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# India: Ideology and Tactics of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh)

Tuesday 28 May 2019, by [BHAMBHRI C P](#) (Date first published: 6 April 2017).

**The ABVP's (Youth wing of the BJP) onslaught of terror and violence in Ramjas College, Delhi University should serve as an important reminder of the fundamentally anti-democratic nature of its parent organisation, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and all its affiliates. We must not look at the hooliganism of ABVP as an aberrant act but instead as something that is integral to RSS ideology. This article, in three parts, reflects on the ideology of RSS, its evolution through its history and links to the present political conditions in India.**

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The fact that for the first time in India's post independent history, so many pracharaks (organiser) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) control the levers of executive power is a matter of great concern. Besides the ascendancy of Narendra Modi, we also have instances of chief ministers of Haryana, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and elsewhere to suggest a dangerous trend. One might ask: what is so dangerous about pracharaks becoming political leaders with executive power? Doesn't our constitution allow everyone to run for public office and then get elected in a free and fair election?

Such an approach to the growing political ascendancy of the RSS in the country is dangerous and ignores the special character of the RSS that distinguishes it from different other political parties. We all know that even within the most representative democracies, the ruling class remains stridently in favour of capital and it finds different ways for its accumulation to proceed without any visible resistance. This is not an easy task. The job of labour appropriation and concentration of wealth occurs through the means of violence as well as making an ideological environment that is favourable to the ruling class. The latter is an important consideration and through modes that may initially seem disconnected, the ruling class yields influence and control over the State apparatus as well as the common sense that governs at the time.

If ideology plays an important role in the formulation of social and political agenda in class-divided, exploiting societies, it is essential to decode and demystify the ideology of RSS which has come to occupy the centre stage in the Indian society and which has grown to be a significant part of the ideological mainstream of India. Attention has to be focused on the rapid expansion of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its 44 affiliates. The context in which RSS is functioning under the protective umbrella of the Narendra Modi government is quite different from the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government though he was also a RSS pracharak since he had to function under the system of checks and balances of a coalition government from 1998 to 2004. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has full control over all the levers of State power because unlike Atal Bihari

Vajpayee, the BJP has its own majority in the Lok Sabha in spite of the fact that it polled only 31 percent of the popular national votes in the sixteenth Lok Sabha election of 2014.

The Hinduisation of this plural, religiously diverse society is the primary agenda of the RSS and this is the reason that it is establishing its shakhas or branches in far off places where in the past it was never present. The primary goal of ideologically oriented RSS is to strengthen its organisation and spread its network in rural, urban, and tribal areas and achieve its short term and long term goal of establishing a Hindu Rashtra (nation) and making Hindus to assert their special and separate identity based on Brahmanical-Vedic-Sanskrit variety of Hindutva. The basic goal of RSS is to awaken Hindus, on the basis of their specific reading of the scriptures, and make them quite assertive as the original inhabitants of Bharat Mata (Mother India). According to this line of thought, this exclusive claim of original indigenous inhabitants of holy Mother India make Hindus of India distinct from other major religions like Muslims and Christians. One nation, one religion and one language are the basic "ideas of India" perceived by the RSS.

It was to achieve this goal, Dr K B Hedgewar of Nagpur, established the RSS in 1925. It needs to be mentioned here that very tall nationalist leaders during anti-colonial struggle like Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malviya, etc. were also committed to promote and protect Hindu religion and its symbols like the cow. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, very strong movements like Arya Samaj under the leadership of Dayanand Saraswati were at work to project and promote Hinduism. All these movements preceded the RSS and were distinct from their championship of Hindu assertion. Hindu Mahasabha's Dr Shyama Prasad Mukerjee floated the Jan Sangh (now BJP), the party of the Hindu right in 1949-50, with the help of MS Golwalkar, the Sarsanghchalak of the RSS. He lent him two RSS pracharaks, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani. In the changed political circumstances, the real focus has to be on the RSS. It is the RSS which is the ideological patron-in-chief of all its outfits. Its ideologically trained "cadre" and officially nominated functionaries are holding the keys for every important decision which is taken by its 44 affiliates and BJP-led governments at the centre and the states.

## What is RSS?

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is primarily a Brahmin organisation and the RSS flag is the 'bhagwa' flag of the Peshwa rulers. This is the reason that RSS has always projected Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as their hero because he is considered a brave fighter against Muslim Mughal rule. Figures such as Shivaji and Maharana Pratap are glorified by RSS because their ideology is sustained and nurtured by hostility towards minority communities like Muslims and Christians. Such social groups like Muslims and Christians are "outsiders" because their religious reference points and holy places like Mecca-Madina, Pope and Christian Church are outside the territorial boundaries of India.

