

## **Dr Hedgewar, the epoch maker**

During 1989-90 when p.p Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar's centenary celebrations were going on everywhere, Dr Kuzhanthaivelu, the registrar of Avinashilingam university for women, presided over one of the functions held in the city of Coimbatore in Tamilnadu. On that occasion he spoke about the greatness of p.p Doctorji. His words were, "I have never seen or heard swami Vivekananda but I know of his greatness because I have read his words in books. I have seen and heard Mahatma Gandhiji speak and because of that I know of his greatness. But I have neither got the opportunity to meet Dr Hedgewar nor have I read what he has said. But still I am able to appreciate his greatness by seeing you all, the swayamsevakas he has been able to create". Doctorji's life became a laboratory of all paths seeking the glory of Bhatat Mata from the humiliating slavery.

### **A self respecting boy**

At the age of eight he threw away the sweet distributed at his school, commemorating the 60th year of coronation of the British queen Victoria. It was this instinctive patriotism which in later days blossomed and burst forth in all its radiance in the form of the peerless patriot and incomparable moulder of men, Dr. Keshav Baliram hedgewar. At the age of thirteen, in 1902, the young Keshav lost both his parents to the cruel plague.

### **An expert organiser**

At the age of eighteen when studying for matriculation, all students of his school shouted 'Vande Mataram' at the time when the inspector of schools visited and the inspector became furious and the school was closed down. After nearly two months, the elders of the city met and arrived at a face-saving formal 'excuse me' and the strike was called off. However, two of the students refused to step into the school again. One of them was Keshav. "Vande Mataram" simply meant saluting the motherland and offering worship to her. To serve one's mother is the sacred duty of a child. "If the foreign rulers consider it a crime to salute one's motherland, i plead guilty. I shall, if need be, continue to commit the same crime any number of times, and shall gladly face the consequences" -such were the fiery expressions which often played on the lips of keshav.

### **Undeterred by adversity**

But Keshav and his friends were not to be so easily deterred from their chosen path. As advised by the teachers, Keshav and two others continued their study in pune. After putting in a couple of months of study, Keshav appeared for the examinations. Keshav came to Nagpur after completing the Matriculation examination. The results came in 1909. But by that time he was completely immersed in public activities. He had connection with the Kolkata based revolutionaries, the Anuseelan samiti. Keshavrao and other like-minded fiery youth saw armed rebellion as the only solution. Keshavrao therefore decided to go to Bengal, the 'Kashi of revolutionaries'. In the middle of 1910, Keshavrao left for Calcutta to join the national Medical College in Calcutta, seven hundred miles away from Nagpur and a place totally unfamiliar to him.

### **Cordeal in college across regions**

Soon after entering the College, keshavrao began cultivating the acquaintance of students from various provinces. In his free time he visited the different hostels. He endeared himself to everybody by his warm and good-humoured disposition. It was only during the first one year that he was a boarder in the Shantiniketan Lodge. Though he continued to stay in the lodge during the next four or five years, on most days he ate in friends' houses. Once in a way he had his food in hotels. As in Nagpur, in Calcutta too Keshavrao continued his vigorous physical exercises and naturally consumed substantial quantities of milk. He thus possessed an impressive physique, a broad chest, and powerful shoulders. His indeed was a figure with 'muscles of iron and nerves of steel.'

### **Service at heart**

Public service was a consuming passion with Keshavrao. Floods in the river Damodar had practically become an annual affair, causing severe hardship to the people. The flood in 1913 was unprecedented and had uprooted the entire population of the Vardhaman district on the western bank of the river. Keshavrao and five of his friends joined the relief party sent forth by the Ramakrishna Mission. One of them was Venkataramana, who later on became a renowned patriot of Madras. He has recorded in his diary, "Hedgewar worked round the clock with untiring zeal. His capacity for work was fantastic."

### **Vibrant social activist**

Because of his various activities, Keshavrao had developed close affinity with almost all the important nationalists of Bengal of those days. He would often visit them. Two of them need special mention: Shamsundar Chakravarti and Moulvi Liaquat Hussain. When Lokmanya Tilak visited Calcutta in 1906, he had initiated the public celebration of Ganeshotsav. After Keshavrao arrived in Calcutta he arranged similar celebrations in all the students' hostels. From the time of Lokmanya Tilak's incarceration in the Mandalay prison in 1908 up to the time of his release in June 1914, Keshavrao observed the vow of fasting on Ekadashi.

#### **Revolutionary activities through Anuseelan Samiti**

Even in such trying times, Pulinbihari's Anusheelan Samiti carried on its activities assiduously. Being of a determined and irrepressible nature, Keshavrao kept himself busy in these and similar activities. The Samiti strove to quicken the public awakening through underground literature. Keshavrao transmitted the books and pamphlets to Nagpur and other places through friends going home during vacations. And whenever he went to Nagpur during holidays, he carried revolvers for the revolutionaries there.

