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राष्ट्रीय स्वयंसेवक संघ

Rashtriya
Swayamsevak
Sangh

**Essence of 'Hindutva'
is 'Hinduness'**

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*At dawn in a park in Nagpur,
central city of Bharat, rows of
men and boys stand in discipline.
They stretch, sing and move in
rhythm. This daily gathering
called a shakha, it belongs to
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
(RSS), the world's largest
volunteer driven movement.*

To its participants, it is the living pulse of an idea first written down a century ago: Hindutva, literally "Hinduness," a word embodied to express civilisational identity of Bharat's soul. It is not a religious or a political slogan, but a way of oneness, belonging to shared Samskruti (closest meaning - culture) that predates modern nation states.

The word Hindutva, formed by appending Sanskrit suffix tva ("-ness") to "Hindu," first appeared in 1923 when Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, then a political prisoner in Ratnagiri, state of Maharashtra in Bharat published his tract Essentials of Hindutva. 'Hindutva' is not a word but a history, he wrote, "not only the spiritual or religious history of our people... but a history in full". This was a deliberate distinction. Hindu, the faith, was one strand; Hindutva was the encompassing weave of geography, ancestry and shared civilisational oneness and uniqueness.



This idea resonated with a young doctor named Keshav Baliram Hedgewar who gave it an organisational life. In 1925, Hedgewar founded RSS, convinced that independence of Hindu society would be fragile without social cohesion.

RSS began as a modest group but with clear purpose: to rebuild the cultural backbone of Bharat i.e. India by instilling discipline, selflessness, strength and unity.

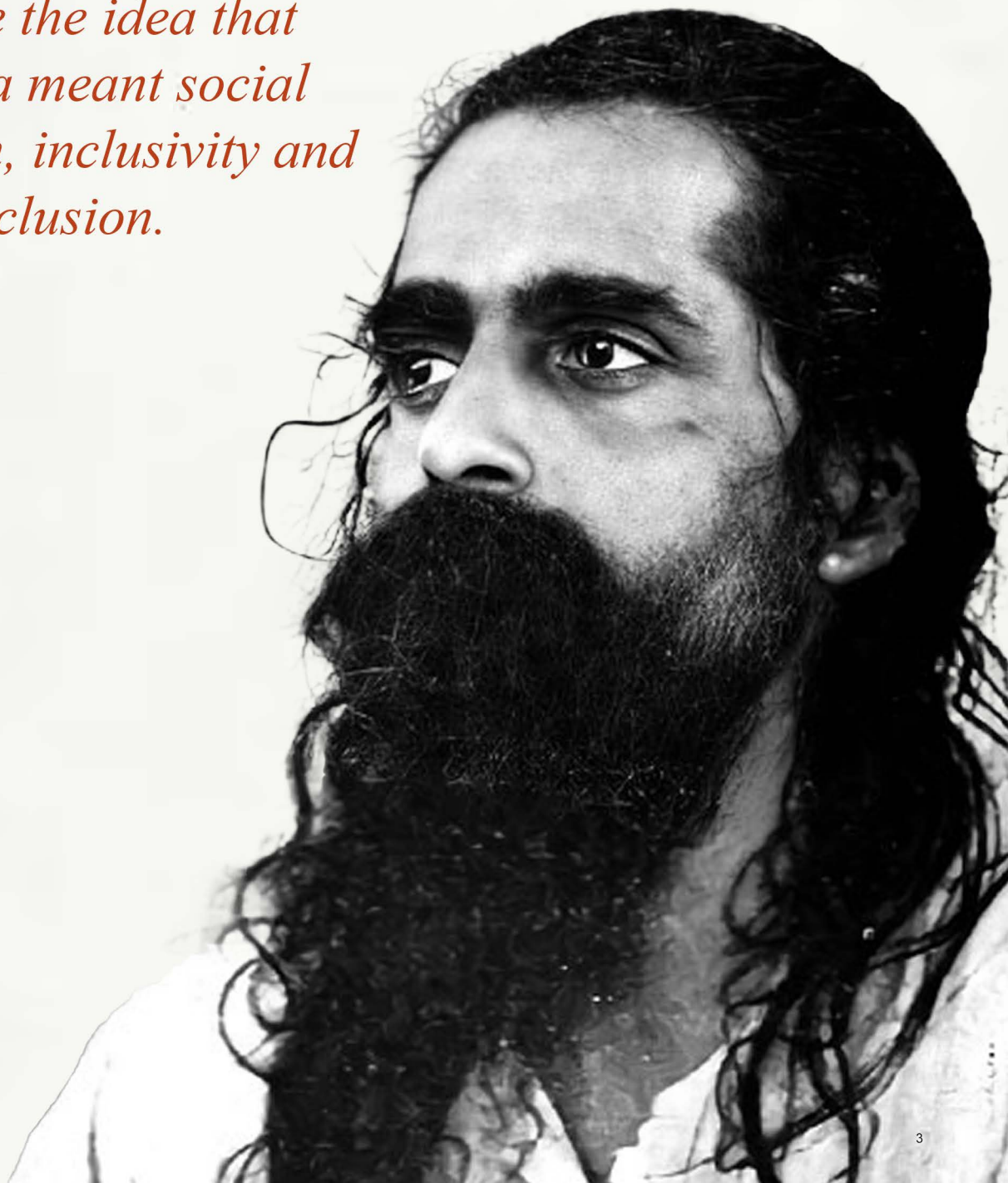
In the early days, at shakhas, volunteers performed yoga, read from epic poems and discussed re-building a shattered nation that was ravaged by several invasions and occupations including British colonisation of India.

