are willing to extend complete co-operation to the government" Guruji announced.



The Rashtra Sevika Samiti

That women ought to participate in the movement for independence, had been Mahatma Gandhiji's constant appeal and the women folk of the country did respond to it. Many of them stepped out of their homes and began work that would contribute towards the independence movement and towards social reform as well. Laxmitai Kelkar of Wardha was one such. She would spin the charkha and travel to across Wardha as part of the social awakening mission. She had six sons and two daughters. Around the time, the Sangh had already struck root in Wardha. Laxmitai's sons began to attend the Shakha sessions of the Sangh. She noted considerable changes in her sons since they began attending the Shakha

sessions.



Laxmitai Kelkar

She found her sons to have become more morally aware than they used to be. They now had an alert conscience. They were more mature than they were before and she was happy that they were imbibing worthy values. She expressed her keenness on paying a visit to the Shakha, evidently to understand exactly what kind of activity the organization was all about. So she did drop by with her children and was extremely impressed by the work

carried on. She then travelled to Nagpur and met with the Sarsanghachalak Dr. Hedgewar. She learnt about the inspiration that had led to the creation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and about its objectives and principles. 'Incredible work!', she exclaimed and even announced to Dr. Hedgewar that she was eager to be part of the mission.

Dr. Hedgewar too, on his part, was very impressed by Laxmitai's enthusiasm and her earnestness. She wished ardently to undertake work dedicated to women. We are talking here, of the year 1936 when work towards the progress and the development of women was an imperative need of the hour. Dr. Hedgewar promised Laxmitai that he would extend whole-hearted support to her work but advised her to set up an independent organization dedicated to the purpose. And so very soon, in the very same year, i.e. in 1936 'Yadav Madhav Kale', a swayamsevak from the Sangh shakha of the Buldhana district arrived in Wardha on the auspicious day of Vijayadashmi and with the inaugural hoisting the sacred saffron flag in an open ground, launched the very first 'shakha' of the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti'.



The Rashtra Sevika Samiti Shibir

So the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' was formed. The very same year saw the commencing of the summer sessions of the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' which

then continually received the guidance and support of several swayamsevaks among whom was the noted senior Sangh swayamsevak of Wardha, Appaji Joshi. Of those, who visited Dr. Hedgewar, there were quite a few, who were eager to be part of the work devoted to women's problems and their progress. Dr. Hedgewar would then direct them to 'Mavshi' as 'Mavshiji' was the name by which Laxmitai was known.

Over the decade that followed the year 1936, the work undertaken by the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' saw extensive progress. In 1940, the 'Samiti' resolved that every such Shakha that was functional consistently over six months be granted the official status. The Shakha session of the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' too, like that of the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' begins by offering the pranam to the supremely sacred saffron flag. The women swayamsevaks of the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' took part in the 'Quit India' movement that was launched in 1942. The sanchalika of the Nagpur shakha of the 'Samiti', 'Kaku Paranjape' gave the 'sevikas' an important message in her address. 'Being able to protect and defend the nation, calls for the ability to protect and defend the honour of your own womanhood in the first place.' In keeping with this norm, the Shakha of the Samiti lays special emphasis on the physical fitness of women.

Women are by no standards weak; and this the history of Bharat has proved time and again. When the power of the evil swelled up, it was to the Aadimata that the gods addressed their austerities for the destruction of the demons. The culture of Bharat attributes immense importance to the Mother Power. It is for this reason that we address our nation as 'Matrubhumi' i.e. 'Motherland' and 'Bharatmata ki Jay' is our slogan. In order that this principle of the mother power become active and function effectively, the physical fitness and the sound physical ability of the woman become a prerequisite. The 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' therefore trains its women swayamsevaks in outdoor sport as also in the Yogachap, the club, the knife and the sword. These not only help to develop their physical capacities but also boost the confidence of women. As a matter of fact, on the day of the Vijayadashmi, women of the Samiti, who lead the parade holding the supremely sacred saffron flag, actually ride the horse.

The Samiti's prayer however differs from that of the

Sangh.

**Z_m_mo d`§ _mVY^y: nwÊ`^yñËdm§ Ëd`m d{Y©Vm: g§ñH¥
\$VmñËdËgwVm:**

*namamo vayam matrubhuhu punyabhustvaam tvayaa vardhitaha
sanskrutastvatsutaha*

.... this prayer depicts the land of Bharat and the essence of being Bharatiya, what it essentially means to belong to Bharat and to be Bharatiya. So the words be different, the sentiment of this prayer is, at the core, exactly like that of the Sangh.

Dr. Hedgewar passed away in 1940. Guruji succeeded him and the responsibility of the Sarsanghachalak's post then fell on his shoulders. He guided the Samiti from time to time. He extended all support required for its growth. As a result the Samiti's work and mission progressed at a pace equal to that of the Sangh. It had its Shakha in every single province of undivided Bharat. Touring every province of the country, Mavshiji brought about the expansion of the Samiti's work and mission. Moreover, all the Sarsanghachalaks that succeeded Guruji too, on their part, have extended all possible support to the Samiti's mission.

Respected Mavshiji set up a contingent of sevikas, who worked with dynamic and intrepid fervour. The second 'pramukh sanchalika' of the Samiti Saraswatibai Apte, Usha Chati, Pramilatai Medhe, Shanta-Akka, Rukmini-Akka, Bakulatai Devkule, Sushilatai Mahajan, Sudhatai Chitale were some among them. Mavshiji assigned to all these women, travel within the country as well as outside it. She initiated several projects to ensure the economic independence of women while in the process of advocating the Samiti's mission.

Swatantryaveer Savarkar too had set up an organization for women. Mavshibai met with the Swatantryaveer to learn about it. At the time, Swatantryaveer Savarkar lauded the work of the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' in just and apt words. 'Your work is like the solemn and calm rain shower. The water of such a shower seeps slowly but surely in the earth, which then

becomes green. But the work and mission of my organization have the character of a hurricane. So do keep to your path for your work' was Savarkar's advice to Mavshibai.

So from the year 1943, the Samiti grew as an organization both in terms of scope and ideology. It established Shishu Mandir (day care centre for children), Sanskar kendra (centres for value education and moral grooming), Awas kendra, Udyog Mandir, etc. Large conventions were organized and the year 1946 saw one such. Sevikas from Miraj, Sangli, Kurundwad and Jamkhede participated in it. In fact HH the Queen of Jamkhed too attended the convention. The work of the Samiti had reached out to all provinces of Bharat. Following Gandhiji's assassination, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was banned. Actually speaking neither did the Sangh have anything to do at all with this assassination nor was it directly associated as such with the Rashtra Sevika Samiti. Yet the Samiti encountered many purposefully planted spokes in the wheel and its activities had to be suspended for a while.

Later in 1949 the ban on the Sangh was lifted and the Samiti too resumed work. In the period that followed many women became associated with the Samiti's work. In 1950 the Samiti celebrated the Ashtabhuja Devimata festival that was attended by a large number of women folk apart from the sevikas. 'Yes we have 'Swarajya' - our independence because the reins of rule on our nation are ours. But in order that the Swarajya transform to 'Surajya' – in order that the rule or the governance be and stay noble yet strong and humbly committed to the people that have trusted the hands holding the reins', the Mother power in the women folk of the nation has to be awakened. There was total consensus on the approach that if all above had to be achieved and the society at large had to be organized and dedicated to the nation, these kind of programmes would prove an absolute necessity.

'Focussing singularly on the 'Ashtabhuja Devimata', may we never lose sight of the fact that this Mother, who created the universe holds the power not just to inspire but also to penalize and of course to annihilate. Moreover, we have to protect these very virtues that every woman holds in any case within her' was the message Mavshiji gave in her address on this occasion. In 1953 the Samiti organized the 'Stree Jeevan Vikas Parishad'. Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, who dedicated his entire life to women's education and Dr. Muskar,

agynaecologist were both present at the convention. Guidance on the wholesome progress of women was offered. Stressing the need for the physical fitness of women, Dr. Muskar offered advice about the kind of exercise regime they ought to opt for.

Every time that the nation was struck by natural disaster the sevikas of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti served shoulder to shoulder with the swayamsevaks of the Sangh – giving to the cause as much dedication and physical energies as did their counterpart of the Sangh. Be it the earthquake at Latur or the floods in Morbi, the cyclone tragedy in Kandla or be it the toxic gas leak disaster in Bhopal, the sevikas of the Samiti had rushed to help in the management work as part of selfless service. Mindless religious fanatics rendered homeless, the families of Kashmiri Pandits in JammuKashmir. The sevikas of the Samiti played a major role in offering support and reassurance to these families. The Rashtra Sevika Samiti even took upon itself, the responsibility of getting the daughters of these Pandits, who had lost the roof over their heads along with all else, married and it also set them up in life.

The sevikas of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti went to the extent of travelling to the border regions and offering service during the wars of 1965 and 1971. They gifted 200 transistors to the soldiers posted there. Respected Mavshiji, the sanchalika of the 'Rashtra Sevika Samiti' said, "The woman and the man are the two wheels of the chariot of familial life. However, practically speaking, the man may take back seat in running the family affairs, the woman is the charioteer, who actually steers the chariot, their family life. She is the one, who keeps him away from vices and addictions and she is the one to lead the man to the zenith of success as well." With these words Mavshiji had not only elucidated the significance of the woman in familial life; but also made her aware of her duties along with her capacities.

The Samiti works in cities and forest areas alike. Educating girls in these regions and drawing them into the mainstream of society, is a cause the Samiti has been working for very passionately. Also, it fills me with pride to share that the Samiti is active in several countries of the world and Shakha sessions and classes of the Sangha as well as those of the Samiti are both independently organized abroad, the bauddhik sessions are a combined event though. A session on these lines was organized in England in 1996. I was a

participant at this session of the Sangh, organized in Leicester, in England; and my wife, Dr. Kirtida Mehta, at the session of the 'Rashtriya Sevika Samiti', organized here at the same place. On the occasion, in her address, Pramilatai Medhe, the 'pracharika' at the national level, gave a message that was wellsuited to the circumstances and so very appropriate. She said, "We have to be loyal and committed to the land we reside in. But we ought not to forget our land, Bharat. We have to cherish and preserve forever, the values that this land of Bharat has given to us."

Just like the Sangh has an organized machinery of pracharaks, the 'Rashtriya Sevika Samiti' has it too but the responsibility is obviously borne by the women counterpart, the 'pracharikas' of the Samiti. Today, many highly educated women count among the sevikas, who carry forward the mission of the Samiti. Doing full justice on the one hand, to their family life and duties, these women serve on the other, the society and the nation by means of the Samiti's mission. With one woman, aware and empowered in every sense, the awareness, awakening and empowerment of the society and eventually the entire nation, is a matter of less than no time. The society with an aroused Mother power can never be in want. Presently we come across women working so very competently, ably in responsible posts and in a wide spectrum of fields, right from the defence forces to the police force. We must therefore, respond actively to the efforts directed towards lending as much verve, as much vitality to this Mother power of the nation, must we not?



The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad

Moving around and mingling with the common people, Guruji was at the same time, quietly observant of events and occurrences in the country. He contemplated over them deeply and in the process certain things became apparent to him. He presented his thoughts in a deliberation session with the senior swayamsevaks of the Sangh. "For a child, it is the parents, who are his guru. It is their responsibility to inculcate in the child, basic righteous values. School education once completed, the student moves forward in life seeking further studies. It is this period, which happens to be the most important period of his life; for it is then, that his personality is formed and groomed. It is then on, that the course of life is determined, making these years of the student phase, the most consequential of all. It therefore becomes very essential, that students receive appropriate righteous values and their thoughts be prudently steered. It is in these formative years, that they ought to be made aware of their duty towards the nation and towards the society. And for the purpose, the Sangh has to enter the field of education" Guruji affirmed.

With the ban imposed on the Sangh, the senior swayamsevaks were mulling over the recourse to be taken next. Swayamsevaks began a protest movement against the ban. However, exactly how long the ban would continue, was something quite impossible to estimate. In the circumstances, creating another platform, apart from the Sangh became vital necessity and it was with this intention that Prof. Balraj Madhok formed the 'Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad' in 1948. We have already read about all the work that Balraj Madhok did in Kashmir, until the Bharatiya army arrived there following Pakistan's attack on Kashmir. When the army arrived, Prof. Madhok returned to Delhi and it was then with the help and support of Bhai Mahavir, that he formed the 'Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad'.

Bhai Mahavir was the son of Prof. Bhai Parmananda, a professor at the D. A. V. College, Lahore. Bhagatsingh and Sukhdev the two revolutionaries were his students. It was Bhai Parmananda, who actually made revolutionaries of

these students. He spent most of his life in the jail of Andaman. His wife happened to take ill when he was serving his sentence in this jail concurrently with Swatantryaveer Savarkar. The family was already down to the last penny and she met her end, deprived of medication. Every time we celebrate the independence of our nation, we must recall to our minds, the families, who made this kind of a sacrifice for the sake of the nation.

The Parmananda family did not ever indulge in any ostentatious display of their sacrifice. But in a befitting retort to a leader, who proclaimed that his entire family had made great sacrifices for the nation's cause, Bhai Mahavir narrated unwillingly though, the circumstances of his mother's death. He added further, that the sacrifice for the nation's sake cannot and must not ask for returns. This is no business deal! Bhai Mahavir wished to devote his life to the Sangh as its pracharak; but he had to marry in keeping with ShreeGuruji's instruction. ShreeGuruji was present at the wedding and waited at the venue until the rites were done lest Bhai Mahavir walk out after Guruji left.

The work and the mission of the 'Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad' formed by Prof. Balraj Madhok and Bhai Mahavir, while the Sangh faced a ban, made very little progress. The ban on the Sangh was lifted in 1949. After the Sangh decided to enter the field of education, it was only in 1959 that the Parishad took wing. It was in this year, that Yashwantrao Kelkar, the present Governor of Assam and Nagaland Padmanabh Acharya, Madhu Devlekar, Dr. Madhav Paralkar, Ved Nanda, Bal Apte, Madandas Devi and Arun Sathe together with other swayamsevaks gave fresh impetus to the work of the Parishad. For ten years in fact, Arun Sathe was the Sangh's pracharak in Assam.

As for Yashwantrao Kelkar, he was a very popular professor among students and their peerless guide. Already a Sangh swayamsevak, he ought to work for the 'Vidyarthi parishad' so Shivraay Telang, also a pracharak of the Sangh suggested. Yashwantrao accepted and his participation propelled the work of the Vidyarthi Parishad even further. He initiated several projects aimed at the progress and development of students. He pointed out that college students could make vacations worth their while, for instance by earning money to pay their fees for the following year. Besides, these work

opportunities opened avenues of learning new tasks and skills not to mention the values of discipline and hard work that students imbibed in any case. These concepts of making good and sensible use of vacations that Yashwantrao introduced, received at the time, an overwhelming response from the students.

Padmanabh Acharya brought students of the North East over here so that they could spend their vacations living with local families. Since we are on the topic, let me tell you that three girls from Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalay and Nagaland each, had spent their vacation in my home. They call me even today and by virtue of the right that an affectionate relation gives, they ask, "Do you miss us daddy?" They moved about in my home like they were my daughters. When they left, my wife and I could hardly control our tears. So Padmanabhji accomplished the very great task of nurturing bonds of affection among people. At the same time, he got students from here to travel to the North East and built a unique bridge of kinship, of affinity and affection.

The 'Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad' began to spread its limbs in colleges and universities of several cities of the country. Alongside organizing students, focussing on developing the sentiment of co-operation among them had all along been a priority with the Vidyarthi Parishad. That the atmosphere in colleges not be defiled or sullied in any way, that positivity prevail at all times was the motive and the Vidyarthi Parishad began working to fulfil it.

For a long time in the post independence period, the central government had neglected the North Eastern states of the country. The separatists naturally then went from strength to strength and discontent simmered in the minds of the students belonging to the North East. Foreign missionaries kept adding fuel to the fire, fuelling in the process, the unrest spreading in the region. As for the progress in the region, it was totally thwarted. The matter spelt a threat to the nation. "It is in these circumstances, that mingling with the local students, we are going to have to do some positive work. If the North Eastern students do not come to us, we ought to go to them; for after all they are ours, they are our kin" was respected Guruji's advice then. The swayamsevaks of the Vidyarthi Parishad went over to these regions and set about the assigned work.

Padmanabh Acharya, Arun Sathe, Dilip Paranjape were among those, who

did great work in the North Eastern states. With the efforts of Satish Velankar, who later came to be known as V. Satish, the work of the Vidyarthi Parishad assumed large proportions in the region and today, it does a very comprehensive job in eight North eastern states. Sunil Deodhar, a swayamsevak, has formed a voluntary organization by the name 'My Home India' in this region. This organization along with others that are affiliated to the Sangh, makes related facilities available to North eastern students, who wish to pursue studies in the different cities of the country. This has strengthened these students' fondness for the nation.

Once while on a tour of Meghalaya, I came across a few girl students actually speaking Marathi! I was stunned! Sunil Deodhar then explained that students were studying in Pune and that was how they were so fluent in Marathi. Thus the Parishad by various ways and means, connects the North East with the rest of the country. As on date, Ashish Bhave, a young worker of the Parishad along with his colleagues, is doing very impressive work for the youth of the North East.

The 'Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad' is known today as the largest student organization in the country. Among its members, there happen to be many, who are not connected with the Sangh. There also happen to be many others, who come to Bharat to study this student organization. Several of those, who worked for the Vidyarthi Parishad are, at the moment, playing significant roles in the politics of the nation. The present finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, the Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, the speaker of the Loksabha, Sumitra Mahajan, the Central Minister for Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Shivrajsinh Chauhan, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Devendra Phadanvis, the Education Minister of Maharashtra, Vinod Tawde have all been swayamsevaks of the Vidyarthi Parishad. But the list does not end here. There are many more names to it.

Moreover, Guruji's conviction, that 'children ought to be inculcated with values of patriotism and of service unto the society when in their student phase', was indeed justified; and considering the work of the Parishad today, that is precisely what one constantly feels.



The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram

Our country has profited to a very great extent from respected Guruji's contemplations. In the course of travel, he realized that there was plenty required to be done in the tribal region. The society could face large detriment, should specially focussed effort not be undertaken in the matter, which potential danger Guruji became aware of.

In the times of the British rule the tribals began to be referred to as the 'Aadivaasi'. The British had spread the misconception, of course with selfish motives, that it was in fact, the Aadivaasi, who were the true natives, the original inhabitants of this country; and all the others were outsiders or strangers. This was subterfuge on their part, a conspiracy to cut off the tribals from the rest of the society. That obviously called for a protest. Planting seeds of rebellion in the minds of the tribal people would surely have suited the convenience of the British but what does the history of this nation have to say?

Who were they, if not the tribals, who welcomed Bhagwan Prabhu Ramchandra? As for the support that the Bhilla community, also tribals, gave to Maharana Pratap, who tirelessly fought the Mughals, there is no match in history and history is full of such instances. Therefore there is not even an iota of truth in the contention of the British. We ought to, however, see through the facade of the British and recognize their malevolent intentions. The British left this country but the ill effects of their sly schemes was what the country could not escape.

Organizations of other religions that worked in the tribal regions were driven by the motive of conversion to their respective religions. In regions like the Purvanchal, one gets to hear poignant experiences. 'Converting to another religion is, in a sense, converting to and affiliating to another nation', so Vivekanandaji had said. It is therefore that this sort of a thing has to be opposed; but the opposition has to be accompanied by simultaneous positive work contribution Thakkar Bappa whose entire life was spent serving the tribals, left for his heavenly abode in 1950 resulting in a big void in the tribal

domain. Foreign religious organizations then began to take advantage of the situation.

After giving deep thought to the issue, Guruji decided to despatch swayamsevaks to work in the tribal areas. A swayamsevak from Maharashtra, 'Ramakant Keshav Deshpande', better known as Balasaheb Deshpande, was directed to work in the tribal regions of Jashpur, now in Chhattisgarh. ShreeGuruji had instructed Balasaheb Deshpande, a lawyer, to serve the tribal brethren but also continue with his profession. Guruji sent Morubhau Ketkar, a pracharak of the Sangh as help for Balasaheb.

Balasaheb Deshpande toured Jashpur and got a hang of the prevailing circumstances. After a meeting with the King of Jashpur, Shree Vijaybhushan Singh, he chalked out his work plan. Vijaybhushan Singh was so very impressed by it that he gave for the noble cause, his old royal palace. The palace stood before a expansive open ground and it was here that 'The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' (The tribal welfare Ashram) was established. Coincidentally it happened to be Balasaheb Deshpande's birthday as well.

Shree Vijaybhushan Singh donated 125 acres of land to the 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram'. If donations received for a good cause are not put to suitably good use, they will have been received in vain, however large and valuable they may be. So, Balasaheb Deshpande and Morubhau Ketkar initiated various projects of the 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' on this land. These tribal brethren possessed a whole spectrum of arts. Some were experts at making earthen pots and some were wonderful painters. Given the opportunity and the right guidance, they could easily stand on their own feet, Balasaheb was convinced. He set about his efforts in this direction.

The tribal students required a hostel and so the 'Chhaatrvaaas' was built. There were all of 13 students to begin with. Gradually the number rose. The 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' took upon itself the task of securing their admission to various schools. Apart from this, it undertook the very significant task of rousing the self-respect and the confidence of the tribal brethren by narrating to them stories of the valiant and the brave belonging to their regions. Raghoji Bhangre, aka the 'Tiger of the Sahyadri', Nagya Katkari, Birsa Munda, Gond Rani Durgavati, Bhagoji Naik, were all as much an integral part of the information provided to the tribals as was that about 'Avaare'

Guruji', who was researching medicinal herbs in the forest regions.

The tribals began imbibing values like awareness about health, de-addiction, and the importance of education. The children, who were pursuing education then began to oppose the wrong that their parents committed.

The Ramayan and the Mahabharat are great epics of our country. With the idea that the contents of these, reach the tribal people and someone explain these to the tribals in the language they spoke, the 'Shreehari Satsang Samiti' came into being. People in these regions were trained in storytelling which played a major role in bringing about mass awakening and in rousing the nationalist sentiment. Five years ago the 'Shreehari Satsang Samiti' had organized the 'Vanvasi Kumbh' in Mumbai and it was attended by ten thousand tribal brothers.

It is now six decades since the 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' was established. The mission of the Ashram gathered immense momentum in this period. As of today, the 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' carries on its work in many states of the country. Even those, who launch blistering criticism on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh laud the work of the 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' that the Sangh has founded. The 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' has set up several hostels in the North-Eastern states and these house students free of charge. We do hear of the Maoist activity in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar but the 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' receives a very good response in these states.

Much as our Prime Minister may have encouraged the construction of toilets in every home, it was admittedly difficult that this concept might find acceptance in the tribal areas. However, once convinced about the importance of having toilets in the home, they showed willingness to cooperate. Today, the construction of toilets has begun in the tribal regions. British residents of Bharatiya origin are making huge funds available for this purpose and so definitely deserve a mention, and the Sanghchalak of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, respected Dhirajbhai Shah and his family, especially, for making a considerable amount available for this cause.

Actually speaking there is so much more to the mission of the 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' but what matters most is that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh had recognized the significance of work in the tribal area, which fact we must take note of. Dr. Hedgewar had, in fact, felt the need to work in the tribal regions even before the creation of the Sangh and he had spoken about it more than once. Guruji commenced this work and how much the country has been benefitting from the expansion of the work, is a picture so clear before our eyes.

In the inaccessible and remote tribal areas, the 'Ekal' school i.e. a school that works on the principle of 'One teacher One School', is now functional. Thousands of such Ekal Schools spread education in the remote regions and other under developed regions of the country. From the state of Kerala right up to our neighbouring country Nepal, several 'Ekal' schools are active and do good work and have succeeded in nipping in the bud, all foreign aspiration of unwarranted activity

These Ekal Schools offer studies up to the fourth standard. Mathematics, History, Social Science and Dharma are the subjects taught here and it is with contentment that I am saying, that even this meagre amount of education has curbed fully the exploitation of the uneducated classes. Thought this mission is well underway, considering a huge sub continent like Bharat, there still remains plenty to be done. We ought to therefore, extend as much help as possible to the 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' and other such institutions in order to bring about progress in the tribal regions of our country.



The Vivekananda Kendra

In the year 1956 ShreeGuruji became 51. It was 16 years since he assumed leadership of the Sangh. The progress that the Sangh achieved under Guruji's leadership in these 16 years can be best described as phenomenal prodigious. Though that was a period of formidable challenges for the most part, it did not in any way hold back the progress of the Sangh. On the contrary, the Sangh emerged sturdier than ever. The work and mission of the Sangh became more comprehensive as it expanded its horizons, entering various fields by means of several organizations. It was under Guruji's guidance, that all of this could be achieved, which fact the swayamsevaks were fully aware of and so the swayamsevaks decided to honour Guruji on the occasion of his 51st birthday. Guruji however, completely rejected the idea. He could not even think of any personal honour or credit. All that mattered to him was the duty and the mission. But not willing to disregard the sentiment of the swayamsevaks either, he had to relent and gave permission for the programme to be conducted.

He gave his approval but insisted that the programme be utilized to further the cause and the objectives of the Sangh and to expand its reach among the masses. Also, he wanted that the funds raised in the course of the function be used only for the mission of the Sangh. So then, beginning 19th January 1956, the Sangh planned a programme of 51 days spread across different places in the country, on the occasion of Guruji's 51st birthday. Literature relating to Guruji's life as also that informing about the Sangh's work, was published on a large scale. The programme was able to raise funds exceeding Rs. 20 lakhs (2 million) in those days. The amount was a willing contribution by swayamsevaks and the society. Considering that gold in those days costed Rs. 90 a tola (a little over 11 gm), we might just be able to estimate how much the amount is worth in today's times. Moreover, it only showed how much the swayamsevaks loved Guruji and how much society respected him. On the day of the Vijaya Ekadashi, certain auspicious religious rites were performed at Guruji's residence. These included the pooja, the yadnya (offering in the sacred fire). Guruji's father was no more but his mother was present and witnessed the religious rites performed on the occasion of his

birthday. Dr. Hedgewar's resting place (samadhi) at Reshambagh was showered with flowers. A public felicitation, the first of the series, was held in Nagpur on 8th March and the series ended with a function in Delhi on 8th April. The chief guest at Nagpur was the historian, Dr. Radhakumud Mukherji and Dr. Seetaramji Sharma, the former ambassador to Pakistan was the chief guest at Delhi.

Thus Guruji's 51st birthday was celebrated all over the country; and the swayamsevaks as well as the society in general, received a special vim and vigour from it. Guruji would time and again, recall great men of our nation for that was his source of inspiration. Spiritualism is the main foundation, the basis of Bharatwarsha. The year 1963 marked the birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda, the one to lay the foundation of the spiritual upliftment of Bharat. Guruji gave lectures across the country to commemorate the occasion and it was this same year that he took an important decision. He resolved to erect a memorial befitting this great Karmayogi, who made the nation aware of its own spiritual wealth. Guruji called a meeting in Nagpur, of the senior swayamsevaks of the Sangh. Eknathji Ranade the Sarkaryawaah then, was of a spiritual bent of mind. Relieving him of his post of the Sarkaryawah, he was assigned the responsibility of the 'Vivekananda Sheela Smarak Samiti'. In 1892, Vivekanandaji swam to a rock at the confluence of three rivers in Kanyakumari. For three continuous days he sat here, in a state of deep meditation. It was here that he experienced a divine revelation, directing him to undertake propagation for the upliftment of his motherland Bharat. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh decided to erect a magnificent memorial of Vivekanandaji at this very spot. The 'Vivekananda Sheela Smarak Samiti' invited Manmath Padmanabh, Kerala's well-known leader, to chair the function. Shri Eknathji Ranade became the Karyawah of the 'Samiti' and in fact devoted his entire life to erecting the memorial and advocating Vivekanandaji's thoughts. In the year 1970, a wonderful memorial and a grand temple had taken shape. Today, this spot is revered as one of the holy places of pilgrimage of Bharat; and is visited by hundreds of thousands of people. Eknathji had toured the country and met with the



Eknathji Ranade

chief minister of every single state to raise funds for this memorial.

To invite and welcome in this project, the participation of the common man, Eknathji got a receipt for one rupee made and this step on his part went on to bring in funds to the tune of Rs. 10 lakhs (1 million). These 10 lakh people received a letter of thanks each, hand-written by Eknathji himself. This, in itself, is a world record. Even after the memorial was built and ready,

Eknathji was not the one to sit back in complacence. He prepared a team of swayamsevaks to spread the thoughts of Vivekananda in the country. These swayamsevaks were sent to the various states and Vivekananda's thoughts were advocated among the youth, as part of service unto society. The youth ought to come forward and take the initiative in wiping out all distinction in society, was Vivekananda's philosophy and the swayamsevaks strived hard to lend realization to these thoughts. As of the moment, the work of the 'Vivekananda Kendra' continues in full swing right from Arunachal Pradesh to Kanyakumari.

A hospital by the name 'Vivekananda Medical Mission' has been set up in a very remote place in Kerala. Communists, who keep lashing out at the Sangh apart from people of other religions whole-heartedly and generously praise this work of the Sangh and this has been my firsthand experience. The Sangh

moreover, has all along rejected any kind of social discrepancy. It is of the view, that leave alone in service (seva), there ought not to be discrepancy of any sort whatsoever in society. It is in line with this ideology, that the Sangh denounces and strongly opposes the caste and social hierarchy that divide society. Since we are on this topic, let me share that in 1956, Guruji met with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the architect of the constitution of Bharat and a great leader in his own right. In the meeting they discussed the injustice meted out to Dr. Ambedkar and to his followers. The injustice faced by the Dalits pains me as much as it pains you, Guruji told Dr. Ambedkar expressing his sensitivity and empathy about the issue adding also that the Sangh did not believe in untouchability and that it had swayamsevaks of every caste, he told Dr. Ambedkar.

Dr. Ambedkar put in tireless efforts all throughout his life, in order that justice be done to the Dalit brothers. There were some who, though of the same social order, had gained fame and chose to disregard this entire issue. They had nothing but derision for a personality as great as Dr. Ambedkar's. Despite years of struggle, if the Dalit class was not going to get justice, a leader like Babasaheb was certainly not going to take things lying down. He announced his revolutionary decision to give up Hinduism. People belonging to other religions then met with him and tried to bait Babasaheb and his followers. In 1956, along with hundreds of thousands of his followers, Babasaheb embraced the Buddhist religion, very much a product of the land of Bharat. You may perhaps be surprised, but Guruji had congratulated Babasaheb. Despite tolerating severe injustice and deciding to embrace another religion, that Babasaheb should choose the Buddhist religion, born very much in this land, was what Guruji found commendable. Guruji believed that Babasaheb's decision was, in fact, a big favour to the nation. It could hardly be called conversion. It was just like walking from one room to another in the house, a house that was basically very much ours! Guruji even thanked Babasaheb, who took the decision.

'The land that we reside in, is our Motherland. Since thousands of years we have been worshipping this land as our Mother. For us, every grain, every speck of this land holds utmost sanctity. It is in this very pure and sacred land, that the Almighty keeps manifesting in different avataars. The sentiment that we are the sons of the glorious and eminent soil of this very land, is the

live, dynamic principle underlying our unity, our integrity and our organization'. Thus was Guruji's message and it is this message that holds the essence of the ideology of the Sangh.



The Hindustan Samachar

It is the victors, who write history and it is the victors, who feel the need to influence it. The history of our country as it is told to us, has been influenced to a very great extent by victors. It therefore becomes necessary, to research the truth, seeking it out, from among all that has been masquerading before us all along, under the name of history. The Mughals established their rule in this country and engaged in large scale propaganda aimed at building the opinion, that theirs was a tolerant and liberal administration. The Mughals profited from it, not just during their reign but also after their era ended, for they went down in history as good rulers and even earned mention to this effect in historical records. Moreover, it is these records, that have been presented to us as history. These records are not factual history, of course not! They were promotional attempts of the Mughals at glorification of their own reign and that is what needs to be understood. Anyway! The British arrived here after the Moghuls and became the rulers. They were past masters in glorification of their administration and way ahead of the Mughals at this craft and there was never a match for the Machiavellian skill of the British.

