



RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH: SHADES OF NEO-NAZISM IN INDIA

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It is a well known fact that India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a trained "Pracharak" (worker) of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and an ardent supporter of the Hindutva ideology. It therefore is no surprise that since 2014, with the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party under the leadership of Narendra Modi, India has fast drifted towards Nazi inspired Hindu nationalism or Hindutva ideology. Hence, in order to understand today's India and its policies in the region and beyond, it is important to understand the foundation and evolution of RSS and its Hindutva ideology.

During early 1900s, the Indian subcontinent under the British rule was witness to number of movements by different communities to protect their religious and cultural identities. There were competing efforts by the two largest communities of subcontinent i.e. Hindus and Muslims to protect their respective religion from getting polluted by other religions or by western cultural influences. The emergence of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 at Nagpur founded by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was also in this backdrop as RSS's proclaimed aim was to free 'Hindustan' and save Hindu culture. Additionally, it also sought cultural and spiritual renaissance of the Hindus as a nation.

While expressing the mission and aim of RSS, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar said, *"The Hindu culture is the life-breath of Hindustan. It is therefore clear that if Hindustan is to be protected, we should first nourish the Hindu culture... Mere geographical lumps do not make a nation. The entire society should*

be in such a vigilant and organized condition that no one would dare to cast an evil eye on any of our points of honor... The present fate of the country cannot be changed unless lakhs of young men dedicate their entire lifetime for that cause. To mould the minds of our youth towards that end is the supreme aim of the Sangh.”¹

RSS is a paramilitary organization that seeks to bring Hindus under nationalistic lines. For this purpose, the RSS relies upon the Hindutva ideology that was first floated by V. D. Savarkar in his book *Essentials of Hindutva*.² Savarkar believed that to be an “Indian” one had to believe that India was both his holy land and fatherland. By this definition, followers of religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were Indian. However, Muslims and Christians were outsiders as these religions had their birth place and holy lands outside India. Savarkar insisted that the ‘outsiders’ must adhere to Hindu symbols that represents India’s national culture if they wish to live in India.

Hence, Hindutva emerged as an exclusivist racial concept that embraced only those religious communities whose origins could be traced to the Indian soil. Apart from the Hindutva ideology, Madhav Golwalkar, who drafted the RSS constitution also took inspiration from Mussolini and Nazism, especially Hitler’s treatment of religious minorities. In Golwalkar's words, *“German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races, the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into a united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.”³*

In Golwalkar’s view, *“the foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture....or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen’s right.”⁴*

Thus, it is no surprise that it was a member of RSS who assassinated Mohanlal Gandhi in 1948, for being too soft on Muslims. The incident forced the then Prime Minister Nehru to ban the

¹ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, <https://www.rss.org//Encyc/2012/10/22/rss-vision-and-mission.html>

² Arun R. Swamy, “Hindu Nationalism – What’s religion got to do with It,” *Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies*, Honolulu, Hawaii, March 2003, <https://apcss.org/Publications/Ocasional%20Papers/OPHinduNationalism.pdf>

³ Christophe Jaffrelot, *“The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s,”* (London : Hurst & Company , 1993), p.55

⁴ William Dalrymple, “Narendra Modi: Man of the Masses,” *New Statesman*, May 12, 2014, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/05/narendramodi-man-masses>

organization in February 1948 which ultimately was lifted after almost 15 months. During the initial years of independence, the RSS maintained a low political profile. It slowly started gaining strength and by the early 1990s, RSS had become a significant power in India. However, it was once again banned following the demolition of Babri Mosque in 1992.

It is also pertinent to mention here that in order to increase its political influence to further its agenda, the RSS first formed the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and later the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Today, most of the BJP cadres and top leadership come from RSS background. In fact, around 60 per cent of BJP's office holders are either former Pracharaks or full time RSS workers or, at least, have close connections with RSS.

Hence, it should not be a surprise that Gujarat saw worst anti-Muslim pogrom when Modi was the Chief Minister of the state. It should also not be a surprise that today, India under Modi, is on the path of becoming a Hindu Rashtra (nation) where religious minorities, particularly Muslims are increasingly targeted for their religious beliefs. Consequently, millions of Muslims are facing the threat of becoming stateless and spending their lives in detention centers. It should not be a surprise therefore that the Kashmiris are witnessing the level of human rights abuses that was never seen before. In its desire to create a Hindu Rashtra, India, in violation of all bilateral agreements and international law, has declared the Illegally Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK) as a part of its Union territories and has launched a massive plan to change the Muslim constitution of its demography by illegally bringing in and granting domiciles to Hindus from its settled territories. But what actually comes as a surprise is the silence of the international community and its continuous disregard to the atrocities being committed by India against the Kashmiri people and Muslims across India in the name of nationalism.