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# India: RSS and the Global Far-Right: Expanding Links, Growing Ambition

Saturday 24 August 2024, by [BHATTACHARYA Dipankar](#) (Date first published: 19 August 2024).

**Perhaps as the RSS readies for its centenary in 2025, we will see more attempts from the RSS to sell itself as a global role model and India as the ideological destination for 'National Conservatives' from around the world.**

Cultural nationalism, the standard RSS description of its ideology, has got a new global brand name: national conservatism. The global far-right has been trying to forge a broad ideological coalition over the last five years by holding a series of NatCon (national conservatism) conferences.

The initial conferences held in London, Washington and Rome between May 2019 and February 2020 also marked the launching of a new American institute named Edmund Burke Foundation chaired by the Israeli-American philosopher Yoram Hazony. The latest NatCon conference, held in Washington DC on 8-10 July, 2024 saw for the first time two participants from the Sangh stable - Ram Madhav and Swapan Dasgupta. This throws some new light on the emerging global linkages of the RSS beyond its own intricate network within the Indian diaspora.

At the time of its inception, the RSS was clearly inspired by the fascist far-right of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Significant inputs were borrowed from the rise of Mussolini in Italy. Golwalkar had talked openly about the lessons that nationalists in India should draw from Hitler.

The current congregation of the global far-right is also happening in the backdrop of a renewed surge of neo-fascism. But the word fascism or Nazism (so-called national socialism) today is a taboo even to the fascists and hence the cover of national conservatism.

Ram Madhav had a typical WhatsApp university answer to the charge of fascism.

"How can we be called fascists or blamed for /following Hitler when we love Jews and Israel so much", said Madhav. He asked his predominantly white audience not to trust Indian and Western liberal talk about 'backsliding of democracy' in India:

"Remember, the same people call you white supremacists and racists"" One just has to listen to Ram Madhav's address at the NatCon conference to see how fascists and racists are seeking to rehabilitate themselves under the umbrella of conservatism.

Ram Madhav and Swapan Dasgupta told the conference that India was best suited to lead this upsurge of conservatism because Indians were apparently born conservatives. According to them, the conservative credo of 'faith, flag and family' - 'belief in God' and loyalty to family and nation - came naturally to Indians.

Madhav was quick to assign a number to the base of conservatism in India, claiming one billion Indians follow the conservative ideology. Incidentally, India has an electoral roll of close to one

billion of which 642 million voted in 2024 and BJP had a vote share of 36.56% or less than 240 million, if we are talking of actual numbers.

From status quoism to fascism, whatever shade Madhav may have in mind while using the generic term conservatism, the Sangh-BJP establishment has never had the support of one billion Indians. Like appropriation of icons and falsification of history, the Sangh discourse continues to misrepresent the justice-seeking democracy-loving common people of India as supporters of the regressive ideological project of the RSS.

If conservatism and conformism were to be the dominant features of India's tradition, call it social, cultural or political, India would still be reeling under colonial rule, Dalits would still be subjected to slavery, and Hindu women would still be burnt on the pyres with their dead husbands in the name of sati.

Of course, while democratic and radical impulses are as 'Indian' as conservative ones, they have always had to struggle to root themselves in what Ambedkar called the deeply 'undemocratic soil' of a patriarchal-feudal caste society – the core of what Madhav celebrates and wants to showcase to the world as a model for global conservatism.

Ram Madhav seeks to lead his fellow conservatives from other parts of the world, by invoking the power currently enjoyed by the Modi regime. He boastfully says that had it been ten years ago, he too would have perhaps been sharing a conservative 'sob story', but today he has a success story to tell.

And he says this success has been achieved by cultural mobilisation from below, grassroots assertion of conservative ideology. He is clearly telling a big lie here. The BJP's rise to power has been paved by a series of violent campaigns from Advani's Ayodhya rath-yatra to the Gujarat carnage under the stewardship of Modi to the relentless anti-Muslim riots, lynchings and bulldozer attacks over the last ten years. And having come to power by systematic use of violence, the BJP today sustains it by unleashing more violence and instilling terror.

True to the classical character of fascism, the BJP rule today in India is virtually an open terrorist dictatorship. Modi 3.0 is by no means ready to reconcile with the increased opposition strength and the consequent weakening of the fear factor resulting from the 2024 election outcome.

And as far as the rise and growth of the RSS is concerned, it has always depended on the organisation's direct and indirect control over state power and the institutional network of a modern society apart from the traditional tools of caste and creed. More than direct appeals to the regressive ideology of conservatism, the RSS has grown historically by spreading lies and rumours and orchestrating hate and violence.

Like Modi's 'Vishwaguru' ambition and posturing, the RSS too now seems to be aspiring for greater global recognition and role. The RSS is aware that India's strategic relevance in the US vision of the world revolves around the role and potential of India as an ally in the so-called war on terror and containment of China.

It wants to place this strategic relationship on a stronger ideological footing of shared far-right conservative bonding. Beyond the diplomatic collaboration of states within a framework of broad neo-liberal economic consensus and Western military domination, the RSS wants to seek out its role in the ideological arena by working for a conservative convergence spearheaded by the far-right regardless of the changing political equilibrium and electoral fortunes in individual countries, building on the shared values of racism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant hypernationalism and

xenophobia.

Ram Madhav and Swapan Dasgupta compare the Indian diaspora in US to the pro-Israel Jewish lobby, Dasgupta even believing that in terms of economic advancement the Indian diaspora has reached a comparable level of strength and affluence. They would now like the Indian role in America to be also politically and ideologically as influential as the pro-Israel lobby.

Just as Israel enjoys complete impunity and active support from the US, Madhav also wants the US to embrace the Modi government's model of dealing with India's religious minorities and its Muslim neighbours, and stop making even mildly critical noises about religious freedom and human rights violations.

Madhav would also like the evangelist American conservatives to appreciate the RSS' opposition to religious conversion or what the Sangh calls the Christian campaign of proselytization.

Perhaps as the RSS readies for its centenary in 2025, we will see more attempts from the RSS to sell itself as a global role model and India as the ideological destination for 'National Conservatives' from around the world.

In fact, Madhav told his conservative colleagues that India was ready to play the vanguard role in taking the conservative agenda forward. The emerging contemporary international linkages of Indian fascism surely need closer attention from anti-fascist forces around the world.

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**Dipankar Bhattacharya**

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