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R S S *LIGHTS UP-*
The Path to Eternal Glory

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A Word Please

We are glad to present before our readers an article by Sri Dattopant Thengdi, who has for years been actively associated with RSS.

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In this article Sri Thengdiji has lucidly explained the historical processes that prompted the founding of RSS and also the rationale behind its way of functioning. The article is a product of deep insight and experience of public life, and puts in proper perspective the stance of RSS in the vicissitudes of our national life.

Sixty Paise

We are to Sri Thengdiji for permitting us to bring out this highly useful article as a Jagarana publication.

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R S S LIGHTS UP THE PATH TO ETERNAL GLORY

When we look into the pages of world history, a strange phenomenon strikes the eye.

The Contrast

The Hindu Nation, the first on the face of the earth to attain its fully evolved nationhood, has been continuing to exist whereas several other nations which came on the world stage for a time and spread their wings of power and influence far and wide, have later on disappeared into the limbo of history. The Rome of Julius Caesar has vanished, with the Italy of today having no semblance of it whatsoever, The Misra of Pharaoh kings has no more remained and the Egypt of today is not its successor. Nor does the Greece of today uphold the legacy of the great Socrates. Iran of today is no longer the Persia of Zarathustra. And so have the empires of Babylon, Assyria and Byzantium been erased from the face of the earth.

A Fatal Weakness

This contrast naturally gives rise to the query: What is the secret of the enduring nature of Hindu Nation? And what is that fatal weakness which brought about the downfall and dissipation of those several other nations?

In the case of the latter it has been found that the entire life of their people was centred round the state. The government had become the central pivot of all aspects of their life—social, cultural, religious etc. And when, either because of external aggressions or on account of

internal social disruption, the government crumbled down, the society woven round it also came down in a crash. Just as a creeper curling round a tree falls to the ground the moment the tree comes down, so also was the fate of these nations.

Secret of our Immortality

In the case of Hindu Nation, however, the social life never centred round the state. It had always been autonomous, self-governed. It had created, for the fulfilment of its various functions and aspirations, various agencies and instruments; the state or the government was only one such. It was neither the only, nor even the chief, instrument. This insistence on the subordinate importance of the state vis-a-vis the society was scrupulously maintained all these past centuries. Our national life, therefore, could go on even though the governments changed and the state crumbled. In a poem titled "Brook" by Tennyson, the Brook says, "Men may come and men may go, but I go on for ever." So is the case with the Hindu Nation. Governments have come and governments have gone but the Hindu Nation has been going on for ever.

And from where did the social life and its several fields of expression draw their sustenance? There was a class of people endowed with character, spirit of service and sacrifice and dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, and who had kept themselves away from positions of pelf and power; it was they, and not the state, who formed the mainstay of society. It was because of this saving factor that even when external aggressions of the most barbaric type continued for several centuries and the state machinery was ruthlessly employed to destroy the nation, it could still maintain its identity. Verily, this is the secret of the immortality of the Hindu Nation.

From the Days of Epics

It is because of the glowing examples of such absolutely self-abnegating and dedicated men that the same life-values percolated into all strata of society. Neither power nor money dominated the affairs of society. It was because of this that *dharma*, the supreme moral and spiritual laws, held the sway. If conflicts arose between power and *dharma*, the latter prevailed.

We find this national ethos beautifully reflected even as early as in Ramayana. When Sri Rama was banished from Ayodhya with a view to installing Bharata as the king by his mother, the latter flatly refused to ascend the throne which he said rightly belonged to Sri Rama. Bharata ran down to Chitrakuta and implored Sri Rama to return to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom. However, Sri Rama would not budge; he in turn asked Bharata to go back and dutifully rule the kingdom. What a strange sight it must have presented—each one of the two brothers saying to the other “this kingdom is not mine, it is yours”, and the other saying “No.” Can we imagine such a thing happening in the present times, let alone for the chief positions of power, but even for a municipal councillorship?

The tradition continued in the times of Mahabharata. When Kunti, after the Kurukshetra war, decides to go away to forest to accompany the old and blind Dhritarashtra in his Vanaprastha, Pandavas tried to persuade her to stay back and live happily as the mother of the ruling princes. Kunti replied, “It was for the sake of *dharma* and not out of any desire to enjoy the pelf and power of kingdom that I urged you to go to war then, and it is to fulfil the dictates of *dharma* that I am accompanying Dhritarashtra to the forest now.”

