

RATAN SHARDA



RSS 360°

Demystifying
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

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In Praise of the Book

One of the best features of Sharda's book is the dozens of stories of individual swayamsevak's simplicity, discipline and devotion to the national cause. It is such tales of daily valour and sacrifice that I most enjoyed in the book. For whatever else it might be, the RSS is steadfast in its commitment to the Indian nation, to what Sri Aurobindo called "Bharat Shakti" in *Foundations of Indian Culture*. Neither an academic study such as Pralay Kanungo's *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (2002) nor a learned "hatchet job" such as Christophe Jaffrelot's *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (1996), it is not even like Sanjeev Kelkar's critique from within, *RSS: The Lost Years* (2012). Instead, Sharda's account is unpretentious, even anecdotal, which is what adds to its readability and authenticity.

Makarand R Paranjpe

*(Indian poet and a professor at the
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India)*

Despite having known RSS for many years now, I still feel that I don't know many of the social services work that RSS does. Your book is like a manual for anyone and everyone who is interested to know about the Sangh, and much more. At a time like this when the curiosity of youth towards RSS has increased many folds, it is critically important to have a book that serves like mini-encyclopedia of the Sangh, and you have done a good job in giving a neutral point of view.

Dr. Subhash Chandra
(M.P., Head of Essel Group)

The simplicity of the RSS has yet to be revealed to the curious reader; this values based organisation finally finds expression in this 360 degree perspective by an author who is probably one of the best commentators on the 92 year old sangh.”

Advaita Kala
(Writer)

‘Shri Ratan Sharda’s book is an important study on RSS, because it is written with rigor, balance and clarity. For readers like me who are not in the RSS, it provides details that many people do not know. A real eye-opener that I very much benefited from’.

Rajiv Malhotra
*(Dharma scholar, Founder Infinity Foundation,
Writer, Public intellectual)*

‘Generally, there is a set format while writing about any organisation. Such a book follows a pattern, like when was the organisation founded, who was the founder, what is its philosophy, highs and lows of its working, success or failure of the organisation to achieve its objective etc. Ratan Sharda has not followed this beaten path. One has to be careful not to seek permission of the organisation about which one wishes to write. Such a writing then becomes propagandist. Ratan Sharda’s book has successfully avoided this trap. Instead of depending on lectures of RSS Chiefs or writings of well-known intellectuals of RSS, he has tried to present Sangh’s philosophy in a different manner. He has quoted Western intellectuals of Indology

extensively. He talks of need for organisation for Hindus with different global reference points that give his arguments more weight’.

Ramesh Patange

(Writer, Thinker, Social activist, ex-editor Vivek weekly)

‘Balasaheb (Thackarey) used to feel that they should also have a dedicated cadre like Sangh. He too established ‘shakhas’ of Shiv Sena for this purpose. You can create *shakhas*, but you cannot create intellectual programmes for them. The strength of Sangh lay in its intellectual training, it lay in training of its cadre in human relations and management. Like Sena, socialists too couldn’t grasp this. They also had *shakhas* but they just disappeared and the volunteers they had were left totally confused. If one wishes to understand what is taught in these intellectual training workshops, one must read this book’.

Vinay Amle

(Critic, Loksatta Leading Marathi Newspaper)

Peculiarity of the book lies in the fact that the analytical mind of the author first highlights the views of the critics of RSS and then in the immediately following paragraphs presents the RSS point of views. The contrast thus highlighted leaves deep impression on the reader of the book.

I am tempted to quote below, some of the most memorable statements I came across in first edition ‘Secrets of RSS’ -

- I. India can be secular as per Indian ethos but not irreligious or non-spiritual. (Page 48)
- II. According supremacy of organization and the mission conquering personal ego for higher objective, promoting talent irrespective of personal likes and dislikes has led to a robust organization and a team of workers difficult to find in any other social organization. (Page 125)

III. Deendayal Upadhyay proposed that every nation must have an economic and political system which is close to its 'chiti' (inherent intellectual state or nature) only then will that model succeed. You cannot impose a system which is alien to its 'chiti'. We can understand now, why the half-baked socialist system failed in India and why Communism has not been able to grow beyond 2-3 states. It also explains why unbridled Capitalism will not succeed in India. (Page 164)

Dr. Ashok Modak

(International affairs specialist, National Research Scholar)

There are three reasons why RSS evokes strong reactions. First, we are a power-centered society addicted to mai-bap culture. Despite democratic trappings, the bulk of the people tend to accept government as the only legitimate organization, and have a vague notion that all other associations are mere subsidiary organizations dependent on government support or patronage. Despite the freedom of associations guaranteed under Article 19(1)(c), the colonial notion that civil associations exist at government's behest continues to dominate our psyche in democratic India. RSS being self-reliant, large, and influential makes it suspect in the eyes of those who believe in state control. Second, entrenched political parties do not want a potentially rival power-centre, or strong civil association that can challenge their political supremacy or defy their will. Equally significantly, other civil associations exhibit envy at the phenomenal spread, growth and influence of one organization. Third, many citizens have genuine fears and concerns that the RSS approach to nation-building does not adequately recognize the contributions of many streams of thought, cultures, ethnic groups and civilizations to what now constitutes the wonder that is India. Detractors of RSS motivated by the first two reasons can, and should be dismissed as irrelevant. But the third group of critics cannot be ignored, and should be creatively engaged by RSS, if its quest for nation-building is to bear fruit.