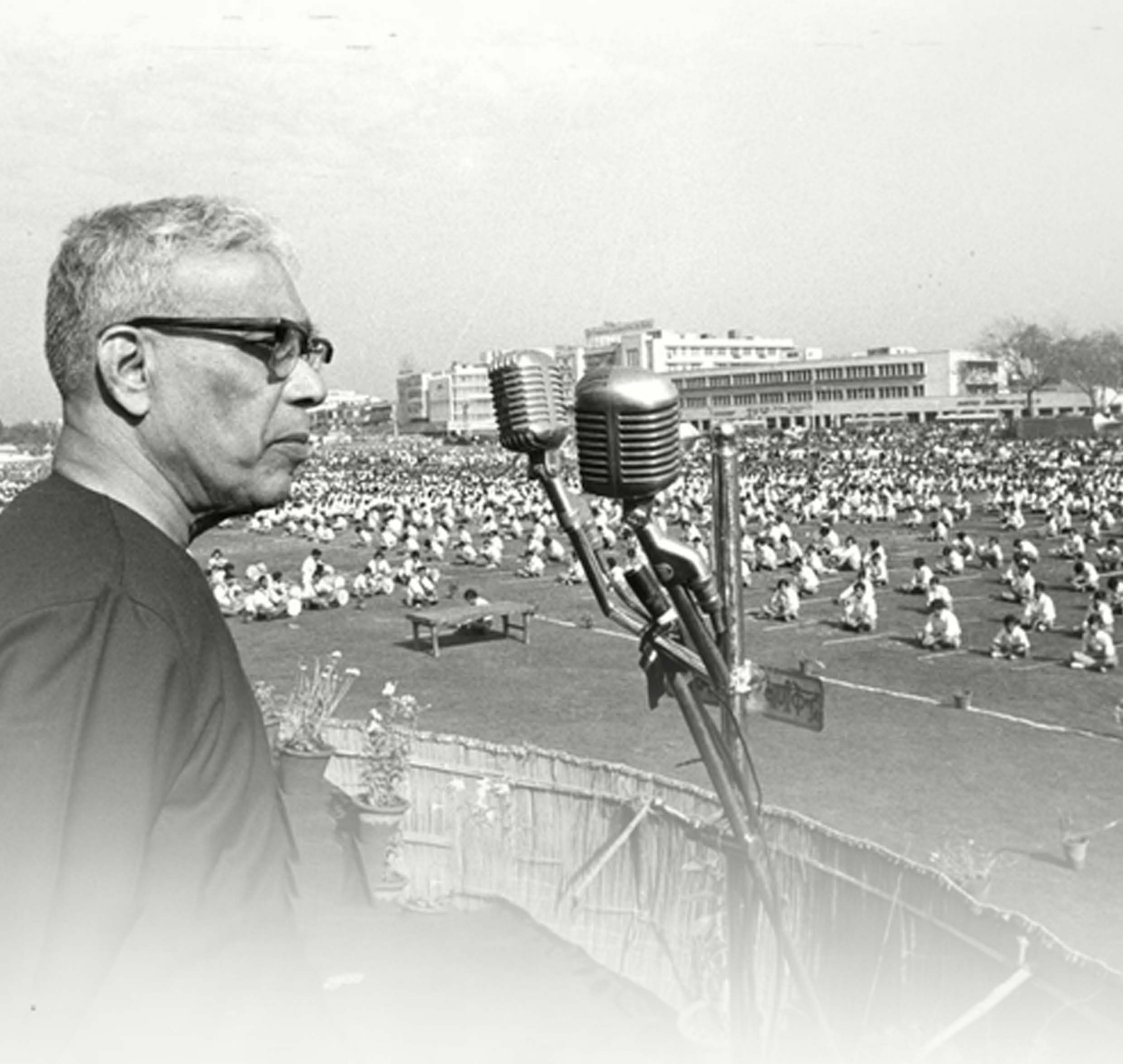
This was not a political grouping but cultural celebration. Hedgewar saw Hindutva as the core principle of Bhartiya (Indian) civilisation, a shared heritage that could bind together its fractious communities. In this sense, RSS was less a group than a peaceful movement of national character that evolved over years translating Savarkar's words and its civilisational ethos into a lived routine. This reiterated the core that Hindutva was not an abstract doctrine but a habit or way of daily life, lived from generation to generation.



