

## THE EMERGENCE OF 'RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH MOVEMENT' A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on the the emergence of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Movement and tries to find out the social, economic, political, and cultural situations prevalent at that time which led to the emergence of this social movement. It tries to answer the questions such as "what caused Rashtriya Swayamsevak movement to be born? What were the structural conditions under which this movement emerged? What were the motivational forces for the same? Data were collected from the available literature and interviews of knowledgeable members who themselves have been involved in the activities of the movement for more than five decades. The very idea of founding Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh can be traced to the time when there were countless efforts done by various leaders for political independence but nothing was being done to achieve cultural independence in the minds of the Indian people. It was against this backdrop a countrywide movement such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was envisioned by a medical doctor Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar.*

### **Keywords**

*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh(RSS), Social Movement, Emergence, Dr.Hedgewar.*

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### **The Problem**

In the first half of the twentieth century, India achieved its independence which was possible due to the Indian national movement, one of the biggest mass movements which modern society has ever seen. During the same period, a unique social movement emerged in the history of India in the form of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. It is in this context the present study focuses on the emergence of a social movement that has been going on for nine decades in the form of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh started by a medical doctor Dr.Keshav Baliram Hedgewar.

### **The Objective of The Study**

This paper focuses on the emergence of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and tries to find out the social, economic, political, and cultural situations prevalent at that time which led to the emergence of this social movement. Does it try to answer the questions such as What caused the Rashtriya Swayamsevak movement to be born? What was the structural conditions under which this movement emerged? What were the motivational forces for the same? These conditions have been described based on the literature available in the context of the movement and verified through interviewing knowledgeable persons.

### **Methodology**

For exploring the emergence of the movement, largely secondary sources such as books, magazines, pamphlets, and reports which were available in the Meerut headquarters(Shankar Ashram) and Delhi Headquarters(Keshav Kunj)have been relied on. At the same time, this secondary data has been supplemented and verified through interviewing knowledgeable persons available in Meerut District(Meerut Mahanagar in RSS Terminology)

### **Emergence of RSS Movement**

To understand the reasons for the origin of any organization, it is very important to have a bare minimum understanding of the life and ideological disposition of its founder. Similarly, the emergence of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh could only be understood if we understand the thought process of its founder, Dr.Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a medical doctor.

#### **1. The Founder-A Staunch Nationalist**

Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was born on Varsha Pratipada, the Hindu New Year Day, 1st April 1889, at Nagpur. A patriot from birth, Dr.Hedgewar was different from other children of his peer group. At the tender age of eight, he refused to

participate in celebrations to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the coronation of Queen Victoria of Britain in June 1897 and threw the sweets distributed to him at his school. Starting from this first spark of his patriotism, to the days of the Vande Mataram agitation in 1907, to his foray into armed revolution during his stay at Calcutta, and later his involvement in Indian

National Movement, Dr.Hedgewar put all his energy into the independence of the country.<sup>1</sup> (Sinha,2015:73).

## **2. Reasons for the National Downfall**

At the same time, his mind was continuously involved in the question that despite India's ancient advancement in every sphere of human activity be it science, arts, philosophy, or spirituality, what is the root cause of our national downfall and slavery in the present times? Dr.Hedgewar was of **the** firm view that Hindus are the true nationals of this great country. Due to the Muslim invasion and British rule, the Hindus were divided and their mind has been subverted to believe that they are weak and had nothing great in past. (Seshadri,2017:72-73)

For Hedgewar, a nation becomes great only when a feeling of unremitting nationalism, patriotism, cohesiveness, togetherness, and social sensitivity are present in its individuals(countrymen) who are its prime unit. This leads to the conclusion that the refinement of the individual can bring about the refinement of the nation. Dr.Hedgewar thought of launching a movement in the form of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh which could refine the character of an individual and begin the process of nation-building <sup>2</sup>(Sinha,2015:73-74). With this background about the founder, we would now proceed to examine the series of events starting from around 1915 which made many alterations in society. These series of events would help us to find the structural conditions and motivational forces that preceded the rise of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

## **3. Prevalent Socio-Political Scenario**

### **a) Politics of Appeasement**

In 1916, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, both tried to ignore their differences. Among other things, both organizations agreed to support the demand for complete self-government and Congress accepted the demand by the Muslim League for the continuation of a separate electorate for Muslims in a legislative assembly. Nationalists such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Madan Mohan Malviya opposed the Lucknow pact because they found this approach instead of

consolidating Hindu-Muslim unity, actually undermines it. (Andersen and Damle,1987:26)

The entry of Mahatama Gandhi into the national movement and his call for Hindu-Muslim unity under the banner of the Khilafat Movement can be seen as one of the most important reasons for the emergence of the RSS.<sup>3</sup> During the First World War, Turkey, which was a German ally, fought against the British. After Turkey's defeat, the Ottoman caliphate was proposed to be dissolved. The Khilafat movement was launched by Muslims in India to persuade the British government not to abolish the caliphate. The leaders of this movement accepted the non-cooperation movement of Gandhiji and led a joint protest against the British. (ibid:27)

