

Indian Culture and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

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Abstract: *Indian culture has been continuously flowing on the Indian land since time immemorial. Even after difficult struggles, it never allowed its values to diminish or disappear. In the vast period of Indian history, the work of propagating this culture in a new form and framework has been carried out by various individuals and organizations. In the nineteenth century, various Indian institutions gave it a new form through many types of reforms across its various aspects, which was further enriched in the twentieth century by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The role of the Sangh in the elevation of Indian culture is considered extremely important, as it analyzed Indian culture according to time, space, and circumstances. Over the past century, it has attempted to spread Sanatan culture at the global level, so that Indian culture could achieve prestige worldwide.*

Keywords: Indian Culture, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Values, Indianness, Shakha, Hedgewar.

Another important reason for the establishment of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was to establish Indian culture in place of foreign culture. As a result of Macaulay's system of education, a large number of Indians began to consider their own culture and civilization as inferior. In this way, an intellectual class was being created that developed feelings of hatred toward its own identity. It came to treat Indian education and culture with contempt. Along with forgetting its self-identity, it had thrown the foundational elements of nation-building- one's own religion, culture, literature, and language- into the depth of oblivion. It began to consider itself civilized by adopting Western civilization and culture. Thus, to remind Indians of the glory of their past, Dr. Hedgewar felt the need for a cultural organization.

In Indian culture, a sense of continuity is found from ancient times to the present day. Various deities of the Harappan and Vedic eras are still worshipped today. The ideology of the *Trimurti*, symbolizing the tradition of harmony, remains a subject of reverence for people today. The tradition of Yoga is visible in its living form from the Harappan period to the present day. During this period, India was invaded by a large number of foreigners. Indian culture demonstrated its generosity by absorbing these various foreign groups within itself. They were assigned a specific place within the Indian caste and *varna* system. Indian culture was most severely affected under Islamic and British rule. Indian society became divided into various castes, sects, and communities. Language, religion, caste, etc., began to act as triggers for disruptive elements. The result of all this was that Hindu society became politically and socially weakened. To overcome these weaknesses, various types of organizations and institutions emerged. Among these, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was able to move forward in a more developed form due to its dedication.

In the prevailing political conditions of that time, Hedgewar envisioned an institution that, while striving for independence, could transform India into a supreme, prosperous nation after independence. The responsibility of organizing society was taken into his own hands by Hedgewar Ji, and to fulfill this responsibility, an organization named Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was established. This organization began working as a vehicle for Indian culture and engaged in the arduous task of awakening Indian Hindus

who had forgotten Indian values.

Imparting physical training and establishing moral values was also a reason for establishing the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. A healthy mind develops in a healthy body. Only a healthy body and a healthy mind can adhere to moral values. In this way, they serve as vital tools in nation-building. The need for an organization to comprehensively train this resource was being felt. This work is accomplished through the establishment of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The Sangh created a plan to conduct morning and evening *Shakhas* (branches). These *Shakhas* were conducted in the courtyard of a temple, a garden, or a public place. Attendance was mandatory for the members of the Sangh. In these *Shakhas*, arrangements were made for various types of physical exercises, yogic postures, and various sports. Along with this, intellectual discussions (*Baudhik Sangoshti*) were organized for moral values and ideals.

Thus, inspired by the plight of Hindus in the prevailing conditions of that time and the protection of Hindu culture, Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar founded the Sangh on the day of Vijayadashami in 1925. During this period, its founding members included prominently Bhau Ji Kare, Anna Sohoni, Shri Vishwanath Rao Kelkar, Shri Balaji Huddar, and Shri Bapu Rao Bhedi. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh conducts physical, military, and intellectual training and orientation activities.

In reality, the establishment of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the nature of its functioning were done in a different manner. Usually, when an institution is established, its office, procedures, receipts, donation funds, events, etc., are advertised, and publicity is carried out through various media. However, at the time of establishing the Sangh, no such activity was undertaken. In this organization founded on Vijayadashami, special emphasis was laid on only two things: first, the resurrection of the Hindu Nation, and second, a group of dedicated workers to make it a reality. To fulfill these two objectives, Dr. Hedgewar Ji dedicated his entire life. As far as the naming of this organization is concerned, initially all work was carried out simply under the name "Sangh". On April 17, 1926, on Ram Navami, it was decided to name it with the objective of taking all workers to Ramtek and creating a distinct identity. A total of 26 members were

present at the meeting. After brainstorming by the members, three names were placed before the assembly: *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, *Jaripatka Mandal*, and *Bharatoddharak Mandal*. Among these, the name *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* was considered to reflect the objectives of the Sangh in the true sense. Dr. Hedgewar Ji laid special emphasis on the word "Rashtriya" (National). He believed that the identity of a Hindu should be linked with the word "National". He considered the words "Hindu" and "National" to be synonymous. He accepted that Hindu is not just a religion, but a way of life, a culture. There can be many sects and communities within it, but their core spirit is one and the same.