Had the British rule not prevailed here, our country could never have achieved any progress! There is a large bracket of people that subscribes to this belief even today! These folks, who recall the 'favours' of the British with great gratitude, invariably forget how much the British looted and fleeced Bharat. And more importantly, the British planted and nurtured an acute inferiority complex in the Bharatiya mind. The British tried to convince this country that the Bharatiya were 'third class', there was nothing glorious about the Bharatiya culture and history. In addition, they also impressed upon the people, that as compared to the English language, the indigenous languages of Bharat were backward and so communicating in them was lowering one's dignity. Do we not see the resultant damage even today? In order that the Bharatiya never lose sight of the eminence of the British and that they never be able to face the British with their head held high, the British made immense use of the media.

As a matter of fact, they created in the country, a whole class of people, who

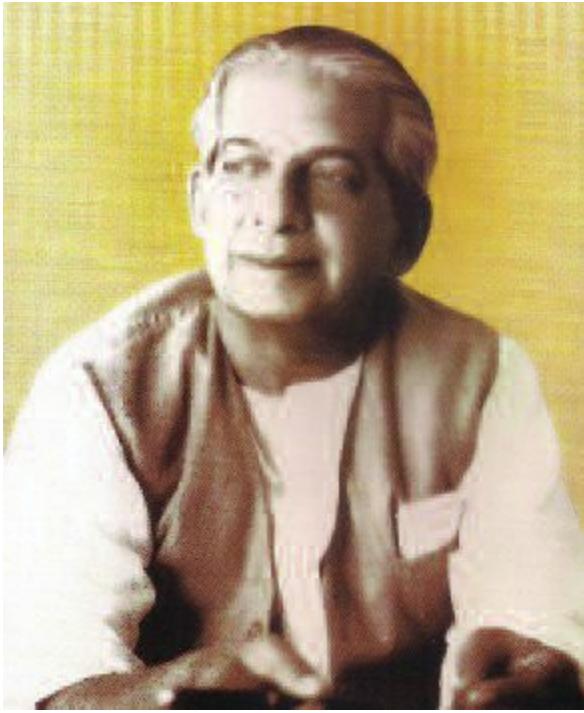
not only accepted the superiority of the British but aspired to become British. 'May we quit this country, no matter at all; but may our influence and impressions prevail here perennially' was the sly scheme designed by them. They met with success too, as the media that disseminated information in the country were all completely under their control. The French news agency in Pondicherry and the Portuguese news agency in Goa were operational during the British rule in our country. These agencies lauded the governments of their respective countries and projected a rosy picture. Needless to say, that the French ruled Pondicherry and the Portuguese ruled Goa. The British too brought into Bharat, news agencies that vindicated their reign and safeguarded their interests.

These agencies did not represent Bharat and so news did not end up being published in rural regions. Moreover, only news items that favoured the British were made public. Therefore, it would not be imprudent at all to say, that it was these very news agencies that groomed the class aspiring to become British. Criticizing Bharat's fight for independence and singing the glories of the British were the norms that these news agencies were completely given to. These outside agencies had spread the following notion:

A backward country that it was, the British ought to rule over it for generations to come; and the British reign was, in any case, going to prevail in the times to follow. This misleading and totally delusive advocacy needed to be countered with a befitting move and so every leader participating in the fight for independence, launched his own newspaper.

The 'Kesri', Lokmanya Tilak's newspaper, published an article written by Dadasaheb Apte. 'The Bharatiya people ought to have their own indigenous news agency. That is what will convey to the public, the news from every nook and

corner of the nation and that is



Dadasaheb Apte

the only way the public will become aware of what exactly is happening in the country', wrote Dadasaheb in the article. In 1942 he even met with Swatantryaveer Savarkar in this regard. Savarkar motivated him to launch such a news agency. Savarkar, who had dedicated all his life to the nation's interest, was fully convinced of the importance of an indigenous news agency. He invited Dadasaheb to live with him and was his host for four years, a period during which the two had exhaustive discussions on this issue.

A few years on, Bharat became independent, the British quit the country. Then the unfortunate assassination of Gandhiji happened and the Sangh was held responsible. The ban imposed at the time was a lesson that taught so much to the Sangh. Despite the fact that the Sangh was completely innocent, there was neither anybody, who would speak on its behalf in the country's parliament nor anybody willing to present its side to the public. So for the adversaries the job of building an anti Sangh opinion among the public was made all the more easy. Nevertheless, if the truth had to be conveyed to the people, if the Sangh had to present its stand, the only option was an impartial news agency that advocated nothing but the truth and that, the Sangh had realized by then. Vivek, Sadhana, Swadesh, Yugadharma, Rashtradharma, Paanchajanya and the Organiser were weeklies associated with the Sangh and

were already in circulation. Yet the news agency remained a vital need. It was around this time that respected Balasaheb Deoras announced the decision of launching a news agency. The name suggested for it was 'Hindustan Samachar'. Balasaheb had discussions in this context with respected Guruji; and the responsibility of the 'Hindustan Samachar' was handed over to Shiwram Shankar alias Dadasaheb Apte, a learned author from Mumbai, who was also a lawyer of repute. Within a few months of acquiring independence, 'The Hindustan Samachar', the very first news agency of the country that reported news in Devnagri had taken off.

Dadasaheb Apte had worked as assistant to Barrister Kanhaiyalal Munshi. Having assumed the responsibility of the 'Hindustan Samachar', he toured several countries and began a study of the Hindu community residing abroad. The lifestyle and the traditions of these Hindus living outside of Bharat for years together, were gradually undergoing transformation, largely because their next generation had no connection left at all with Bharat. Dadasaheb narrated to ShreeGuruji, all that he had seen and experienced; and Guruji then began reflecting over the situation. Later, Dadasaheb took help of Bapurao Lele for work involving the 'Hindustan Samachar'. Then began a new chapter in Bharatiya journalism! This news agency reported to the Bharatiya public about the Hindu community living abroad. Within a year, the 'Hindustan Samachar' had offices in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Nagpur and Patna. Newspapers reporting in Hindi, in Bengali and in English began publishing news from the 'Hindustan Samachar'.

In 1961, as the correspondent of the 'Hindustan Samachar', Dadasaheb Apte toured Italy, France, Switzerland, Britain, the USA, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. He had dialogues with the journalists as well as the representatives of the respective governments. In 1963, he was invited by the government of Pakistan. He accepted and visited the country. By means of the newspaper, he presented impartially to the Bharatiya public, his experiences while on tour along with the local news in Pakistan. Dadasaheb presented news always exhibiting fearlessness, transparency, honesty and integrity apart from courage of course. His work often invited the ire of the government. He believed that journalism was 'dharma', not 'profession'. At no cost, was he going to compromise on the truth; and that was Dadasaheb's unflinching stand.

The greatest treasure of the 'Hindustan Samachar' was the thousands of swayamsevaks, who sent in news to this agency without any expectation whatsoever. These swayamsevaks were only too willing to make their offering in the sacred fire – the yadnya of journalism, kindled for the purpose of national interest. The 'Hindustan Samachar' reported boldly and candidly to the world, the freedom movement of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the freedom movement of Goa, Shama Prasad Mukherji's sacrifice and the freedom movement of Kashmir that he led. In 1964, the 'Hindustan Samachar' turned 15. It grew, spread its limbs and earned a name in the country for its advocacy of the truth and its credibility. In 1975, in the period of the emergency, the 'Hindustan Samachar' faced a ban for the first time.

The ban proved greatly damaging to the 'Hindustan Samachar' and it even had to suspend operations for a few years. However, a senior pracharak of the Sangh, Shrikant Joshi started it anew. Originally from Mumbai, Shrikant Joshi had worked a good 25 years as pracharak in Assam. Naturally, he had a profound study of the North-east behind him. Later on, he was handed the responsibility of personal assistant to respected Balasaheb Deoras. In Mumbai, Balasaheb Deoras would stay with us. As his personal assistant, Shrikantji also often stayed in our house. Always with a smile on his face, Shrikantji was known to be very innovative. On many occasions in life, he has guided me as a follower of the Sangh.

In the course of the year 1985, Shrikant Joshi tabled his thought of reviving the 'Hindustan Samachar' that had closed down. The Sarsanghachalak did give him the nod but setting up this news agency all over again was not going to be plain sailing, in any case. Shrikantji travelled the length and the breadth of the country. The big news agencies tended to totally neglect news concerned with the rural and remote regions. The former journalists and swayamsevaks associated with the 'Hindustan Samachar' expressed readiness to extend full cooperation. Swayamsevaks and well-wishers on their part, pitched in with their support to raise funds and the news agency was back in the saddle so to say.

As on date, the 'Hindustan Samachar' is active in every part of the country. Dadasaheb Apte left for his heavenly abode in 2005. Shrikant Joshi, too is now no more. But even today this news agency that they set up, strives

relentlessly in the field of journalism, all for the sake of national interest. Journalism has to direct its strife towards the welfare of the society and the nation. To maintain peace and stability in the society is the core, the essence of journalism. However, the scenario in the present times only points to a negligence of this norm. The misconception, that sensationalizing news, be it impetuous or reckless, is what journalism is all about, is the accepted norm of the day. Only if the society and the nation remain stable and the nation achieves progress, will journalism and journalists progress. May we never lose sight of this truth.

Making a mountain out of a molehill, is no big deal for journalists but the extent of damage this could cause to the society and to the nation as well, is what should make each of us must stop to think. If journalists were to keep at the back of their mind, the simple value, that 'nothing, just nothing can be greater than national interest', journalism today would be very responsible, I feel. The worthwhile awareness that 'journalism is no profession, it is but a great duty', must seep deep into our media. The country will undoubtedly profit from it.



The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh

Soon after independence, there began the process of industrialization. Industrialization although a need of the country, focussing on it, nevertheless, did not justify the consequent neglect of agriculture, a traditional occupation of the Bharatiya man. But, for a long period of time, those in power did sideline agriculture, and that is a fact. Industrialization entailed progress and with it, sprung up many workers' unions that looked to represent the rights of workers. These unions were under the influence and dominance of the communist ideology. The aggressive policies of these unions could not achieve the welfare of the industry or that of the workers either. This was largely because these 'dynamic, enterprising' worker unions 'of undaunted spirit' were fashioned on the lines of foreign 'models'. The fact remained also, that these kind of unions had not met with any noteworthy success in foreign countries either.

It was in this period, that after discussions with senior swayamsevaks, ShreeGuruji pointed out that the Workers' Union ought not to become synonymous with a body that does little apart from engaging in conflict with the industry. Guruji insisted that the Workers' Union ought to work in the interest of the worker but not lose sight of the fact all the same, that it is in the development of the industry that the interest of the worker lies. So then on 23rd July 1955 an organization by the name of 'The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh' advocating these thoughts of Guruji, was founded in Bhopal. Shri Dattopantji Thengadi was the first chief secretary of the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh.



Dattopantji Thengadi

Dattopantji Thengadi, a great thinker with remarkable organizational capacities, was born on 10th November 1920 in Arvi, Wardha. Gifted with an extremely sharp intellect, Dattopantji was the pracharak of the Sangh until the age of 50 years. Apart

from the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, he founded the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Samajik Samarasta Manch, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, Sarwepanth Samadar Manch and the Paryawaran Manch.

Besides, he was one of the founders of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and the Sahakar Bharti as well. A very well-read and learned person, with abundant study behind him, Dattopantji has to his credit, books in Marathi, Hindi and English. These books transmit his wisdom and farsightedness. His books 'Nationalist Pursuit' and 'Our National Renaissance' received tremendous applause. Dattopantji was one of the priceless gems that the Sangh was blessed with.

It was a good twelve years after its creation, i.e. in 1967, that the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh convened its national level conference in Delhi. 541 worker unions decided to become part of the 'Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh' and the membership figure of the BMS shot up to more than 2 lakh 46 thousand.

'Workers of the world, unite! You have a world to win!' was the message of the communist philosophers. Firm believers in the principle that the industry and the worker are incomplete without each other, the BMS on the other hand, differed considerably from them. The BMS began working on the very constructive thought, that the union of the worker force can make this world a beautiful place. These views started to influence the workers as much as those in the field of industry and BMS began to expand and spread its limbs. This nation is ours and the progress of the industry is a requisite for the progress of the nation. All the same, no industry can achieve growth at the cost of the worker or to his detriment and this was the constructive norm that sent out a new and reassuring message to the worker force of the country.

The BMS demonstrated on many occasions, that 'be it the workers' rights or their demands, the fight could be put up by constructive and legitimate means'. Let me quote an example, a truly wonderful one. Shri Ghanashyamji Birla, the well-known industrialist of the country, visited one of his many

factories. He used to pay surprise visits. In that particular factory, he had a very unusual experience. It was lunch time and supposedly meant an hour long break. But the workers were done with their meal in half an hour and were back at work. Every worker had a black ribbon tied to his arm. Ghanshyamdasji was baffled and he enquired about the reason.

He learnt that as a matter of fact, these workers were on strike. However, this strike was not being staged by bringing the work to a standstill or even by shouting slogans against the management. On the contrary, the workers had lodged their protest by boosting production, maintaining the quality of the production and so in a very constructive way. Ghanshyamdasji was taken aback. Through the management, he called for and tried to understand the demands of the workers, which he found very reasonable and appropriate. He then directed the management to admit all the demands.

Just think! With the usual strike and the loud slogans, the workers could perhaps even have had their way. But at the end of the day, that would have left both the workers and the management bitter. Also, opting for the way of conflict, could not have guaranteed in any case, that the demands would have been admitted. This option of raising production and demanding one's right proved effective and ruled out losses for either side.

This was a strike of the BMS. Influenced by the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the BMS had ingrained in its members, the value that, 'the loss to the industry is loss to the nation'. Owing to these positive principles, on the one hand, many in the industrial field began to ask for a BMS union and on the other, some more worker unions came forward to become affiliated to the BMS



The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh – cherished moments

Let me share one of the experiences I had with the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh. 'Janmabhoomi' is a Gujarati newspaper and has a 'BMS' union. Late Harindrabhai Dave, a journalist, was its chief editor. A poet in his own right, Harindrabhai was a literary person. We knew each other very well. One day I received a call from him, saying the workers serving 'Janmabhoomi' had declared a strike. Harindrabhai had asked for my help because the union was a BMS one. I was very sure that the BMS would not opt for a strike, except as the last resort. I gave a careful hearing to Harindrabhai and then contacted Ramanbhai Shah, the President of the BMS and listened to the workers' side as well.

Reposing full faith in the management, the workers here, had put in extra hours of work. But they had not been compensated for these work hours. The BMS repeatedly reminded the management, but all requests seemed to fall on deaf ears. Finally the BMS warned of a strike and even intimated the date of its commencement. Despite a notice well in advance, the management did not budge. Now that the strike was a mere 24 hours away, the management suddenly woke up and broke into cold sweat, for if the strike really happened, the loss was unimaginable. To add to the stress, the management had taken on many other responsibilities apart from that of the daily newspaper. Naturally, they were making all effort to avert the loss and also the consequent disgrace.

Ramanbhai Shah filled me in on the whole matter and I reverted to Harindrabhai; and told him that the workers' demands were indeed legitimate and fair. They must be compensated for the work they put in. Harindrabhai agreed but his management required some time. While I acted mediator, I had made a total of as many as 26 phone calls to Harindrabhai and Ramanbhai. At last they arrived at a settlement. Trusting the management's assurance this time, the BMS withdrew the strike and the workers did go on to receive compensation for their work.

Before the strike was actually to begin, all that was done by the BMS was this: a board bearing the date of commencement of the strike, was put up outside the newspaper's office! Apart from this, there was no slogan shouting and no demonstrations which Harindrabhai appreciated very much. He thanked me; but I refused the credit. The credit was rightfully due to the BMS; because this organization had right till the end, observed restraint in their fight for the workers' rights. The strike was their last resort, a weapon they reached out for, only when they had no option left. They did not take an extreme stand or even decide to teach a lesson to the management, which by then, already had its back against the wall. So, not only were the demands acceded but the probable conflict was warded off.

Among a few other members of the Bharatiya Parliament, Dattopant Thengadi, a member of the Rajyasabha and Bhupesh Gupta, a communist leader were invited to visit Soviet Russia. On reaching the hotel in Moscow, Dattopantji received a call from the swayamsevaks there. They wished to know his engagements, so they could arrange to schedule their meetings with him. In a short while they arrived to meet Dattopantji and fixed their programme to suit his convenience.

Bhupesh Gupta was stunned. "I am a communist leader and nobody has got in touch with me, despite arriving here in this communist country! To think that the swayamsevaks of the Sangh could contact you in such a short time of your arrival! This one instance is more than adequate indication, of how widespread the Sangh network must be!" he said in appreciation of the incident.

Moreover, the BMS is indeed the largest workers' union in our country and has millions of workers for its members. A few years back, Russia hosted a summit of four thousand workers' unions. At this summit the BMS was declared the largest workers' union in the world and was appreciated for its manner of work and operation. It is this kind of a positive and constructive approach, that makes a noteworthy contribution towards the nation's progress. Although the BMS is now the largest workers' union not only in the country; but in the whole world, it does not ever operate on the imprudent lines of misusing its power to hold the industrial sector under its thumb, render it helpless and harm national interest. The reason behind this, is the ideology

and the values of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh that the BMS has for its foundation and guiding principles.

ShreeGuruji saw and recognized the need of the country that was now independent. His decision to form the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, to attain the progress of the industry, as also the welfare of the workers, only reflects his far-sightedness, his vision, which leaves us absolutely astonished. 'There ought to be coordination between the industrialists and the workers, not conflict', was ShreeGuruji's approach. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh with its faith in this very principle of coordination, has been acclaimed as the largest workers' union in the world, mainly because for this organization, the nation comes first, the national interest is its top priority. It is only if the nation progresses, that the nation's people including the workers will progress and the nation will reclaim its 'supreme glory's.



The Sangh journeys overseas

The month: September. The year: 1946. The liner S. S. Vasna that set sail for Mombasa, Kenya from Ballard Pier, Mumbai, carried many Bharatiyas, who wished to try their luck in Africa. One evening a young man by the name 'Jagdish Chandra Shastri sat on the deck of the ship, reciting the Sangh's prayer, 'namaste sadaa vatsale maatrubhoome'. Maneklal Rughani, who sat at the other end of the deck, heard it and walking up to Jagdish Chandra Shastri he asked, "Were you saying the Sangh prayer? I happened to be saying it too!" This happened to be the sixth day of the voyage. Aboard the same vessel, two swayamsevaks of the Sangh had been reciting the Sangh prayer in two different places but met each other only after six days!

Jagdish Chandraji had left from Delhi and Manekbhai, from Jamnagar. From the very next day these two began reciting the prayer together. It was as if they began a miniature version of the Shakha on board the S. S. Vasna. Later, watching them 17 others joined them in saying the prayer. These 17 persons were not swayamsevaks; but eventually did go on to become swayamsevaks. Thus happened for the first time ever, a Sangh Shakha onboard a liner, in the presence of the blue waters of the ocean; and under the immense open skies. This, I think is phenomenal!

This vessel reached the shores of Mombasa after 16 days. Initially Manekbhai lived in the town of Nyeri in Kenya while Jagdish Chandraji went to Nairobi; and worked there as a teacher in the 'Sanatan Dharma Kanya-shala'. Within a few days Manekbhai too, began working as a teacher in the same school. On 14th January 1947, on the auspicious day of Makar Sankranti, the Sangh began a Shakha on an open ground in Nairobi.

The 17 persons, who had joined in the Sangh prayer onboard the S. S. Vasna were present in this Shakha session. Together they decided that a weekly session was what they would conduct. Here, apart from Hindus, there were Parsees and Sikhs. Gradually, this Shakha too, shaped up like those back home in Bharat. In those days there was a considerably large Hindu population in Kenya; and in fact, in the whole of the African continent. Some

of them have been residents of Africa since two hundred years; and have yet preserved their Bharatiya essence and core. They had however, not formed an organization or come together in a systematized form as such.

The people of Bharatiya origin living in Africa, tended to interact within the framework of their respective communities. There was no organization that could bind them, bring all of them together under one roof, precisely what was needed there in Africa. It was the Sangh Shakha that accomplished this task of bringing together the Hindu community.

A few years later an organization called the 'Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh' was officially registered in Kenya. This then went on to become active in the world, as the 'Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh', whose source of inspiration was of course, the 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh'. Thanks to the 'Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh' the Hindus in Kenya found a big platform. The work of the Sangh was now increasing by way of volume and scope. Jagdish Chandra Shastriji toured the countries of Uganda which is Kenya's neighbour, Tanganyika that is now known as Tanzania and Zanzibar. He spoke about the mission and selfless service of the Sangh to the Hindu community. The Hindu population in these countries was huge and so, the response to his appeal in these regions was more than heartening.

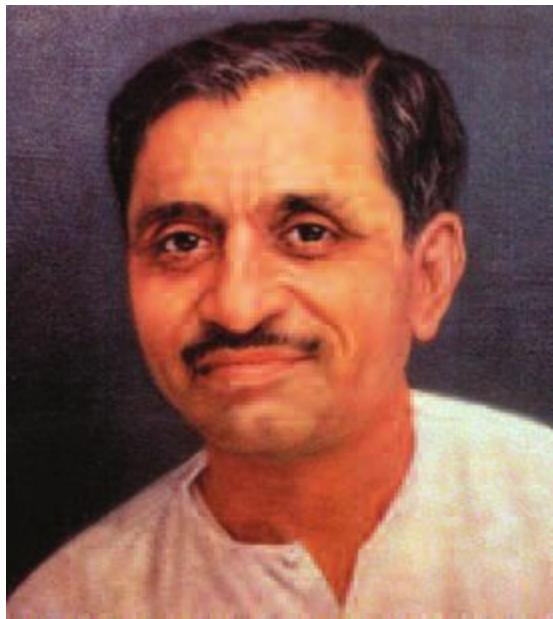
Meanwhile a senior pracharak of the Sangh, Laxmanraoji Bhide along with Chamanlalji set about the spade work of the Vishwa Vibhag. Chamanlalji would make a note of every swayamsevak travelling outside the country. Speaking of Chamanlalji, I cannot help but share an incident. With a Masters degree in Science (MSc) he was a gold medallist. He was born in a very wealthy business family of Rawalpindi. It was there, that he became a swayamsevak and went on to dedicate his life to the Sangh. Following the partition, he came to Delhi. He told his parents about his decision to devote his entire life to the mission of the Sangh. They did not stop him; in fact they gave him their blessings. Chamanlalji became a pracharak of the Sangh. A fiat parked outside Keshav Kunj, the Sangh office in Delhi, was a gift given to Chamanlalji by his father.

Chamanlalji declined the gift and requested his father to gift the car to the Sangh instead. His father agreed and granted the request. I have met Chamanlalji on several occasions. Whenever he came to Mumbai, he stayed

with us in my house. It is indeed my good fortune that I received affection from him. Extremely soft spoken, he used only two sets of clothes all his life. The topic of the fiat that he had received long time back, used to annoy him. He did not like it at all.

That was Chamanlalji! He would guide swayamsevaks travelling to other countries. 'Make an effort to organize the Hindus living in the country that you visit; and strengthen their bond with Bharat', he would advise them. Swayamsevaks did begin work under his expert guidance; and the results began to show. Let me share my own experience. A lady, who lived in the USA had come down on a visit to Bharat. She happened to come in contact with me. She was facing many problems and needed a lawyer. She could not however, have afforded an American one. I called Chamanlalji in Delhi and told him the lady's problem. Within ten minutes of this call, I received a call from a swayamsevak, who was a lawyer living in the USA. 'Chamanlalji has spoken to me about the lady's problem. Please give her my phone number and do tell her to get in touch with me when she is back. The job will be done.' said the lawyer. In a few days the lady got back to me to tell me, that her matter had been taken care of; and she had not had spent a single penny for it.

Talking of Chamanlalji, refreshed my memories. Anyways, to pick up where we left off, the work of the Sangh that Jagdish Chandraji and Manekbhai initiated in East Africa, went on expanding. In 1958 Laxmanrao Bhide, the senior pracharak, was delegated to Kenya. Earlier he was stationed in Uttar Pradesh, as a pracharak and colleague of Bhaura Deoras, who was the 'praant pracharak'. In Kenya, Laxmanraoji along with Jagdish Chandraji, visited the Hindu organizations, the temples and the saints and sadhus. He spoke to them at length, about the Sangh's ideology, its work and mission; and even drove home to them, the significance of it all. Meeting with the men of repute among the Hindu community in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia, Laxmanraoji connected them to the Sangh, which gave a head start to the Sangh work in the African countries. Kenya became the centre of activity. The 'Din Dayal Bhavan' in Nairobi, Kenya, erected in memory of Pandit Din Dayal Upadhyay houses the headquarters of the Sangh there.



*Pandit Din Dayal
Upadhyay*

The Sangh spreads its wings overseas

In 1987 the work and mission of the Sangh, its existence in Africa became 40 years old. I was a special invitee to the celebrations on the occasion.

Moreover, the Sangh had founded a body called the 'Hindu Council of Kenya' and organizations on the same lines were created under other names in Uganda and Tanzania as well. A grand event was organized on the occasion of the completion of 40 years of the Sangh's existence in these countries and 25th December 1987 onwards, a grand three day Shibir was organized in Kenya. The sections in this Shibir were named after Maharana Pratap, Shivaji Maharaj, Guru Govindsinh and Swatantryaveer Savarkar.

On 1st January 1988 the 'Hindu Council of Kenya' had organized a programme in Kenya. On this occasion, an extremely significant decision of forming an organization of all the Hindu brothers in the entire African continent was taken. The proportion of the Hindu population residing in many of the African countries was considerably large. South Africa ruled by the Whites, did have a big number of Hindus as well; but they were under the influence of the west. It was for this reason, that initially the Sangh did not get an encouraging response here. Senior swayamsevaks of the Sangh travelled to South Africa and this definitely made a difference and could influence the Hindus.

After South Africa attained independence, its relations with Bharat strengthened more than ever; and the Hindu community there began to travel to Bharat in large numbers. You may perhaps not be aware but numerous Hindus from South Africa come down for the 'Char-dham pilgrimage'.

Mauritius too became an independent nation. With Hindus forming a majority of its population, Bharat does, all said and done, have a fairly good influence on the country. The 'All Africa Hindu Council' established in 1998 represents the entire Hindu community across all the African countries. After the African countries freed themselves from the clutches of the British

empire, most of the Hindus there migrated to England, Australia and Canada and settled there. A few among these were swayamsevaks of the Sangh. They set about carrying forward the mission of the Sangh in these countries. As on date the Sangh Shakha sessions are conducted in about 40 countries and the web of the Sangh has extended to around 100 countries.

The swayamsevaks settled overseas visit Bharat once in five years to attend the 'Vishwa Sangh Shibir' (a summit of the Sangh at the global level) This event first took place in 1990 in Bengaluru and was attended by 550 swayamsevaks from about 40 countries. The second Vishwa Sangh Shibir was held in Vadodara and saw a noticeable rise in the swayamsevak attendance. The third was held in Keshavsrushti, Bhainder, Mumbai, the fourth in Gandhinagar, Gujrat and the fifth in Pune. The sixth Shibir held in Indore, between 29th December 2015 and 3rd January 2016 was attended by 750 swayamsevaks from 45 countries.

In 2015 the 'World Hindu Congress' convened by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in New Delhi, was inaugurated by the Dalai Lama. Representatives of the Hindu community the world over, participated in this congress and presented their respective thoughts. Also, the congress engaged in deliberations upon the economic, political and social occurrences on the global scene at the time.

Thus, globally speaking, the impact of the Sangh is evidently growing. Moreover, thanks to the funds sent in by the Hindu community across the world, it is possible to carry on service in several places. The Hindus overseas extend monetary support to the Ekal Vidyalay, the Sewa International, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and to numerous other organizations affiliated to the Sangh, which again gives momentum to the service it offers.

I have had the opportunity to work with the swayamsevaks of the African nations and also with those of England. Whenever I spoke to the youth of these nations, I urged them to understand the nation Bharat. "As of this moment, you do not reside in Bharat, no matter! But you absolutely have to be well-informed about the country your forefathers lived in!" I always insisted. To this, I got an overwhelming response. Many among the youth from the African nations and from England, travelled to Bharat. Most of them have visited the forts of Shivaji Maharaj. This young generation was totally

astonished and awe-struck when they acquainted themselves with the history of Bharat. The glorious history of Bharat's battle for independence had left the youth stunned.

The 'National Hindu Students' Forum', (NHSF) an organization on the lines of the 'Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad' has been formed in England. An extremely impressive student organization, its first president, Manoj Ladwa had been invited to the Buckingham Palace by the Queen of England.

The work and mission of the Sangh in England completes 50 years this year in 2016. A Mahashibir, a summit on a large scale has been organized to commemorate the occasion. So, we see that the Sangh's mission is assuming indisputably expansive proportions across the world.

Now let me narrate just this one instance that bears testimony to the affinity and attachment that the Bharatiyas living overseas feel for their motherland. Bharat fought a war against Pakistan in 1965 and in 1971 each. The Bharatiyas in Africa abstained from Diwali celebrations during these times. Actually speaking, we had won both the wars. "But the country's soldiers were martyred in the wars and so we were just not up to the Diwali celebrations" said these brethren from Africa. I was moved too and still in the same overwhelmed state, 'May the Bharatiya go to bed in any country on the face of the earth, at his first waking moment, he is in Bharat!' were the words that escaped my mouth.

I have travelled the world and am well in contact with the Hindus across the world. I can therefore affirm and very proudly at that, all that I have observed and experienced in the course of my tours. That the Hindus went all out to achieve the progress of the nation they settled in, is a given; but they accomplished at the same time, the important task of connecting the country of their residence with Bharat and this they achieved preserving their allegiance to that country. Even today, the Bharatiyas abroad engage in the most important task of increasing the impact and influence of Bharat. However, it is only now in these times of globalization that people have realized the significance of such endeavours.

Guided by the Sangh, the work that Laxmanraoji Bhide and Chamanlalji commenced has now visibly assumed imposing, really prodigious and lofty

proportions.



The Vishwa Hindu Parishad

Independent Bharat was faced with many a challenge. The political system was still in the process of finding its feet. As for the social and the economic scenes in the country, they were still fine-tuning to the circumstances. While on the one hand, efforts were being directed towards building and developing of the independent nation, a well-planned conspiracy aiming at conversions in the Bharatiya society, was being hatched on the other. A far more appalling number of conversions were happening in independent Bharat than those that happened during the British rule. Initially, this plot targeting the backward, ignorant, simpleton and gullible population in order to convert it, did not quite draw the attention of the Bharatiyas. However, eventually when the cat was out of the bag, the whole nation was shocked, so much so that those, who claimed to be 'secularists' were taken aback too.

To effect conversions, the guileless tribals were at times incited and at others, offered bait or even lured with promises of transforming their lives for the better. These were planned preparations to institute a new culture in Bharat. In those days, millions were splurged on this scheme of conversion; and as of the year 1951, thousands of people were engaged in the realization of the plan. In a mere four years the number rocketed. Whether the truth dawned on anybody or not, on the Sangh, it certainly did; because the Sangh was making constructive contributions in every field and its swayamsevaks were forever vigilant and alert as far as the interest of the society was concerned. So, the Sangh was the first to warn about these disquieting and worrisome incidents. In this connection, Shri Dadasaheb Apte, a senior pracharak of the Sangh wrote an article in Tilak's 'Kesari'. In this article, Dadasaheb revealed all the information available about the conversion conspiracy.