It is easy to conclude that religion is the defining foundational principle of the ideology of the RSS. This principle is reflected in its organisational structure. KB Hedgewar established the RSS in 1925 in Nagpur to provide 'physical training to Hindus so that they are strong enough to stand against the attacks by its opponents especially the Muslims'. Hindus should be strong physically so that they can defend their Janma Bhoomi and Punya Bhoomi i.e. the Holy Mother India. (Rakesh Sinha in his work, 'Builder of Modern India', New Delhi 2014-15) B.S. Moonje, a comrade in arms of Dr K.B. Hedgewar, provides some significant insights about the reality of the RSS organisation and its objectives especially because the founder, Hedgewar did not provide any constitution of the organisation.

## The Organisation of RSS

One fundamental approach of the RSS from 1925 to 2016 has been its secrecy that is maintained by a rigid hierarchy where all power is concentrated in the RSS supremo known as Sarsanghchalak who is closely assisted by trusted senior RSS pracharaks represented in the Pratinidhi Sabha (Supreme Council). B.S. Moonje, who met fascist leader Benito Mussolini, developed a great admiration for the dictator and his fascist organisation beginning with youth institutions known as the Balilla that was conceived as a military organisation for the military regeneration of Italy. These were Moonje's observations upon his meeting with Mussolini and experiencing first hand, the Balilla.

"The idea of fascism widely brings out the conception of unity amongst people...India and particularly Hindu India needs such institutions for the military regeneration of the Hindus: so that the artificial distinction so much emphasised by the British of martial and non-martial classes amongst the Hindus may disappear. Our institution of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of Nagpur under Dr Hedgewar is of this mind, though quite independently conceived. I will spend the rest of my life in developing and extending this institution of Dr Hedgewar throughout Maharashtra and other provinces."

The military like training of the RSS cadre, known as Swayamsevak, is the distinctive feature of this Hindu organisation. The goal of RSS is to train Hindus in its shakhas so that they have enough military strength to defend Bharat Mata from its opponents – the Muslims. The RSS holds daily branch meetings for imparting ideological and physical training to young Hindus because like fascists and Nazis of Italy and Germany, of Mussolini and Hitler, it is the youthful minds, which have to be indoctrinated. This ideological commitment of the RSS has been transmitted to all Swayamsevaks beginning with KB Hedgewar to Mohan Bhagwat. Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS supremo, on March 4, 2016 felt it essential to make a public statement that the "Feelings towards your motherland should come naturally but now-a-days one has to be taught to say Bharat Mata Ki Jai because voices against this (slogan) are becoming louder".

The RSS' Akhil Bharati Pratinidhi Sabha in a meeting held from March 11-13, 2016 repeated that, "only (the RSS) creates awareness about our ancient cultural values among people."



*In Shakha, Cadres are training with Lathis*

The reality is that the highest organisational pillar of the RSS regularly reviews the working of its 44 affiliates; prominent among them BJP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad etc. It has an elite core of committed workers and many of them whole timers, who as products of the school of RSS *shakhas* (branches) are engaged in spreading the ideology of Hindu Rashtravad as defined by the RSS. The RSS network of activists is engaged in multiple activities to spread the message of "Sanatan Dharma" i.e. Hinduism in far off tribal areas, rural and urban India. RSS has penetrated every formal and informal organisation like temples, educational institutions and others to make the message of Sanatan Dharma an all India phenomenon. If on one hand RSS is trying to become a mass movement and spread its ideology from schools to the residences of ordinary Hindus, on the other, it is fully engaged in providing physical and paramilitary training to the Hindu youth so that they can physically confront the non-Hindus. The RSS has a women's wing

known as Durga Vahini, which is training women in “self defence”.

During physical exercises, the cadre is trained to use strong sticks known as *lathis*. Bhou Singh Rajawat of the Bajrang Dal observed on May 30, 2016 that, “If we want to train people to defend themselves in case of a terror attack and make Hindu girls aware about being exploited by Muslim men or prevent cows from being slaughtered, how is this communal?” Paramilitary feature of the RSS and its daily training programmes for improving the physical strength of the Hindu youth was not projected openly by the RSS because it maintained “secrecy” like all other military-minded organisations. With the passage of time, the RSS has come out in the open and it has publicly proclaimed and practiced in its *shakhas* and other off shoots that preparing Hindu youth, men and women, for confronting its opponents violently, physical training has to be imparted and they have to be trained in the use of arms to defend themselves.