When Hedgewar passed on in 1940, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar or popular as “Guruji,” became second Sarsanghchalak (Chief) of RSS. In his writings, Golwalkar described Hindutva as “the fundamental truth of our national life,” extending beyond any one sect to embrace “the entire cultural inheritance of this land”. India had adopted a formal constitution in 1950 while Golwalkar maintained that genuine unity could emerge only from recognising this civilisational core.

Under his leadership, the RSS expanded nationwide, setting up service projects and cultural initiatives to reinforce the idea that Hindutva meant social cohesion, inclusivity and never exclusion.





Balasaheb Deoras, third Sarsanghchalak of RSS from 1973 pushed Hindutva more explicitly into realm of social reform. In a landmark 1974 speech, he declared,

“If untouchability is not wrong, then nothing in the world is wrong”

In *The RSS: A Vision in Action*, Deoras explained that Hindu Rashtra was “not a political slogan but a cultural reality” with “no place for caste discrimination”. He pressed volunteers to work with Dalit and tribal communities, treating social inclusion as integral to Hindutva itself. This marked a shift from the defensive pride of 1920s to an activist engagement with inequality in 1970s.

Rajendra Singh, known as Rajju Bhaiya, took over as Sarsanghchalak of RSS in 1994. He described Hindutva as

“the collective consciousness of the people of Bharat, not directed against anyone but for welfare of all”