Dr. Baliram Hedgewar had long been associated with the Hindu Mahasabha. In 1930, he severed his ties with this organization and started publishing a magazine named *Swatantrya* from Nagpur. However, due to government repression, he could not succeed in this endeavor. Dr. Hedgewar Ji did not accept the prevailing political ideologies and methodologies of politics, but instead laid special emphasis on culture. He believed that the enthusiasm required for the all-round development of the nation could only be generated if possible efforts were made for cultural unity. For this reason, he kept the Sangh away from political shelter. Because of this, the ideology of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* has remained inspired by serious, revivalist tendencies.

Through the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, Hedgewar Ji taught Hindus the lesson of social and cultural unity, which is its fundamental strength. Accepting the cultural strength of Hindus as the core of Indian culture, attempts were made to spread it to the people. It is not possible to include Islamic, Christian, and other Western elements in this culture. The ideology of the Sangh has been that the path to national reconstruction can only be paved by remaining organized peacefully and for a long duration. Whatever followers of other religions reside in India, they will have to accept Indian culture, which is the counterpart of Hindu culture. For this, they do not need to abandon their religion.

When this organization was founded by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, people did not believe that it would be able to function for many years. However, due to the circumstances of the time, space, and competent propagators (*Pracharaks*), this organization not only grew continuously but has today become like a massive banyan tree. The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* is celebrating/nearing its centenary year of establishment. During this time frame, it has succeeded in establishing itself not only on the Indian horizon but also on a global level. This organization has continuously attempted to resolve the problems emerging before the nation on the basis of an emotional ideology of nationalism. This type of tradition has existed in the Sangh since its inception. At present, through its affiliate organizations, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* is working to influence political ideology alongside cultural and economic advancement.

In the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, Hedgewar Ji's successor as *Sarsanghchalak* was Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar. He not only carried forward the previous tradition but also worked to give it a new direction. He worked to connect prominent individuals from religious, educational,

social, literary, and other fields with the Sangh.

The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, while remaining steadfast on its core ideology and character-building values, is working to spread Indian culture in various fields. As a result, various projects developed under the Sangh. It is carrying its work forward through various organizations such as *Rashtra Sevika Samiti*, *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* (ABVP), *Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram*, *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh*, *Vidya Bharati*, *Vivekananda Kendra*, *Bharat Vikas Parishad*, *Bharatiya Kisan Sangh*, *Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad*, *Deendayal Research Institute*, *Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Samiti*, *Bharatiya Shikshak Sangh*, *Sanskar Bharati*, *Bharatiya Rashtriya Sikh Sangathan*, *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP), *Swadeshi Jagran Manch*, *Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad*, *Hindu Jagran Manch*, *Prajna Bharati*, *Vigyan Bharati*, *Laghu Udyog Bharati*, *Poorva Sainik Seva Parishad*, *Sahakar Bharati*, *Akhil Bharatiya Grahak Panchayat*, *Samajik Samrasata*, etc. Apart from India, many of its branches (*Shakhas*) are functioning in various countries. All these organizations have their own independent departments and working styles, but members of all organizations consider themselves part of a single family.

If one analyzes the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, its various affiliate organizations, and their objectives, it becomes clear that there is no other organization in the world like it that does social work on such a vast scale. In reality, it is a mass movement in which the people themselves are its key drivers and the carriers of its progress. Analyzing the history of the Sangh shows that it was never well-resourced. Continually struggling against inconveniences, it kept flourishing after criticisms and bans. The workers of the Sangh worked with single-minded devotion even under adverse circumstances. Even after severing ties with any affiliate project of the Sangh due to political or personal reasons, individuals maintained their faith in the core *Shakha* of the Sangh.

Vinoba Bhave Ji believed that to run any organization, power, direction, and momentum are required. Without these, no organization can function smoothly. Power is the central point of an organization, which is endowed with individual and collective thoughts and resources; momentum and proper direction are provided to it by wise and thoughtful workers. The Sangh can be placed in the category of such an organization.

The contribution to the development of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* came from its *Sarsanghchalaks* as well as its workers and *Swayamsevaks* (volunteers). All of them expanded the Sangh with dedication, honesty, and perseverance. Apart from this, the disintegration of political values, vote-bank politics, the politicization of secularism, the opportunism of political parties, etc., were factors that provided favorable opportunities to the Sangh. Under these circumstances, the ideology of the Sangh developed rapidly. If an analysis is made of the work done by the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* in various fields, its role presents itself before us in a revolutionary form after the 1980s.

The above analysis makes it clear that the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* is an organized body of dedicated,

honest, hardworking flag-bearers of Indian culture. Generally, it is seen that even after possessing these qualities, many organizations do not remain long-lived and distortions arise in them after a period of time. However, even after so many years, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has remained free from these flaws. The Sangh has been unique in itself from the perspective of its organization and expansion. Drawing inspiration from the fundamental elements of Indian culture, this organization has worked to demonstrate Indian values on a global level.

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