ShreeGuruji was already aware of the impending danger that the country was going to have to brave. At the same time, he had observed that the next generation of the Hindus residing in foreign countries, had begun to drift away from their country and from their dharma as well. Guruji then instructed Dadasaheb to tour different countries and review the Hindu community residing there. On such a tour, Dadasaheb realized that the

situation faced by the Hindus living in the Caribbean islands, was utterly horrifying and the new generations of the Hindus there, had fully given in to western influence. All in all, inside the country as well as outside it, the Hindu community was faced with big challenges. Precisely at this time, China attacked and seized Tibet. So, to safeguard his religion, the Dalai Lama had to seek refuge in Bharat. Dr. Shambhunath Kapil Dev, then a member of the parliament of Trinidad, a Caribbean nation, felt very concerned about the cultural assault of the west on the Hindus in his country. To save them, he sought the help of the Bharatiya government in power at the time. He requested that scholars well-versed in the Hindu dharma, skilled educationists be sent to Trinidad and to the neighbouring countries. However, the government just did not display any interest. Ultimately Dr. Shambhunath got in touch with the Sangh and met with respected Guruji, who gave him an attentive hearing, understood the circumstances and assured him of help.

Around this time, 'V. G. Deshpande', the chief secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha, through his article, proposed that there had to be a collective effort directed towards resolution of the problems of the Hindus across the world. Further, he had also expressed that there was a need for non-political organizations to come forward and engage in these efforts. He had even met with Guruji in this regard. The disciples of Swami Chinmayanandaji, the head of the Sandipani Ashram, were spread all across the globe. Swami Chinmayanandaji had been constantly propagating the philosophy of the Hindu dharma; and convinced that there was a need for an organization at the global level that would bind the Hindus of the world, he wrote to Guruji stating his thoughts to the issue.

Guruji and Dadasaheb Apte had a discussion covering all these issues and Dadasaheb then recalled that it was this very thought, that he had presented in his article in the Kesari. Guruji then decided to correspond with the Sant-Mahanta of all the sects of the Hindu dharma, the Dharmacharya, the heads of the 'Math' along with those active in the domain of social service in the whole of Bharat. Dadasaheb Apte was assigned the responsibility and he wrote to all as decided, relating to them, the need to create an international organization, to rally the Hindu community of the world under one umbrella. The response received was positive and heartening. All concerned agreed that such an organization was indeed a need of the hour. Besides, all concurred on

the stand, that there was a simultaneous need to rid the Hindu community of vices like distinctions of caste, creed and hierarchies based on these. This proposition caused a surge of zeal in the Sant-Mahanta and the Dharmacharya. The job was difficult but by no means impossible.

So, on the auspicious day of Janmashtami, 2021 as per the Vikram Sanvat (calendar) i.e. 29th August 1964, all the respected and notable personages of the Hindu dharma assembled at the Sandipani Ashram. On the occasion, apart from Swami Chinmayanandaji and ShreeGuruji, Rashtra-sant Tukdoji Maharaj, the Jain Swami Sushil Muni, the Buddhist saint Kushag Bakula, B. P. Sinha, a follower of the Arya Samaj and the former Chief Justice of Bharat. 'Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi', the famous barrister from Mumbai and a leader of the Congress party, exhibited immense enthusiasm on this front and even promised complete co-operation. It was his speech that ended the meeting. Babu Jagjivan Ram, a senior leader of the congress too was present on the occasion. He also agreed that an organization at the global level, meant for the Hindu community in the entire world, was indeed a necessity. The honourable former President of the Akali dal of the Golden Temple, Shri Bhupendrasinhji, also present at the meeting, showed willingness to extend complete support. Master Tarasingh of the Sikh community also attended the meeting.

A multitude of languages are spoken in our country. In fact, there is no other country in the world that is so rich as far as the variety of languages is concerned. However, just like the languages of this land have their roots in Sanskrit, the religions and the sects that are native to this soil, stem from the original Sanatan Hindu dharma. So, an all-encompassing organization devoted to the purpose of the original dharma, was the need of the hour. Above all, it was a truly historic event, that the Dharmacharyas unanimously acknowledged the importance of uniting under the one common umbrella of the Sanatan Hindu Dharma, dissolving differences of opinion, of approaches, of hierarchy and also those on the linguistic and the regional front, not to mention of course, doing away with the sectarian divides.

That the Hindu community found itself divided into groups, proved to be the greatest misfortune. Actually speaking distinctions, hierarchy and untouchability had no place at whatsoever in the Hindu dharma; these were

but misconceptions and misbeliefs that had made their way into the dharma in course of time. Uniting the Hindus, ridding the dharma of these wrongful notions, in other words, reinstating the sentiment and conviction that 'the Hindus are one and equal – no high and no low', to create a competent, capable Hindu community, was the objective that all present at the meeting set before themselves and...

... the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was born. Swami Chinmayanandaji was appointed the President and Dadasaheb Apte, the Mahamantri. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, formed on the Janmashtami day of 1964, has never looked back ever since. It spread its limbs through the world and today, it has become a worldwide organization in the real sense of the term. It is active in fifty countries. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad implements thousands of seva projects. It runs schools and hostels in the tribal regions and has undertaken yet another mammoth task of making the tribals economically selfdependent, teaching them to use their art and skills. Besides, the Parishad executes programmes to efface vices like addiction. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad is pledged to create a society that is capable, organized and committed to national welfare.



Goodwill to one and all

The formation of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was a milestone in the history of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The Sangh was founded in 1925 and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in 1964. The period of close to four decades that transpired in between, saw the work of the Sangh expanding in different domains. Several organizations were formed under the guidance of ShreeGuruji. These were engaged in service towards the society in different ways, striving at the same time to organize society, which fact we have already spoken about. However, the thought and inspiration that went into the formation of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was something else.

Guruji insisted that the strength of the dharma ought to come together with the strength of the nation. He was of the view that in order to fulfil this purpose, it was mandatory that each person shed his ego. He trusted that dropping the 'I' and embracing the 'We' boosts both unity and strength and leads to the progress of the organization. Differences in opinion have subjected us to much unpleasantness. The country had even suffered a partition for the very same reason. But that was it! No more of this! May that be the resolve, unflinching and dauntless! Guruji appealed to the spiritual leaders.

This thought in itself was so brilliantly ingenious, so effective that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad received a stupendous response then and that is how it is even today. Our nation has faith in democracy and so there is nothing wrong in adopting democratic means to safeguard the interest of our dharma. Resorting to a legitimate path to influence the political affairs proves beneficial not just to the Hindus but to everybody. However, while taking up work for this cause, the Hindus will have to welcome with open arms, all those they pushed away from the dharma, on grounds of misconception and of noxious customs or beliefs. For the purpose, closeminded and dogmatic concepts will have to give way to a broad-minded, liberal view and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has continually directed efforts towards this intent.

Swami Chinmayanandaji, the first president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad

and Dadasaheb Apte, its first Mahamantri carried its mission forward making admirable progress. But in light of the vast expanse of Bharat and of the fact that the Hindu community had inhabitants all across the world, the work done did not seem adequate. There still remained much to be accomplished. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh then handed over the responsibility of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to a few senior and experienced swayamsevaks. The honourable Shree Ashok Singhal, Acharya Giriraj Kishor along with other senior pracharaks discharged very ably, this responsibility of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad that had been assigned to them. In 1969, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad organized the first Vishwa Hindu Sammelan. The main Sant-Mahanta and acharyas of the Hindu dharma attended it. The next 'Sammelan' was organized in 1974 in Prayag.

In 1995 the International Hindu Convention was organized under the aegis of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in South Africa. What merits special mention is, the South African President Nelson Mandela was the chief guest at the event and as per schedule, had accorded forty minutes to it. But, in actual fact, he ended up spending two and a half hours at the convention! Also, in his speech he very liberally showered praises on the Hindu community. He recalled with gratitude the contribution of that the Hindus made in South Africa's struggle for independence.

At the time I had been assigned the responsibility of the 'Vishwa Vibhag' of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and was also the 'co-ordinator – African continent'. Naturally, I was present. President Mandela's speech was so moving! Tears had welled up in my eyes and I noticed that tears were continuously streaming down the face of the lady in a sari, sitting next to me. Needless to say, she was a Hindu residing in South Africa. I asked her what it was that had moved her to the extent of tears. I cannot ever forget the reply she gave me. "I have lost my young son in South Africa's fight for independence. He fought against the Whites. He was arrested and till today I do not know his whereabouts." Saying this, the mother wept for her son. Just like that lady's son, so many Hindus have sacrificed their lives in the battle against the Whites for the independence of South Africa.

Holding the tricolour, school children presented a wonderful dance to "Bharat humko jaan se pyara hai" a song from the film 'Roja'. Nelson Mandela

specially appreciated the children for this presentation. At this convention held in Durban in South Africa, I was to deliver a talk on 'Human harmony through the Ramayan'. On hearing my thoughts on the subject, many came to see me. Hindus have been living in South Africa for about two hundred years and so generations of Hindu families have grown up there. They had, all along, sort of resigned to the feeling that they had come away from the Hindu dharma. "But we heard you and the very first thing we plan to do now is to visit Bharat!" they said to me. They also made a touching appeal: 'At any rate, the Bharatiyas ought not to turn their backs on us' they said. I am proud to state that even today the Hindus there, share a very firm bond with the dharma and with Bharat as well.

I had a similar experience in Bali, Indonesia. I happened to meet a few persons of the Hindu community that has been residing there for years. They made the same request that the Hindus in South Africa had made. They said to me, "Do keep coming. That is how we connect well with our dharma. Do not abandon us. The girl's parents and kin do not shirk their responsibility even after she goes to live with the in-laws, do they?" I was really taken aback by this response. There is a Ganesh temple in Bali and I visited it to seek darshan. 'O Lord Ganesh! Please protect the Hindu community here and unite them" I said in prayer. The guide accompanying us had a lump in his throat and could not speak. He had goose pimples. "You are so concerned about us! We have now begun to trust that there is somebody, who is dear and near, who is ours in all senses of the term!" he said.

International Hindu conventions have taken place not just in South Africa but also in Great Britain, in the USA and in Australia. The governments of these countries have also praised these conventions mainly because they neither aimed at discomfiting the government nor did they have any demands to make. The Hindu conventions posed no threat whatsoever to the security, the culture and the integrity of the host nations. These conventions would have fetched benefit for the host countries, if at all. The Hindus living in these countries were aware of course, that their origins were rooted in Bharat but they also knew that it was their duty to owe allegiance to the country of residence. Besides, these countries know that the Hindus have very sincerely adhered to this norm and so the Hindu conventions received whole-hearted support from these countries.

In our country the majority of the population is Hindu and so we do not really realize the importance of their unity. However, when one is in a foreign country, one sees very clearly how crucial it is to be united. In Mauritius the population is predominantly Hindu and is divided in groups, often depriving them of political advantage. In light of the situation, impressing upon them the vital need to unite, was a responsibility allocated to me. Several local Hindu organizations were brought together under one umbrella. They took an oath that 'they would shun all that stood in the way of the interest of the Hindus and would maintain excellent relations with Bharat at all times'. Mauritius has drawn tremendous advantage from this unity.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad is by no means a body blinded by religious fanaticism. An organization born of a culture that prays for the welfare of the world, cannot possibly hate anybody, can it? The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has full faith in 'Sarwa-Dharma-Sadbhaav' (goodwill and good wishes to all the religions that be). It is for this reason, that this organization received a thumping response from the entire world. Had this organization been fanatical about dharma like it has been alleged, would it possibly have got the kind of response that it did, from the Hindus the world over? Certainly not! The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has undertaken many seva projects and to serve the nation and the dharma in the future, it aspires to take on many more. The goal that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has set itself is creating a united and undivided society, keeping intact of course, the original culture of the nation, also ensuring thereby, service to this cause and the cultural security of the nation.

In our country, many have been subjected to religious conversion. We do not need to get into the history of the matter; but the fact remains that adopting another religion does not fundamentally and fully transform the original culture, lifestyle and traditions. Conversion cannot completely divorce people from them. We all the same forefathers! How can we forget this? We cannot. We must not. In fact, we ought to humbly point it out to our brothers, who have gone over to embrace another religion. This could go a long way in resolving many problems prevailing in society. This certainly is not intended to create bitterness or tension in the country. It is, on the contrary, aimed at diffusing the tension and filling the rift to close it completely. This country is ours, it belongs us all. To cause damage or harm to the house that belongs to

us, the house that we live in, is mindless insanity and for that, there is no place in the Sangh's ideology.

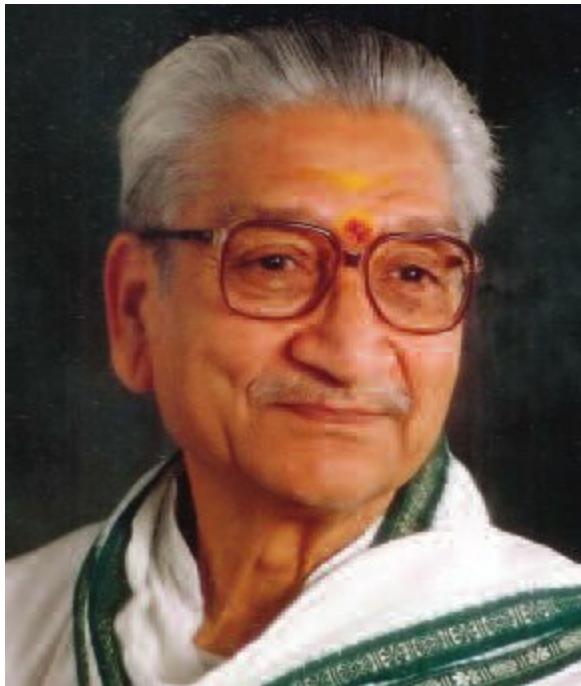
The Hindu Dharma is an immense ocean and many a river and runnels flow and merge into it – the waters of the supremely sacred Gangamata flow into the ocean as much as those of any runnel do. The ocean welcomes one and all with open arms; but without giving up its identity, its specialty. The ocean is seen as an analogy for the Hindu Dharma and for the Bharatiya society and this precisely ought to be the reason behind it.



The honourable Ashokji Singhal, Acharya Giriraj Kishore and Dalmiyaji at a programme organized in the course of the Ramjanmabhumi movement

Ashokji Singhal

The mere mention of the work and mission of the 'Vishwa Hindu Parishad' brings Ashokji Singhal before the eyes. The work of the 'Vishwa Hindu Parishad' was taking rapid strides of progress both inside and outside the country. It was in these circumstances in 1982 that Ashokji was handed the responsibility of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He had been a pracharak of the Sangh until then. Ashokji, born in Agra on 27th September 1926, was the fourth among seven children. His family originally hailed from Bijoli situated in Aligarh,



Uttar Pradesh. His father was a very well-placed government officer. So, this family blessed by the Goddess Laxmi with affluence as much by the Goddess Saraswati with intellect, had a legacy of both wealth and scholarly pursuits.

Ashokji's parents always welcomed sanyasis, sadhus and saints to their home. Growing up in this home with a pious atmosphere, Ashokji while still a young student in 1942, was made a swayamsevak of the Sangh by Rajjubhaiyya. Rajjubhaiyya, who had had very close ties with Ashokji's

family, once recited the Sangh prayer to Ashokji's mother, Vidyavati. She was left so impressed that she encouraged Ashokji to work for the Sangh mission. Thus began Ashokji's life journey at the Sangh and as part of it.

Ashokji had a vey good ear for music. He had a study of classical music behind him and was an excellent singer in his own right. In his college days, he wrote patriotic songs and even set them to tune. The youth listening to them used to be left impressed and awe-struck. Ashokji was an engineer from the Banaras Hindu University, with metallurgy as his specialization subject.

In 1947 the country became independent but was partitioned and so thousands of swayamsevaks of the Sangh were dejected. Ashokji was among these. It was then that he decided to dedicate his entire life to the mission of the Sangh and to the nation. In 1950 he began working as a full time pracharak. Initially work in Gorakhpur, Prayag, Saharanpur and Kanpur was allocated to him. He shared very affectionate relations with the Sarsanghachalak ShreeGuruji.

Ashokji happened to come into contact with Ramchandra Tiwari, who lived in Kanpur and was proficient in the Vedas, in fact an authority in the subject. Ashokji always said that ShreeGuruji and Ramchandra Tiwari were the two most powerful influences in his life.

In the post emergency period, Ashokji assumed responsibility as the regional pracharak of Delhi and Haryana. In 1982 he was appointed joint 'mahamantri' of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The Rath Yatra for National Integrity, the ShreeRamJanki Rath Yatra, the Sanskriti Raksha Nidhi and the Shreeram Janmabhoomi Mukti Movement brought about an awakening on a massive scale not just inside of Bharat but all over the world. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad won acclaim in the world. In the times that followed, the Go-Raksha, the Ganga Raksha, Paraavartan, the Bajrang Dal, Sanskrit Sanwardhan, Ekal Vidyalay and other seva projects and endeavours taken up by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad picked up remarkable momentum. The most significant of all these turned out to be the ShreeRam Janmabhoomi Movement! This movement changed the social and political course of the country.

At the outset Ashokji was the joint general Secretary, then the Joint Secretary

and eventually the working President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. In 2005 he became the President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. In 2011 however, he stepped down on grounds of advancing age but never stopped working. He guided the swayamsevaks, met with the SantMahanta. Till his last breath, he strove to arouse and keep religious verve alive in the people and spent earnest efforts in the service of the society.

The strength and competence that the Sant-Mahanta possess by virtue of their devotion to the dharma and its principles, ought not to be restricted to the 'Math' and the temples. Ashokji was of the ardent belief that this strength, this power ought to be utilized for social progress. With this intention in mind, he made an appeal to the Sant-Mahanta and that was how they came to be part of the mass movements of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, making it all-pervasive and comprehensive. Ashokji's personality was lofty, great in every sense; and his oratory skills, eloquent and so efficacious! This was the reason why the youth was tremendously influenced by him and this was the reason why the Ramjanmabhoomi movement drew a spontaneous response from the masses but specially from the youth. The rest is history and we know it.

The Ramjanmabhoomi movement and other events that marked the year 1992, occupied places of special mention among the significant events of the world and the entire world took note of them. Ashokji toured many countries in the world. I have had the opportunity to travel with him. I was with him in 1998 when he attended the 'All Africa Hindu Council' in Nairobi. He had delegated to me, the responsibility of the Vishwa Vibhag of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and so I travelled to several countries in connection with this work. The 'All Africa Hindu Council' had been established under Ashokji's guidance and in fact on his insistence.

With no thought for his health, Ashokji spent his life in dedication and devotion to the cause of the dharma and of the nation and continued work until his last breath. Three months prior to his demise, he had toured Holland, the UK and the USA. His body be aged and tired, he boosted at full throttle, the zeal and vigour of the swayamsevaks he met with on the tour.

In November 2015 Ashokji's health started failing. On 10th November he was admitted to the Vedanta Hospital in Delhi. Even in that condition, Ashokji engaged in a discussion with the Sarsanghachalak Shree Mohanraoji

Bhagwat, who visited him in the hospital. Until his last living moment, Ashokji's mind was occupied with thoughts of the dharma and of the nation. By birth, he belonged to an extremely wealthy family, he was like a prince born in a rich and educated family. By deed, he was a karmayogi and as for his end, he departed like a sanyasi.

On 17th November 2015 Ashokji breathed his last. His age was 89 then; and in all probability, 89 was how many hours he rested in all of his life, so I recall reading somewhere. I am sure that was how it must have been. To catch sight of Ashokji resting was indeed very rare.

'The funeral pyre is the one resting place' so Ashokji had once said, quoting Parampujya ShreeGuruji. The creation of the Ram Mandir will prove the only real tribute to this great personality.



*In the year 2000, the Vishwa Sangh Shibir was organized at Keshavsrushti, Bhayandar.
Rameshbhai with Ashok Singhal at the event.*

The Organizational skill – a science

The Shankaracharya of the ShardaPeeth left his body and so, his position now vacant, awaited a successor. Discussions were underway about who it would be. The Shankaracharya of the DwarkaPeeth, Abhinav Sachchidananda approached ShreeGuruji with a proposal. 'There cannot be a person as suitable, as capable and as appropriate as ShreeGuruji to assume the position of the Shankaracharya of ShardaPeeth. He ought to accept the proposal' insisted the Shankaracharya Abhinav Sachchidanandaji. The Sant-Mahanta too were in favour of the proposition. But Guruji gave a reply befitting his personality.

In his reply to the Shankaracharya Abhinav Sachchidanandaji, Guruji wrote, "O Jagadguru, your word is my command. But I have already a great mission to shoulder. The Shakha of the Sangh is the faith in my life. The service I can offer to the mission by means of the Shakha, is much more extensive, in scope, volume and extent than that I may be able to offer, in the capacity of the Shankaracharya. I trust that you will generously excuse me. I have dedicated myself to the cause of the society and of the nation. May this mission be blessed by the virtuous strength of saintly persons like you! I have always received your guidance. May I continue to receive it along with your blessings, so I pray."

That Guruji humbly declined the offer, was a clear indication of how ardently and passionately concerned he was about the society and the nation. He had great regard for the Shankaracharya and the Sant-Mahanta. He never missed an opportunity to meet them. Once when he was on a tour of Tamilnadu, he expressed his wish to seek the darshan of Shree Chandrashekhar Saraswatiji, the Shankaracharya of the Kanchikamkoti Peeth. "Guruji is welcome at any time that suits his convenience, I will see him" was the message that the Shankaracharya Chandrashekhar Saraswatiji sent in return. So then Guruji arrived at the ShankarMath of Kamkoti.

The Shankaracharya seated in the pooja room, was at that moment, engaged in worship. This 'Math' followed the rule that once the worship (pooja) began,

nobody was allowed entry. The Shankaracharya's disciples too were not allowed to enter and this discipline was very stringently observed. However, the Shankaracharya learnt of Guruji's arrival and he invited him to the pooja room and even began the worship seating Guruji by his side. The worship over, Guruji left and one of the disciples of Chandrashekhar Saraswatiji had a question to ask.

"Nobody is allowed entry here, once the worship begins.

How is it then, that he (Guruji) was allowed?" The Shankaracharya Chandrashekhar Saraswatiji replied, "ShreeGuruji embodies Chandramaulishwar. It is he, who has graced us with his visit. As regards virtue, value and knowledge, he is in no way a person of lesser honour than me. He has resolved to accomplish a great mission." Building a nation and a society was after all the highest, the supreme mission of all, the Shankaracharya pointed out to the disciple whose mind was of course put at rest by the reply.

Guruji then proceeded to the Ramkrishna Mission Vidya Mandir in Mysore. Swami Amitabh Maharaj gave a discourse welcoming Guruji. "ShreeGuruji has toiled rigorously and performed his Sadhana with fortitude and firm focus in the Saragachhi Ashram. From the time I spent in his company, I can tell, that it is 'Narendra' indeed that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has for its leader." Thus, authorities in the spiritual domain looked upon Guruji with great regard and Guruji too, on his part had abundant respect for the Sant-Mahanta. He was basically of a spiritual bent of mind but Dr. Hedgewar had very skilfully drawn him into the Sangh mission and handed him the responsibility of leading the Sangh.

Four or five years after Guruji assumed the leadership of the Sangh, one of the swayamsevaks suggested that 'the Sangh ought to change its style of work'. He had put up this proposal directly before Guruji, who was the Sarsanghachalak. Guruji had this remarkable quality of giving a quiet and attentive hearing to anybody who spoke. The swayamsevak in question, expressed to Guruji the view that if the Sangh did not adopt a change in its style of work, it would be finished. Guruji listened to him and replied, "The style of work that the Sangh now follows, is a product of the profound contemplation on the part of Dr. Hedgewar. There is absolutely no need to

change it. There is no cause for worry, should the Sangh even be finished because of it. I will start afresh and build the Sangh all over again. But at any rate, this will not ever happen. The Sangh will grow, it sure will!" saying so, Guruji dispelled the doubts in the swayamsevak's mind.

Plans aimed at the expansion of the Sangh were very often presented to Guruji. He very carefully listened to each of these. His thoughts in the matter were very clear. The Shakha was the life and soul of the Sangh. Every swayamsevak ought to attend the Shakha sessions. It is through the Shakha, that on the one hand contact with the society could be achieved and on the other, the expansion of the Sangh, so Guruji firmly believed.

In February 1946 Guruji was touring Kolkata. A meeting had been arranged for eminent personalities to meet with Guruji. In the meeting Guruji explained the objectives and the principles of the Sangh's mission. All present were impressed. An aged doctor among those present asked, "Your objective is truly sublime. No doubt about it. But how do you think you can achieve the objective by doing the 'daksha-aram-danda-kabaddi' regime in a Shakha session?"

"Could you name the one Master drug in medical science?" Guruji asked. "Penicillin" replied the doctor. "What is penicillin made from?" was Guruji's next question. "Rotten food that is full of stink" said the doctor. To that Guruji said, "When in the right hands, even the rotten turns useful, is it not? This is it, the science behind the art and skill of organization and we are the experts in this science." The seemingly ordinary can go far and high and make great accomplishments and this Guruji had convincingly proved to the doctor.

An hour of the Shakha session and 23 hours of contemplation was what the work of the Sangh signified for the swayamsevak. Trying to put to good, noble use, the values that an hour of the Shakha session gives, is the essence, the vital spirit of the Sangh's work. Learn to say 'we', do not say 'I' was what Guruji taught the swayamsevaks. Though the 'Sarsanghachalak', the head of the Sangh, Guruji believed he was first a 'swayamsevak' and very meticulously and sincerely discharged all the duties of a swayamsevak. The Sarsanghachalak must epitomize the ideal conduct and lead from the front so to say; and that indeed was Guruji's practice and conviction at all times!



Magnanimous and liberal

In 1969 the convention of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was organized in Udipi, Karnatak. This one turned out to be historic. The acharyas of all the sects in the Hindu dharma including the 'Peethadheesh' of the backward classes were seated on the stage. In the presence of 15 thousand representatives, in one voice, all the dharmacharyas resolved that untouchability had no place in the Hindu dharma and the resolution was unanimously passed. The message sent out was not merely verbal. Shri Vishweshwar Teerthaswami, the honourable head of the Pejawar Math gave to the world, a new mantra, viz. 'Hindavah sahodarah sarve' meaning all Hindus are equal.

The deliberate distortions and misconstructions introduced in the Hindu dharma ended up pushing away for different reasons, certain people of this same dharma. Distinctions of caste creed, hierarchies and absurd beliefs, compelled people to embrace other religions, which amounted to fouling their own nest so to say. A piece of bread thrown in the well was enough to drive people to go over to other religions. We excommunicated people on grounds that, be it inadvertently, they drank water out of a certain earthen pot! Who in the world gave us the right to do so?

Actually speaking the Hindu philosophy is so liberal and all pervasive that narrow-mindedness or intolerance has no place at all in it. There was a need to stress that the wrongful notions and the practices that made their way into the dharma in the course of time are not the Hindu dharma. It was in light of these facts, that the 1969 convention at Udipi and the one prior to this held in 1966 in Prayag on the auspicious time of the Kumbhamela assume significance. The Dharmacharyas had come forward to rid the Hindu community of the distinctions that had been entertained through centuries.

At the convention at Udipi, the Shankaracharya Shri Vishwashwar Teerthaswami had embraced a representative of the so-called backward classes and demonstrated that he neither believed in any distinction nor in the caste hierarchy. The sight moved ShreeGuruji to tears. "This is exactly what I

expected to happen" he said and his voice joined in the never before kind of rejoicing and celebration commemorating the moment. Shri Yadavraoji Joshi, a senior pracharak of the Sangh, witnessing the moment, had affirmed that that was indeed the moment of supreme joy in Guruji's life.

There was a misconception in society that once a person fell out of the Hindu dharma, he would not be allowed to return to this faith. This misconception worked to the detriment of our dharma. As a consequence, the number of Hindus in society was on progressive decline; whereas the number of people following other faiths rose progressively. With a view to correcting this situation, a revolutionary announcement was made at the convention of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Prayag. It was very much possible to return to the Hindu dharma. Hindus, who had converted to other religions could very surely regain entry into Hinduism, a faith they earlier belonged to. The principle 'Na hinduh patito bhavet' meaning the Hindu, may he have converted to another faith, could very well return to his original faith, if he so wished, was unanimously upheld at the convention.

Guruji wanted that the 'acharyas' of the various sects of the Hindu dharma, the heads of the 'Math' to step out of their Ashrams and institutions and lend verve and vigour to the dharma; and present to society, the vast and liberal aspect of the Hindu dharma. For this purpose, he kept appealing to the spiritual and the saintly in society. This appeal met with a very overwhelming response and the religious zeal that resulted from the response, in turn led to many positive occurrences. The revolutionary decisions taken at the Prayag and the Udipi conventions were products of this very effort on Guruji's part.

Guruji travelled the length and the breadth of the country. Unlike today the means of communication and contact were not very easy or even fast then, making written correspondence obviously very important. Guruji has such a huge written correspondence to credit that a record of all the letters he wrote in his lifetime would mean a difficult proposition. Through his letters, Guruji kept regular contact with swayamsevaks, active in every nook and corner of the nation as well as overseas. He also maintained contact with the dharmacharya across the nation in the same way. He wrote these letters personally; but did, at times, get them written from his personal assistant, Dr. Abaji Thatte. I have spent time with Dr. Abaji Thatte and so I am aware of

how he became a pracharak of the Sangh.

Abaji lost his parents when he was still a child. His elder brother and his wife brought up Abaji like their own son. Abaji's sister-in-law had given her word to Abaji's mother i.e. her mother-in-law in the latter's last days that she would take care of Abaji like her own son. And so his sister-in-law was indeed his mother. He was good at academics and became a doctor. While still a student he began attending the Sangh Shakha sessions at Shivaji Park. Later, Abaji felt the desire to dedicate his life to the Sangh. His sister-in-law however, did not at all approve of his wish to become a lifelong pracharak.

She wanted to get him married and to see him settled in marital life. She was even trying to get things going in this direction. For Abaji, it was very difficult to go against his sister-in-law's wishes. What was he to do?

ShreeGuruji resolved the issue in his own special way. Aware that Abaji was in a tight spot, Guruji dropped by at his place at Shivaji Park. Abaji's sister-in-law welcomed him very warmly. After awhile, Guruji broached the topic. "I tour the whole country. It would be nice if I had Abaji to accompany me for help" he said. "How long would you need him?" Abaji's sister-in-law asked. Pat came Guruji's reply, "Forever!"

Unnerved, she flatly refused. "I want to get Abaji married and see him settled in life" she said voicing her disapproval. Guruji heard her out and spoke very calmly, "That is a good idea. I too want to get married. But I am older than Abaji, am I not? Who do you feel should get married first, the elder brother or the younger one?" "Well of course the elder brother!" she said, compelled to agree. "Fine then!" said Guruji, "Abaji will get married only after I do. But I want to take him along and keep him with me till he gets married. May I?" The poor lady just had to give in and Abaji then set out of home to become a lifelong pracharak of the Sangh.

There was obviously no question of Guruji getting married and so there was no question of Abaji getting married either. Abaji himself had narrated this story to me and that too sitting in his home at Shivaji Park and in the presence of his elder brother and his sister-in-law. They had not been able to control their laughter as they listened to the story. Abaji had dedicated his entire life to the Sangh. He had been Guruji's personal assistant and then went on to work as personal secretary to Shri Balasaheb Deoras too, who

succeeded Guruji as Sarsanghachalak.

Guruji was the only surviving child among his parents' eight children. The parents naturally had expectations from him, those that differed from the life that Guruji actually lived. Guruji had initially decided to devote his life to spirituality. Eventually he came into contact with Dr. Hedgewar and service to the society and to the nation, through the mission of the Sangh, was the connotation that spirituality then assumed for him. Guruji had dedicated his entire life to this very cause; and so his appeal to the swayamsevaks had a moral and rightful basis. He was of the view, that the Sarsanghachalak in himself, ought to be an exemplary figure, that the swayamsevaks could model themselves to. His life was, of course, a source of inspiration to many, who aspired to live a dedicated life like his. Not giving much thought to his health, until his last breath, Guruji tirelessly undertook journeys for the cause of the Sangh. While we are on the topic, I wish to share an instance in this connection.