The Historical Tradition

We see the story repeated in the historical tradition. The incomparable Chanakya, who was the architect of the great Magadha empire under Chandragupta, however installed another competent person as its Prime Minister in his place and went away to the Himalayas to plunge himself into austere penance. Similar was the case with Swami Vidyaranya. After founding the "never to be forgotten" Vijayanagar empire, he transferred the mantle of his Prime Ministership to another and departed to become the Shankaracharya of Sringeri.

During the last several centuries there have been many saints who refused to receive the royal partronge of their times. There is an instance of Saint Kumbhandas. When he was invited with all due honour by Akbar to visit his capital, Fatehpur Sikri, the saint replied, "For saints, of what use is your royal capital Sikri? While going to and fro, my sandals will only get torn. I may forget God's name also. So, it would be a double loss." So also Tukaram. He refused to respond to the invitation of Shivaji to go over to the capital to be honoured with presents.

The life story of Shivaji also has the same lesson for us. The crown held no fascination for him. Instances are there when he was only too ready to give away his kingdom and take to the path of renunciation. So with Guru Govind Singh. There is a beautiful allegory in a poem written by him. He was then the unchallenged ruler of Punjab. There is a reference in that poem to a love story popular in Punjab as Heer Ranja. A girl was in love with a young man who belonged to an "inferior" social and economic status. So her parents would not allow their marriage to take place. Instead, she was married into a rich family, called Kheda. Although she was in a rich family,

abundant with all amenities and articles of luxury, she was not feeling happy there. The girl says in that traditional Punjabi song : “ Oh Lord, why did you place me in this Kheda family ? My mind is not at peace here, it is with my lover.” Quoting these words, Guru Govind Singh also says in his poem : “ Oh Lord, why did you place me in this ‘Kheda’ family of kingship ? My mind is not at ease here. It is with God, my lover.”

Recent Examples

The tradition had continued during the freedom struggle against the Britishers also. Lokamanya Tilak the ‘Father of Indian Unrest’ was once asked in what position he would probably be after the Independence of Bharat was achieved. The questioner was amazed when Tilak replied that he would probably be in prison. “Because,” Tilak felt, “then also our political rulers might become corrupt and unconcerned about the people’s problems and miseries. Fighting for the people’s cause would be as necessary then as it is today.” How ‘surprising’ that Tilak who was one of the pioneers of the freedom movement should never have thought of sitting in seats of political power but preferred continuing his mission of awakening and organising the people and suffering for that cause.

The tradition continued with Gandhiji. He was, as all know, the inspiring symbol of the struggle of independence after Tilak. However, when the moment arrived for the transfer of power and there were hectic movements and negotiations in Delhi and Simla, he was nowhere near those parleys involving the power equations. He was away in the dense suburbs of Calcutta and, later on, in the remote villages and marshy forests of Noakhali to carry words of hope and solace to the victims of fanatic religious fury.

It is this grand immortalising tradition enshrined in the lives of these great nation-builders of Bharat, that was sought to be resuscitated by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar through the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

The Founder

Dr. Hedgewar was a born patriot if ever there was one. Even as a tiny tot of eight he threw away the sweets given to him in the school to celebrate the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria. And as a high school student he sounded the battle-cry of "*Vande Mātaram*" and got rusticated from school. He chose Calcutta to prosecute his medical studies only with a view to entering into the heart of the revolutionary freedom movement there. After he returned to Nagpur as a medical graduate he became totally immersed in the activities of Hindu Mahasabha and later of Congress. He courted imprisonment, during both the Satyagrahas of 1920 and 1931 launched by Gandhiji. Thus we find him deeply engrossed in the political movements of the day devoted to the emancipation of the country from foreign serfdom.

The Instrument

Though physically he was merged in the political current, his mind was constantly in search of answers to certain deeper questions. Questions like, what is the basic cause for the downfall and degeneration of our nation which was once mighty and glorious beyond compare? Will mere throwing out of the foreign yoke solve all our problems? Will mere transfer of political power from the foreigner's hands set our nation on the path of glory? Dr. Hedgewar's discerning intellect said "no" and unerringly pointed to an altogether different direction. He said, first comes society and second, political power. Hence it is society, the individuals in it, which has to be changed first. And

transforming of the social mind was to be brought about through the inculcation of *samskārs*, i.e., the training in character formation, and the RSS was to be that instrument.