Dr.Hedgewar sensed danger in this move of Gandhiji for „Hindu-Muslim Unity. He once even met Gandhiji and said “There are in India people of various religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, etc. Why then do you harp upon only „Hindu-Muslim Unity instead of promoting the unity of all the various sects ?”<sup>4</sup> Gandhiji replied, “This will secure the friendly attitude of Muslims towards our country. As you are witnessing, they can be persuaded to side wholeheartedly with us in the nationalist struggle.” Doctorji said: “Long before this slogan of Hindu-Muslim Unity came into vogue, many leading Muslims had identified themselves with our nation and worked shoulder to shoulder with Hindus under the leadership of Lokmanya Tilak — e.g., Barrister Jinnah, Dr. Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and others. But I am afraid that this new slogan, instead of helping unity, might further aggravate the feeling of separateness among the Muslims.” “I have no such fear,” said Gandhiji and closed the issue. (Seshadri,2017:59)

#### **b) Large Scale Communal Rioting**

The widespread communal rioting that occurred on the Malabar coast of southwestern India in August 1921 can be seen as one of the major events that underscored the revivalist concern about dangers faced by the Hindu community in this sub-continent. According to the report published by the Servant of India Society, One thousand Hindus were killed.<sup>5</sup> Forced conversion of twenty thousand was done, and thousands of Hindu women were dishonored and abducted. Property to the tune of over 3 crores was looted. To add to this, the All India Congress Committee condemned the event in a very mild way. These events and the biased nature of Congress made leaders like Dr.BS Munje, NC Kelkar, and Dr. KB Hedgewar believe that the political influence of Muslims was being increased at the expense of the Hindu community. (ibid:60)

The Non-Cooperation Movement(Launched on 1 August 1920) gradually died down due to the abolishment of Calipha and with the Chowrichowra incident on 5<sup>th</sup> February, Gandhiji called off the movement on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1922. The ousting of the Calipha had naturally spread despair and disappointment among the Muslims in India but their leaders cleverly converted their follower's discontent into an anti-Hindu hysteria. As a result, everywhere Muslims rose in anti-Hindu rebellions in 1923. They slaughtered cows and attacked Hindu temples. Mahatmaji, too, was so greatly shocked by these happenings that he began at Delhi a 21-day fast in the house of Maulana Mohammed Ali, in the presence of Dr.Ansari and Abdul Rehman. (Andersen and Damle,1987:27). Dr.Hedgewar delved deep into the meaning of all these developments and by about the same time, the historical treatise "Hindutva" by Veer Savarkar reached Doctorji's hands. Savarkar's inspiring and brilliant exposition of the concept of 'Hindutva', marked by incontestable logic and clarity, struck a chord in Doctorji's heart.<sup>6</sup> Even as Doctorji's mind was deeply pondering over the method to unite Hindus he continued to be busy within the Congress doing a variety of public activities. In 1922 he was appointed a joint secretary of the Provincial Congress and tried to organize a disciplined volunteer corps as part of the congress to arrest the pronounced indiscipline among the workers at every level. But the experiment didn't yield. (Sinha,2015:66). During the period between 1921-1923, the dormant Hindu Mahasabha which was formed in 1915 to present Hindu interest was revitalized.

In the same year, Doctorji gathered together Bhauji Kawre, Appaji Joshi, Vishwanathrao Kelkar, and other friends and also a few political workers of the Central Provinces, and placed before them his ideas concerning organizing the Hindus and took feedback. It is not wrong to say that this was one of the important events where the seeds for setting up of RSS were sown. (Anand,2019:33)According to VN Shende(Author of Param Poojneeya Dr.Hedgewar, published in 1941), "the ten years of his(Dr. Hedgewar) life from 1915 to 1924 were spent in minute observation and analysis of the various political movements happening in the country and diagnosing the ills plaguing the nation and finding solutions for them." (Sinha,2015:74). In early 1925, Dr.Hedgewar went to meet Swatantrya-Veer Sawarkar in Ratnagiri and spent two days in a useful exchange of views. (Anand,2019:34)

Lastly, the July 1924 Hindu-Muslim communal riots in Nagpur made Doctorji search for the answer to the questions such as: "How is it that Muslims,

who are so few in number, are so fearlessly attacking the Hindus? And why are not the Hindus, who constitute the majority, even able to protect themselves? After a lot of brainstorming Doctorji realized that it is the lack of cohesion and self-respect among Hindus which has led to this miserable condition and the only lasting solution was therefore to instill confidence and unite the Hindu community.<sup>7</sup> (ibid:71)

**c) Need for a Nationalist Organisation**

Further, he felt that neither the Congress nor the Mahasabha was suited to stir Hindus into a cohesive force.<sup>8</sup> Though he was an active participant in Indian National Congress till 1928(the congress session was held at Kolkata in 1928) but he found Congress activities to be concentrated on appeasing Muslims and thus unable to unite Hindus. Similarly, Hindu Mahasabha from starting was an organization with a political orientation hence a separate organization was required which would work on the revival of Hindu Dharam and nation-building. (Sinha,2015:82).