Guruji was not keeping good health at the time. He needed rest. But he was scheduled to travel and was not ready to call off the plan. "Swayamsevaks must be waiting for me. How can I disappoint them?" he asked and began his preparations for the journey. Abaji tried to object but to no avail. Finally Abaji narrated the situation to Balasaheb Deoras, who was the 'Sarkaryawah' then.

In the Sangh, the post of the 'Sarkaryawah' is an extremely important one. The Sarsanghachalak too gives serious consideration to the recommendations given by the Sarkaryawah. Balasaheb Deoras came up to Guruji and requested that he cancel the journey. Guruji did not pay much heed. Balasaheb then began speaking in a stern voice. "I, Balasaheb Deoras, the Sarkaryawah, recommend that you stay back and rest as per the doctor's instructions and call off your journey plans. Accordingly, arrangements will be made to inform the swayamsevaks expecting to see you" he said.

At that Guruji broke into laughter. "I do not have the courage to travel, going against the recommendations of the Sarkaryawah!" said Guruji and respecting Balasaheb's wish, he stayed back. The incident says a lot about Guruji's personality; but it also reveals how the top leaders of the Sangh were bound to one another by affection. This is the very reason why the Sangh has been

growing over the last nine decades and the reason why it will continue to do so in the future as well.



Guruji departs for his heavenly abode

There was a fundamental difference between the war of 1965 and that of 1971. In the latter, the Bharatiya armed forces were fully prepared for war. In 1962 when China launched an attack on Bharat, we were caught unawares. The political leadership at the time had blindly trusted China, making things easy for them. Following China's betrayal in 1965, the circumstances changed as Bharat had become wise, learning the hard way though. The Bharatiya army could thus retaliate powerfully and give a befitting reply to Pakistan's attack. In 1971 not only was the Bharatiya army well-equipped, alert and prepared; but the political leadership too, had its war strategy chalked out and ready.

Bharat had decided to liberate Bangladesh from Pakistan. The atrocities of Pakistan had enraged the people of Bangladesh. They said, "Although we belong to the same religion, our Bengali culture is completely different from that of Pakistan and it can never relate with that country." Pakistan owed its existence to the two nation theory; and the sentiment expressed by the people of Bangladesh, sent this very theory for a toss. It dawned on Pakistan that the country could have been created in the name of religion but it was not going to be possible to run its affairs on the basis of religion. The country of Pakistan is not an integrated and united whole; it is not so today and cannot ever be. Anyway, coming back to the topic, the people in East Pakistan reached out for their weapons to break away from Pakistan.

Bangladesh was created with the help of Bharat, who was its ally in the war. This support on Bharat's part does not qualify as interference in another country's affairs because 10 million refugees had entered Bharat owing to the atrocities that Pakistan had committed on them. Consequently, what Pakistan labelled as its 'internal problem', was assuming the form of Bharat's problem. Bharat could obviously not be a distant spectator of the event.

It was in the war of 1971 that Bharat had seized 'Kargil' in Jammu-Kashmir.

This was certainly an episode of great importance. Pakistan tried to take over Kargil because its strategic location would have facilitated keeping control over the whole of Kashmir.

During the 1971 war, ShreeGuruji had instructed the swayamsevaks to extend full co-operation to the prevailing government. Besides, Guruji had written a letter to Indira Gandhiji, in which he had said, "The partition of the country resulting in the creation of Pakistan was a big mistake in the first place. Every war gives us an opportunity to correct this mistake. But we keep wasting the opportunity. The people in Chittagong, East Bengal are Buddhists. They must be connected with Bharat. Similarly the port of Cox's Bazaar if opened up for Assam, could solve many problems for us. I suggest the issue be attributed the importance due to it; and viewed from the angle of national interest. Moreover, the Hindu brothers crossing over to Bharat from East Bengal may not be referred to as "refugees". May they be welcomed as Bharatiyas. They ought to be granted all the rights that the Bharatiya citizens ordinarily enjoy. What is essential to make this happen, is the political will." This was the expectation Guruji expressed in the letter.

In this very letter that Guruji wrote to Indiraji, he had also made an appeal that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh not be viewed from the political angle. Neither does the Sangh owe allegiance to any political party nor are its operations controlled by any party. The actual mission of the Sangh is to bring about 'the progress and the upliftment of the cultural life of the nation'. Guruji made it clear in the letter that 'the concern for the wellbeing and the security of the Hindu brothers all over the world' was an objective of the Sangh. In the letter, Guruji had as a matter of fact, elucidated concisely, the philosophy of the Sangh along with its goals and policies. It was an inimitable presentation indeed!

Bharat won the war of 1971, a result of the valour of the Bharatiya army and of Indiraji's firm resolve. If the political leadership is resolute and capable, what can Bharat not achieve! The victory in this war testified wonderfully to this sentiment. During the period of this war, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh extended full co-operation to the government and to the army. Guruji had even toured certain places to ensure that the swayamsevaks were discharging their duties properly.

Guruji was suffering from cancer. He was well aware that he did not have much time left on his hands. But despite such a situation, taking rest was not even the last thing he wanted to do. He, in fact, set about work even more rigorously than before. He was putting in all his energies for this purpose. His mind felt surges of strength that he wished to devote to the mission but his body was not keeping up with his mental strength. So then in keeping with the Bharatiya tradition, Guruji decided to call the last national level meeting of all the chief swayamsevaks of the Sangh. The meeting was to be held at PandurangaShastri Athavle's 'Tattvadnyan Vidyapeeth' in Thane, Mumbai.

ShreeGuruji was present all through the meeting. After a deliberation over how the Sangh would be going about its mission in the times that followed, a few among those present, expressed their thoughts before Guruji. 'To organize the Hindu community, has very clearly been the objective of the Sangh. But owing to this, the Sangh is branded 'racist'. So instead of saying that the Sangh works for the unity of the Hindus, why not say, that the Sangh works towards uniting all the Bharatiyas?', asked one of those present. Guruji gave a very fitting reply to the question.

Giving the inherent meaning of the term 'Hindu', he explained what it implied. Falling back on instances in history, Guruji gave a rational presentation of the liberal approach of the Sangh in the matter. "The Hindu philosophy is very much capable of ensuring the welfare of mankind; and of helping man to attain lasting happiness and that is the unshakable faith of the Sangh. Not allowing ourselves to be thinking about the objections and allegations of others, we ought to proudly advocate the Hindu ideology" said Guruji in reply.

Despite a body that was giving in to debility, Guruji kept travelling, meeting with swayamsevaks and guiding them. In a public function in Bengaluru on 4th February 1973, Guruji presented his brilliant thoughts in eloquent English. The audience was held spell-bound. But the swayamsevaks, who heard him became sadly aware that 'Guruji was not going to be with them much longer'. Then Guruji spoke for the last time on 25th March in Nagpur in the representative meeting at the national level. Guruji summoned every drop of energy left in his body as he addressed the swayamsevaks. Always all ears and insatiably avid listeners, the swayamsevaks wanted to make an exception

that time. They wished very earnestly, that Guruji limit his speech. They could see that his health was failing. But Guruji spoke a good 40 minutes.

"Our manifold mission has just the one purpose viz. achieving the superlative progress of the nation and its acclaim and mark in the world. Irrespective of the atmosphere prevailing in the world, we have to walk on, trusting that it is the word 'Hindu' that will receive renown in the world. Only then is it going to be victory all the way" These words were part of Guruji's last speech.

Then in May, the 'trutiya warsha' (third year) training sessions of the Sangh began in Nagpur. Guruji was unable to attend these despite a strong will to do so. The swayamsevaks too wished that he rest. Swayamsevaks from the various states expressed that they would go over and visit him instead. On 3rd June, the Sanchalika of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the respected Mavshi Kelkar paid a visit to Guruji. "I am now fully prepared" said Guruji as he laughed. He was of course referring to his mental preparedness for his final departure from this world.

On the morning of 5th June 1973 a few swayamsevaks dropped by to see Guruji. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Vaze from Adilabad were among them. Swayamsevaks tried to touch his feet and like he always did, Guruji pulled them back. Very enthusiastically, he began telling a joke. "A patient went to the doctor. The doctor asked him what was wrong. At that the patient blew his top and shouted., 'If the doctor has to ask me what is wrong, how do I trust that he is capable of treating me? It is you, who must diagnose my ailment. How can I say?' The doctor kept quiet. After a while the doctor said the patient would require another doctor and that he would fetch him. The other doctor arrived in a short while. He was a veterinary doctor. 'Only this doctor can know the ailment of the patient without the patient saying a word about it!' the first doctor said!" Everyone laughed at the joke. Guruji then went on to tell another joke and then yet another. All were laughing and so was Guruji. The next moment, Guruji felt a shooting pain in his stomach. But Guruji ensured that cheer was maintained in the atmosphere.

Just then the tea arrived. Guruji enquired if all had got it and also if those, who did not drink tea, got milk instead. He drank some tea after everybody had had it. Actually, he found it difficult to sip the tea; but he did it just for the sake of company. He was finding it difficult to breathe too but his usual

smile had not left his face. It was then time for the Shakha session to begin. Guruji had never once missed the Shakha session or even the prayer. But this time, he prayed from where he was seated. Death was approaching and Guruji clearly sensed it. His body was released one bond after another as the time for the auspicious and sacred liberation approached. In any case he looked upon death as liberation and not the end. Guruji breathed his last at five minutes past nine.

On 6th June the atmosphere in the Sangh office was grief-stricken. Guruji's body was kept at the Sangh office for the last darshan. Guruji was now not going to be able to stop any hands from touching his feet. He was not going to be able to run his hand tenderly over any head. He was neither lovingly smiling at anyone nor affectionately enquiring after anyone's wellbeing. Guruji had departed for the eternal journey. How long after all, was his personality, his self, immense in every sense, to reside in the meagre body? How much longer was Guruji, who had spent himself, burnt down his every speck of energy to light up a million lives, to remain trapped in the cage of the body?

Be he absent in body, ShreeGuruji is most certainly present in the heart of every swayamsevak and is alive in the mission. Dazzling and fervent, this flame of patriotism, this flame of inspiration of loving and selfless social service that Guruji kindled in every heart will burn on... it can never be quenched ...by nobody and never!



Rashtraya swaha, Rashtraya idam na mama

The news of Guruji's demise spread to places far and wide and on 6th June crowds thronged the Mahal office in Nagpur to seek the last darshan. Those, who loved Guruji were drowned in sorrow. Prior to his death, Dr. Hedgewar had made it known through a letter, that he had handed over to Guruji, the responsibility of the Sarsanghachalak's post. Guruji too had left three letters which were read openly on the microphone.

Babarao Bhide, the Sanghchalak of the Maharashtra region, read out Guruji's first letter which revealed that Guruji had passed on the responsibility of the Sarsanghachalak's post to Shri Balasaheb Deoras. The next two letters were read by Balasaheb Deoras himself. The second letter contained a peculiar indication. Guruji had indicated that there ought not be a memorial to anybody except to Dr. Hedgewar, the founder and the first Sarsanghachalak. He did not think it appropriate. So, this obviously was a clear indication that he did not want a memorial to himself.

The third letter contained a very humble request on Guruji's part. 'If it so happened that I inadvertently hurt anybody, I join my hands and ask for forgiveness from them', Guruji had said. These words were enough to bring tears to the crowd of thousands witnessing the moment. Balasaheb Deoras too had a lump in his throat as he read the letter. In this letter, Guruji had made a reference to an abhang by Sant Tukaram:

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(Explanation: My appeal, this last one – do listen O noble men! May you not lose sight of the principles - our guiding light – yours and mine. All that is, I have already submitted at your feet. Need I say more? Tukaram Maharaj says, I bow at your feet. May I receive your soothing grace.)

The last rites were performed laying Guruji's body on a pyre of sandalwood. ShreeGuruji's mortal remains became one with their source. Hoisting the saffron flag, the Shakha session was then conducted. A thousand voices choked with emotion recited the Sangh prayer. Concluding the proceedings with cries in one voice of 'Bharatmata ki Jai', the swayamsevaks and others present dispersed with a heavy heart.

The words 'Sewa hai yadnyakund, Samidha sam hum jale' ("godm h; `kHw§ \$S> g{_Ym g_ h_ Obo') (*Selfless service is like*

the receptacle on which the sacred fire of our mission burns. May our life be an offering in this sacred fire. May we live and die for the Sangh's cause) were an essential value of Guruji's life and for him, as sacred as a mantra.

And 'Rashtraya swaha, Rashtraya idam na mama' ("ami''>m` ñdmhm, ami' 'm` BX§ Z __')(I offer all to the nation. Nothing belongs to me) was the supreme purpose of his life.

In Resham Bagh are two lofty inspirational personalities now. Respected Dr. Hedgewar, who sits in the form of his statue in the 'Smriti Mandir', a monument built in his sacred memory and ShreeGuruji, the other great soul, who offered himself in the sacred fire for a sacred cause like the sage Dadhichi did, exists here symbolically in the form of a memorial. Dr. Hedgewar looks on, contented with his choice of Guruji as his successor.

It was owing to ShreeGuruji that the Sangh became a world-wide organization. Many paid respects to Guruji on his demise. In his tribute, Acharya Vinoba Bhave said, "Guruji did not harbour any narrow-mindedness whatsoever. He worked on the lines of pure nationalist thought. With great regard for Islam and Christianity in the heart, he tried to ensure that no person in the country be alienated." Shri Niranjan Teertha, the Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Puri, in his words of homage described Guruji as 'a great

saint in white' and the Jain Acharya, Muni Sushil Kumar expressed that he was a great man of culture. The Jain saint Acharya Tulsi paid reverence to Guruji saying he had a knack for spotting talent and he was a critic, a balanced one though.

The President, Shri V. V. Giri and the speaker of the Loksabha Gurudayalsingh Dhillon both enumerated Guruji's virtues. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi too paid her homage to him. She said, "Guruji Golwalkar, not a member of parliament but a person of repute and eminence is not with us anymore. An impressive personality and his undying, singular faith in his principles lent immense significance to his position and presence on the national scene." The communist leader Samar Guha stated that Guruji roused patriotism and dedication in thousands of young hearts and S. M. Joshi, also a communist leader felt that Guruji was an ascetic. Jaththedar Shri Santoshji, a leader of the Akali Dal said that Guruji was a great human being and so immortal.

Taqi Rehman, a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) paid his respects saying, "I never got to see Guruji in person but what I have seen and known, is that he kindled the flame, the vital verve of patriotism in thousands of persons." The earnest words that expressed the homage of Hafizuddin Qureshi, a leader of the Congress party were, 'Guruji was indeed a great personality, an extra-ordinary humanbeing! He was in no way anti-Muslim. The phobia induced in the Muslim minds that the Sangh is anti-Muslim has in fact misled the Muslim."

"Guruji was a spiritually a very evolved person, who roused the true nationalist sentiment in thousands of youth and awakened them" said Jayprakash Narayan as he paid his tribute to the departed soul.

The Sanchalika of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Shrimati Laxmitai (Mavshi) Kelkar, the President of the Bharatiya Jansangh, Lal Krishna Advani and a leader of the Jansangh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee too expressed grief over Guruji's death. Baburao Vaidya, a senior swayamsevak of the Sangh paints a correct portrait of Guruji in the following words:

"Performing rigorous austerities, Bhagirath brought the Ganga to this earth Vasundhara and made the land of Bharat prosperous and productive. In the

same way, steering and redirecting towards the welfare of the Bharatiya people, the flow of Guruji's life that was aspiring for liberation, Dr. Hedgewar made the Hindu community organized and competent."







Balasaheb Deoras

The 'Bal' era

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha was founded in 1925 and by 1926 had begun its Shakha in Wardha and a little later in Nagpur as well. Among the few children, who were present at the Shakha sessions with Dr. Hedgewar right from the beginning, were Bal Deoras, Madhav Mulye, Eknath Ranade and Keshav Vakil. Of these, 'Madhukar Deoras' also known as 'Bal', was very clever and sharp-witted. He came from a very wealthy family and his father, Dattareya Deoras, commonly referred to as 'Bhaiyyaji', was formerly in government service. Stern and implacable, Bhaiyyaji found the ways of the government service unacceptable. He had been gifted a piece of land at Balaghat by the royal family of the Bhosales. A well-known Zamindar of this place, he was unyielding and a stringent disciplinarian. He had five sons and four daughters. Bal was the eighth of these nine children.

From his childhood, Bal excelled at both academics and sports. Bal was his mother, Parvatibai's favourite. He was a popular boy owing to his proficiency in the sport of Kabaddi. Moreover, his team always won at tournaments. What Bal was fond of was taking the initiative to participate in projects and speaking on the subject of revolutionaries. 'The British, who had made a slave of our country, ought not to be spared. Every single one of them ought to be picked out and finished', he felt. He often suggested to his friends, that they get together to make bombs and expel the British from the country. In short, Dr. Hedgewar, the founder of the Sangh and Bal Deoras both shared a common temperament in their respective childhoods.

So, this boy Bal Deoras came into contact with Dr. Hedgewar and began attending the Shakha sessions regularly. His younger brother, Bhaurao followed suit. Their mother approved of the boys attending the Shakha and asked them everyday what they did there. Bhaiyyaji however, was totally against this and wanted that they concentrate on their studies and aim for a well-placed government job. Dr. Hedgewar was leading his children astray, he felt. So, 'here come the other Hedgewar' was the sardonic remark with which Bhaiyyaji welcomed the two brothers, when they returned home from the Shakha.

Despite Bhaiyyaji's open disapproval of the boys attending the Shakha they were not to be dissuaded. They kept going to the Shakha. Their mother was of the opinion that they were doing well at studies and in any case there was no harm attending the Shakha. Bhaiyyaji had no grounds to contest this argument but he was worried that the boys might not find a government job if they continued with this activity. Undaunted by it all however, Bal and Bhau whole-heartedly participated in the Shakha sessions. Bal once noticed that one of the boys was absent over a few days. He visited this boy at his home and learnt that he was in financial difficulties. He helped resolve the problem and advised the boy to not ever give up attending the Shakha. The boy resumed his regular attendance.

The attendance at the Shakha was on the rise. Other children felt drawn to these sessions held in open grounds and asked if they could join. They were of course welcomed and thus the Shakha kept growing both in expanse and number. Kabaddi tournaments and debate competitions were part of these sessions and Bal participated in these activities. His eloquence and articulation became known to all. His talks on the life of great personalities made a wonderful impact and were truly impressive. The audience would be left in awe of him. It was around this time that the Sangh training classes began and Bal joined these along with his friends.

Bal's friend circle was growing. But for the most part, his friends came from what were considered inferior castes in those days. Bal shunned caste distinctions. "I am going to invite my friends home. But they will all come to the kitchen to have their meal just like I do. Would you mind?" Bal asked his mother. "After the meal would you pick up the plates they would have eaten from just like you pick up mine?" was Bal's next question to her. His mother agreed and Bal brought all his friends over. Soon these friends became frequent visitors to Bal's home.

With age, Bal's attraction for revolutionaries was becoming increasingly intense. He began to make efforts to join the revolutionary activity. But this did not escape Dr. Hedgewar's sharp observance. When he learnt that Bal was mustering his own group, he explained, "There are many in the country, who are going all out to bring about a revolution, they are putting in their best effort. But what happens is, that they get caught within a few years. It is our

own people, who inform the police about them. The police happen to be our people too. The judges, who convict and punish them, are from among our own fellow citizens. So, it is none but we, who stab the revolutionaries in the back, the very revolutionaries, who happen to be fighting for our independence! Why this moral downslide in society has occurred, is what we ought to give a thought to. If this has to be prevented, a society that has morality, integrity and the strength of virtue, is what we must create. And this is exactly what we are striving for and aiming at." Dr. Hedgewar convinced Bal; after which he plunged himself passionately into the Sangh work, devoting time, energy and capacities.

Bal completed his education. He now was a graduate in law and had the LLB degree to his credit. But no way was he going for a government job like his father expected him to. Like Dr. Hedgewar, he wished to dedicate his life to the mission of the Sangh. The pracharak machinery of the Sangh was by then functional and the pracharaks had already been delegated to different parts of the country to spread the good work.

It was the year 1939. "We are slated to start work in Bengal. You may go to Kolkata as a pracharak" were Dr. Hedgewar's instructions to Bal. Bal was of course ready. But it was very unlikely that his father would permit him to go. Bal discussed the issue with his mother and even informed his elder brother about it. It was all otherwise fine but the question was, who was going to bell the cat and inform the short-tempered Bhaiyyaji about it? Finally Bal decided to take the responsibility upon himself.

One afternoon, Bhaiyyaji was resting as he was unwell. Sitting by the bedside, Bal was pressing his father's feet. Bhaiyyaji was very pleased. His son, who otherwise preferred to stay away from him, was actually serving him! Bhaiyyaji was feeling good and was lulled into sleep. It was in his sleepy state that Bal asked him in a hushed tone, "May I go to Kolkata as a pracharak of the Sangh?" Half asleep, 'Hmmm' was all that escaped Bhaiyyaji's mouth. "I have to catch the evening train. I must leave" Bal continued. "Hmm" Bhaiyyaji murmured again. The moment this fell on Bal's ears, he slowed down on pressing his father's feet and tapered off. He went straight to his mother and his elder brother and announced that he had his father's permission and so, was leaving.

Bal packed a set of clothes and arrived at the station where Dr. Hedgewar was waiting for him. He handed to Bal, a ticket to Kolkata and Rs. 20. Bal was also given the address of a family that had shifted to Kolkata from Rajasthan and settled there. The family was known to Dr. Hedgewar. This was all that Bal had with him. He got into the train and sat in the window seat.

Back home, the scene was that Bhaiyyaji had woken up. He began enquiring about Bal. "But you gave him permission to go, didn't you?" his wife said. Bhaiyyaji felt someone had pulled the rug from under his feet! He ran to the station. When he reached the station, Bal was already seated at the window in the train and Dr. Hedgewar was giving him instructions. Bhaiyyaji began to yell and scream. "This Dr. is abducting my son!" Crowds began to gather and Dr. Hedgewar was in a fix. What was he to do? But as usual he remained calm. Just then Bal signalled to him to leave assuring that he would take care of the consequences. Bhaiyyaji was furious and was shouting at Bal. He wanted him to get off the train. Bal was desperate and was praying in his mind, "O dear God! May the train blow the whistle! Right now please!" God heard the prayer and the whistle went off. The train chugged out of the station...

.... and leaving everything and everybody behind him, Bal was on his way.



The cause of the Sangh – the nation's cause

Diversity is a specialty of our country, in fact an adornment. Every single one of the states has its very own special feature. So whenever a pracharak was assigned the responsibility of work in a particular state, he had to first of all, learn the language of that state, become proficient in it and of course imbibe the local lifestyle. To the 24 year old Bal Deoras, Dr. Hedgewar gave orders to launch the Sangh's work in Bengal. All Bal had, when he set foot in Kolkata was, the ticket, Rs 20, the address of the swayamsevak, who had settled in Kolkata and a letter of introduction from Dr. Hedgewar. Bal, who came from an extremely wealthy family was going to make his onward journey with these meagre possessions. Despite giving devoted time to the Sangh, he had secured a first class in the LLB examination and a bright future would have definitely been in store. However, turning his back to it, he willingly opted for a life dedicated to the mission and cause of the Sangh.

Bal's father had great expectations from him. Dr. Hedgewar too had advised him to try for the ICS (Indian Civil Service) job. But after his LLB results were out, Bal flatly refused to take up anything in life except for the Sangh mission. "After you got your medical degree, you too could have started practising. But you did not. I want to follow in your footsteps. The values and principles that you inculcated in me all along, inspire me to devote myself but to the cause of the Sangh and exclusively to it!" said Bal to Dr. Hedgewar expressing to him, his ardent wish to dedicate his entire life to the Sangh, its cause and its mission. Dr. Hedgewar founded the Sangh in 1925 and its very first Shakha was held in 1926. Bal was among the first five children, who attended it. He was all of 11 years then.

"In these children, I see the image of tomorrow's Bharat" Dr. Hedgewar had said. This child Bal, who followed Dr. Hedgewar to the T, gave complete and perfect realization to these words that Dr. Hedgewar had uttered. Leaving behind all comfort, all luxury, Bal came to Kolkata for the cause of the Sangh. He did not know a word of Bengali but within a short while he picked

it up and began speaking the language fluently. He set about directing all his hard work towards disseminating information about the Sangh by speaking about it to every person he came in contact with, grooming Swayamsevaks for the mission and carrying the mission forward. Dr. Hedgewar and Guruji had visited Bengal to boost Bal's zeal. They were both very impressed by his work. Dr. Hedgewar had not been keeping good health in those days and so Guruji guided the Swayamsevaks that Bal had groomed.

About a year later, Bal returned to Nagpur as per Dr. Hedgewar's instructions and Shri Dixit was sent to Bengal as pracharak in his place. Guruji had accepted the responsibility of the country-wide expansion of the Sangh. Nevertheless, there had to be somebody stationed in Nagpur to back it up in the process of its progress, so Dr. Hedgewar felt. It was for this reason, that he had wanted Bal back in Nagpur. On his return, Bal went all out, toiling hard to accomplish what Dr. Hedgewar expected. He had evolved a strategy. The Sangh was founded in Nagpur and it was here that Dr. Hedgewar had prepared a background conducive to the Sangh's mission. Nobody could enjoy Dr. Hedgewar's company as much as the people of Nagpur could. Balasaheb maintained therefore, that it was that very place that the pracharaks working on the country-wide expansion of the Sangh ought to belong to. He therefore began putting all effort into this purpose.

The combination of Dr. Hedgewar's concept, Guruji's direction and Bal's effort worked wonders; and Nagpur successfully produced pracharaks groomed to work for the expansion of the Sangh. In Maharashtra it was Moropant Pingle, in Punjab it was Madhavrao Mulye, in Karnataka it was Yadavrao Joshi and in Kerala it was Dattopant Thengdi, in the Sindh it was Rajpal Puri and in Gujarat, Madhukarrao Bhagwat. Bhaiyyaji Dani, Eknathji Ranade and Prahladpant Ambekar were delegated to central Bharat, Mukundrao Munje to Orissa, Gajanan Joshi to Bihar, Narhari Parkhi, Raja Deshpande and Rajwadkar to Andhra Pradesh, Vasantrao Oak to Delhi, Bhaura Deoras to Uttar Pradesh, Balraj Madhok and Jagdish Abrol to Kashmir and Basraj Vyas to Rajasthan. Each began work as pracharak in the state allotted to him. They were all products of Nagpur. Indeed Nagpur was the centre of inspirational energy and it was in order to initialize and activate this energy and get the ball rolling so to say, that Dr. Hedgewar felt Bal was required to be present in Nagpur. Bal on his part, lived up to Dr. Hedgewar's

wishes and to his trust.

Dr. Hedgewar's health was failing and Bal could not bear to see him in that condition. Since his childhood, Bal had looked up to Dr. Hedgewar as his ideal and his personality had been influenced for the most part by Dr. Hedgewar.

In the course of time Bal began to be known as 'Balasaheb'. His style of work was unique and there was always a definitive thought that went into his work operations. He was of the view, that if the Sangh had to grow, the Shakha would have to be strengthened, which in turn demanded that every Swayamsevak be given individual attention. In the event that a Swayamsevak missed the Shakha, be it even for a day, Balasaheb would personally visit his home and find out the matter. This strengthened the bond between the Sangh and the Swayamsevaks, who felt attached and increasingly committed to the Sangh.

Eventually the volume of Balasaheb's responsibilities increased and he had to send for the details of the programmes and projects held in the Shakha sessions. He was aware that the projects run at the Shakha were of utmost significance. If the entire society was to be brought together, if the Sangh had to expand, the Shakha would have to become powerful and increase its expanse and that was for sure, said Balasaheb, always stressing on these facts. Also, he absolutely insisted on every Shakha undertaking sport and exercise. Sport, he said, promoted the team spirit and that exactly was what could facilitate the organization of the society.

Balasaheb was an extremely well-read person. He was very fond of the Sanskrit language and the ancient literature in Sanskrit was his special favourite. He had read volumes on war literature. I have personally heard him relate many incidents from the first and the second world wars. Moreover, what might be called the quintessence of all of this voracious reading and study, was the one simple thing that he often reiterated: 'It is we, who ought to learn to protect ourselves. We cannot afford to be dependent on others for it!'

Even before the creation of the Sangh, Dr. Hedgewar had toiled tirelessly to unite and strengthen the society and that had had a great impact on

Balasaheb. ShreeGuruji even said, "Those, who could not see and experience Dr. Hedgewar, ought to look at Balasaheb. Balasaheb's manner of working is the same as Dr. Hedgewar's!"

After independence, happened the unfortunate assassination of Gandhiji. Anti-social elements incited riots all over the country. The Sangh had nothing at all to do with the assassination; yet there were assaults on Swayamsevaks all over the country. Look at the sad irony! All his life Gandhiji advocated the philosophy of non-violence. But those, who claimed to be his followers attacked innocent persons, committed atrocities on them. Some prepared to launch an attack on Guruji's house. They even reached there.

But they did not dare to do it. Armed with clubs, Balasaheb Deoras along with a few other Swayamsevaks stood outside Guruji's house. "Come forward if you have the guts!" Balasaheb challenged them. But one look at Balasaheb and the other Swayamsevaks, who were all burning with fury and the ruffians had to turn around and flee. However, they did manage to vandalize Dr. Hedgewar's samadhi at Resham Bagh in Nagpur.

This deeply pained the Swayamsevaks. Gandhiji himself had great regard for Dr. Hedgewar and on his visit to the Shakha in 1934, he had even praised the work. And to think that the anti-social elements had vandalized Dr. Hedgewar's samadhi, although the Sangh did not have anything to do with Gandhiji's assassination! But what definitely needs mention is that after the fit of mindless fury on the part of the ruffians subsided, a few of these realized their mistake. They approached Balasaheb and asked to be forgiven. They even expressed their willingness to erect the Samadhi afresh. Balasaheb refused. "Our Guruji is under arrest. Once he is free, we will rebuild Dr. Hedgewar's samadhi under his guidance. But please ensure that you do not repeat your blunder. The Sangh does not slay or destroy. The Sangh does not break or disintegrate society either. The Sangh wants to bring together, to join and to unite. That is it, the national mission of the Sangh!" Balasaheb had retorted.



Balasaheb's style of work

Balasaheb had his own special style of work. He insisted that the Swayamsevaks keep in constant contact with the people. There was no reason to believe that only those, who attend the Shakha session belong to the Sangh, he felt. The one, who watched on, in appreciation and admiration, while the Shakha session was in progress, also belonged to the Sangh. 'May those, who do not attend the Shakha but hold the Sangh in high esteem and appreciate its work, also be made part of the mission, in one way or another', was Balasaheb's message to the Swayamsevaks.

In today's times, there is a whole gamut of media available for communication and contact. Fifty or sixty years ago, the story was quite different. Newspapers, weeklies and monthlies, were all that constituted the media of communication. Balasaheb took the initiative to utilize these means for the purpose of the Sangh. There was ample published literature in the form of monthlies, weeklies and pamphlets promoting the ideology of the Sangh. Nevertheless a medium as effective as a newspaper that assured contact with the public on a daily basis, was what the Sangh ought to make use of, Balasaheb thought.

Running a newspaper was not an easy job. It required funds on a large scale, to start with. Although he was well aware of these basics, Balasaheb was convinced that they needed one. It was relying on the gurudakshina and the support of the Swayamsevaks, that the Sangh ran its affairs; and Balasaheb had faith that these very Swayamsevaks would shoulder all the responsibility of the newspaper. So then, in the year 1949, with Guruji's blessings, Balasaheb launched the Sangh's newspaper 'Tarun Bharat'. Before setting a project or any work for that matter in motion, he delegated responsibilities to the Swayamsevaks. He instructed them to disseminate information to the people about the task in hand at that moment and to find out how the people could be of help.

On the same lines, he instructed the Swayamsevaks to talk to people about the 'Tarun Bharat' and explore the possibilities of obtaining the co-operation

for the cause. The Swayamsevaks received an extremely encouraging response. There happened to be many, who, though not directly connected with the Sangh, promised to do all they could for the purpose of the daily. It was not just the Swayamsevaks, but also the entire society, who very heartily welcomed the 'Tarun Bharat' and the credit for this, ought to be attributed to the background prepared by Balasaheb.