While Dr. Hedgewar placed before the Sangh as its supreme vision the attainment of '*Param Vaibhavam*', the highest pinnacle of national glory, he pointed out that it is through the restructuring and resuscitating of the social mind that it can be achieved. He also emphasised that in order to effectively carry out this grand plan the Sangh had to be kept totally free from the day-to-day political currents and cross-currents.

Fears or Favours Deter Not

Dr. Hedgewar steered the ship of Sangh on this rather "unfashionable" charter till 1940. Before his death he had passed the mantle to Sri Guruji Golwalkar. Sri Guruji, in turn, continued the same tradition. Then came a testing time. Sangh was banned in 1948. The sin of Gandhiji's murder was sought to be foisted on the head of Sangh and nation's fury turned against it. During those critical days—when many thought that there was no other go for the Sangh except to bow before the dictates of the almighty Government—Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in one of his letters to Sri Guruji, made an offer to him that the Sangh could join Congress and serve the nation through that medium. Well, one would have thought that it was an honourable way out of the crisis. It would also have taken the Sangh straightway into the portals of power. Here was a chance to occupy places of pelf, power and prestige in the royal durbar. But Sri Guruji said "No." He replied to the Sardar that the mission of RSS lay in serving the nation through cultural rejuvenation.

The same story has been repeated, in the post-Emergency period also. When the Janata Party leaders invited the RSS

to join that party or at least become a part of its youth wing, the Sangh again refused. Here was indeed a right royal chance to share power at the Centre, but the Sangh stuck to its commitment of social resuscitation.

Psychological Identification—the Essence

The essence of this restructuring of social mind lies in the cultivation of the spirit of psychological identification of the individual with the society. The principles and laws of life which form the warp and woof of such a self-sustaining society are compendiously called *dharma*. It ensures, on the one hand, social stability and harmony and, on the other, individual happiness and development. It is to emphasise this basic and distinguishing feature of the Sangh that in its *Prārthanā* the protection and upholding of *dharma* is made a prerequisite for the attainment of the all-round national glory. The particular sentence reads: “*Vidhāyāsyā dharmasya samrakshanam*”—protecting the *dharma* and then on that basis, to accomplish *param vaibhavam*.

Will Short-cuts Help ?

In the present atmosphere surcharged with politics, however, this method of social transformation as an instrument of achieving national progress and prosperity appears to be quite unrealistic and impractical. When the “omnipotent” instrument of state power is at hand, why not employ it as the instrument for bringing about both material glory and necessary social transformation? Indeed political power appears to be a most effective short-cut to bring about whatever change one desires in social conditions.

But what are the actual results of such experiments? Let us consider a few examples.

Dictatorship out of Ballot Box

In our country, after independence, a Constitution was framed which embodies the Western type of parliamentary democracy. There have been several suggestions given by eminent men, in the light of the past thirty years of experience, to introduce certain devices in the Constitution, which would ensure better control over the elected representatives. But it is clear that even with the best of devices and constitutional safeguards, unless the level of national consciousness of the common citizen of the land is high, no such manipulations can ever guarantee the working of real democracy. Robespierre was a great thinker and a great democrat who became the first dictator after the French Revolution during that transitional period. He had, prior to revolution, passed a very significant remark that the elected representatives could, if they chose, come together, conspire against the people and impose their dictatorship. Thus, even through the democratic ballot box could emerge dictatorship. In Germany, for example, this was how Hitler emerged as the supreme dictator out of the ballot box itself. The same has been our experience in the recent past. In June 1975, Emergency was clamped. Draconian laws were enacted. Basic freedoms of the people were taken away. Parliamentary democracy was turned into a mockery—all done under the constitutional framework itself.

The Only Guarantee: National Consciousness

Wherein, then, lies the guarantee for the continuance of democracy and real participation of people in decision-making? It can only be in the raising of the level of consciousness of the common man. Now, who will do this job? The political leaders? They can only carry on

political agitations and electioneering propaganda which has nothing to do with real public education. In fact, many of them have a vested interest in keeping the electorate ignorant and credulous. For, an intelligent and enlightened electorate would easily find out the extent of trustworthiness of their representatives and would not hesitate to throw them out if found wanting.

And so, we come to the same conclusion—that the first and foremost task to be undertaken is to mould the individual's mind; he should be made to feel that he is responsible for shaping the destiny of the nation, that the joys and sorrows of the nation are his own joys and sorrows.

In short, without the inculcation of national consciousness among the people even the best of political systems would degenerate and fail to yield the desired results.

