

Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar - The Architect of India's Transformation

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- Tarun Vijay -

If we have to select a person whose life and the organisational capacity has impacted the life of an average Indian the most, that would be undisputedly Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar.

Born in Nagpur on the Hindu new year, in 1889 (1st April), he later rose to be the architect of a modern powerful India with an unapologetic pride in Hindu civilisational legacy of the nation.

It is an incredible saga of a person who succeeded in transforming the society with a new order of dedicated youth, whose spread is seen today in every corner of India- from Tawang to Leh and Okha to Andamans.



He founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Vijayadashami day in 1925 but the name was given an year later- the very first announcement that day was a simple one liner- 'I am announcing the formation of Sangh (organisation) today.' The name RSS was given a year later after intense deliberations and receiving many suggestions which included- Bharat Uddharak Mandal (loosely translated as - Society to rejuvenate India) and Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. The principal purpose was to create a society that will never fall prey to the internal squabbles and forge a solidarity so that none would be able to subjugate us in future. Before that he had been an active member of the Congress and was the co-incharge for organising the famous Nagpur session of Congress. He participated in non-cooperation movement and was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment for giving passionate speeches for freedom. He had also been a target of the British for his connections with the revolutionaries of Anusheelan Samiti and its leader Pulin Behari Bose.

But he got the least publicity and his life remained less known than the people he moulded who later became international celebrities. Today perhaps the largest network of service-projects run by any organisation in India are serviced by the RSS - the people who are inspired by Dr Hedgewar. One lakh seventy thousand is the number of these projects- which include hospitals, blood banks, eye banks, special centres to help Divyangs, visually challenged and Thalassaemia affected kids. Whether it's a war time or a natural calamity - Hedgewar's followers are the first to reach and provide relief. Whether it was Charkhi Dadri plane crash, Tsunami, Bhuj, Uttarkashi earth quakes or Kedarnath tragedy- the RSS Swayamsewaks were in the forefront to help the affected people and later in rehabilitation work too.

It is true that though the BJP owes its moral strength to the RSS and a large number of its leaders are

swayamsewaks, still it would be an underestimate of Dr Hedgewar's impact on Indian society to judge it only by the political spread of the BJP. Think of Moreh, the last village on India-Myanmar border - who is running a school there and providing medicines to the local villagers? It is the people inspired by the vision of Dr Hedgewar. Similarly, the Mokukchang and Changlang projects for serving local tribes in far North-East and Portblair ashram for the tribal students in Andamans are run by these people only. RSS today has the biggest network of schools and teachers and educational institutions in the country. Vidya Bharati today runs more than 25000 schools, has a quarter million students and one lakh teachers from the farthest village in the northeast to the snow deserts of Ladakh and border areas of Rajasthan, Jammu and Punjab.

Last week I was on a shoot to make a documentary on Dr Hedgewar's ancestral village Kandakurti in Telangana. It's a historic village on the confluence of Godavari, Haridra and Manjiri. The ancestral home of the Hedgewar family is about fifty ft by twenty eight feet which has been turned into a memorial by local villagers helped and inspired by a senior RSS leader Moro Pant Pingle. It is running a beautiful co-educational school Keshav Bal Vidya Mandir, having a modest strength of about two hundred students. I was pleasantly surprised to find a good number, almost thirty percent Muslim girls and boys studying there. It is not that the village doesn't have other schools. The sleepy, calm village has almost 65% Muslims and 35% Hindus. The mosques are as many as the ancient temples. They exist side by side and there has been not a single unpleasant incident. Why the Muslims love to send their children in a school established in the memory of the RSS founder?

I met a parent- Mr Jalil Begh, who traces his ancestry to the moguls. He is a journalist, writing for the famous Urdu daily Munsif. He said his family has found the school as a nice place to study because it caters best facilities to the poor and financially weaker sections. Above all the standard is good and they have a digital class also, training kids with computer education. I heard Rafia, a little sweet student of the school, sing rhythmically 'Hind Desh Ke Niwasi, Sabhi Ham Ek Hain, Rang Roop, Vesh Bhasha, Chahe Anek Hain'. (We the people of Hind are one, even if our colour, attire and language differ).

Dr Hedgewar, who remains the biggest influence on several prominent leaders, has given them the best gift to them through his ancestral village representing the theme of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas in its full glory.

The man who gave a pan Indian vision to the millions, inspired bright young Indians to be a part of a new order of thought as Pracharak-monks, who might not be wearing ochre robes but live a life of an ascetic, giving their best for the peoples' education, health care, civilisational awakening in a most silent, unpublicised way, keeping away from the media glares, is a story of an India that is being transformed like never before.

Dr Hedgewar, who inspired millions to live for the greater good of the nation, injected a sense of pride and courage to stand for the universal values and Dharmic traditions of Bharat, that is India, needs to be studied and appreciated more. He is the biggest change maker India has ever witnessed.

 About the Author

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Author of several books which include (in English), (i) Saffron Surge, (ii) India Battles to Win and (iii) An Odyssey in Tibet (the book has been translated into the Chinese, Marathi, Gujarati

and Hindi language); edited, Indus Saga; In Hindi, (i) Sakshat Shiv Se Samvad, (ii) Akash Hamare Seene Mein, (iii) Samay Ka Sach, (iv) Yudh Abhi Baki Hai, (v) Bharat Ka Man, (vi) Pankh Lagi Pagdandiya, (vii) Bharat Niyati Aur Sangharsh, (viii) Rishi Parampara and (ix) Man Ka Tulsi Chaura (launched in Delhi and Patna Book Fairs, 2012) edited, (i) Vampanthi Kalush Katha, (ii) Communist Atankvad, (iii) Kargil Katha (iv) Sindhu Gatha and (v) Ram Setu Raksha; has written over 2000 articles in English and Hindi in national dailies and magazines; regular columnist for more than twenty two newspapers; was chief Editor of Panchjanya for approximately two decades .

Participated in save democracy movement during the Emergency in 1975; established Vani Parishad, an organization for the youth and spread Vivekananda Youth Mahamandal under the guidance of the Ramakrishna Mission; worked as a full time worker of the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram in Dadra and Nagar Haveli for five years; was the only Editor known in South Asia to have taken the initiative to launch a 'Peace Agenda Initiative' collaborating with the largest circulation daily in Pakistan, Daily Jang; participated in Metropolis Conference, The Hague, 2010; has completed pilgrimage to Kailash-Mansarovar twice, from Indian side and from Lhasa; was felicitated by the Princess of Thailand for strengthening India-Thai relations

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