Balasaheb believed that since it was from the society that the Swayamsevaks come, it would be none other than the Swayamsevak, who could keep the Sangh firmly bound to the society. It was for this reason, that he always instructed the Swayamsevaks to maintain contact with the public at large.

Balasaheb launched a Hindi weekly by the name 'Yugdharma'. The launch of the Pune edition of the 'Tarun Bharat' coincided with that of the Jabalpur edition of the 'Yugdharma' and was followed by the Raipur edition of the latter. During the period that the Sangh was banned after the unfortunated assassination of Gandhiji, a weekly called 'Paanchajanya' saw the light of day. The editor of this periodical was 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee'. Besides, 'Organiser', the English weekly, was also launched around this time. It was all Balasaheb's effort that had borne fruit.

The various dailies, weeklies and monthlies published in so many different regional languages and in every nook and corner of the country, carried ever so easily and smoothly, the ideology, the work, the objectives and the policies of the Sangh to the masses. It was during the period of the ban, on 9th July 1948, that the Vidyarthi Parishad, a body based on the principles of knowledge, character and unity, was established. Today, the Vidyarthi Parishad is the largest student body in the world. After the ban on the Sangh was lifted, the 'Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh' that, nurturing the worker's interest, aimed at making a constructive contribution to the industrial sector, was founded. When the Sangh faced a ban, it had no representation in the parliament to present its side of the story. Therefore, motivated by the thought that the Sangh ought to become active in the political field as well, Dr. ShamaPrasad Mukherji founded the Jan Sangh.

Dr. ShamaPrasad Mukherji was the Vice Chancellor of the Kolkata University. During the time that Balasaheb was in Kolkata as a pracharak, he had had contact with Dr. ShamaPrasad Mukherji which led to the latter's

contact with the Sangh. Balasaheb invited him to preside over the Sangh's function. Incidentally, this gives us a clear idea of the kind of work that Balasaheb accomplished living in Kolkata. Dr. Mukherji wished to establish a political party that took care of the Hindu interests. It was to this thought that the Jan Sangh owes its creation.

In 1950 Dr. Shamaprasad Mukherji had three or four rounds of talks with ShreeGuruji. Guruji then handed over to him, Nanaji Deshmukh, Balraj Madhok, Sunder Singh Bhandari, Jagannathrao Joshi and Lalkrishna Advani and the Bharatiya Jan Sangh was born. Within a year, the two pracharaks Deendayal Upadhyaya and Atal Bihari Vajpayee were appointed by Guruji to work for the cause of the Jan Sangh.

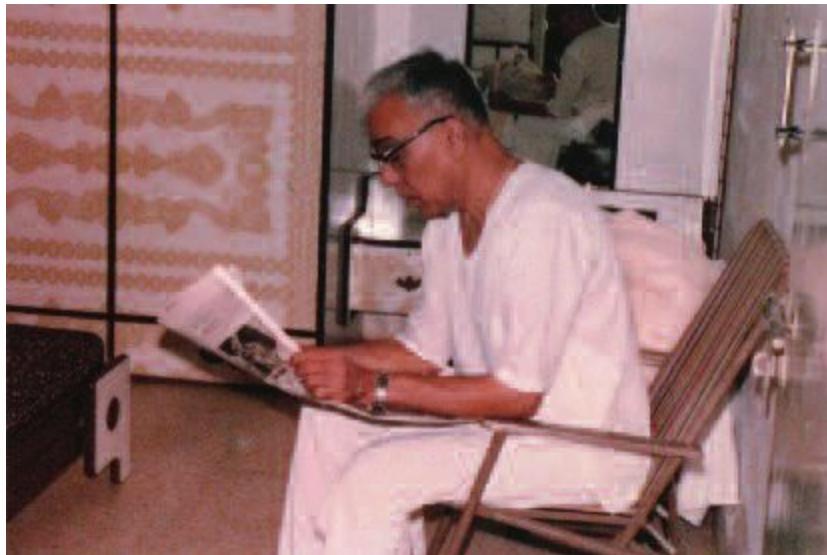
After the ban was lifted, the Sangh entered several fields over the four years that followed. Prior to initiating any project, respected Guruji discussed it with Balasaheb and sought his opinion on the matter. While Balasaheb had dedicated himself fully to the Sangh and was completely taken by this cause, he had to suffer a terrible setback on the personal front. His mother Parvatibai passed away in 1946. His younger brother Bhaurao was working as pracharak in Uttar Pradesh at the time. With the Sangh training sessions in progress, Bhaurao was unable to attend the last rites of his mother. Their mother had been a big influence on the lives of both the brothers, Balasaheb and Bhaurao. It was she, who encouraged them to attend the Shakha sessions and it was she again, who, standing up to their father's objections, supported the brothers which was why they could give themselves to the Sangh work and could go on to devote their lives to the Sangh.

Balasaheb's father had passed away much before; and his mother's demise laid family responsibilities on his shoulders. Somebody was going to have to take on the responsibility of the farms that the family owned. Balasaheb took it upon himself and during this period, did not accept any post in the Sangh. He discharged his duties related to the agricultural land, continuing work in the capacity of a Swayamsevak. Even as a child, he had been fond of agriculture and so although he spent his childhood in Nagpur, he made frequent visits to the fields. In those days, the highly educated ordinarily shied away from farming. Balasaheb proved an exceptional case. He attended to the farms and within no time earned himself a name as a progressive

farmer. He was well-versed with the technique of reaping optimum produce with minimum use of water. He was an expert agriculturist and the farmers in the vicinity benefitted greatly from his skill and experience.

Balasaheb passed on his earnings from agriculture to the cause of the Sangh. At the time, he demonstrated to the world that it was very much possible to give your best to the Sangh mission not compromising in any way on the family responsibilities. He kept a close eye on all the projects that the Sangh initiated though he had refrained from assuming any post in the Sangh during the period between 1950 and 1960. Every such time that Guruji felt the need, Balasaheb made himself available.

Winding up once and for all, neatly and conclusively all his responsibility with regard to the agricultural land, finally in 1960, Balasaheb returned to his full time and full-fledged presence and participation in the Sangh - for its cause, its mission and its work.



*Balasaheb
immersed in reading and contemplation like he always was.*

Balasaheb and Abaji Thatte with our family.



Balasaheb and reputed persons in discussion at Lonavala.

The third Sarsanghachalak

1960 onwards Balasaheb resumed the work of the Sangh and full throttle at that. At the time Guruji was busy touring the country. Balasaheb was thus required to stay put in Nagpur, direct the affairs and hold the fort so to say. With advancing age, Bhaiyyaji Dani, the Sarkaryawah was suffering ill health and so Balasaheb had been appointed Sahsarkaryawah to relieve him of the work load. Eventually Balasaheb was designated the Sarkaryawah and he assumed the responsibilities of the post.

As mentioned earlier, Balasaheb had a style of his own as far as work was concerned. "If the society has to be integrated and organized, we must be disciplined" he said and was himself a disciplinarian. However, he maintained that discipline, though meant to be implemented stringently, ought to stem from love, or else it defeats the purpose. Groupism, distinctions and hierarchies were eating into society. "Should we aspire to create a healthy society, these disparities would have to be buried and on that score we have to put our foot down" he affirmed. On his part, he always took special effort to ensure that this principle was put into practice.

Love marriages are very common today and with time have become an accepted practice as well. In the olden days however, society looked upon the love marriage with scorn and would vehemently oppose it. But Balasaheb heartily supported love marriages. He felt that if young men and women, be they from different backgrounds, wished to come together in marriage, we ought to welcome the move. This would succeed in weaving even more firmly, the fabric of our society, would it not?, he asked.

Balasaheb had a very pragmatic approach to life. He had profound faith in the conviction that the society was just not going to come together unless the walls of castes and creeds were knocked down. He even made humble appeals to the Sant-Mahanta, who came in contact with him, to work towards the promotion of oneness and equality in society. This would go a long way in benefitting society.

When the Sangh was still young, i.e. in its initial days, there were a few persons, who avoided having meals with the Swayamsevaks, who belonged to castes other than theirs. Dr. Hedgewar was, of course, against a distinction of any sort but refrained from overtly expressing his objection. Eventually, these persons realized their mistake on their own and even admitted it. Asking to be forgiven for it, they began mingling freely with one and all and eating with all the other Swayamsevaks.

This kind of a change of heart, is the one that is lasting, it stays. Dr. Hedgewar did bring about a transformation in those with these misconceptions of caste distinctions, but without openly criticizing or reprimanding them. These gestures on his part, had had a deep influence on Balasaheb.

In Balasaheb's discourses, the oneness and equality in society was a point of significance and emphasis. He was a voracious reader. He had read everything from Yogi Arvind's literature to that by Karl Marx. He had a great understanding of the country's history and had engaged in profound contemplations on it, which fact was very evident in his talks.

We look upon Shreeram and Shreekrishna as the Ishwar, the Almighty God. But Balasaheb made references to them specially in order to drive home the point, that they brought the society together and they fulfilled their mission bringing oneness in the people. "Organizing the society neither implies gathering crowds nor staging rallies. What it means is, the bringing together of a people bound by oneness of sentiment and conviction. We are all children of the one mother, our motherland. We have been living in this land since thousands of years. It is we, who have made this nation and it is we, who have marred it - a fact that must be brought home to the people and a sentiment that must become an intense awareness in them. The society will then become one, a whole; and this in turn, will on the one hand enable us to make amends for the mistakes we committed in the past and on the other, create a bright future. We cannot hold the other religions responsible for our downfall and evade owning the responsibility of our faults" said Balasaheb.

Orthodox thought, obsolete beliefs and practices ought to be changed. Changes in keeping with the times have to be accepted. This Balasaheb clarified citing very simple references like this one: "We have a well in our

yard and the well is filled with salty water. Our forefathers used it but must we not make arrangements for pure potable water?" This was how he gave the message of keeping the evil or the wrongful element of the customs and traditions.

As the Sarkaryawah, Balasaheb began touring the country. Guruji was travelling too but his health was failing because of the cancer. He was advised against it but Guruji went ahead with his travel plans. Once when he was very unwell, in the capacity of the Sarkaryawah, Balasaheb had managed to stop him and with a smile on his face, Guruji had agreed to stay back.

At the time of Guruji's demise, Balasaheb was in Andhra Pradesh for the Sangh training course. He rushed to Nagpur when he got the news. Guruji's personal secretary Abaji Thatte was waiting for Balasaheb. The moment he arrived, Abaji embraced him and began to weep. Neither could control his emotions. But mindful of their responsibility, they set about the preparations for the funeral.

When Balasaheb learnt that Guruji had chosen him as the Sarsanghachalak, he was surprised. But he made an allusion to the words Guruji uttered when Dr. Hedgewar had assigned the post of Sarsanghachalak to him.

"The post of the Sarsanghachalak is the proverbial throne of Vikramaditya. So, ordinary as I am, with the cooperation of you all, I will carry forward the mission of the Sangh" Guruji had said. "ShreeGuruji was an amazing personality. He carried forward the legacy that Dr. Hedgewar handed down to him and the mission of the Sangh spread as much within the country as it did abroad. The organizations founded in various fields that owe their inspiration to Guruji, are all operating in full force. This is my greatest inspiration and I wish to further the cause and the mission for which I trust I can rely on your support" said Balasaheb as he assumed the responsibility of the Sarsanghachalak's post.

Following Guruji's last rites, the Sangh held its Shakha session in the Resham Bagh and the Swayamsevaks bowed before Balasaheb, now the 'Sarsanghachalak'.



Guided solely by the purpose

'The Statesman', a western daily published an article expressing concern about the Sangh's journey after Guruji's demise. What would become of this immense organization established by Dr. Hedgewar and by Guruji? Would the new leadership be capable of shouldering the responsibility of the Sangh? These were some of the questions posed in the article. Did Balasaheb possess as much organizational skill and as much competence as Dr. Hedgewar and Guruji did? To put it bluntly, that was what 'The Statesman' had doubts about. These questions did bother those, who looked at the Sangh from the outside. The Sarsanghachalak gives orders and the Sangh obeys and so the Sangh is a monocracy that walks where the Sarsanghachalak leads, so believe those, who have insufficient information about the purpose, the policies and the work culture of the Sangh. This was precisely the preconception that had prompted the doubt expressed in 'The Statesman'. But Balasaheb dispelled it with a befitting reply.

The first time that Balasaheb travelled to Delhi as the Sarsanghachalak, he delivered a talk in which he made a reference to the doubt raised in 'The Statesman'. 'The concern expressed by this daily is actually as much in the interest of the Sangh as it is in mine. Most importantly, what they say, is absolutely correct. Dr. Hedgewar and Guruji both were great, lofty nonpareil personalities. But the basic fact is that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is not an organization that walks on the orders of the leadership. It is one that walks on the path guided by its purpose and leading to its goal. It is because of this norm, that the Sangh flourished even after Dr. Hedgewar's demise. Dr. Hedgewar and Guruji have guided me from time to time. They have composed the Sangh in a way that we may keep receiving guidance even now in their absence. And so, even in the times to come, that is how it will be! The Sangh will keep growing.'

Even today we experience the truth contained in these words uttered by Balasaheb. The expansion of the Sangh does not depend on who leads it, as Dr. Hedgewar had made sure right when he created the Sangh, that it would not remain tied to an individual. Individuals come and go, they perish. What

persists, is work, which is why the Sangh attributes supreme importance to work.

Assuming the responsibility of the Sarsanghachalak's post, Balasaheb took up extensive travel. Abaji Thatte, Guruji's personal secretary was now personal secretary to Balasaheb and accompanied him everywhere and at all times. So then, Abaji too found himself travelling constantly. When Guruji was still alive, Balasaheb had been the Sarkaryawah for eight years and did undertake a lot of travel. As Sarsanghachalak however, he travelled much more and more extensively. He took efforts to ensure that the work of the Sangh got a boost and received positive energy; but was watchful enough to ensure that nothing dented its discipline.

There were times when the Swayamsevaks referred to him as 'Parampujya Balasaheb'. He stopped them right there. "It would be perfectly in order to address the Sarsanghachalak as 'Parampujya'. But linking this address of reverence to my name, would be unacceptable as far as the discipline of the Sangh goes. So, if at all you wish to use the word, it has to refer to the 'Sarsanghachalak' not personally to Balasaheb" he had warned.

All throughout his tours in the country, he emphasized in all earnestness, that Bharat was a Hindu nation. "Our society remains unorganized, which leaves it weak and vulnerable. It is not the government of the nation that makes it great. It is an organized, well-integrated society that makes the nation great and powerful. It is after all, from the society that the government is created and it is from the society again that the army is constructed. Therefore, building an organized and sturdy society is the mission of the Sangh" saying so, Balasaheb cited the example of Israel. "Israel is powerful by virtue of the fact that it is organized" he often said.

Even as a young sawayamsevak boy, Balasaheb was fervently against caste distinctions. On assuming the Sarsanghachalak's post, he laid utmost weight on the issue of social harmony. "We ought to be willing to do whatever it takes to eradicate untouchability from the society" he told the Swayamsevaks. He had also instructed the Swayamsevaks to take up special seva projects for the economically backward communities. This was the direction in which Balasaheb was steering the Sangh. There are a large number of tribals in our country. Referring to them as Adivasis and

segregating them from the rest of the people, is a policy the Sangh has found inadmissible. Balasaheb therefore insisted that they be called 'Vanvasi' and not 'Adivasi'. Bhagwan Shreeram too lived in the forest for fourteen long years, did he not? Those, who live in the 'van' (forest) are the 'Vanvasi'. As simple and straightforward as that!

The Ramjanmabhumi movement began during Balasaheb's tenure as the Sarsanghachalak. Balasaheb was staunchly in favour of the Ram Mandir being built in Ayodhya. 'The Ram Mandir just has to be constructed there but may politics not enter into the matter. This is no issue to be politicized, this issue has to do with faith of millions of people!' This was Balasaheb's stance on the Ram Mandir issue. He therefore despatched Swayamsevaks across the country to awaken the masses. Around this time, two thousand Hindu families underwent conversion in 'Meenakshipuram', Tamilnadu. The reason they had opted for conversion lay in untouchability and poverty. Taking advantage of this very situation, certain people from another religion brought about the conversion. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was the Prime Minister then, had also expressed concern over the incident. Considering the gravity of the instance, Balasaheb instructed the Swayamsevaks to set about intensive work aiming at awareness of the dharma. In the course of time these families, which had embraced a new religion, returned to their original faith. Arrangements were also made to ensure improvement in their economic conditions.

1989 was the centenary year of Dr. Hedgewar's birth. At a programme organized in Mumbai on the occasion, Balasaheb announced a very ambitious resolve of launching a hundred thousand seva projects. Even for the Sangh, this would prove a challenging task, believed the well wishers of the Sangh but Balasaheb had made the announcement with utmost confidence.

The swayamsevaks toiled rigorously and lived up to the confidence that Balasaheb had expressed. As of today, more than a lakh and 75 thousand seva projects function on behalf of a central body called the 'Seva Bharati' from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kutch to Assam.

The task accomplished is undoubtedly immense but the Sangh is not one to sit back in complacence. Considering the difficulties that the nation has been facing, there is so much more that needs to be done. There is a long way to go

and the Sangh is well aware of it.



The test of the mettle – the second time

Succeeding Dr. Hedgewar after his demise, Guruji assumed leadership of the Sangh. The Second World War was on at the time. These were testing times for the leadership qualities of leaders the world over. It was during this period that Guruji gave the Sangh, a remarkable leadership. Under his leadership, the Sangh expanded and progressed with incredible speed. The Sangh began work in full swing entering different walks of life and adding ever new facets to the work. The running of the Sangh affairs became Balasaheb's responsibility after Guruji's demise. The times were no less challenging then.

On assuming the leadership of the Sangh in 1973, Balasaheb took up touring of the country. He made keen observations of the circumstances prevalent in society. He found that the society was a victim of corruption and was terrorized by power. The social mindset in general, was driven to despair by corruption and malpractices. The government was evading its responsibility of alleviating the anguish of the people and seemed more interested in consolidating its power instead. Though it was aware that discontent against its administration was seething in the minds of the people, the government was resorting to repression as control measure.

Eventually the situation deteriorated to the extent that made one wonder, if the nation was a democracy or an authoritarian dictatorship! Granted that the government had been elected by the people; but in a democracy, not even the government is allowed unchallenged indulgence in its whims or in vested interests. The opposition of course, raised its voice against the government's repression. Instead of opting for a dialogue to resolve the issue, the government stepped up its authoritarian ways. Unrest brewed in the minds of the leaders and also of the workers of the opposition party. The country needed to be liberated one more time; this time from the clutches of authoritarian control, so they all felt very strongly. The Sangh was watching all of this and it was not going be a laid back spectator to the society's distress. At the time, Jayprakash Narayanji, who had quit politics after

independence and devoted himself to the service of the nation was also displeased with the government's ways. To him, a government that could not rid the people of their anguish, was just not acceptable. It was therefore, that Jayprakashji was toying with the idea of launching a mass movement against the government.

Having kept away from active politics for a considerable period, Jayprakashji lacked the organizational support necessary for a mass movement. He approached the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh for help. He had talks with a senior pracharak of the Sangh, Nanaji Deshmukh, who assured him that his appeal would be conveyed to the Sarsanghachalak. Parampujya Sarsanghachalak on his part was very pained at the state in which the society found itself and just then Jayprakashji's request for help reached him. Not a political party, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh had no interest in gaining political ground from the mass movement and so, it was decided that the Sangh would back Jayprakashji with all its strength but not set up the movement in its own name. The Sarsanghachalak gave instructions that the Swayamsevaks participate in this movement.

And lo! Jayprakashji's call received an overwhelming response. Already agitated, the people rallied under the leadership of Jayprakashji. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad literally laboured for the sake of this movement. The movement spread through the country like wild fire. At this juncture, it was expected that the government would step back and take steps to pacify the movement. This was a movement representing the aspirations of the people and so, it was the duty of the popularly elected government to take due note of it. However, declaring the demands to be illegitimate and antidemocratic, the government attempted to crush the movement, resorting to an even more callous stand than ever; and for the purpose, used all the governmental power.

Though the movement spread across the country owing to the participation of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, in the initial stages, the states of Gujrat and Bihar had taken the lead in giving impetus to it. Jayprakashji personally led the movement in Bihar. The police mercilessly opened lathi charge against a rally that was led by Jayprakashji. A whack of the baton was to hit and injure Jayprakashji. But Nanaji Deshmukh, who was with him at

that moment, took that blow on his arm. The baton hit him so hard that he broke the bone of his arm. He had succeeded in protecting Jayprakashji, who asked him, "Why did you do that?" Nanaji's reply was touching. "That is a value that the Sangh has given to us, right in our childhood" he said.

The emergency was declared in the country on 25th June 1975. The Allahabad High Court ruled against Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi and barred her from contesting elections for six years. This became the immediate cause of the declaration of the emergency. A movement prior to the emergency was one thing; and exhibiting the courage to come out on the streets and to defy the government after the declaration of the emergency, was quite another. This called for a nationwide organization and a Swayamsevak network. And so, political parties appealed to the Sangh to support the movement. The Sangh responded positively to the appeal made by Jayprakash Narayanji and other senior leaders to save the democracy of the country.

After the declaration of the emergency, the repressive stand of the government found legitimate justification and a series of arrests were made across the country. The police force seemed to have been accorded a permit to quell the agitation by hook or by crook and also to arrest and torment the agitators. These instances sparked a public outrage in the country.

Restrictions were imposed on newspapers. Though the television had only just arrived in the country, the radio had a large audience and an expansive reach. Both these media were now under government control. The government did all that it took, to suppress the news pertaining to the opposition. As many opponents as was possible, had to be behind bars and the government was going all out to ensure this.

Jayprakash Narayan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani apart from other prominent leaders, were arrested. On 30th June 1975, the Sarsanghachalak, Balasaheb Deoras, was returning to Nagpur after the Sangh training sessions. He was arrested in the train. A few journalists, present in the compartment, interviewed Balasaheb. At the time, Balasaheb had said, "There is absolutely no cause for worry although I have been arrested; and with me, a few Swayamsevaks too. The thousands of Swayamsevaks of the Sangh will go underground and continue work in the nation under the

leadership of the Sarkaryawah". These words were sufficient to motivate the Swayamsevaks of the Sangh.

The government imposed a ban on the Sangh and arrested about a hundred thousand Swayamsevaks. The Sarsanghachalak was taken to the Yerawda jail. Yet the government could not manage to block this movement. On the contrary, in these trying times, the work of the Sangh picked up fervour and momentum.

Following the unfortunate assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the Sangh was banned. However, the Sangh was proved innocent and the government had to lift the ban. Then during the emergency period, the Sangh was banned again. This time it was a demanding period. The capacity and the power of the Sangh were incredible and now the entire society had become aware of it. The people at large had had a glimpse of what exactly the Sangh was capable of, in the event of a crisis. In any case, the endurance and fortitude exhibited by the Sangh in these exigent circumstances, remains unmatched by far.



The emergency brews discontent

The emergency declared, the government resorted to blatant repression and that too in full force all across the country. Many had been taken into custody solely on grounds of suspicion of anti-government activity. A mere association with the Sangh, was enough to make people objects of harassment. As for what the office bearers and the Swayamsevaks might have had to suffer, the less said the better. A hundred thousand Swayamsevaks had been arrested and put behind bars. Thousands had gone underground. And yet the government failed to put the reins on the Sangh. Irked, the government exercised all its might but in vain again! The Sangh's mission against the emergency just could not be stopped.

Before we get down to talking about the Sangh's work during this period, we need to understand, why exactly the Sangh was opposed to the government. It was the first time ever in the post independence era, that the emergency had been declared in the country. The government had done so under the pretext that its opponents were spreading anarchy in the country. But in actual fact, even before the declaration of the emergency, arresting those, who stood against the government and harassing them in whichever way possible, had become frequent occurrences in the country. It was because of corruption, scams and wrong government policies, that unrest brewed in the country; and not because of the opposition. The government however, stubbornly refused to acknowledge this reality. The declaration of the emergency stifled the democracy that the nation was. So it follows, that the struggle resulting from the circumstances was entirely aimed at conserving the democratic order in the country; and the Sangh was, of course, the spearhead.

Of the thousands of Swayamsevaks working underground, the police did manage to lay their hands on a few; but the Sangh continued work undeterred. Government censorship was imposed on newspapers, weeklies and monthlies when the range of the communication media available in those days was, as it were, fairly limited. The radio, an effective medium of the time was entirely under government control. Under the circumstances, the Swayamsevaks operating underground were responsible for distribution of

pamphlets, putting up posters etc. to acquaint the masses with the repressive tactics on the government's part. Not only this, they called secret meetings in different places and brought about an awakening against the emergency among the people.

The Sarsanghachalak Balasaheb Deoras had been arrested and sent to the Yerawda jail. The Sarkaryawah Madhavrao Mule and Dattopant Thengdi along with Moropant Pingle, Bhaurao Deoras, Yadavrao Joshi, Kedarnath Sahani, Nanaji Deshmukh and other senior Swayamsevaks of the Sangh went underground. They began travelling across the country; and all this without the police getting a whiff of their activities. The police were chasing these prominent persons in any case and some even had a price on their head. But then within no time, the government got a taste of how unassailable and impenetrable the network of the Sangh was!

Thousands of families associated with the Sangh came forward to hide those, who had gone underground. They allowed these Swayamsevaks, whom the police were trailing, refuge in their homes, they protected them. These families were convinced that these Swayamsevaks were fighting for the democracy in the country. All of this was possible, as the society stood firm in support of the Sangh. Followers of the socialist ideology, who have always been opposed to the Sangh were, at the time, astonished at the kind of strength the Sangh evidently wielded. The socialists too put up a fight against the emergency. Some of them had been arrested and some others had gone underground. But the Sangh extended as much help as possible to the socialists as well, who, though opponents of the Sangh, were fighting to conserve the democracy of the country.

Expressing that they lacked the kind of network that the Sangh possessed, these persons said, they had great expectations from the Sangh. In a letter to her friend, the wife of a prominent leader, who was in jail at the time, wrote that her husband had been deeply influenced by the Sangh. When free, it would be in the Sangh's uniform that he would emerge out, she had added. That nothing of the sort happened, was of course a different story! Out of jail, this leader began mindlessly launching severe attacks on the Sangh, not sparing a thought for the help that the Sangh had extended to him. Neither was there an iota of truth in the criticism nor did he so much as mention the

help he received from the Sangh during the emergency period. The Sangh however, does not take these incidents to heart.

How do the Swayamsevaks of the Sangh appear in the darkness? When and how do they manage to stick posters on the walls? How do they manage to give them the slip? The police just could not fathom. They were doing all that it took to catch the Swayamsevaks gone underground but had not met with much success. They were frustrated. Incidentally, while we talk about the repressive acts committed by the police force all over the country, the following point definitely deserves special mention:

Granting that the police force was only implementing orders received from higher-ups, the fact remained that it was aware, that the acts it was executing were very much unjustified and that what was happening was wrong.

The Swayamsevaks had to face many a challenge in that period. Many among those arrested were bread winners of their family. With the bread winning husband or the son in jail, the family naturally found itself in dire states. The Sangh was not one to leave them in the lurch. Be it in the form of a modest sum, the Sangh did extend financial support to these families. Along with the money the families received a reassuring message to help sustain them in the circumstances: "This is a dharma-yuddha, a war for the sake of truth, justice and righteousness. We have to be brave in the face of the situation." This was the message given to the families, who had accepted from the heart, what had come their way. The Swayamsevaks, who had been jailed, held the Shakha session inside the jail. May the Shakha session not have been conducted openly in the emergency period, but groups singing bhajans sang the 'Ram-dhun' in many places. The people responded wonderfully. The police knew perfectly well, who these persons were but they could do nothing to stop the programme, as it had nothing to do with the Sangh as such; and so there was nothing apparently objectionable.

In order to elude the police those days, the senior Swayamsevaks of the Sangh, who had gone underground, disguised themselves and moved around using a fictitious name; speaking of which, I recall an incident involving the Sarkaryawah, Madhavrao Mule. Madhavrao always wore the dhoti. But during the emergency period, the same Madhavrao moved around in the bell-bottoms, which were in vogue at the time. Also, I had got a wig made for

him. Nobody was able to recognize him in this attire. Actually speaking, Madhavrao was not quite in good health and was undergoing treatment. But without sparing a thought for his health, he went underground. However, in order to ensure uninterrupted medical treatment, over a long time, he lived in my house at Juhu. My brother's wife being a doctor, Madhavrao was very well taken care of.

Assuming different names and not worried at all about the police or even his health, Madhavrao fearlessly travelled across the country to awaken people to reality; and stir up sentiment against the imposed emergency. The Sangh did not stop at condemning of the government's policies in the country. It voiced denunciation in countries abroad as well. A warrant was issued in the name of Dr. Subramaniam Swamy, then a member of the Rajya Sabha. Had he absented himself from the Rajya Sabha, he would have had to forego his membership. Though outside the country at that moment, he was obliged to return and attend the House. Arresting him then would have been a cake walk. But Dr. Subramaniam Swamy not only attended the session of the Rajya Sabha, he gave a small speech challenging the government, even managed to slip out and was soon back where he had come from! Abroad! The Sangh had made this possible and the plan had been chalked out by Madhavrao Mule.

Senior swayamsevaks toured the country under the guidance of the Sarkaryawah, Madhavraoji Mule. Still underground, they were bringing about an awakening among the people. The entire nation found itself influenced.



The Sangh's network

A hundred thousand Swayamsevaks had been jailed in the emergency period but undaunted, the Sangh kept at its work and effectively at that, leaving even the fierce opponents of the Sangh amazed. The more repressive the police force became, the more intensive the work of the Sangh was! Driven to desperation now, the government realized that it was not going to be able to put tabs on the Sangh. No doubt the support of the people was a big asset of the Sangh and no doubt it was this support that made achievements possible. Also, how cleverly the Swayamsevak gave the policemen the slip, was just incredible. Let us talk of my house, for instance!

During the emergency, there was a warrant issued in my name. I lived at Shivaji Park at the time and my house at Juhu was, actually speaking, not ready for occupation yet. But along with my family, I shifted to the Juhu residence. The police could never have had any information about this house and so the senior and prominent leaders of the Sangh lived there during the emergency period. Sunder Singh Bhandari and the Sarkaryawah, Madharao Mule were among them. The secret meetings of the Sangh were held in that house. Moropant Pingle, Yadavraoji Joshi, Bhaurao Deoras, Dattopant Thengdi, Dr. Aba Thatte, Kedarnath Sahni and Bapurao Moghe met here in secrecy, to chalk out strategies of how to oppose the emergency while still underground. Nobody got a whiff of the goings on inside the house or even of the fact, that so many people had gathered in the house. We took foolproof care on that score.

Juhu, in those days, was quite a sparsely populated area and too much footwear outside the door, could have caught the eye of the police, who would promptly have started interrogating us. So, we decided that the footwear would be kept indoors. Besides, in order to portray that the house had a pro-government owner, we had hung on the wall, a calendar with Sanjay Gandhi's photograph. Eluding the police in one clever way or the other, the Swayamsevaks all over the country were building minds against the emergency. The Swayamsevaks had to suffer a lot of hardships in the process. But if democracy had to be salvaged, this was inevitable and the

Swayamsevaks were aware of it.

Anger against the emergency seethed in the minds of the people. The wave of discontent among the people that the world witnessed, was a result of the awakening against the emergency that the Swayamsevaks had brought, about by means of their effective public contact network while still underground; and that too, in the absence of the communication media. But there were some, who looked upon the prevalent circumstances as a golden chance to wipe out the Sangh. The communists and the socialists had always hated the Sangh and their resentment peaked in the emergency period.

Some followers of the communist ideology were persuading the government to finish off the Sangh, although a few belonging to this same school of thought but against the emergency, had accepted the Sangh's help. The truth however, was that they had no other alternative. Setting aside the differences in ideology, the Sangh had extended support to them, in consideration of national interest. That they chose to forget this fact, was a different story.