It was not easy to get admitted to the Anusheelan Samiti. The applicants were meticulously screened. The person's attitude, character, patience, endurance, obedience, self-control and such other traits were put to a severe test and only those who came through it successfully were admitted. The members were graded, and the best of them formed the hard-core. Each member on enrolment had to take a religious vow in the presence of ten or twelve people, or in the Kali temple or in the crematory. There were four strata of members, and the vows were different for each category. The severity of requirement increased as one proximated to the hard-core. Keshavrao was, of course, amongst the hard-core. His code name was Koken. One of the leading members of the Samiti, Trailokyanath Chakravarti, has included the photographs of some top members of the Samiti in his book 30 years in Prison. Keshavrao's picture also figures in that group. Chakravarti has remarked, Only those who had taken the ultimate vow were considered full and true members of the Samiti. And only those who had renounced their homes and families were entitled to take that vow. Keshavrao had fully merited admission in accordance with this stern norm.

#### **Qualified physician**

Keshavrao passed the final examination and secured the L.M.S. degree in 1914. In accordance with the requirement, he underwent practical training for the prescribed period and completed the course on 9th July 1915. He had on hand offer of a lucrative job in Bangkok. But he refused. After completing the five-year course, Dr. Hedgewar returned to Nagpur in early 1916. Even prior to leaving for Calcutta he had determined not to become "your most obedient servant" to the government. He returned to Nagpur with an even greater resolve about his future course of action. Many of his co-students, however, anxious to 'settle down in life', conformed to government requirements and started their professional careers. But as far as Dr. Hedgewar was concerned, it was not for earning money or personal prestige that he had studied.

It was at this time that there was a recurrence of plague in Nagpur. The eldest of the brothers Mahadev Shastri, like the parents, fell a victim to it. There was mounting pressure from some friends and well-wishers that Doctorji should start his medical practice. They even offered to find a suitable place for his clinic. But Doctorji evaded the issue saying "Where is the hurry?" and sometimes laughing it away. He had in his possession a few drugs, a weighing balance and some medical books. He attended to the medical needs of close friends and acquaintances. However, he was not in the least interested in pursuing it as a career. Doctors were few in those days. Around 1917 it is said there were not more than 75 private medical practitioners in the whole of Central Provinces and Berar. A lucrative career was thus open to Doctorji who also commanded considerable social esteem.

#### **Revolutionary back in Nagpur**

World War I was going on, and the British were obliged to deploy the greater part of the Indian army on the Warfield. Doctorji set out to make the best of this situation. Doctorji bought revolvers and other weapons and sent them to activist youths in various parts of the country. Agents were dispatched to Calcutta, Bhagyanagar (Hyderabad) and Goa to purchase the much needed arms. By then Doctorji was also able to establish contacts with underground workers of Bengal and Punjab, and sent a contingent of 20 selected volunteers from Nagpur and Wardha districts, to organize work in Northern Bharat. Gangaprasad Pande, a most energetic and fervent revolutionary, was made the leader of the group.

#### **From revolutionary path to mass movement**

But after the world war 1 ended and Britain became victorious, the revolutionary movements crumbled due to the actions by the Britishers and the inherent indiscipline of the members. The collapse of revolutionary plans did not unnerve Doctorji in the least. He now engaged himself in organizing various kinds of social and political activities. Bal Gangadhar Tilak passed away on August 1, 1920. The Congress session took place in Nagpur by the end of 1920

December under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Over 3,000 members of the Reception Committee, nearly 15,000 delegates and 8,000 spectators participated in the session. As leaders of volunteer group Dr. Paranjpe and Doctorji were in charge of lodging and food. All were thoroughly impressed with Doctorji's rare organizing skill, humility and service-mindedness with a corps of some 1000-1500 volunteers.

### **From fire arms to fire brand speaker**

The Nagpur session of the Congress adopted a resolution for the Non-cooperation Movement. Doctorji moved like a hurricane, lighting up the torch of freedom in the hearts and minds of people. A bonfire of foreign clothes would follow at many a place at the close of his meetings. How could the government tolerate all this? Restrictions were imposed upon Doctorji about participating in public meeting, lecturing and addressing gatherings of more than five persons. At last, the government sued him (31st May 1921). The complaint was that of "sedition". Doctorji's speeches in Katol and Bharatwada had been found "objectionable." Doctorji prepared to plead his case himself. He read out his written statement on the 5th of August. On seeing his statement the presiding judge exclaimed, "His defense is even more seditious than his original speech!" On 19th August the judge pronounced one year's rigorous imprisonment for him. Doctorji smilingly received the verdict.

### **In search of answers**

The non-cooperation movement gradually died down; Gandhiji had been jailed. Many who had jumped into it in a momentary flush of enthusiasm were now disillusioned; they now sulked. On 5th February 1922, people in Chowrichowra in Uttar Pradesh made a violent assault on the police station. They murdered 21 policemen and one officer, and set fire to the police station. Gandhiji was shocked by the incident. He called off the non-cooperation movement on 12th February.