Balraj Dunger of the Bajrang Dal on June 27, 2016 openly stated that “weapons’ training has always been a part of Indian culture and for this purpose camps are held at regular intervals.” The Vishwa Hindu Parishad secretary, Surendra Jain, observed on May 26, 2016 that weapon training is routine and self-defence camps were held in Ayodhya. It was reported in the media that at Saraswati Shishu Mandir, school maintained by the RSS, NOIDA Sector 12, under the supervision of Bajrang Dal, hundreds of young students are learning the army crawl, rope climbing and crossing hurdles apart from sword fighting, karate kicks and using nanchaks. Not only this, during the camp’s training, slogans were raised like Vande Mataram and Bharat Mata Ki Jai and Hindu youth were shown fighting with swords against skull-cap-wearing Muslims. While responding to allegations about military like training being given to Hindus who were fighting against skull-cap-wearing Muslims, Balraj Dunger observed: “Every village has an akhara (wrestling ground) in India and it’s no crime in training with weapons which are allowed to civilians.”

Can it not be asserted that B.S. Moonje, a close associate of K.B. Hedgewar, inspired by military like training of youth wing of Mussolini’s fascist party, replicated Italian fascist practices in the organisational structure of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh? The ideological inspiration that the RSS founders drew from fascists and Nazis does not end only with the establishment of the organisational structure of the RSS; it is also an integral part of the ideology of nationalism of the RSS, which defines Hindu nationalism on the lines of pure German nationalism of the Nazis. The RSS is committed to the idea of creating Hindu India or Rashtra also on the same pattern as Hitler’s idea of great Germanic nation of pure German blood. All major inter community conflicts which have arisen in contemporary India are because RSS wants to ruthlessly impose its idea of monolith Hindu nationalism which is otherwise, resisted and opposed by multiple and diverse cultural communities of India.

To summarize, RSS, its ideology and paramilitary network of the organisation which is spreading in every corner of the country is grave threat to the idea of plural India which is enshrined in the secular, democratic and federal constitution where the Indian State is supposed to protect diversity of culture, languages, ways of life of the people of India. The struggle against RSS that is undemocratic, hierarchical, divisive and anti-religious and cultural minorities has to be waged by all those who defend the philosophical foundational principles this very constitution.

This article outlines the history of the RSS and its affiliate organisations exhibiting how violence is at the core of its ideology. Its an effort to explore other facets of RSS and its relationship with its cadre in the present conjuncture so that all Left, democratic forces can prepare their strategies in accordance. The present agenda before these social and political forces in India is to confront the ideological and political agenda of Sangh Parivar to confront the quasi-fascist, hierarchically organised paramilitary organisation of the RSS that is relentless in its aim of creating a Hindu state.

I have already spoken of the qualitative change in India's contemporary politics that is represented by the massive intrusion by proponents of the Hindu Rashtra at different levels of state power. Narendra Damodar Modi, a committed RSS ideologue and *pracharak* is now the prime minister of India with a clear majority support in the lower house of the Indian parliament. The RSS has graduated from a marginal status to mainstream of Indian public life and in less than three years beginning with 2014, the RSS has not only recognised the significance of new political situation prevailing in the country. It is making every effort to exploit the new openings which it has captured for the first time and is trying to penetrate every institution of the State and all important non-State institutions like mass media, both print and visual, educational institutions from elementary schools to universities and technical education.

The RSS is actively implementing its project of Hinduisation of Indian society by promoting Brahmanical rituals' based Hindu belief systems by involving large number of Hindu priests in hundreds and thousands of temples propagating that Hindu religion is superior to all other religious faiths and in a Hindu country, languages like Sanskrit and Hindu symbols like the protection of holy mother cow or Hindu rituals like **Surya Namaskar** and *Gayatri Mantra* have to be popularised in every part of the country. The RSS is marked by its heightened social work among the tribal communities of India, is now working towards the Hinduisation of these groups with a renewed vigour. The Organiser, the RSS weekly, has re-asserted that tribal peoples are integral part of Bharat since the time of the Mahabharata wars and they have to be brought back to Sanatan Dharma because they have always been Hindus.

Despite common knowledge, few facts may be mentioned to substantiate the argument that under the protective umbrella provided by BJP governments at the centre and states, the RSS/ BJP are expanding their areas of influence and activity and institutionalising their legitimacy as the protector and promoters of Hindu interests in India. First, the RSS leadership has always pretended that it was a cultural and non-political organisation. However, the RSS had a clear political agenda and it had always been engaged in spreading its so-called cultural message by penetrating in various institutions of the State.

**Prof. C P Bhambhri**, April 6, 2017

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