All through the 20 arduous months that the emergency spanned, the Sangh worked on multiple planes. First of all, posing a challenge to the government that had become totally insensitive, the Swayamsevaks gave to the world, the message that they were not going to allow democracy to be smothered. Further, the Sangh proved that it had the fortitude and the fearlessness to give a befitting reply to the authoritarian and repressive tactics of the government and this, it could accomplish while still underground. Secondly, the Sangh fulfilled its responsibility towards the families, whose members had, without giving a thought to their home and their near ones, gone to jail for the cause of the nation. Exhibiting great strength, the families of the Swayamsevaks, who were in jail, bore the pain with a smile. And after all the great work accomplished, the Swayamsevaks did not brag about it. Neither were they boastful then nor are they so today, the credit for which we attribute to the values and the discipline of the Sangh.

"Whatever we did during the time, the pain that we bore, was for a cause; it was in the national interest. Please do not ever capitalize on that and do not be tempted to reap advantages from it either" was the Sarsanghachalak's message. 'We did our duty. That is all there is to it!' was the sentiment that prevailed in every Swayamsevak's mind and this humility deserves special

mention. It is a common occurrence to see people blowing their own trumpet that they worked for the nation; and over and above it, reaping undue benefits from their act. The Sangh is an exception to this rule. Out of a lakh and 30 thousand people in the country, who did the satyagraha against the emergency, the Swayamsevaks numbered more than a hundred thousand. But the Sangh claimed neither credit nor benefit of the work done in the emergency period. It just does not suit its disposition.

Actually speaking, the emergency and the Sangh's work during the emergency could in itself be the topic of an independent series of articles. But we need not really dwell on the emergency. We are all familiar with this period, this dark, jet black chapter in our history. We do not have to harp on the same old things. But I did present a few points with a view to acquainting the readers with the work that the Sangh accomplished in this period. The Sangh has dedicated itself to the nation and to society. As for those, who ask sardonic questions like 'What did the Sangh do?' 'What does it do?' may please check on what the Sangh did in the emergency period. They could thus get their facts straight on the goals and policies of the Sangh and also know the abilities of the Sangh.

The Swayamsevaks, who had stood up against the emergency, hailed from different strata of society. There were farmers, workers, shop-keepers, teachers, students, those in government service, doctors, lawyers and industrialists as well. Among those, who were arrested, some lost their jobs, students had to drop out of their courses and in some cases, business had to close down. But they were not to be disconcerted.

Also, we have not the faintest idea of the atrocities committed by the police during the period. The instances of police atrocities in some places could even have put the British to shame. Some lost their lives when in jail and some were maimed for life. These included women too. The government that we elected made use of the police force to execute atrocious acts on us. There is no point blaming the police force for it.

The Sangh had a remarkable network. Just this one instance that I am about to share, should suffice to convince us of it. During the period of the emergency, Sanjay Gandhi met with the President, Fakruddin Ali Ahmed in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Sanjay Gandhi was annoyed that the President had

not signed the papers he had sent over and it was to voice his anger, that he had gone there. What Sanjay Gandhi said to the President and what he received as a reply both reached the Sangh within no time. It would not be deemed proper to share the details. But it was indeed regrettable, that an elderly person of the standing of Fakruddin Ali Ahmed should feel hurt that he had not received the respect due to him. His face reflected the pain in his heart and said it all.

The Sangh never misuses information. Be it this piece of information that we just spoke about; or be it something even more sensitive. For the Sangh, it is always 'national interest first!' It was in keeping with this sentiment that its movement opposing the government and the emergency did not end up in a movement against the nation. The Sangh was vigilant on that front.

Governments come and go! It is the nation that persists! That is what the Sangh believes and that is why it resolutely keeps up its good work. The spread of anarchy was not the Sangh's intention. Not at all! The Swayamsevaks conducted Shakha sessions in jail. They celebrated festivals. This endurance and courage on the Swayamsevaks' part was a source of strength for many. Those, who had all along slammed the Sangh, now awe-struck, began to appreciate it.



A 'shibir' in the jail

Senior office bearers along with a hundred thousand Swayamsevaks were put in different prisons of the country. There was no knowing how much longer the emergency period would continue. Nevertheless the Swayamsevaks were prepared to face a long drawn conflict for the nation's cause. Resorting to all tactics possible in their respective circumstances, the Swayamsevaks, who were imprisoned and those, who operated underground, both opposed the repressive acts of the government. The morale, the resilience and the spirit of the Swayamsevaks in prison was incredible. They joked that they had been accorded a chance to participate in a long term 'shibir' (workshop) at the government's expense! Well, very much so... because the huge number of Swayamsevaks, who lived inside the prison, had truly transformed the whole ambience.

The prison had turned into a site for deliberations and lectures on a variety of topics. The reading and recitation of the Ramayan, of the stories from the Shreebhagwat, the Ramraksha, the Ganpati Stotra, talks on the Ayurved and on Homeopathy; and astrology training classes were among the activities conducted in the country's prisons, thus transforming them into a venue for a festive reunion of the Swayamsevaks. Not that home and family did not concern the Swayamsevaks, yes of course they did. However, their seniors, who were in jail with them, reassured them. "There are people, who care for your family and are in regular touch with them. There is no cause for worry" were words that comforted them and enough to boost their confidence.

Messages meant for those operating underground and for those in jail reached their appropriate addressees smooth, safe and sound. The police had no clue whatsoever and remained totally oblivious about the activity. That the Sangh had a very efficient network, was a fact that the government was by then convinced about. Why was it that even the imposition of the state of emergency was unable to restrain the Sangh? Senior police officers were questioned about it. But how and where does one look for Swayamsevaks and pracharaks, who operate underground or have no particular place of residence to call their own, was the question that the police officers asked one another.

It occurred to the police that those operating underground, lived with families that had no association with the Sangh. It was therefore not going to be possible to track them down. Moreover, there were many officers in the police force, who had regard for the activities that the Sangh was carrying on; but had to nevertheless execute orders they received from the higher-ups. The police forces of Maharashtra and Gujarat did follow orders, for after all it was their duty to do so. But there were no instances of atrocities in these states. In certain other states, the situation was horrifying but the Swayamsevaks stood undaunted in the face of it all.

In the Yerawda prison, Balasaheb Deoras, the Sarsanghachalak and Rambhau Mhalgi, a senior leader of the Jansangh were engaged in a discussion and Balasaheb said, "A change, a complete transformation awaits us in the times to come, one that independent Bharat has yet to see." His words came true. For the first time ever, the Congress party lost at the elections that followed the emergency period. This party might have suffered many a defeats and setbacks in the times that followed; but the point worth noting is, that the Sarsanghachalak could foresee change in an era when people were so convinced that there was no alternative to the Congress Party!

So, let us go back to the scene at the Yerawda prison. Balasaheb received many visitors in prison and once it was the socialist workers, who paid him a visit. They asked Balasaheb, "You are in prison and so are thousands of Swayamsevaks. The Shakha sessions of the Sangh have stopped and there are a thousand others, who have to operate underground. Yet there is peace in the country. How come?" He knew exactly what they were driving at. "What precisely, in your opinion, is an agitation?" Balasaheb asked tossing the question back to them. "Brawls, plunder, violence, vandalizing... that is not what an agitation means. The government has had me arrested. Fine! But there are 4 or 5 others as capable as I am, who are operating underground. Under their guidance, the Sangh is communicating its disagreement but ensuring that no harm comes to the nation or to national interest." was Balasaheb's reply to the visitors. Whether they were convinced or not, there is no way to know; but the Swayamsevaks did for sure get to know how much faith their Sarsanghachalak had in them and that certainly was fulfilling.

While still in the Yerawda prison, Balasaheb wrote a letter to the Prime

Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Following the unfortunate assassination of Gandhiji, the government in power then, had imposed a ban on the Sangh. Guruji had then written to the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru making him aware that the ban was a mistake. The Sangh had nothing at all to do with the assassination of Gandhiji and so the ban on the Sangh was an injustice. Referring to this incident Balasaheb wrote that Indiraji too was making the same mistake. He then went on to add, "Corruption and scams have plagued the country and you ought to be viewing the agitation against these vices with appropriate objectivity. But you are looking to quell it and that is, by any standards, wrong."

The effects of the awakening that the Swayamsevaks operating underground had caused, began to show. The discontent against the government was growing. At the same time the general sentiment at the international level too was against the government's policies. The Sangh had taken special efforts to make this happen. The Sangh launched an organization overseas, by the name, 'Friends of India Society International'. This organization kept the entire world abreast of the discontent in Bharat. Newspapers abroad published reports voicing concern about what was happening in Bharat, the largest democracy of the world.

'The Economist', a British weekly, in its issue dated 4th December 1976 showered praises liberally on the agitation launched by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh against the emergency imposed in the country. 'This is no antiestablishment movement of a leftist organization. Operating underground, the Swayamsevaks of the Sangh are fighting to save democracy in the country, for which they have wholehearted support of the Bharatiya masses. Thousands of Swayamsevaks operating underground have been distributing literature expressing disapproval of the government's repressive acts', stated the report adding that the funds required for this purpose were being raised by the people. This indicated that 'The Economist' and other foreign newspapers had made a note of the happenings right down to this detail.

The help and support extended by the people during the emergency period, is even today, fresh in my memory! Like thousands of other Swayamsevaks, I was operating underground. Among the many, who helped me, some, mere

acquaintances, secretly gave me money. 'Do accept our humble contribution to the good work you are doing' they would say and shove money in my hand. With this kind of support from the people the confidence of the Swayamsevaks kept swelling. "This is a test of endurance and a war of ideologies. The Sangh will succeed in awakening the masses to the oppression and the injustice of the ruling powers. Be sure it will!" On receiving this message that the respected Sarsanghachalak gave while still in prison the Swayamsevaks felt an upsurge of vigour and zeal that had received a powerful boost.

Alongside the impact of the resistance within the country, the impact of the stand taken by foreign nations began to work on the government, consequent to which, the elections were declared on 18th January 1977.

The opposition parties decided to put up a united front and enter the election arena. That was how the 'Janata Party' was born. All the Swayamsevaks, who were operating underground came out in the open. However, not a single Swayamsevak was released from prison. Those in power contacted senior Swayamsevaks of the Sangh. They were approached with a proposal: 'If you refrain from supporting the Janata Party in the ensuing elections, the ban on the Sangh will be lifted and all the Swayamsevaks will be released from prison.' Did they think that the Sangh would fall prey to such temptation? They did not know what and who the Sangh was made of, they had no idea of its mettle.

This proposal was tabled at a meeting held in Delhi. Lala Hansraj Gupt, Bapurao Moghe and Brahma Devji attended the meeting on behalf of the Sangh. The Sangh dismissed the proposal downright. The Sangh would not fall for any temptation. For the Sangh, national interest came first; and would be the one supreme consideration. In this country, democracy must, at all costs be protected, was the staunch opinion of all the three. The Swayamsevaks were thus still in prison although the Lok Sabha elections were over and done with. The other Swayamsevaks, openly worked for the Janata Party. The Janata Party won the elections and formed the government. It was then, that the ban on the Sangh was lifted and the Swayamsevaks stepped out of prison to breath freedom.



The emergency now over...

The respected Sarsanghachalak was arrested on 4th July 1975 and was released on 21st March 1977. On his release, Balasaheb Deoras was travelling to Mumbai. Huge crowds had thronged the Kalyan station that falls on the way. They had all gathered to welcome him. It was after 21 whole months that the Swayamsevaks were seeing the Sarsanghachalak. For all present, it was an emotional moment. Greeting the crowd, Balasaheb gave a small speech at the Kalyan station. "Let us all get back to work. Service unto the society and service unto the nation! That has been our mission and that is what it will ever be!" Balasaheb said.

In Mumbai also, Balasaheb received an extremely zealous, excited and festive welcome. Here, his message to the Swayamsevaks was, 'Do not be bitter. Get back to work.' On 22nd March 1977 the Shakha sessions of the Sangh had resumed all across the country. The enthusiasm of the Swayamsevaks knew no bounds that day. The entire country reverberated with proclamations of the glory and of the victory of Bharatmata; Bharat – our Motherland, our Mother.

On 24th March 1977 Balasaheb was publicly felicitated at the Kasturchand Park, Nagpur. On this occasion, he threw light on the stand of the Sangh. 'Forget and forgive', was the Sarsanghachalak's message. Following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, a ban was imposed on the Sangh and Swayamsevaks were harassed. Yet after the ban was lifted, ShreeGuruji had appealed to the Swayamsevaks to not harbour any hostility in the mind. After the emergency was lifted, Balasaheb adopted exactly the same approach.

The Sangh chose to take the forgiving stand. But we must all understand that it was not at all easy. Many had to bear the brunt of the oppression, the atrocities committed in the entire nation during the period of the emergency. Some lost their lives as a result of the torment and others were maimed for life. Then there were numerous others, who lost their source of livelihood. To be able to forget all of this and forgive the oppressors, was certainly not easy, to say the least. In fact, fury in reaction to 21 months of horror would count

as natural, not to mention justified too.

"The oppressors were not strangers or foreigners. They were our own, our kin. We cannot be holding on to our anger because a near one hurt us. Punishing them and seeing them suffer does not gratify us, does it? So let go off the anger and the bitterness. Should we harbour revenge in the mind and decide to be vindictive, there would be unrest, disquiet everywhere; for which again we would be partly responsible." This message, Balasaheb kept reiterating in the times that followed, throughout his tours across the country. "The credit of the Janata Party's victory is attributed to the Sangh. What more do we want? The restraint we exercised in the trying times to protect democracy must also manifest on attaining victory" he said quoting Sir Winston Churchill's words: "In defeat – defiance. In victory – magnanimity".

The Sangh is given the credit for the withdrawal of the emergency. We ought to be exhibiting humility now, Balasaheb urged the Swayamsevaks. On achieving victory at the Mahabharat war, the victors ought to exercise restraint prudence and grace, so Bhagwan Shreekrishna had said. The Sarsanghachalak, who read the Bhagwadgeeta each day, gave to the Swayamsevaks this very message urging them to be large-hearted and to forgive the oppressors. Exhibiting this kind of tolerance brings immense benefits to the society, so history has time and again proved.

When the racist Whites ruled South Africa, they oppressed the native blacks. Nelson Mandela, who fought for the rights of the blacks, was jailed for 27 years. When the country was liberated from the clutches of the white, the blacks were strongly tempted to act out of vengeance. "But this exactly is the moment that calls for restraint!" saying so, Nelson Mandela appealed to the masses to maintain peace, thus warding off anarchy in South Africa. As compared to other African countries, South Africa is a much more advanced country and is enjoying even today, the fruits of Mr. Mandela's approach of mature restraint and tolerance.

Following his release from prison, the Sarsanghachalak began touring the country. In the course of the travel, many men of repute came to see him apart from of course the Swayamsevaks. While travelling to Delhi, he met with Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, Nanaji Deshmukh and Dattopantji Thengdi. "We have to now look forwards and forgetting the

unpleasant past, resume work for the mission. Let us all strive to ensure that such an emergency is never imposed" he appealed in one of his talks.

While in Mumbai, the well-known writer Durga Bhagwat invited Balasaheb over to her home. As we all know, Durgabai had adopted a very stern stand against the emergency. When Balasaheb arrived, a few other literary persons were already present at her home. He had a free and hearty talk with them all. They had but sincere praise for the work that the Sangh had done during the period of the emergency.

Mr. Shah, a retired High Court judge also visited Balasaheb at the office of the Sangh and expressed gratitude. At a public function held at Shivaji Park on 7th May 1977 Nani Palkhiwala and former Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court, Mohammedali Currim Chagla, both very wholeheartedly and liberally showered praises on the Sangh. I still remember M. C. Chagla's talk.

"Who says the Sangh is fascist? I have been watching the Sangh and know the work it does. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is an organization of patriots. In the youth, the Sangh inculcates the value of patriotism. The Sangh is not against anybody" said Mr. Chagla, adding also, that he expected to be guided by Balasaheb Deoras in the times to come. "I am willing to work for the Sangh. I always receive guidance from Nanaji Deshmukh, a senior pracharak of the Sangh" were Mr. Nani Palkhiwala's words.

At a press conference, while in Mumbai, Balasaheb had to face several round of questions by journalists, especially those asking about the Sangh's concept of the Hindu nation or about the definition of the term 'Hindu'. Balasaheb's answers were very logical and rational. "All those, who live in this country are indeed Hindu by virtue of their values and their culture. 'Hindu' is a way of life, it is an ideology" Balasaheb clarified. "Why are followers of other religions not allowed at the Shakha?" was one of the questions posed. "It is the Hindus, who ask this question" he exclaimed. "Should followers of other religions want us to inculcate value and virtue in their children like we do to the Hindu community, we would be only too willing to do so. We would definitely welcome them!" said Balasaheb in reply to the question.

"Bharat, our Motherland, our Mother, is ours. All the great souls born in this land are respectable for all and this fact, every person, who wishes to come to

the Shakha, must accept and acknowledge. May those, who follow the religion that arrived here from outside the country not forget that it was in this soil that their forefathers were born. That is all that I expect" he had said, his words making plain, his stand.



The Sangh's influence

The Sarsanghachalak was touring the country across its length and breadth. The emergency period long over, the elections had been conducted and the Janata Party government was now in power. The respected Sarsanghachalak was undertaking special effort in order that the Sangh be able to reset focus and return to its work, putting behind it, all the unpleasantness of the emergency period. While in Delhi on one of his tours, Babu Jagjivanram, who was the Deputy Prime Minister at the time, expressed his wish to see Balasaheb. But Balasaheb was busy and pleaded inability to spare the time. He however assured Babu Jagjivanram that he would definitely see him on his subsequent tour to Delhi.

Balasaheb did visit Delhi and Babu Jagjivan Ram invited him over for a meal. Accompanied by Lala Hansraj Gupt, Balasaheb arrived at Jagjivan Ram's home. In the talks that ensued, Jagjivan Ram whole-heartedly lauded the work of the Sangh. "I do not talk openly about the Sangh but the fact remains that I have great regard for the work the Sangh does" he made it a point to add. He then went on to share his grievance. The Janata Party government was in power. Leaders of different parties and belonging to different streams of thought were part of the government. In the light of what happened during the emergency and in consideration of national interest, they ought to have buried the hatchet. But exactly the contrary was happening. Jagjivan Ram expressed deep regret that Chaudhary Charan Singh, a minister in the Janata party government, often insulted him.

He requested Balasaheb to talk to Charan Singh and sort the issue. Having heard him out, Balasaheb asked him why he did not directly address the issue to Charan Singh. Jagjivan Ram however, was of a different view. He felt, that if Balasaheb intervened, it would certainly make a better impact. "Chaudhary Charan Singh is not a Swayamsevak of the Sangh and so my intervention has its own limitations. But if I get the opportunity, I will certainly talk to him" Balasaheb assured Babu Jagjivan Ram.

After a few days, Balasaheb received a message from Chaudhary Charan

Singh. He wished to meet Balasaheb and the meeting did take place. Charan Singh had a complaint too! "The Prime Minister Mr. Morarji Desai does not treat me with due respect" he said. "He says I am not a national leader. I am a leader of a modest social community. He keeps deriding me. Please tell him to stop this." Balasaheb listened to him. He always gave a calm and patient hearing to people, who spoke to him and that was what he did.

These two instances would suffice to demonstrate how big an influence the Sangh was during the tenure of the Janata Party government. The Sangh on its part, never took advantage of it though. The work of the Jan Sangh leaders, in the Janata Party government was very impressive and efficient and that precisely was what piqued the others. They were sour and resentful. With a huge and well-connected network of workers at their disposal, the ministers belonging to the Jan Sangh delivered much better on all fronts and a few members of the Janata Party felt threatened and worried that they might prove ineffectual. The insecurity resulting from what they viewed as a precarious situation, prompted them to make moves to the disadvantage of their own government.

Mr. Madhu Limaye and Mr. Raj Narain began making open allegations that the Jan Sangh leaders in the government stood firm by their allegiance to the Sangh. The Socialists insisted that the Jan Sangh leaders in the government sever ties with the Sangh. But since the Swayamsevak believes, that he is first a Swayamsevak and all else comes after that, the Jan Sangh leaders dismissed this demand of the Socialists, point blank! The workers and the ministers of the Jan Sangh both made their stand very clear: they were ready to step down from their posts and resign from ministership as the case may be. Under no circumstances were they going to cut off from the Sangh. No way!

The Sangh is not a political party in any case. It is a socio-cultural organization. Moreover, during the period of the emergency, it was these very people, who had taken help of the Sangh, who had pleaded with the Sangh to extend support. Their differences with the Sangh did not matter at that time, did they? And now, after the government was formed, the anti-Sangh feelings of these people had suddenly surged up to boil over!

On one occasion, Balasaheb happened to run into the President of the Janata Party, Mr. Chandrashekhar at the Nagpur Airport. In those days, Mr.

Chandrashekhar was the proverbial 'young turk'. This was a chance meeting. So the talks did not involve anyone apart from the two. Balasaheb elucidated the stance of the Sangh in no uncertain terms:

"The Sangh will not ever compromise on its ideology and principles. As regards the national interest and the national security, the Sangh has been a guard - vigilant and alert. And so the Sangh will not tolerate anti-national activity – neither on the part of a political party nor on the part of an organization nor even on the part of an individual. The office bearers of the Sangh do not share a political platform with any political party but the Swayamsevaks can very well be part of a political forum. They are free to associate with any political party. They may well join a political party of their choice if they so wish; but the Sangh would definitely insist that they discharge their work with responsibility. The Jan Sangh has merged into the Janata Party. We do not interfere in their affairs. By virtue of the values that the Sangh gave them, the job they do, will undoubtedly be done with honesty and discipline. And the nation's interest must at any rate, be above all else, it must be supreme" said Balasaheb to Mr. Chandrashekhar.

Finally, making allegations of dual loyalty, some very tenacious and obstinate people with dogged views, refused to see reason and went on to topple the Janata Party government. The country had voted them to power, pinning all its hopes and expectations on them. It did not bother them that this amounted to letting the people down. In the times that followed, they did suffer the consequences of their actions though. The members of the Jan Sangh then went on to form the 'Bharatiya Janta Party' in 1980. An analysis of the bitter experiences of the past, had, perhaps, led them to areas which they looked upon as vulnerable and so needed mending; or for other reasons best known to them, the Bharatiya Janta Party, shedding its customary ideology, adopted a new outlook viz. that of liberal socialism. In the initial phase, this newly formed party liked to believe that it had opted for this so-called liberal outlook to expand its patronage among the people. But actually speaking, this was not at all required.

Liberalism is not something the Hindu culture and tradition needs to be taught. No person in the world can ever have exhibited as much liberalism towards any other, as the Hindu has. It is precisely out of this sentiment and

for this reason, that the minorities of the world receive a warm welcome in this country. Communities that were in dire states, miserable and penniless, arrived here; they grew, flourished and prospered. What in the world is this an indication of, if not the Hindu magnanimity? The Bharatiya person therefore, does not need to adopt the foreign ideological concepts of liberalism. Eventually, the fact did dawn on the Bharatiya Janta Party too, but in the meanwhile, an important incident took place and I wish to share it.

While the supposed liberal socialism was still in the tryout stages, a senior leader of the Congress Party contacted the Sarsanghachalak and invited him over for a meal. Incidentally, the Sangh has singular and unwavering faith in its ideals but it does not consider followers of other ideologies to be its enemies. So the swayamsevaks and the pracharaks of the Sangh have cordial relations with one and all.

Coming back to where we left off, Balasaheb accompanied by Abaji Thatte, went over to this leader's place. The leader of the Congress party poured out his sentiments. "I am now old. Honestly speaking I did not wish to contest elections this time. It was only because the higher-ups insisted, that I did. At any rate, this will be the last one of my life. I have no aspiration or interest left. But there is this one thing that tugs at my heart. The Bharatiya Janta Party did not do the right thing to shed their customary ideology of liberal Hinduism. At least this party ought not to give up their Hindu stance. How would the Bharatiya Janta Party be different from the Congress then? If there is a salvaging option for the country, it is the 'Hindutva'. The positive effects of the Hindu ideals and outlook will show, if not today, then tomorrow! In the times to come, it is going to be a party with the Hindu outlook that will be in power and that is going to be the country's best era" the leader had said.

Balasaheb listened to these words very calmly. It was his specialty – he always listened calmly to every person, who spoke to him. Anyway, the events that unfolded in the country in the course of time, are history. We all know it. Moreover, the Bharatiya Janta Party went on to define clearly, its liberal Hindu stance; and that was when the party spread out its wings. The words of this leader, who had felt the pulse of the masses and gauged the future, have come true. We are experiencing the truth of his predictions at this moment. Need we say more?



'The Virat Hindu Sammelan'

Time passed by and the Sangh continued its journey with it and in keeping with it. Those were days when the Sarsanghachalak was travelling extensively. Respected Guruji had once said, that his place of residence was the railway compartment. On assuming the post of 'Sarsanghachalak', Balasaheb also took to similar rigorous travelling. Abaji Thatte, who had worked as the personal secretary to ShreeGuruji, was Balasaheb's personal secretary too. So, among other matters, chalking out tours had become easy for Balasaheb. In the course of his tours, Balasaheb very minutely observed the society around; and gave a hearing to the Swayamsevaks. He even had talks with persons of repute. The atmosphere in the country was disturbed and disconcerted. At the elections held after the emergency period, the country taught a lesson to the government that had declared the emergency in the first place. But owing to the negativity of a few, the government that the people voted to power could not retain its power and its position. The elections were held again and once again Indiraji became the Prime Minister of the country.

In the meanwhile, dissolving the Jan Sangh, the Bharatiya Janta Party was born. Shedding its original principles, this party launched a new experimental concept. The party workers, who were committed to the Sangh felt let down and hurt. The Swayamsevaks too, were totally at sea about what was going on. They carried their grievances and indignation to the Sarsanghachalak. It was around the same time, that incidents like the one at 'Meenakshipuram' happened. Two thousand families had converted to another religion. The Sant-Mahanta felt concerned. Apart from them, cautious and vigilant political parties, that were closely following the prevailing social circumstances, were shocked. The Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi too had openly expressed concern over the incident which fact was sufficient to indicate the gravity of the matter. She had made an appeal to the Shankaracharya of all the four institutions and to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh as well to look into the matter. This kind of a religious conversion could prove a threat to the country, she felt.

The Sangh, of course very worried, contacted the two thousand families, of Meenakshipuram, that had undergone the religious conversion. On finding out what their grievances were and what sort of injustice they had been subjected to, the Sangh set about suitable remedial measures. At the same time, the Sangh took up the mission of bringing about an awakening among the people. In the meanwhile a huge Hindu summit was being organized in the capital, New Delhi. Actually speaking, the Sangh had nothing as such to do with the event. But all work that is undertaken in the interest of the Hindus, though not initiated and executed by the Sangh, is accepted and supported by the Sangh, like it were its own. The Sangh was however, not involved in the organization of the summit

- the 'Virat Hindu Sammelan'. Dr. Karan Singh, the son of Hari Singh, the Maharaja of the princely state of Kashmir and a leader of the Congress Party, was to preside over the summit.

The preparations for this event in New Delhi, were in full swing. Then for reasons unknown, Dr. Karan Singh suddenly chose to relinquish the Presidentship and distanced himself completely from the summit. Naturally, the responsibility of making the summit a success now fell on the shoulders of the promoters of the event. Indiraji was very keen that the summit be held. But, who would come forward and accept the challenge of conducting the summit at such a short notice? Without any apprehensions, Indiraji contacted the Delhi office of the Sangh. Her secretary discussed the issue with Balasaheb's secretary Abaji Thatte. "Indiraji is extremely keen that the 'Virat Hindu Sammelan' happen. In fact, she insists that it must. She wishes that the Sangh take charge and organize the event." This was the message that her secretary conveyed to Abaji.

It was during Indira Gandhi's term that a ban was imposed on the Sangh and here she was, the same Indira Gandhi, requesting the Sangh to extend support in organizing the Virat Hindu Sammelan! Seemingly ironical, but very much true!

Putting the unpleasantness of the past behind it, the Sangh agreed to the request and took charge of the organization of the event. The above instance would suffice to prove that neither does the Sangh hold on to grudges nor does it act out of vengeance. The Sarsanghachalak immediately called a

meeting of the senior workers of the Sangh and those of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, in Delhi. In the meeting, the decision to take charge of organizing the Virat Hindu Sammelan was taken; and the plan of the work it entailed, was chalked out. It was also decided that Bhagwati Singhji, the Maharana of Mewar, who was the President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, would preside over the Virat Hindu Sammelan.

Maharana Bhagwati Singh was a great personality. In the land of Mewar, was born many a valiant person like Bappa Rawal, who had sacrificed his life for the cause of the nation and of the dharma. Bhagwatisinhji belonged to the same tradition. There were some families in Rajasthan, who wished to return to their original faith. The Sangh had assigned the responsibility to its senior pracharak, Moropant Pingle. These families were worried that they may not be accepted by the community after returning to Hinduism, their original faith. They therefore asked Moropantji if Maharana Bhagwati Singhji would accept them. Moropantji laughed and said, "Sure he will accept you. And it does not stop at that. He will also have a meal with you!" The families were very relieved and reassured by these words. Later, Maharana Bhagwati Singhji really did have food with the lakh and fifty thousand people in a grand event. As part of the event, all these families returned to the Hindu dharma after collectively performed appropriate rites.

That was he! The Maharana Bhagwati Singhji, who became the President of the Virat Hindu Sammelan! The event he presided over was a great success, which obviously pleased Indiraji. For the second time over, Indiraji could get a taste of the Sangh's capacities. Indiraji's secretary then called Abaji to convey gratitude. "Is there a message for Indiraji from the Sarsanghachalak?" the secretary asked. "Rescind article 370 and implement the Uniform Civil Code in the country. If that happens, Balasaheb Deoras will personally felicitate you in a public function". So he wrote to Indiraji in response to her secretary's question.

Some time after this, the assembly elections of JammuKashmir took place. The 'National Conference' was in power then and it was expected, that they would retain their power at the elections. Indiraji had to fall back on the Hindutva issue in the Jammu-Kashmir elections. So, in places where the Congress was winning scanty seats, it ended up winning a thumping majority.

The Bharatiya Janta party, on the other hand, had only one seat to its credit. Although the hard way, they had learnt a lesson! The lesson was, 'changing the original ideology and thoughts, gets one nowhere'. It had proved pointless.

Following these elections Indiraji's approach and outlook with regard to the Sangh began to change drastically. Sanjay Gandhi died in a plane crash. On this sad occasion, Balasaheb requested to meet her as he wanted to convey his condolences. However, it later came to light that Indiraji's secretary had not conveyed this request to her. "I would have liked it if in this situation, I could have met Balasaheb" she is known to have said. It was obvious that she was not aware that Balasaheb had indeed asked to see her.

Anyway, Balasaheb expressed his condolences through his response in the newspaper. A little later, Indiraji was assassinated and they could not meet in person. It never happened.



Within the country and outside it

The Virat Hindu Sammelan was a success, highlighting one more time, the efficacy and the capability of the Sangh. Mrs. Indira Gandhi had on her own, thanked Balasaheb for making it a success. The event over, the Sangh redirected attention to its usual work. The representatives of the Hindu community from the world over, who had participated in the event, now came in contact with the Sangh. Most of them, not associated with the Sangh until then, brought to light several issues in the course of the information they shared.

The Hindu community is scattered all over the globe. It is their diligent and industrious temperament that has earned them wealth. Moreover, the benefit of these qualities, not limited to them personally, profits also the countries in which they reside. But this community never forgets its motherland. Whenever their country is struck by calamity or disaster, it is this community that is the first to rush to its help. However, when calamity strikes them, there is sadly nobody in sight – neither to offer support nor to stand by them.