To conclude, we can say that emergence of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh owes a lot to the thought process of its founder, Dr.Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. A staunch nationalist, Dr.Hedgewar was proud of India s cultural, economic, and geographical strength in ancient times. At the same time, he was worried about the reasons that led to the erosion of its glory. Due to years under foreign slavery, first under Muslim invaders and then Britishers, Hindus were taught that they had nothing great in past. Moreover, the foreign rulers were successful in creating fissiparous tendencies among the Hindus based on castes, sects, languages, and regionalism. The unifying feeling of nationality among the Hindus had weakened. Coincidentally, this thought process of Dr.Hedgewar got support from the prevalent socio-political scenario in India, which was devoid of any real efforts by any organization to unite and rejuvenate the Hindus. All efforts were done to achieve political independence for the country with the hope that with the advent of freedom, there would be an automatic usher in a revival of genuine nationalist values which were present preceding foreign rule. As a result, there was a need for the eradication of all those habits and tendencies among the Hindus that devitalized the feeling of nationalism in the country. Thus with the mission of revivifying the eternal values of Hindu Dharma and bringing unity among the Hindus with the spirit of nationalism, Dr.Hegewar thought of establishing a Sangh(organization).

On 27<sup>th</sup> September 1925, about 15-20 young men gathered in Doctorji's house. Chief among them were Bhauji Kawre, Anna Sohni, Vishwanathrao Kelkar, Balaji Huddar, and Bapurao Bhide. Doctorji announced to the gathering: "We are inaugurating the Sangh today." Stating the reasons for establishing the Sangh, Dr. Hedgewar said, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is an organization of people who have undertaken the yeoman task of serving the nation of their own accord and inspiration. The people of every nation create a similar organization that is intended to serve their particular nation. This Hindu Rashtra (Nation), Bharat is our dear homeland, and since it is also the domain of our work, we have established the Sangh for safeguarding it" (Sinha, 2015:78).

### **Conclusion**

The very idea of founding Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh can be traced to the time when self-oblivion had overtaken society. There was zeal for independence in minds of Indians which is natural to come to the minds of ruled people. But worrying was the assumption among people that with independence there would be automatic emergence of nationalist values that were present on Indian soil before the advent of foreign rule.

The wave of Hindu-Muslim riots that swept across India in the early 1920s also made the RSS founder Dr. Hedgewar conclude that these communal riotings are a symptom of the weakness and divisions within the Hindu community. For Doctorji, independence could be achieved only after the elimination of various basis of divisions such as caste, religion, language, and sect among the Hindu community. Further, he felt that neither the Congress (in which he had been an active participant till 1928) that had appeased Muslims nor the Mahasabha (which was politically oriented) was suited to stir Hindus into a cohesive force. Hence a separate organization was required which would work on the revival of Hindu Dharma and nation-building. Moreover, on one hand, there were countless efforts done by various leaders for political independence but nothing was being done to achieve cultural independence in the minds of Indian people in general and the Hindu community in particular.

The RSS, therefore, emerged to bring about the unity of the Hindus and instill the feeling of nationalism in the minds of people through Sangathan (organization). To achieve this aim, it emphasized habit formation and acculturation as the means. It constituted itself as a web of shakhas spread throughout the length and breadth of the country extending to even foreign lands where the Indian citizens

lived and worked. The RSS slogan is “Every shakha is an ashram where Hindus are nationalized and nationalists Hinduised.”<sup>9</sup>

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### **Footnote**

1. These facts were also narrated by Mr. Darshan Lal Arora, Age 80, UP Paschim Kshetra Karyakarini Sadasya, at the time of an interview conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1-20, 2020
2. These facts were also narrated by Mr. Ajay Mittal, Age 68, Meerut Prant Prachhar Pramukh, at the time of an interview conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1-20, 2020
3. These facts were also narrated by Mr. Rampal, Age 45, Shankar Ashram (Meerut headquarters) Karyalay Pramukh, at the time of an interview



conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1- 20,2020

4. These facts were also narrated by Mr.Vinod Bharti, Aged 63, Sanghchalak-Meerut Mahanagar,at the time of an interview conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1-20,2020
5. These facts were also narrated by Mr.Padam, Age 52, Paschim UP Kshetra Prachaar Pramukh,at the time of an interview conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1-20,2020
6. These facts were also narrated by Mr.Jatan Swarup, Aged 73, Meerut Vibhaag Sanghchalak,at the time of an interview conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1-20,2020
7. These facts were also narrated by Mr.Tapan, Age 51, Prant Sangathan Mantri Vidya Bharti,at the time of an interview conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1-20,2020
8. These facts were also narrated by Mr.Amarjeet Sachdeva, Aged 70, Shastri Nagar Sanghchalak,at the time of an interview conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1-20,2020
9. These facts were also narrated by Mr.Darshan Lal Arora, Age 80, UP Paschim Kshetra Karyakarini Sadasya,at the time of an interview conducted by researcher in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh between Oct 1-20,2020