Confession of Failure

This is where the Western thinkers have been stumbling all along. Karl Marx and others who followed him declared that if the external socio-economic set-up is altered on the strength of political power, then there will be a corresponding transformation in the minds of the individuals also. The individual mind, Marx said, had no separate identity. Marx had based his theory on the postulates of science of those times which stated that matter was supreme and that mind was only a superstructure on matter.

When, however, Marx's theory was sought to be put into practice in countries where the Communists had captured power, it was found that it could not work. It is the case even to this day. Private property could not be completely abolished there. Disparity of incomes continues. And, new classes have come up in place of old. This was natural. See what Mao Tse Tung has to say in this regard. When the Communists, who claimed to be revolutionaries at the time

of their taking over the reins of government, began enjoying the various amenities and privileges of government, they fell a prey to them. They naturally wanted that the chariot of revolution should not proceed further lest they be deprived of those luxuries. They began to obstruct the march of revolution. Thus, the revolutionaries of yesterday became the reactionaries of today. The revolutionaries—the pro-changers of yesterday became the status-quoists—no-changers of today. The comrades of yesterday became the enemies of today. Mao declared that this was inevitable, and that the remedy lay in bringing about another revolution throwing out the present entrenched people. But even after that next revolution again, the new revolutionaries would become the government officials, managers and administrators and so turn into reactionaries and obstructionists. That would necessitate yet another revolution. Mao says that such revolutions would be endless. This theory of “permanent perennial revolution” of Mao is a clear admission of the failure of Marx’s dictum that if there is an appropriate change in the socio-economic structure then automatically changes would take place in the individual minds.

Bhishma Excelled Marx

This fact of human nature was taken note of long long ago by Hindu thinkers. In Mahabharata, Yudhishthira asks Bhishma as to what could be the ideal condition of society and whether such a state of affairs existed at any time. Bhishma says “Yes” and describes it.

*Na rājyam naiva rājaseet
na dandyo na cha dāndikah
dharmenaiva prajāsarvā
rakshati sma parasparam*

(There existed no state, no king, no punisher and no one to be punished. All protected one another by virtue of *dharmā*.)

Yudhishtira then asked him, "When such an ideal condition was prevailing, then what is it that caused its degeneration and collapse?" Bhishma explains :

*Te mohavashamāpannā
manujā manujarshabha
pratipativimohāccha
dharmasteshāmaneenashan*

"The evil of temptation (or confusion) entered the minds of the people. As a result, they lost their pristine knowledge causing the collapse of *dharmā*. And with the fall of *dharmā* the society too degenerated." So we find that the diagnosis of Bhishma is more basic and realistic than the theories of Karl Marx about matter and mind. Unless there is some continuous and continuing process of inculcation of right attitudes and values of life among the people mere external state of social life, however good and noble, will not last long. So long as the individual mind is not properly attuned to and identified with the body-politic of society, whatever the super-structure, political or economic, imposed from above, it is bound to fail. This is the fundamental viewpoint of Hinduism which has been made the sheet-anchor of the work of Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh.

Ultimate Vision

Thus the mission of Sangh is basic ; on its strength alone can all fields of national activity flourish and prosper. Just as breathing is a basic function of the body, without which it will not survive even for a minute, so is this work of constant inculcation of the right *samskārs* in society.

Now we come to the special features of the organised state of society which the Sangh is striving to build. There had been several attempts, even before the founding of

Sangh, to organise the Hindu people. They had all taken the form of either a volunteer corps or a political group or a sect or a cult. However, it was left to the genius of Dr. Hedgewar to conceive of an organisation which was to encompass the entire society and not any one particular segment or aspect of it. To put it in another way, the frontiers of *Sanghasthan* (the meeting place of Sangh Swayamsevak) should in course of time become co-extensive with those of the Hindu Nation. The ultimate vision of the Sangh is that both the Sangh and Hindu Nation should become identical, the entire Hindu society reaching an organised state of affairs and the Sangh merging itself into the society.

Liberty with Discipline

There is a misconception often associated with the term "organisation" in the minds of those influenced by Western thought. In the West, the psychological pendulum swings from one extreme to the other. Under democracy, they praised the individual liberty to the skies. But soon they found to their dismay that liberty had degenerated into licentiousness and exploitation of the weaker sections of society. The people became fed up with this state of affairs and began to talk of social discipline. But in the name of social discipline the pendulum began to swing to the other extreme of regimentation. In that condition, the liberty, initiative and aptitudes of the individual were all extinguished. This is how licentiousness has come to be associated with liberty and regimentation with social discipline. Of course, both these extremes are perversions and are to be eschewed. Liberty of the individual is to be valued as much as social discipline. It is this harmonious synthesis of individual liberty and social discipline that has been the hallmark of the Hindu social structure.