The developed countries, in which Hindus have lived and prospered, do certainly appreciate their achievements; and confer on them, the honour due to them. But in the underdeveloped countries, the prosperous Hindu used to be an object of resentment. Conspiracies to strip them of their wealth were hatched. In those days, hate and resentment against the Hindus had engulfed the African nations, generating a feeling of insecurity in the minds of the Hindus living there and also of those living in the Caribbean Island Nations.

Green eyed about the possessions of the Hindu industrialists and businessmen, a few local aggressive groups in the African nations, looked at them covetously. These violent groups then incited misleading and malicious stories that the Hindus had earned their wealth by exploiting them, which of course were far removed from reality.

The Hindu community had, as a matter of fact made abundant contribution towards the progress and prosperity of the countries they lived in. The Hindus

had even extended help and support to the native inhabitants from time to time. The Hindu industrialists and businessmen put in considerable effort to boost employment. The contribution of the Hindus in the domain of education and that of medicine has been commendable. But the violent groups spreading hate against the Hindus, managed to veer public attention away from these acts of goodness.

The Hindus did have to bear the brunt of the anti Hindu campaign launched in the African countries; and also to a certain extent in the Caribbean Island nations; but the



Chamanlalji and a few others at the Mumbai Airport, see off Bhaura Deoras, as he left for his first overseas tour



The honourable Atal Bihari Vajpayee along with Sheshadriji among others at the first Vishwa Sangh Shibir, Bangalore

importance of organized existence became evident to them. Earlier, owing to the efforts of the Sangh, the Hindus in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia had already become organized, but now organizations in these countries working for the welfare of the Hindus, consciously worked in their interest especially in the face of calamities. It was around this time that 'The Hindu Council of Africa' was founded.

From time to time, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had been organizing a convention of the Hindus of the world. The Virat Hindu Sammelan however, brought a much larger cross section of the Hindu community in contact with the Sangh. It brought to the fore, bare and direct, the problems of the Hindus living in the African nations and in the Caribbean island nations. At the time, Laxmanrao Bhide was already in charge of the Sangh's work abroad. When Balasaheb learnt about the problems the Hindu community faced, he deputed Bhaura Deoras, RajjuBhaiyya and Sheshadriji abroad and obtained details of the prevailing circumstances. Then began the task of reassuring the Hindus in the African countries, as they were feeling insecure.

The Sangh had a comforting message for them: "The Sangh stands behind

you and by your side. Have no fear." Actually speaking the Bharatiya government should have been discharging this duty. A country ought to take care of the interest and the security of the people, who originally belong to it, regardless of their citizenship or even of their country of residence. The Bharatiya government was however, quite negligent about the Hindus living abroad. They could have made a very useful contribution to the progress of our nation, had the government not been so persistently apathetic towards them. Of the many reasons that had led to the insecurity of the Hindu community in the African and in the Caribbean Island Nations, the indifference of the Bharatiya government definitely counted as one.

The Sangh however, did all it could to offer protection to the people of the community and to their property as well. More importantly, the Sangh brought the Hindus of the world together and united them in a bond. Dissolving all distinctions of caste and sect, the Hindus of the world, could rally under a common Hindu umbrella so to say and this went on to prove a great advantage to the Hindus abroad. The bond of unity boosted their confidence. By then, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had been established in several regions across the globe and this kept providing the necessary moral support to the process of organizing the Hindus. Balasaheb was extremely mindful and vigilant as far as protecting the interest of the Hindu abroad was concerned and it was for this very reason, that he watched with a keen eye, the work of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

There is a marked change in the circumstances today. The Bharatiya Prime Minister is given a truly magnificent welcome abroad. The Hindus working in the Islamic countries too, attend the Prime Minister's functions with confidence. Not only has the government begun to take steps to protect the interest of the Bharatiya community abroad, it is also going all out to ensure that the Bharatiyas, who are foreign nationals remain connected with their country of origin. This definitely deserves special mention. Had the earlier governments resorted to this course, it would have been our country that would have profited from it. Moreover, this stand would have transmitted to the Hindus the world over, the message that their motherland had not disowned them. But sadly, that was not to be. The Sangh however, very lovingly discharged this responsibility.

Balasaheb did not travel abroad but he had more wisdom and knowledge than a person, who might have seen the world. He was, of course, a keen follower of the goings on inside the country too. The separatist activity in Punjab presented a grave challenge to the nation. A plot to segregate from the nation, alienate the Sikh community that was known for its unsurpassed patriotism was hatched. The involvement of a foreign hand was evident. Under the circumstances, Balasaheb gave instructions that the Swayamsevaks residing abroad step up contact and connection with our Sikh brothers residing in those countries. In the year spanning 1982-83, a forum by the name 'The World Organization of Hindu Sikhs' was formed in Africa. The Sikhs the world over thus received a message that was positive and reassuring; not to mention the befitting reply that was transmitted automatically to the few strayed handful, who had undertaken a smear campaign against the Sangh.

The tribal regions of the country required special attention, so Balasaheb began to feel. Work in these regions had already begun. Dr. Hedgewar had felt the need for intensive work in the tribal area and later on, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram established due to ShreeGuruji's inspiration, furthered the cause. But considering the huge expanse of the country and the extensive stretches of the tribal regions, there definitely was a need to give momentum to the work; and even increase its scope.

In order to fulfil this purpose, Balasaheb appointed pracharaks on a larger scale in these regions. The endeavour yielded marked returns. To ensure the spread of education on a larger scale, the Ekal Vidyalayas were set up here. The Ekal Vidyalay is a single teacher school. In regions that are backward, and where education has never touched the lives of people, the Ekal Vidyalay imparts education upto the fourth class. To continue further education, one has of course to go to a regular school. In the tribal areas, even the basic primary education assumes vital importance. These Ekal Vidyalayas receive not just children but the aged too. The syllabus ranges from the local language to basic mathematical functions. This has succeeded in protecting the 'Vanvasi's from some sly persons, who had been taking them for a ride owing to their illiteracy.

People from other religions professed to have worked in the tribal regions but the basic purpose that had motivated their seva projects, was 'religious

conversions'. The work of the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram not only put a stop to the conversions; but also brought into the main stream, the tribal population that had remained cut off from it. Many dedicated urban people began to display interest in the work carried out in the tribal area. However, in consideration of the vast regions of tribal population and of the need for the development of the Ekal Vidyalayas, Balasaheb appointed Shyamji Gupt, a senior pracharak to take up intensive work in the region and in fact go at it hammer and tongs. Balasaheb suggested that he opt for Ranchi as the location of his main office as the area had a dense tribal population; as it was here, that the foreigners were bringing about conversions.

The Ekal Vidyalay successfully brought about an awakening among the tribals; and on a large scale at that. The instances of exploitation dropped considerably. Education spread in the area and the diligence of the tribals received encouragement too. Most importantly, the cunning locals, who exploited their ignorance and their naivety, had their plot busted. The Ekal Vidyalayas and the work that the Sangh initiated in the tribal regions are growing. Work as always, goes on tirelessly. But a special mention above all, to the Hindu community the world over, that makes a very generous contribution towards this noble cause!



Unity in Diversity

Following the incident of conversion that happened at Meenakshipuram, the Sangh became alert and cautious. Hindu organizations were established in several places in Southern Bharat. The 'Hindu Munnani' is one such established by the Sangh. This organization began directing efforts towards effacing distinctions of caste and creed. Also, it adopted a very fervent stand against religious conversion. This organization even set about weaning back to the original dharma, all those, who had undergone conversion. The attempts were proving fruitful. While on the one hand, this work was underway in the South, Punjab was witnessing horrific violence owing to the demand for Khalistan.

If politics takes precedence over national interest, the harvest to be reaped is bound to be bitter, in fact dreadful. The Khalistan movement was a classic example. Those, who made a demand for Khalistan were initially reinforced for political vested interests, viz. the acquisition of power in Punjab and then given undue importance. This separatism eventually went on to assume unmanageably huge proportions; and literally blew up in the face of those, who had pumped up the separatists. But it was the nation that bore the brunt and suffered damage. Punjab is a border state and has Pakistan just across its borders as its neighbour. Pakistan, forever driven by ill will towards Bharat, saw an opportunity here and lapped it up.

The strayed and misled people in favour of Khalistan began a series of violent acts in Punjab and carnage was often in the news. The Sangh was certainly not going to lay back and be a spectator to the events. The respected Sarsanghachalak gave orders, that efforts be taken to clear the misconstruction of the Sikhs, that they were a different lot, alienated from the rest. In 1981, the Sarsanghachalak himself travelled to Punjab. He addressed an audience of about eight thousand Swayamsevaks in uniform, at the Gurugobind Singh stadium, Jalandhar.

The Sarsanghachalak had probably had a premonition much beforehand that terrorists could go on a rampage in Punjab. It was perhaps for this reason,

that he had already set about efforts for unity in Punjab. However, not all were aware of the danger that lurked round the corner. And so, with political interest at heart, the demands of the separatists were being reinforced; the covert motive of those at play being to establish their rule in Punjab.

Nobody cared if the nation had to bear the brunt. However, the Sangh went all out, doing all it could in its power and means, to establish peace in Punjab. Had these efforts received support from the others, thousands of citizens would not have had to lose their lives. But that was not to be.

The Sangh had cautioned the nation just when the violence began in Punjab. For the cause of the Hindu-Sikh unity, Yadnyadatta Sharma, a Swayamsevak of the Sangh went on a hunger strike that lasted 45 days. "Of my two eyes, one is Keshdhari and the other, Sahajdhari!" he had said. The Sangh respectfully addressed the Sikhs as the 'Keshdhari'. The Sikhs tried persuading Yadhyadatta Sharma as much as the Hindus did, to end the hunger strike. Only after the Hindus and the Sikhs together pledged, that there would be no distinction and the two communities would remain united, that he agreed to call off the hunger strike.

Those pressing for Khalistan, looked upon the Sangh, as their downright enemy. They massacred many Swayamsevaks. But the respected Sarsanghachalak's message had been, "Be prepared and willing to sacrifice your life in the interest of the nation. Prevent a second partition in the country, even if it costs you your life." These words were enough to fire up the Swayamsevaks and so Shakha sessions were bravely held even in areas predominantly targeted by the terrorists. "Try to persuade the Sikh brothers to attend the Shakha" These were the instructions that the Swayamsevaks received from the Sangh. The stance gradually gained ground leaving the terrorists disconcerted. To teach the Sangh a lesson they attacked a Shakha session in progress at Moga.

This attack, launched on 25th June 1989, claimed 25 lives and left many injured. The attack was meant to deter. "We are going to refrain from reaction" was the Sangh's message for the Swayamsevaks. And despite this horrific attack, the very next day the Shakha session was conducted at the very same place. This is a more than obvious indication of the high morale of the Swayamsevaks and of their commitment to the cause. The courage of the

Swayamsevaks in any case had a very positive impact on the people of Punjab.

The people of Punjab began to talk openly about the separatist terrorists. Terrorist activity in Punjab abated as the public went against it. I would like to mention one thing at this point: The separatists were being instigated by Pakistan. Among the Khalistani terrorists, were ISI agents, who had arrived from the Punjab province in Pakistan. Eventually, these facts did come to light; but by then, it was too late, as thousands of innocent lives were lost. Pakistan was never a friend of Bharat and was never going to be – a fact that was proved one more time and beyond doubt!

When they realized that it was all Pakistan's ploy to cause a rift in the country, the misled persons asking for Khalistan, were forced to come back to their senses. They had played into the hands of Pakistan, it was as clear as day. Separating from Bharat meant a bleak future, so it dawned on the youth, who had joined the terrorist gang. The impact of this realization began to show and it took the heat out of the terrorist and separatist drive. Peace gradually set in and in the decade of the 90s, Punjab was back to normalcy.

The Sangh is active and alert in the east, in the west, in the north and in the south. It is thus that the Sangh always becomes aware of the impending dangers to the nation, much before the others do. The Sangh also knows how to counter the calamity that strikes the nation and it stakes all strength for the purpose. The sacrifice of the swayamsevaks in Punjab and their willingness to put their lives on the line for the nation more than endorses the above statement. So then, why would the Sangh ever feel the need to reply to any spiteful campaign against it? They consider it totally superfluous!

The respected Sarsanghachalak has always given this one message to the Sangh: "Do not be concerned about what your opponents and critics have to say. Do not lose sight of your purpose. Be focussed and keep working. The nation has to attain supreme glory and we have to put in sustained effort, we have to toil to achieve this objective." It is thanks to these words that the Swayamsevak stands firm, undaunted. He is never deterred. The Sangh has taken flak like nobody else has; and yet has never stopped growing. The reason behind this, is the unflinching faith of the Swayamsevak.

The pracharaks of the Sangh travel to different states. The pracharak in the north travels to the south if delegated there. Those working in the south are willing any time to go east. While working in a particular state, they blend in with the culture, the essence of that state and to such an extent that the state becomes their own, and they, of the state. This is because the Sangh believes, that every state of the country is theirs, their very own; every language of the country is theirs, their very own. So we say, 'Unity in diversity - the Hindu specialty'. True indeed!



Balasaheb's foresight

Back from a tour of Punjab, Balasaheb was extremely restless. Attempts to cause a rift between the Hindus and the Sikhs would spell doom for the country and that he was sure about. They had to be nipped in the bud and the Sarsanghachalak decided that an independent organization, dedicated to the purpose, would have to be formed for the purpose. So the 'Rashtriya Sikh Sangat' came into being. Sikh Swayamsevaks of the Sangh were entrusted with the responsibility of this organization. The awareness that there were political vested interests at play, behind the plot to separate the Sikhs from the Hindus, was the message that went across from the platform of the organization. In the initial phases, it was for the most part, the Sikhs, who attached themselves to the 'Rashtriya Sikh Sangat' but with the passage of time others joined in too.

'Guru Gobind Singh gave to the Sikh community its very own, unique and special identity viz. that of the protectors of the dharma', said Balasaheb recalling this chapter in history. Thousands of years down the ages, several schools of thought and numerous sects have enjoyed a peaceful co-existence in Bharat. There is no denying that there have been moments of discord; but viewed across the thousands of years of history, admittedly, the times of amiable co-existence have exceeded by far, those of conflict. But the fact remains, that every such time that the discord among the sects and the schools of belief escalated beyond measure, it had a debilitating effect on the society. The foreign aggressors naturally took advantage of the situation. But we just did not learn a lesson from our history. We kept making the same mistake.

Take the practice of untouchability. A practice as harmful and damaging as untouchability had persisted in the society. Hence the increased significance of social harmony! The respected Sarsanghachalak, who regularly travelled across the country and keenly observed the prevailing circumstances, was very much aware of the drawbacks in our society too.

He was therefore working on promoting social harmony on different planes.

With a view to enhancing the congruity among the different sects and schools of belief, all in any case, off shoots of the Hindu dharma, Balasaheb entrusted those who composed songs and poetry for the cause of the Sangh, with a special assignment. The Ekatmata Stotra, (a hymn in praise of solidarity) of the Sangh invokes gods and goddesses and recalls with reverence, the country's geographical structure, the rivers, the mountains, the saints and the holy men born here and the valiant men and women of this land. Great souls, eminent poets and artistes too are recalled with respect in this composition. Balasaheb wished that a hymn on the lines of the Ekatmata Stotra, that would connect and keep bound all sects and schools of belief belonging to the Hindu culture, be composed. This was it, the special assignment we just mentioned! In keeping with the instructions of the Sarsanghachalak, the persons concerned undertook the relevant study and within a short while, the 'Ekatmata Mantra' of the Sangh was ready.

In the Shakha sessions, the Ekatmata mantra began to be recited regularly alongside the Ekatmata Stotra. The impact showed. Not only did the Ekatmata Mantra convey respect for all sects and schools of belief but also strengthened the sentiment that they were part of the original, all-encompassing Bharatiya culture. There cannot be solidarity unless there is social harmony. There cannot be a powerful nation unless society is organized. That was precisely why Balasaheb attributed utmost importance to social harmony. The 'Samajik Samarasta Manch' founded by the Sangh, very passionately dedicated itself to this mission. The forum was active in every state of the country and Balasaheb had specially appointed pracharaks to work for it.

Balasaheb closely watched the operations of all the different organizations that were associated with varied fields. He attended their programmes and offered his guidance from time to time. He watched the work of the Vishwa Vibhag of the Sangh with equal meticulousness and attention. For years Laxmanraoji Bhide and Chamanlalji had been in charge of the Vishwa Vibhag of the Sangh. The Vishwa Vibhag was making good progress. But its director Laxmanraoji was now getting old. Balasaheb felt that the Vishwa Vibhag required a young pracharak and he chose Ravi Kumar Iyer, the young pracharak from Tamilnadu.

Ravi Kumar Iyer was an engineer and had passed out from the Madras University with a first class. Initially he worked for the Vidyarthi Parishad but was later delegated work related to the Sangh. The Sarsanghachalak himself entrusted him with the responsibility of the Vishwa Vibhag. Ravi Kumarji is a scholarly and well-read person, a thinker. He has authored excellent books that are contemplations over society and the nation. A skilled orator, Ravi Kumarji has a command over Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Malayalam and of course English not to mention Tamil, his mother-tongue. He strikes an affectionate chord with the overseas Bharatiyas, who easily connect with him.

Laxmanrao groomed and guided Ravi Kumarji. He made a team of the young men working in the Vishwa Vibhag. After the demise of Laxmanrao Bhide, the responsibility of the Vishwa Vibhag passed on to a young pracharak called Soumitra Gokhale. Soumitraji lives in the USA. Led by Soumitraji and Ravi Kumarji, the Vishwa Vibhag has made great progress.

Balasaheb had a remarkable knack for spotting talent. "Ravi Kumar Iyer is a man of great capacities and I have great expectations from him" Balasaheb often said. Ravi Kumarji still works as a pracharak for the Vishwa Vibhag.

The Sangh has spread out its wings in countries abroad. Every time I think of the expanse of the Sangh overseas, I naturally think of Balasaheb's ability to spot and groom talent. There was another young Swayamsevak from whom Balasaheb expected big things. He always spoke fondly of him. The name was Narendra Modi! At the time he was the regional pracharak for the state of Gujarat. Balasaheb called him over to Mumbai. In Mumbai, Balasaheb used to stay at my house. Yes I was indeed fortunate! Narendra Modi arrived at our place to see Balasaheb. "Continuing as a Swayamsevak of the Sangh, you are to start work in the field of politics." said Balasaheb to him. In keeping with these instructions Narendra Modi began working for the Bharatiya Janta Party in Gujarat.

The above conversation dates back to the year 1989. It is 27 years since and Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister of Bharat, a fact that bears testimony to Balasaheb's infallible knack of recognizing capability and to his farsightedness that saw really far into the future... and so clearly!

With constant travel, observation, contemplation and reflection taking up his time, Balasaheb was left with very little for rest. Moreover, continuous activity does tell on the body and Balasaheb's health manifested the effects of his strenuous life. He had diabetes and was stringent and meticulous about following diet restrictions. One after another, his co-workers with whom he worked and grew up, were going away, departing this life.

The demise of Madhavrao Mulye and of Appaji Joshi had left him deeply moved and upset. His younger brother Bhaurao Deoras too passed away. Dr. Hedgewar had paired the brothers, Bal and Bhau. But the pair had now split. Abaji Thatte, who was Guruji's personal secretary before he became Balasaheb's, also was not keeping good health. When Dr. Hedgewar launched the Shakha for children, little Bal had come to the Shakha accompanied by Eknath, i.e. Eknathji Ranade. But Eknathji too was no more. His passing away in particular had left Balasaheb deeply pained and grieving.

The 'pracharak' of the Sangh's work focus on their mission. They work with singular devotion, neither lured by any temptation nor tied down by worldly life. With their kind of dedication, there is hardly a thought to spare for other things, least of all for health. I have seen pracharak, who eat, if food is available, go without it if it is not; and over and above this, do not breathe a word of this to anybody. They travel miles on end on the bicycle or even on foot, no thought given to comfort or to rest. Not even their families can hold them back or lure them. After all the hardships, the health is bound to suffer but no complaints at all from the pracharak! Hard work is never an issue and all vicissitudes can be borne wearing a smile on the face but if one has to lose a fellow pracharak, a companion to death, can emotions be held back?

So it happened with Balasaheb. His friends, his companions, who were with him on his journey towards the goal that Dr. Hedgewar gave them; his companions, who grew up with him and were groomed along with him by ShreeGuruji, had departed from this world. Balasaheb anguished over the separation from his companions. Nobody ever knew what went on in his mind. He never allowed his emotions to get the better of him or to be reflected on the face. But it did hurt that his companions were no more and the pain remained buried deep in his heart. He directed the Sangh holding this pain in his heart.

He aimed at building a powerful nation by rendering the Hindus capable and competent and he was taking all possible effort to accomplish it. But at the personal level, he never let pain get the better of him and stand in the way of work. Never!



The Seva-projects grow

The Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the Vivekananda Kendra, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Din Dayal Shodh Sansthan were among the organizations established by the Sangh. Engaged in their respective work and mission they were active all over the nation and Balasaheb gave each of these, his due attention. No doubt they were spreading their wings but the respected Sarsanghachalak Balasaheb Deoras felt that there was surely a need and scope for further expansion, considering the immense expanse of the country.

With the passage of time the political and even the social problems assume changed looks. The water that flows under the bridge so to say, intensifies or escalates the old ones but even brings new ones to the fore. There is no alternative to seva – selfless, devoted service – if we have to tide over problems on the social plane. The scope and extent of the seva projects too have to expand and that in turn implies an increase in the number of Shakhas of the Sangh namely because the Shakha serves as a platform to organize society and facilitates the inculcation of values. It was for this reason, that Balasaheb always emphasized the need for increasing the number of Shakhas and with it, an enhanced attendance at its sessions.

The emergency period behind them, the Swayamsevaks had emerged confident and assured. Notwithstanding the government's disapproval, the general public had stood by them as they went through fire and water serving the mission. The people, who had so willingly supported them during tough times, would definitely help them to further the cause of national interest, so they trusted. What this called for, was connecting the people with the Sangh at varied levels. Work to this effect began right away. for instance, there were people, who held the Sangh and its mission in high regard, may they not visit the Shakha. Attempts were made to invite the participation of such individuals in the projects dedicated to a social cause.

In 1982 the Sangh held its three day 'Maha-shibir' (workshop on a mega scale) in Bangalore (Bengaluru). 21 thousand Swayamsevaks in full uniform

attended this event. The next, held in Maharashtra in 1983 was attended by as many as 35 thousand Swayamsevaks and the one subsequent to this, held in Jaipur, Rajasthan in 1987 was attended by a whopping 50 thousand Swayamsevaks. The Mahashibir was eventually conducted in every state of the country. The common people were watching, taking note of it all and the impact was showing. There were many, who visited the shibir and many others, who asked how they could be of help in the Sangh's mission. There were yet others, who lent support in their own humble way.

The attendance at the Sangh's training sessions was on the rise and the Sangh was growing in every way. However, that was by no means an indication of smooth waters. Of course there were challenges to counter and rough waves to battle. There were opponents lashing out at the Sangh with bitter criticism. The Swayamsevaks were even physically assaulted. The attacks were no more merely verbal, speaking of which reminds me of the instance at Kerala. The forces opposed to the Sangh launched frequent attacks on the Shakhas and assaults on the Swayamsevaks. A fitting reply was very much in order. To take the thrashing lying down is not our culture. We have to counter the attack, should we be targeted. Our gods and goddesses too, as we see, hold weapons, do they not? They fight the evil, the demonic forces and defeat them and that is the principle the Sangh believes in. They are the Sangh's ideals.

While on a visit to Kerala, a reporter informed Balasaheb that there was a threat to his life. "You roam freely here in Kerala. But know well, you are on the hit list" he cautioned. To that Balasaheb laughed and replied, "Oh it is not just me! It is all the Swayamsevaks. They are all on the hit list too! But that does not stop our work, in fact work has kept growing." The reporter was nonplussed by the response. In Kerala a hundred thousand Swayamsevaks in full uniform conducted the parade for the respected Sarsanghachalak Balasaheb Deoras. Over and above this, another hundred thousand were present on the occasion, not in uniform but well wishers of the Sangh for sure!

On learning how noble and worthy the Sangh's mission was, some of those, who had attacked the Shakha came up on their own and expressed repentance. In fact, some of them went on to become Swayamsevaks and

some others even became pracharaks of the Sangh. The Sangh opened its arms to welcome its one time vehement antagonists, now part of the very mission they opposed.

There happen to be declarations of a Sangha-free Bharat from some quarters. But the Sangh travels on, growing and resolute. The reason is that the Sangh does not fight for its existence. The Sangh exists for the well-being of the nation and of the society. Their interest is the purpose of its existence.

ShreeGuruji always said, 'Rashtraya swaha, Rashtraya idam na mama' (I offer all to the nation. Nothing belongs to me)" and that precisely is the Sangh's stand.

The Sangh's office in Kenya completed 40 years in 1987. The Swayamsevaks planned a grand event to commemorate the occasion. Yadavrao Joshi, a senior pracharak was invited to the programme. The Swayamsevaks from the three East African nations of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania were part of the event apart from others, who came down from Bharat. I was one of those. I delivered a talk and my theme was 'the influence of the mother power on the youth force'.

It is unfortunate that the Hindu society allows itself to be divided by caste. This incapacitates the society, makes it feeble. The Sangh therefore resolved to integrate this society that had permitted the fragmentation by castes and other social distinctions. 122 organizations of different castes and sects, rallied together under a common umbrella, forming an organization by the name 'The Hindu Council of Kenya'. This organization formed under the guidance of the Sangh continues in full strength and vigour even today. So, in the different African countries there are now several organizations of the Hindus inspired by the Sangh and operating under its the aegis. Later on in 1998, all the Hindu organizations of all the African countries came together under a principle central organization called 'The Hindu Council of Africa'. This organization, a vast body of all the Hindus across the whole of the African continent, is engaged in constructive activity. It is through this organization that the prosperous Hindus of the African countries make generous contributions towards the progress and social welfare of the African countries. Apart from working for the upliftment of the African people, this organization also sponsors the education of needy students and even awards

scholarships.

The work of 'The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh' began in the UK in 1966. In 1984 the 'Hindu Sangam' was organized at Bradford. Such a disciplined shibir of as many as six thousand Swayamsevaks drew the attention of the Scotland Yard, the metropolitan police force. They ordered a thorough investigation. They wanted to know when the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh was established, what its objectives and policies were, what kind of inclinations it had and so on. Officers of the Scotland Yard travelled to Bharat and paid a visit to the Sangh's offices in Nagpur and in Delhi. They were presented with the book 'Bunch of thoughts' written by ShreeGuruji.

The investigation over, the officers submitted their report. The work, the objectives and the policies of the Sangh had left them profoundly impressed. They found the work of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh to be constructive; and they even went a step further to recommend, that the government extend full co-operation and support to it. The mayor of London too, had then praised the organization.

In 2016, 'The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh' that was launched in London, completed fifty years of its noble work. A three day 'Mahashibir' from 29th July to 31st July to mark the occasion has been organized in London.



A hundred thousand Seva-projects – the solemn vow

After a horrific carnage, Punjab was gradually returning to peace. Life was trudging back on track. It was the people of Punjab, a state torn and racked by terrorist violence, who had actually changed the flow of events. They did it by standing together in unity. Here is an example stunning yet heartening! On one occasion, terrorists forcibly stopped a bus and ordered all but the Sikhs to get down. All the non-Sikh passengers were to be finished. But the Sikhs aboard the bus flatly refused. "If you must kill, kill us all. We are in this together!" was their bold retort. The terrorists had no choice but to spare them all. It was this kind of unity that brought Punjab back to peace; but unfortunately for the nation, in the state of Jammu-Kashmir, there was unrest owing to the anti-national and destructive activities of the separatists and they were escalating beyond measure.

The separatist movements in Jammu-Kashmir and in the North-Eastern states were fast gaining strength and momentum. Down South, the LTTE was a growing influence in Tamil Nadu. The unity and integrity of the country was under dreadful threat. It appeared that the decade of the 80s had come with a mountain of challenges. Snatching Kashmir from Bharat had, in any case, been Pakistan's most cherished dream; and fuelling terrorism in Punjab was part of their plan of fulfilling it. On the one hand, it was Pakistan, standing with all its might behind the terrorists in Kashmir and on the other, it was China providing aid to separatists in the NorthEastern states to spread unrest in Bharat.

The Sangh had a close eye on the events. These were not problems of the recent times. Their roots are entrenched deep in the country's past. The Sangh had from time to time cautioned the government and the people about them but its earnest words of caution were thrown to the wind and as it turned out, the country had to bear the brunt of it.

ShreeGuruji had alerted the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on the

Kashmir issue. He had advised against granting special status to Kashmir. It was bound to backfire, Guruji had warned. To Lal Bahadur Shastri, who succeeded Nehru, Guruji sounded the same kind of warning. The war of 1965 presented a golden opportunity of reclaiming all of Kashmir's land that had been ceded. "Let us not waste the opportunity!" Guruji had appealed to Shastriji. It was just so unfortunate that these words of wisdom fell on deaf ears! It was only a matter of a few decades, before the vicious effects of not having heeded good advice became challenges for the nation. The same went for the separatist activity in the North-East. The warnings that the Sangh gave from time to time were ignored. In order to strike down the separatist forces, the Sangh was extending its limbs in the North-East. The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad had purposefully increased their scope of work in those states and full-time workers were appointed in the region.

The Sangh was well aware of the widespread separatist activity and of the foreign hand in the conspiracy to trigger unrest by sponsoring this activity. So that our people may not become victims of this conspiracy of outside forces, Balasaheb pitched in all his strength and that too despite an ailing and frail body. He toured the entire country and awakened them to the plot at play against the nation. However huge or however perilous the conspiracy of the foreign forces be, as long as there was no rift in the society, these schemes were bound to prove futile. They were never going to meet with success. If the people stood firm and united, thwarting any anti-national plot, could have been easily accomplished. It was with this thought in mind that the respected Sarsanghachalak accorded utmost importance to organizing the society; and from time to time, stressed the need for unity.

In the year 1988, the Samajik Samarasta Manch organized programmes across the country in honour of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's death anniversary. From sadhus and saintly figures to our brothers of the tribal regions, everybody participated in the event. Persons, who had meticulously kept themselves away from the Sangh also happened to be participants. Some came on foot, some by bus, some rode a bicycle to the venue and others, a horse. The tribal brothers carried with them, the bow and arrow, their identity. The number of women participants ran into thousands. Then there were certain others, who arrived carrying the 'Dr. Hedgewar Jyoti' that they

had travelled places with. The grand scale on which the programme was organized at different places and its magnificence left people dazzled and stunned.

The newspapers could not but take note of this event. The Sangh's literature too was distributed on a massive scale. The event proved very fruitful as it was followed by a surge in the number of Shakhas. Some Shakhas commenced even in the tribal regions. In the face of the challenge posed by the separatist forces, the people can accomplish what the government cannot, so the Sangh believed and this event more than confirmed the view.

On the occasion of Dr. Hedgewar's birth centenary, the respected Sarsanghachalak Balasaheb had declared that the Sangh would be initiating a hundred thousand seva projects. Every single organization associated with the Sangh got going. A dream had to be fulfilled. The resolve that the Sarsanghachalak had made, implied huge funds and the Swayamsevaks went from door to door appealing to people to make a contribution. The Sangh was not asking for funds for its own sake. The money was required to further a noble cause after all and it was the Sangh's faith that the people would respond positively to the appeal. That was what exactly happened! The people made whole-hearted and very generous contributions towards the cause. They validated the Sangh's faith in them.

Contributions came from the labourers living on daily wages, from the poor farmers, the restaurant workers in the cities and they came from the wealthy citizens too – each in his own way, was part of the endeavour. The receipts bore amounts of hundreds of thousands as much as those of Rs 5 or even Rs 10. Housewives and students too did their humble bit. The aim, viz. that of transforming the society, making it a strong and healthy one, definitely called for work on an extensive scale. While work was in progress in the country, Balasaheb personally made trips to certain places and guided the process. His body was ageing and tired. But he never let his declining physical energies affect his travel schedule or his work.