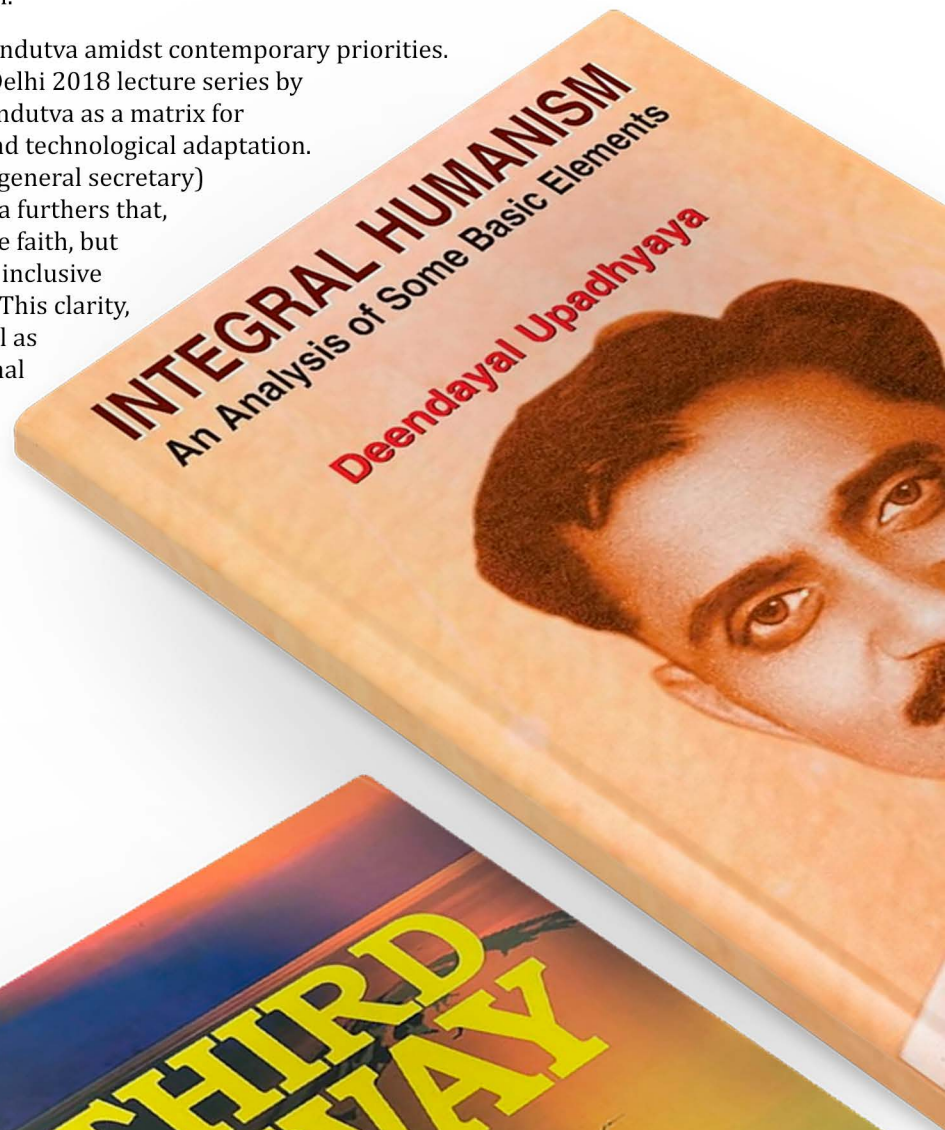


K.S. Sudarshan who succeeded him as Sarsanghchalak in 2000 furthered the sentiment that Hindutva must respond to new global challenges, economic liberalisation, environmental stress, technological disruption. Sudarshan presented Hindutva as a guide for the future rather than a retreat into the past.

Parallel to these RSS leaders were thinkers who shaped Hindutva's intellectual reach. *Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism (1965)* proposed that Hindutva's holistic view of the human being; body, mind, spirit, intellect and soul should drive governance and development. This philosophy rejected both Western capitalism and Marxism, instead rooting the human policy in Dharma or righteous moral duty. *Dattopant Thengadi's* work entitled 'Third Way' extended this economic thinking, calling for *Bhartiya* models that balanced social justice with cultural integrity. Together, these ideas presented Hindutva not merely as cultural identity but as a civilisational blueprint for public life.

By the 2010s, RSS leadership was consciously addressing perceptions of Hindutva. In his 2015 Vijayadashami address, current Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat reiterated, "Hindutva is Hinduness. To say that it is political is misrepresentation. It is cultural identity of this nation which accepts all and excludes none". In a three-day lecture series in Delhi in 2018, he went further, telling an audience of intellectuals and scholars: "Hindutva is Bharat's identity. All who consider Bharat as their motherland and respect its culture are part of Hindutva. There is no question of exclusion". These open statements distilled what the movement's founders had insisted all along; that Hindutva was synonymous with cultural pluralism and not a code for exclusion.

At the same time, the RSS began to discuss, Hindutva amidst contemporary priorities. Future Bharat-An RSS Perspective, based on Delhi 2018 lecture series by Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat envisions Hindutva as a matrix for environmental stewardship, women power and technological adaptation. Echoing the sentiment, current Sarkaryavah (general secretary) Dattatreya Hosabale's Hindutva Hindu Rashtra furthers that, "Hindu Rashtra is not about domination of one faith, but about recognition that Bharat's soul is Hindu, inclusive and open. Hindutva is that soul's expression". This clarity, was distilled much by global audiences as well as by Bharat's citizens, as Hindutva is civilisational humanism rather than majoritarianism.



Across decades, the sentiment is clear. Savarkar's writings to Hedgewar's organisational skills, Golwalkar's philosophy to Deoras social reform, Upadhyaya's holistic development model to Mohan Bhagwat's universal messaging; the core of Hindutva in multiple dimensions is crystal clear. It's only that each generation added a dimension to Hindutva while preserving its essence as Hinduness, a living continuity with Bharat's ancient civilisational self. The daily shakha in a city park is therefore more than exercises and activities. It is a ritual of belonging to something larger, a performance of cultural memory.

Hindutva is inclusive and plural, a unifying canopy for Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, tribals and others whose traditions sprang from the same soil or are of the same soil. Hindutva's own texts insist on this civilisational thrust in nature and spirit.

Even after a century, the term remains foundational. It carries the weight of Savarkar's words, "a history in full" and the imprint of generations of organisers who sought to turn that history into social practice. Hedgewar gave Hindutva its organisational form; Golwalkar gave it philosophical weight; Deoras gave it social inclusiveness; Rajju Bhaiya and Sudarshan gave it continuity and modernity; Bhagwat and Hosabale have given it global clarity. In their hands, Hindutva has been presented as the cultural heartbeat of a diverse yet culturally one nation, one people with one civilisational identity.

Hindutva as Hinduness is both anchor and horizon: the anchor of Bharat's ancient ethos and horizon of a future rooted in cultural confidence yet open to the world. To watch a shakha at sunrise is to see that story unfolding centuries old ideals rehearsed every morning, tying the past to the present and projecting a vision of India's selfhood into the future.



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