A Striking Example

At the commencement of Mahabharata War, Arjuna feels depressed, confused and refused to fight. He tells Sri Krishna of his condition and requests him to tell him what he should do. However, Sri Krishna does not give him any such directive. He did not straightway ask him to go and fight. On the contrary, he carried on a long discussion with his disciple running into 18 chapters of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Even after all this, Sri Krishna did not command Arjuna to do this way or that. He says, "*Yathechchasi tathā kuru*" (Whatever you deem fit, do accordingly). The only precondition laid down by Sri Krishna is "*Vimrishyoitadasheshena*" that is, after giving a comprehensive thought to the entire matter.

Not Uniformity, But Identification

This is the type of democratic discipline (which alone can form the basis of disciplined democracy) which Hinduism has always been advocating. In this concept, uniformity is not what is aimed at. Differences among the individuals on all plans — physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual—are duly recognised. Differences in temperments, aptitudes, likes and dislikes are all taken into account. Generalisation or codification of a uniform conduct for all is considered neither feasible nor desirable. It is not uniformity nor generalisation, but the emotional identification of the individual with the society that is sought to be brought about. That will ensure full scope for the growth of the individual characteristics and capabilities but at the same time bring about social discipline.

Scientific Technique

Now, how can this attunement of the individual's mind with the society be accomplished? Will the modern techniques

of mass propaganda serve the purpose? No. The mass media are at best useful in effecting some changes on the intellectual plane. They may leave their impress on one's opinions and views on certain subjects. But a mere intellectual understanding or formation of opinions does not change one's character. Character-formation needs a regular and daily practice of imprinting of suitable *samskāras* through congenial programmes in the company of like-minded people. It is this principle of character-moulding that informs every little item of the technique of Sangh. The daily gathering of swyamsevaks in the form of Shakha is the practical expression of this technique. It is the most scientifically planned technique on the psychological plane that one could conceive of. But the sheer simplicity of its exterior often makes people doubt its potency.

At the Hands of an Expert

Once, when Sri Guruji was with the elite at Calcutta, an elderly doctor asked him: "Your objectives are indeed noble. But the methodology you have adopted appears to be very insignificant in comparison to your grand ideas. Playing Kabaddi or practising lathi and sword and all such instruments—with such programmes as these, how can you possibly expect to reach the lofty goal?" Sri Guruji smiled and posed a counter-question: "What is the master drug of Allopathy as on today?" That year was 1946. The doctor said "penicillin." Sri Guruji continued: "Surely you know how penicillin was first produced? It was out of stale and stinking food! Does it not mean that even the meanest of things can yield the greatest of results at the hands of experts? And the workers of Sangh are the experts in the science of organisation."

The Shortest Way

There are some others who feel that the path of Sangh is a very long one and that we should resort to some short-cuts. I remember a signboard in the railway-yard at Mughalsarai. It says, "Beware, short-cut will cut you short." Indeed, this has been the experience with regard to several experiments in "short-cuts" in the field of our social reorganisation during the last several years. As such it is best that we stick to the path lighted up by reason and experience and march ahead with speed and vigour to reach the Goal of All-round Glory of Our Nation. And, as a great thinker has once remarked, "It may be a long way. But if it be the only way, then it is also the shortest one."



Politics is described as—

V̄āraṅaneva Nripan̄itiranekarūpa

— changing its hue and shade every now and then. It is only an arrangement, a means to serve social life. But external arrangement is not all, is not life. However, in our case the 'means' was mistaken for the 'end'. Man wears clothes according to the needs of the body. He does not cut down his body according to the size of the clothes !

There is a story of a robber by name Procrustes who used to invite an unwary guest to his forest house and ask him to rest on a cot. If the guest was longer than the cot, the robber used to chop off his extra length, and if shorter, he was elongated forcibly ! That was the novel technique the robber employed to murder persons. And so are our leaders hammering and straining the body of our nation to adjust it to the bed of politics with the inevitable result that our age-old social life has fallen into a perilous plight.

—Pujya Sri Guruji

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