Inspired by the Sangh there was immense seva work underway in the country. But the people needed to have a certain kind of verve, a fire and it was Prabhu Ramchandra, who could give it to them. This country with a history of thousands of years behind it, could receive this vigour, this drive

from Prabhu Ramchandra! And to think that attempts at liberating, opening up the site, where this very Prabhu Ramchandra was born, was not meeting with success! Justice was sought from courts of law as much as from the government but it was denied. Both these authorities seemed apathetic and the people ran out of patience. They could not take it anymore. A sweeping mass movement was an imperative need.

The locks opened. The locks that had kept shut, the Ram Janmabhoomi, the place of birth of Prabhu Shreeram, now opened. Worship began. The people had waited years and years for justice. When there is delay in justice, there is denial too and so having met with despair, despite long years of patient restraint, it was but natural that the people should feel they had reached the threshold of their tolerance levels. "To erect a magnificent temple on the birthplace of Prabhu Shreeramchandra, the pride and the glory of the nation, is the right of the Hindu community and its sacred duty as well" Balasaheb had affirmed openly.



Banned for the third time

Following the emergency period were times marked by extensive progress of seva projects for the Sangh. So those, who had been objecting to the Sangh, eased the frowns on their faces and softened their outlook towards the Sangh's work. It also happened that somewhere along praising the Sangh's work, a few of them began praising the Sangh. It dawned on them, that they had misconstrued the picture. The Sangh was not what they perceived it to be. So, the one time critics of the Sangh, now on the other side of the fence, found themselves expounding the specialties of the Sangh to the opponents. The Sangh gained steam and could consolidate its support among the masses. The people looked up to the Swayamsevak, who strove selflessly with the one life purpose he had at heart, viz. the national interest. The Swayamsevak had earned this respect and it lent momentum to the work of the Sangh.

We Bharatiyas are truly very fortunate. The history of this nation abounds in great men. From time to time, great men of stature tall in every sense, took birth in this land to direct society, to show us the way. It was in this land, that Shreeram and Shreekrishna manifested, for the purpose of protecting the virtuous. They fought, engaged in arduous strife to protect the good, the virtuous and efface the evil powers from the face of the earth. It is therefore that these great personalities inspire us, guide us about the steps to take and the path to choose in the given circumstances. If the nation has to receive vigour and vitality, we cannot afford to overlook Prabhu Ramchandra. This precisely was the reason and the thought behind the mega programme that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad organized in 1984 to liberate the 'Ramjanmabhumi', the site of Shreeram's birthplace.

A huge procession was organized from Seetamadhi in Bihar to the site of Ramjanmabhumi. The Ram-Janaki RathYatra was a procession that symbolized the journey of Mother Seeta from the house of her parents to that of her husband. Thousands joined this procession. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated at the time. Taking into account the gravity of this calamity that the country was faced with, the Rath-Yatra was postponed. On 23rd October 1985 the Rath-Yatra resumed its

course. The Mahanta of the Digambar Akhada in Ayodhya issued a threat to the government. "If the locks of the RamMandir are not opened before the Ramnavmi day, I will burn myself to death." Pressure was mounting on the government, to open the locks of the temple.

On 1st February 1986, the district court of 'Saket' ruled that the locks of the temple be opened. The orders of the court were executed with immediate effect sending a wave of exhilaration among the Hindu community of the world. It was a historic day indeed. It was as happy an occasion as the festival of Diwali and in several places it was celebrated on those lines. But on the other side, there were people, who were irked and agitated. A particular group was especially annoyed, let us be straight about that. No point denying it! Then there were also others, who, out of ignorance about historical facts, kept putting the sensitivity issue out on display, which was neither justified nor necessary. A nation's symbol of glory and pride must be supreme in the minds of all its citizens and ought to be supremely revered by all.

Self-serving and opportunistic leaders looked upon the situation as a perfect chance to create communal tension and induce insecurity among the people of a particular community. They declared that the Republic day of the year 1987 would be observed as a 'Black Day'. The Bajrang Dal took a firm stand against this mindless declaration. "You are free to decide your stance on the issue in question. However, should your decision happen to challenge or defy the honour and pride of the nation, be sure that will not be tolerated."

On 1st February 1989 the Vishwa Hindu Parishad convened the third Dharma Sansad at Prayag. A hundred thousand bhaktas of Prabhu Shreeram and thousands of SantMahanta attended the event. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad organized the Ram-Sheela Poojan (the worship of a brick meant to be used in the creation of the Ram Mandir) across the country. A minimum of one worshipped brick each, from every single locality of the country, was to be brought to Ayodhya. Truck loads of such bricks began to stream into Ayodhya. The first to perform the worship of the Ram-Sheela, was a dalit brother by the name Kameshwar Chaupal. There was even now, a stumbling block. So long as the old structure still stood in its place, a new one could not have been erected.

Vishwanath Pratap Singh was the Prime Minister then. He asked for four

months to resolve this issue. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad agreed to give him the time. But it decided all the same, to go ahead with the Kar Seva which they planned to commence on 30th October 1990 and for the purpose, established the Akhil Bharatiya Kar Seva Samiti. Mr. Ashok Singhal was appointed co-ordinator. Mr. Lal Krishna Advani, the president of the Bharatiya Janata Party set out on the Rath Yatra with the intention of educating the masses. The take off point was Somnath and the destination of course, Ayodhya. Karsevaks began pouring in from all corners of the country. The government of Uttar Pradesh did not let go of a single opportunity to obstruct them. I was part of the movement. I was assigned the responsibility of the 'Mumbai Vahini'. We were not allowed the possibility of reaching Ramjanmabhumi at all. We were arrested even before we could and dumped in the Jaunpur jail of Uttar Pradesh. But on our release, we made it to the Ramjanmabhumi site anyway.

Some Swayamsevaks had reached Ayodhya cutting across a distance of 250 km on foot. Orders of firing on the Karsevaks had been issued; and some of the Karsevaks did fall to bullets. Nevertheless, the Karsevaks hoisted the saffron flag atop the structure that actually stood in the way of building a new temple. The two brothers, Ram Kumar and Sharad Kumar Kothari, actually planted the flag atop the structure. Both fell to bullets. They were martyred.

Thousands of the agitating crowd were arrested and jailed. Mr. Lal Krishna Advani's Rath Yatra was blocked and he was arrested in Bihar. The Bharatiya Janata Party then withdrew its support to the Vishwanath Pratap Singh government, resulting in the fall of the government. In the subsequent months, the government led by Mr. Chandrashekhar came to power.

Prior to the subsequent Lok Sabha elections, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. P. V. Narsimha then assumed office. While this stream of events flowed, the Ramjanmabhumi movement gathered momentum once again. The media the world over, took note of this agitation in Bharat. The Virat Hindu Sammelan was held in Delhi and was attended by as many as a million people.

The governments that came to power have till today, ignored the sentiments of the Hindus, so the country's common man has always felt. For years, the Ramjanmabhumi issue lingered in the court and so did the ruling. How much

longer were the Hindus to hold on? And how much longer were they to keep restraint? Instead of taking cognizance of the issue and working on a solution, the government machinery tended to dump the issues in cold storage, which explains why, a movement so phenomenal had to be launched. Had there been political will, there would have been a way too! But disregarding the popular sentiment was a habit the rulers had willingly embraced. But the agitators were prepared to do whatever it took to build the Ram Mandir. What then unfolded, is history and we need not revisit it. But there is no denying, that the event stirred the political climate of the country and lent it a new course leading in a new direction. A game changer it was!

Mr. Kalyan Singh, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh at the time, handed in his resignation to the governor. On 10th December 1992 the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was banned under 'the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act'. This was the third time the Sangh was facing a ban.



Fervour until the last breath

The Ramjanmabhumi movement culminated in the imposition of a ban on the Sangh in December 1992. The Sarsanghachalak Balasaheb Deoras put his protest on record – upfront and bitter. He even wrote to the government in this regard. "The country is faced with gruelling times. And a ban on the Sangh in this trying situation? Why? This is flagrant injustice and the Sangh will fight it" he had said in the letter. He then went on to address the Swayamsevaks across the country: "This is another one of our tests. But know well, that the truth is on our side. We will brave the rough seas. Not stopping at the liberation of the Ramjanmabhumi, the people will go ahead and liberate the Shreekrishna Janmabhumi – the birthplace of Bhagwan Shreekrishna and the Shree Kashivishweshwarnath temple as well." Balasaheb's message to the Swayamsevaks was an expression of his trust that it would happen.

Down the centuries, foreign aggressors insulted us, vandalizing the temples that are the glory and the pride of the nation. How many years are the people supposed to tolerate this violation and endure this insult? They sought justice on the Ramjanmabhumi issue and waited long years for it. But even after years of patient endurance, if the decision is just not going to come, what in the world do we do? The Ramjanmabhumi movement, that was born of this situation, was indeed justified and Balasaheb stood firm by this view.

Attempts to seek justice were underway. No arrests were made though and the offices of the Sangh could conduct business as usual. It was just that the Shakha sessions could not be held. The Swayamsevaks sang the 'RamDhun' instead. The general public too participated in the gajar of Shreeram and the police did not object to it.

At the end of six months the ban was lifted. The Shakha sessions of the Sangh resumed with fresh zeal and there was in fact a dramatic addition of thousands to the existing ones. So, like on the first two occasions in the past, the ban imposed for the third time only ended up reinforcing the Sangh's strength and rendering it sturdier than before. All the same, it would be very

pertinent to mention, that this time the government adopted a mature stand; and avoided any drastic and harsh action against the Sangh. The Sangh commanded a solid backing from the masses; and this fact the government at the centre had had to acknowledge.

Mr. Narsimha Rao, who was the Prime Minister then, was a proficient and seasoned leader. Very well-read and learned, he had a command over several languages. Fortunately for the nation, this leader of pious inclination, had a very clear and real picture of the circumstances in his mind, which was, in any case, welcome.

While the country witnessed turbulence, Balasaheb's health was on the decline. His diabetes was producing other ailments. His health was failing but he sat strong and able in the leader's seat, making do with a liquid diet. His eyes were dry and he frequently had to be administered eye drops. His body now frail, Balasaheb's mind kept visiting the memories of his companions.

Balasaheb's personal secretary Dr. Abaji Thatte had not been too well either and Shrikantji Joshi had replaced him. Abaji had been admitted to a hospital in Nagpur. One after another, they were gone. Balasaheb's childhood companions had left this world. Madhavrao Mule, Eknathji Ranade, Appaji Joshi and Balasaheb's own brother Bhaurao Deoras departed from this world. The Bal-Bhau pair, so famous in the Sangh, had split. Balasaheb visited Abaji in the hospital. What he saw, made Balasaheb sad. Both were overwhelmed and could not hold back their emotions.

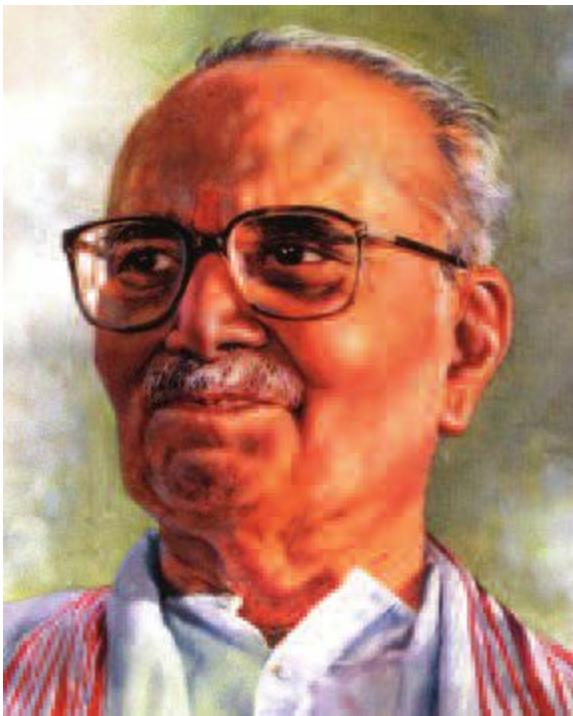
Even at this stage in life, Balasaheb was dutifully at his usual routine. The pain of his personal loss, his health, just nothing mattered and nothing stopped him. His health was bad and he had become dependent. He was chosen for the Lokmanya Tilak award but he could not travel to Pune to receive it. Mr. M. G. Vaidya received it on Balasaheb's behalf. His strength was giving way and his body was very weak. His intellect however, was as sharp as ever and his thinking capacities had the same edge that they always had. In 1993 there was a bomb blast in the Chennai office of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. 11 people were killed in the explosion. Only a little while before the blast, the Sangh had concluded a meeting. The blast occurred after the Swayamsevaks had left the office or else the damage could have been beyond imagination. The explosion left Balasaheb dejected and

sad. He wanted to go to Chennai and meet the Swayamsevaks. But considering his health, the doctors denied him permission to go and his health worsened. His body began to quake. The doctors were flustered. They had no choice but to grant him permission to go.

On board the flight to Chennai, the air hostess asked Balasaheb, "Grand father, what exactly is the purpose of your visit to Chennai?" The 'Grand father' must probably be going to the Apollo Hospital for treatment, she expected. "There has been a blast in the Sangh's office at Chennai and 11 persons have lost their lives. As the Sarsanghachalak, it is my duty to visit the site, offer my condolences to the grieved families and console them. I am going there to fulfil my duty!" the 'Grand Father' said. Baffled, all the air hostess could manage, was a pranam to Balasaheb.

Balasaheb arrived at the Chennai office in a wheelchair. The Swayamsevaks stood in a file. He was taken to every one of them. He had longed so much to meet them. Come what may, he wanted to and he did. This meeting gave him utmost satisfaction.

All the representatives of the different Sangh offices were to meet in a national level meeting on 11th march 1994 in Nagpur. This is considered a very important meeting and is attended by office bearers of the Sangh, active in different domains at the state and at the national level. They review and evaluate work done. Towards the end of the first session, an extremely important decision was announced. Balasaheb was stepping down from the post of Sarsanghachalak and Prof. Rajendra Sinh (Rajju Bhaiyya) had been appointed in his place. Actually speaking the Sarsanghachalak is a life time appointment. But Balasaheb changed the rule. "I am unable to do justice to this post because of my failing health. I therefore feel that I have no moral right to hold it" he said. He had chosen the new Sarsanghachalak much beforehand and had had talks on the subject with the seniors in the organization. The procedural formalities concluded very simply. In his address to the



*Prof. Rajendra Sinh
(Rajju Bhaiyya)*

Swayamsevaks the following day, Rajju Bhaiyya said, "Until today, we walked our path guided by Balasaheb and that is how it will be hereafter. We will walk on, under his guidance."

Balasaheb became 80 years old on 26th November 1995. The 'Sahasra-chandra darshan' function was organized on this occasion. He participated in the function in serene and contented joy. Good wishes and messages of felicitation poured in from all across the country and he accepted them graciously. By this time, his tours had stopped completely. But he was brought to Mumbai for a short period. In Mumbai, Balasaheb lived with us in our house. It has been my good fortune, that on every one of his visits to the city through 17 years, I could receive him as a host. My home has been blessed by his stay, his presence. For us, he was the head of our family and he on his part, expressed equal closeness and said, "Yes indeed! This is my very own family!" Every time he did so, was a fulfilling moment for us. But to see Balasaheb in the condition that he was, hurt very much.

The Kaushik Ashram in Pune was where the retired pracharaks lived and Balasaheb wished to stay there. Shrikant Joshi and I went to drop him. There, a precious treasure, a priceless moment came his way. He could watch on

television, Atal Bihari Vajpayee take the oath of Prime Minister of Bharat. A pracharak of the Sangh had become the Prime Minister of the nation! For Balasaheb it was a moment of ultimate gratification and of course, of pride.

His health deteriorated and he was admitted to the Ruby Hospital, (Ruby Hall Clinic) Pune. On 15th June 1995 his health worsened. His nephew Dr. Harshawardhan Mardikar and his wife Dr. Manjusha Mardikar along with their team of doctors, were trying their level best but they could not succeed. On 17th June 1995 at ten past eight late evening, Balasaheb was no more.

His soul had departed from the body to meet and join Dr. Hedgewar and ShreeGuruji. What a strange coincidence it was! Dr. Hedgewar departed from this world on 21st June 1940 and ShreeGuruji, on 5th June 1973. And now it was Balasaheb, who left us on 17th June. Strange indeed!

The three Sarsanghachalaks together lifted the Sangh to stupendous heights. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has today become the largest organization in the entire world. "The Swayamsevak ought not to be contented with his work, leave alone complacent. A keen and sustained drive, a passionate aspiration to keep going, to keep at the expansion of work, is what the Swayamsevak ought never to give up. Unless we acquire for the nation, the supreme glory, the supreme splendour that rightfully belongs to it, we will not have accomplished our mission. Until then, we do not rest." This is the Sangh's message and the Swayamsevaks will hold it in their hearts forever.



As we take leave...

What begins must end. It is now over a year since the series 'Chalta bolta itihas' based on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha, first appeared in the 'Dainik Pratyaksha'. No matter how much we speak about an organization, whose expanse stretches across countries and continents and has a history of 90 years behind it, we will never have said enough. And when I traced the history of the Sangh, I did, admittedly, have this thought at the back of my mind. I was a child when I began attending the Shakha sessions. I attend them even today and at 75 years, I feel the same zeal, the same eagerness that I felt as a child. What I saw and experienced about the Sangh has all gone into the body of this series. Incorporating in the series, every single thing associated with the Sangh, is an absolute impossibility though. The Sangh is an ocean, as immense as it is profound. The vastness, the scope and the reach of the Sangh can compare but with the ocean. How has it happened that this organization has kept growing, so resolute on the one hand and yet so simply smooth on the other, ask many. The resolve of the first Sarsanghachalak, respected Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, should put this question to rest.

The Sangh was not conceived as just another organization looking to unite the people. The birth of the Sangh was preceded by immeasurable contemplation on Dr. Hedgewar's part. He had explored and studied the real history of this country. It was these contemplations, that had given way to the realization of where exactly the cultural roots and the strength of this country lay. At the same time, he had given deep thought to the reasons why this country, with so rich a tradition, had been reduced to so sad a state. What exactly was the Achilles' heel in this case? Over thousands of years this nation countered the invasions waged by foreign aggressors. Be it for a brief period, a few of these invaders did meet with success; but they could not succeed in changing the dharma, the culture and the tradition of this nation - these stayed, they prevailed. Eventually, the foreign aggressors had to bow before this great dharma and this equally great culture. Those who did not, perished in the course of time.

Time and again, great men took birth in this land and brought home the glory

that rightfully belonged to the nation. When Alexander waged war on Bharat, there was no single empire or kingdom big enough to match his power and make him bite the dust. But size did not matter! Small as they were, the kingdoms existing at the time, did fight back and hounded the huge army of Alexander. All the same, the need for a large and powerful empire, that would protect the nation and bring progress, became evident to Acharya Chanakya. So the guru Chanakya and his disciple Chandragupta, the best in every sense, came together and created a mighty empire. So it kept happening in this country! Great souls took birth here in this soil and created everything out of nothing.

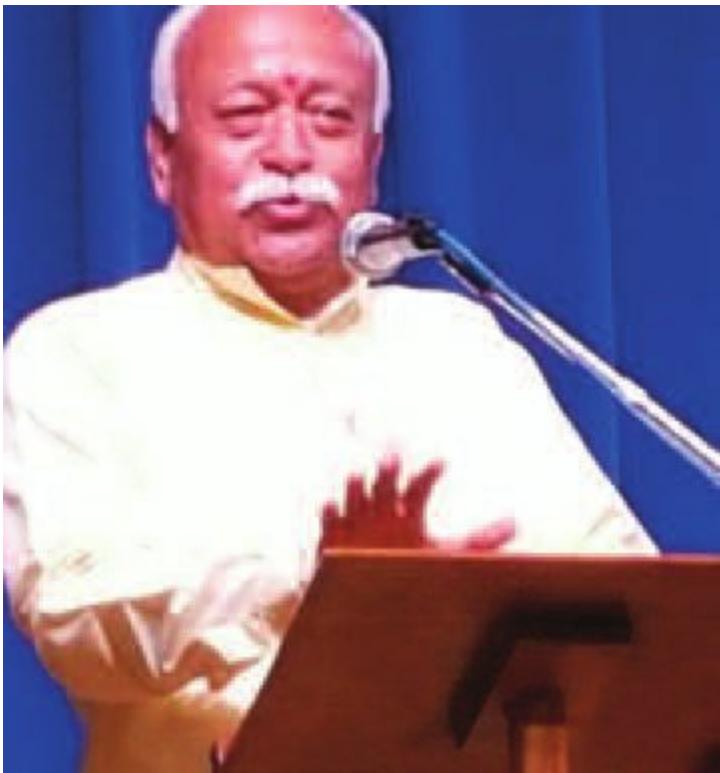
Our history abounds in tales of such valiant heroes. The Hindavi Swarajya was Jijamata's cherished dream. Her son fulfilled it. This is indeed an example of a wondrous and matchless episode in the history of the world, one that is our source of inspiration even today. When Dr. Hedgewar was mulling over the establishment of the Sangh, it was this same history that lured him on and it was this very history again, that was the fundamental motivation, the basic inspiration behind the creation of the Sangh. He had set himself the goal of forming an organization of ardent and fervent patriots, that would unite all of the Hindu community. "To groom Swayamsevaks, who would dedicate their entire life to the cause of the organization" was Dr. Hedgewar's resolve.

Sincere effort towards a noble cause invariably receives blessings from God and so did the effort of Dr. Hedgewar. His relentless efforts bore fruit and one after another he groomed Swayamsevaks. His message to the youth was 'Swayameva Mrugendrata' (The lion does not have to be made king. He is king and that too, by virtue of his intrinsic heroism, valour and leadership qualities.), which proved a tremendous boost to their confidence. He moulded so many dedicated Swayamsevaks for whom, right from their childhood until their last breath, all there was to life, was serving the cause of the Sangh and through it, the cause of the nation. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar an intelligent young man of spiritual inclination came into contact with Dr. Hedgewar. To the young Madhav, who had but the aspiration of moksha (liberation) and was all set to become an ascetic, Dr. Hedgewar gave the 'diksha' of the Sangh's work and mission. Madhav, better known as ShreeGuruji, took over the leadership of the Sangh after Dr. Hedgewar's demise. Dr. Hedgewar

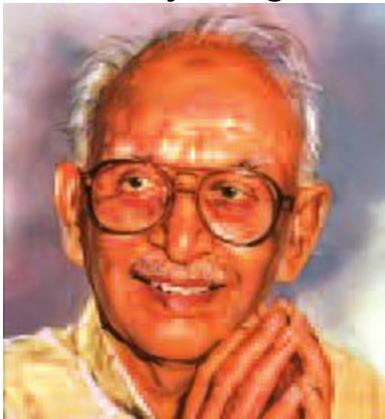
planted the sapling of the Sangh and ShreeGuruji tended to it and nurtured it. The sapling blossomed and flourished into a tree of immense expanse, of the stature of the Banyan tree with widespread branches and roots deeply embedded in the soil of this land. The Sangh reached out to every such place that the Hindu community inhabited and grew. This expanse of the Sangh was made possible by ShreeGuruji's vision and guidance. 'Rashtraya swaha, Rashtraya idam na mama' was his message. After him, as per his wishes, the mantle of the post of the Sarsanghachalak was assumed by Balasaheb Deoras.

Balasaheb took the Sangh even further on the path towards its goal. 'There cannot be strength and sufficiency without unity and in turn, no unity without social harmony', so he believed and as a result, he gave utmost importance to social harmony and seva projects. The Sangh really assumed phenomenal strength during Balasaheb's tenure. He insisted that the Swayamsevak ought to work in every domain of the nation. That, in his last days, he was able to witness Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a former 'pracharak' of the Sangh, take the oath of 'Prime Ministership' of the country, was a happy endorsement of his view. Deputing the present day Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi to serve in the political field, was also Balasaheb's decision. The unusual foresight that prompted it, stirs up in one, both pride and wonder and leaves one awestruck.

Owing to his failing health, Balasaheb handed over the responsibility of the Sarsanghachalak's post to 'Rajju Bhaiyya'. Highly educated, Rajju Bhaiyya came from a very prosperous family. He too led the Sangh forward. When his health declined, he stepped down and the responsibility of the Sarsanghachalak's post came to 'Shri Sudarshanji'. In keeping with his legacy, he too



*The Sarsanghachalak,
Mohanraoji Bhagwat in discourse...*



Shri Sudarshanji

diligently carried on the work of the Sangh. In due course, he handed over charge to 'Shri Mohan Bhagwat' and led by him, as of today, the Sangh is making progress by leaps and bounds.

How come there is neither bitter competitive ambition nor one-upmanship for posts in the Sangh? A question that crops up in many minds! But Balasaheb has provided the answer to it long back. The Sangh is a 'monocracy'. Considering that it is led by one single leadership at the top of

the structure, yes it is one, which is also why it is accused of being 'fascist'. For purposes of administration, it is definitely a monocracy; but as far as the organization, as in the organized body of dedicated persons bound by a common purpose goes, it is not controlled by a single individual at the top. The Sangh is bound and committed to its purpose and not to an individual. It walks its course under the guidance of a leader. Oh yes it does! But it walks led by the purpose, towards the goal. For the Sangh, the saffron flag, supremely sacred, is the guru. The Sangh's philosophy, its mission and its policies are all reflected in the saffron flag.

The Sangh travelled on adhering to the 'One goal, multifaceted work' policy. Along the journey, it had to brave rough weather that came in the form of hate, antagonism and denunciation. The Sangh was even ignored. But it remained undeterred from its mission and objectives. But all of this was possible only due to the Swayamsevaks' sacrifice, their sustained dedication and their readiness to give up their lives! Today, the Sangh is an object of research for several universities all over the world. The vast channel of the river Ganga cannot be gauged by looking at its site of source and the immense expanse of the Banyan tree cannot be estimated by looking at its seed. So it is with the Sangh. What began 90 years ago with a mere 15 or 20 individuals in Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar's modest Nagpur home, has assumed magnificent proportions of a mammoth mass movement and a huge crusade of patriotism.

The hope of patriots, the Sangh today stands unflinching, as a challenge in the face of the anti-national forces. The ordinary-looking Shakhas of the Sangh moulded extra-ordinary personalities. Not only the Sangh but the entire nation is proud of the Swayamsevak, who draws his inspiration from the Shakha. Be it an ordinary farmer, a worker, a clerk or be it highly placed officers of the governmental or of the semi-governmental bodies or be it even the Prime Minister of the country, the Swayamsevak offers his dedicated selfless service to the nation in several domains. By virtue of their qualities, their hard work and their honesty, the Swayamsevaks have become a source of inspiration for people at large. Respected Dr. Hedgewar said, "Apart from running the Shakha, the Sangha will do nothing. As for the Swayamsevak, he will leave nothing undone" meaning thereby that the Swayamsevak will do everything that is required to be done in the interest of the nation and of the

society.

Having imbibed the values of patriotism, of discipline and of affinity for the society, the Swayamsevak is active in every walk of life. In this series, we have already spoken about some of the institutions and organizations founded by the Sangh. In response to the prevailing social requirements, the Sangh founded other organizations too. Among these count The 'Vidya Bharati', the 'Akhil Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal', 'Akhil Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad', 'Sanskrit Bharati', 'Bharat Vikas Parishad', 'Rashtriya Seva Bharati', 'Din Dayal Shodh Sansthan', the Vidnyan Bharati', 'The Purva Sainik Seva Parishad', the 'Krida Bharati', 'Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad', 'Akhil Bharatiya Sahakar Bharti', 'Akhil Bharatiya Grahak Panchayat', Laghu Udyog Bharti', 'Pradnya Pravah', 'Seema Jagran & Suraksha Manch', 'Swadeshi Jagran Manch', 'Bharatiya Kisan Sangh', 'Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana', 'Rashtriya Sikh Sangat', Hindu Jagran Manch', 'Arogya Bharti', 'Akhil Bharatiya Shaikshik Mahasangh', 'National Medicos Organization', 'Bharatiya Kushtha Nivarana Sangh', 'Saksham', 'Gosewa & Sanvardhan', 'Parivar Prabodhan', 'Samajik Samarasta Manch', 'Dharma Jagaran Vibhag' and many more on these lines that work tirelessly. If we get down to the details of each, we might have to dedicate a series each, to these organizations. Perhaps we could give it a thought, should the opportunity present itself.

I am not a writer and since I completed my studies, I do not remember holding the pen except to sign my name. I never even carry a diary to the Sangh meeting. I was never in the habit of writing and I still do not write. Many years ago, I happened to meet Aniruddha Bapu. "You should start writing" he told me and I told him my problem. "Tell me to do anything in the world. I will. But please do not tell me to write. I just cannot!" At that Bapu gave a hearty laugh. A few years passed by and the responsibility of the series of articles on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the Dainik Pratyaksha, came my way. Sure enough, I have fallen back on a number of books for the purposes of this series. But this series also includes instances and references that have, as yet, not appeared in any publication.

I, along with my family, have had the good fortune of enjoying the company of Balasaheb Deoras for a good 17 years. We looked upon him as the head of our family and my daughters called him 'Dadaji'. Balasaheb took keen

interest in all matters, right from the education of my daughters to their wedding ceremonies. This is indeed our most precious treasure. The reason why I mentioned the family relations we had with him was, Balasaheb had shared things related to the Sangh that were not published anywhere. I have shared here in this series, what I heard from him first hand. These would have otherwise not found mention anywhere at all. I always cherished the wish that such things see the light of day. My wish is now fulfilled. Moreover, whether at all I did justice to the responsibility of presenting the Sangh's history, is a decision I leave to the reader. He is the best judge.

I consider myself very fortunate that from time to time, I received respected Aniruddha Bapu's blessings and guidance. The special programme of the ShreeGuruji Hospital was to be held on 16th June 2015. We decided to invite Bapu to the programme. "Bapu, you are a doctor yourself. Would you address the doctors of this hospital? I already happen to have given them my word on your behalf" I said to Bapu. Bapu's words in reply to my question were, "By all means! It is indeed your right." I have etched them in my heart and will cherish them all my life. Bapu very graciously attended the function. On the occasion, Bapu delivered an amazing talk on ShreeGuruji's life. Only those, who might have done a deep study of ShreeGuruji's life and engaged in reflection over it, could have spoken thus.



Rameshbhai and Kirtida Mehta with Dr. Aniruddha at the ShreeGuruji Hospital, Nasik

I received respected Bapu's blessings and support for this series as well. I had Sameerdada's guidance and my friend Jeetendraji's help. Thanks to them, that I could present this series to you! As I wind up the series and bid farewell I feel the surge of certain feelings. Allow me to share.

Ours is an ancient country. Bharat has gifted several things to the world. When the rest of the world was still fairly primitive, science, technology and art had already made astonishing progress in Bharat. Our culture and life in general was at the zenith of evolution. The Almighty has endowed this land of ours with untold natural wealth. We have the Gangasagar to the East, the Sindhusagar to the West, to the South we have the Hindu Mahasagar and to the North, the Himalayas, the king of the mountains with so many different rivers that originate in it.

Just like our country is rich in natural beauty, it is rich in languages too. Our country has been home to the culture that attains for man, the peak of evolution and progress. The legacy of sacrifice and valour that we have been blessed with, will not be found anywhere in the world.

So why and whence the backslide then?

The reason for the backslide is our concern for the society and for the nation has given way to concerns about our own selves. We are caught up in our own web of lures and tangled in our bonds.

But O Motherland Bharat, our Mother, we give you our word that we will not repeat our sins. We promise to organize ourselves, to imbibe good values and bring back to you, your past glory. And so...

...no more differences of opinion nor those of the heart! May there neither be regional dispute nor hierarchy, nor even communal discord.

May the nation be the one supreme dharma and the nation alone, the one supreme God! Bharat, our motherland, is our Mother. Let us all come together and sing:

"O Motherland, our Mother,
may your riches and your splendour prevail. Our stay in the world be short,
no matter. May your riches and your splendour prevail!"

Vande Mataram!

||BharatMata ki Jay||