To woo the muslims into the national movement, the congress leadership chose the dangerous path of appeasement and as we know it all ended up in the tragedy of partition of our motherland. The failure of the Khilafat movement angered the muslims who plunged into riots and killed hindus in Kerala in 1921. While every one of the national leaders were thinking of the ways to drive the foreign aggressors away, Doctor Hedgewar as a professional physician was looking for the roots of the cause of our misery.

### **Founding of the Sangh**

The idea of establishing the Sangh became gradually crystallized in Doctorji's mind. It now only remained to translate that concept into actuality. Doctorji chose the sacred day of Vijaya Dashami, 1925, for the historic occasion. That day was, indeed, very auspicious for launching the work, since Vijaya Dashami traditionally symbolized the conquest of good over evil. Founding the Sangh was the first step in the future victorious march of the Hindu Nation - from the individual to collective life, from subservience to invincibility. About 15-20 young men gathered in Doctorji's house on that day. Doctorji announced to the gathering, "We are inaugurating the Sangh today". The sole capital of the Sangh at the time of founding was Doctorji's own life of utter dedication and sterling character, his unsurpassed organizing ability and spirit of self-effacing service.

### **Evolution and growth of Shaka Karya Padhati**

Activities relating to physical training were conducted by Doctorji's friend Anna Sohni, who was an adept at handling lathi, dagger, lance and such other conventional weapons. He was himself a well-built figure and his unique technique of coaching fascinated the youth. Training in drill, marching, etc., was imparted on Sundays by another friend of Doctorji, Martandao Jog. On Thursdays and Sundays there were discourses on national affairs. These sessions later on came to be known as Bouddhik Varga. Doctorji and Vishwanathrao Kelkar lectured at these sessions. Among the younger leaders, Balaji Huddar, Dada Paramarth, Bhaiyaji Dani and others were encouraged by Doctorji to speak.

Within a short time, Doctorji evolved an integrated scheme of threefold training covering the three aspects - physical, intellectual and mental. The Swayamsevaks thus began to assemble every day on the grounds of a primary school. As the number grew, that place proved insufficient. The Mohitewada ground, which was then in utter neglect, was cleared and the Shakha was started there. From 28th May of 1926, the daily Shaka programme was commenced as a regular routine.

### **Sangh growing as an organisation**

For the naming of the Sangh, Doctorji arranged a baithak in his house on 17th April 1926. Twentysix Swayamsevaks participated in the discussion. Several names were suggested, and there was elaborate discussion about each. The name 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' was evolved after long and intense deliberation.

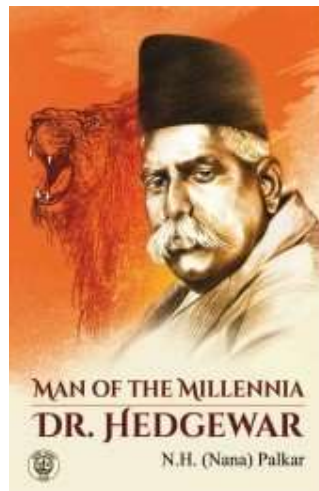
The Sangh grew slowly but steadily with enrolment of young men one after another, in ever increasing numbers. Doctorji spent every single minute of his waking hours in building up the nascent organization. The first anniversary of the Sangh was celebrated at a simple function on the Vijaya Dashami day of 1926. On that occasion, Doctorji also started a library for the use of Swayamsevaks. Doctorji used to say - "We need lakhs and lakhs of young men wholly dedicated to the uplift of the nation. It is they who can bring about the much needed national awakening; and this national consciousness has to be transmitted to successive generations. Then only will the grave problems besetting our country be solved."

Dr Hedgewar didn't say that it's my 'organisation' and that I would run it. He never thought or behaved like this. He promoted collaboration in every aspect. But in order to ensure smooth operation, it was unavoidable to have centralized planning and direction. For this reason, Doctorji was designated as the formal chief of the organization at a baithak held on 19th December 1926.

Dr. Hedgewar toiled day and night to lay a secure foundation for the strengthening and growth of the Sangh. In the meanwhile he participated in the 'jungle satyagraha' on his personal capacity after giving the responsibility of Sarsanghachalak to Dr Paranjpe and was imprisoned for nine months. Till 1940, for fifteen years he worked hard to spread the Sangh work to the length and breadth of our country.

### **Epoch maker**

As we have mentioned in the beginning, a pedigree of karayakarthas continue to derive inspiration from Doctorji's life and mission. As rightly said Doctorji is an epoch maker and seed for the rise of Nava Bharat.



(For inspiring anecdotes in Doctorji's life please read the book, "MAN OF THE MILLENNIA, DR. HEDGEWAR" by N.H (Nana) Palkar. [🔗 ORDER ONLINE](#))