This book by Shri Ratan Sharda is an earnest attempt of an insider to demystify the Sangh, and engage the outsiders.

Dr Jayaprakash Narayan

(Founder of Loksatta Andolan, Foundation of Democratic Reforms, ex-Member of NAC of Prime Minister, Second Administrative Reforms Commission and Vigilance Advisory Committee of CVC)

‘Reading ‘RSS 360°’ turned me sentimental as I remembered my father who was in Jammu & Kashmir during 1948 army operations as a soldier. He had told me about sacrifice and dedication of young RSS volunteers during 1948 attack in helping the army stop enemy advancing near Shrinagar. In fact, when his company was encircled by the tribal army, RSS volunteers acted as the only line providing food and communication links at great risk to their own lives. In fact, scores of RSS volunteers perished in defense of India. I attribute my own rise in life from a very humble back ground to reach the top of the corporate ladder and my subsequent renunciation of material comfort for grassroots level activism through *Loksatta* also to the RSS, being an RSS karyakarta in my formative years.

Surendra Shrivastava

*(Ex- President Great Eastern Shipping Company,
Senior leader of Loksatta Andolan)*

After completing the reading I felt that fundamental appreciation as to why the RSS has expanded in various spheres of social activity should have been included. Till 1947 the goal of the RSS was to achieve independence of our country. I had taken my pledge in 1941, in which the meaning of the words in the pledge was "I had become a constituent of the Sangh to make Hindu Rashtra independent." This was changed after 1950. From 1950 onwards for few years there was commotion in the RSS as to what form the RSS should take. Many senior workers and office-bearers felt that it was of no

use to do 'Daksha-Aram', i.e. daily Shakha. Some of them wanted RSS to transform itself into a political party. Others thought that the RSS should engage itself in social service projects. Shri Guruji was not opposed to these ventures. But he was firm that the Shakha is the most important activity, and that it cannot be given a secondary status. This was explained, in a week-long congregation of all Zilla-Pracaraks in 1954 in Sindi near Wardha. This was repeated in 1960 at Indore before a larger gathering. This was again repeated in Thane in 1972.

M G Vaidya

*(First RSS spokesperson, Senior ideologue,
worked with all the RSS Chiefs since 1941)*

Foreword

When Ratan Sharda requested me to write a Foreword for the third edition of his book, *Secrets of RSS – Demystifying the Sangh* (now being reprinted with some revisions and updates as *RSS 360° – Demystifying Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*) my first reaction was, ‘Oh my God, this will get me branded and damned as a ‘Sanghi’ for life by the Leftist cabal!’ Although the word ‘Sangh’, simply means ‘an organised group of people with a shared aim or interest, an association or organisation’, it has been bestowed ominous dimensions by being made synonymous with Nazi-style since the term is associated with carrying out genocides. And once that label is struck to someone, leftist networks which have held mafia like grip over academia, cultural bodies, “avante garde” media – both in India and abroad – ensure that the person is marginalized, damned and demonized everywhere – no matter what your actual beliefs and actions on any issue.

‘But then I told myself, if after three decades of battling the intellectual tyranny of the Left and braving out blatant forms of victimization at their hands, without the backing of any organization or godfather, it is imperative to spit it out this fear once and for all.

I must confess that despite avoiding the Leftist camp, I had imbibed some of the popular prejudices against the RSS, which have been made politically so fashionable that most people catch them like a virus. My early exposure to Sangh was two-fold:

- 1) Accounts of my father who narrowly escaped death at the hands of Jinnah’s *jehadis* at the time of Partition. Like countless others, he had been forced to migrate as a penniless refugee from Lahore to Delhi,

following the massacres of 1947. To the end of his life, he never tired of narrating how narrowly he had escaped death and how RSS workers had saved countless Hindu refugees at the risk of their own lives.

- 2) Through neighbours who were RSS workers. They invariably turned out to be the most helpful in times of a crisis in the neighbourhood or *mohalla*.

And yet, I had never closely interacted with or studied the RSS. However, given my profession as an academic, I could not escape reading hate tracts against the RSS by Leftists. Since Leftist writings on the Sangh Parivar are so loaded with prejudice and ill-founded critiques, I instinctively developed a healthy mistrust of their assessment of RSS. That is why I am glad Ratan Sharda has provided us a much-needed insider's account of the Sangh. The ideals that motivated its formation, its core organisational principles, its structure, and the range of activities it undertakes, along with brief profiles of its founding fathers as well as subsequent heads of the RSS.

The original title of the book, *Secrets of RSS*, is suitably tantalising because its ideological opponents have projected it as a sinister secret cult. The subtitle in smaller print—'*Demystifying the Sangh*'—explains the real purpose of the book, to demonstrate through verifiable evidence that the RSS has no secrets. To quote Guru Golwalkar, '*There are only two secrets of our work. First is that there is no secret. And second is Kabaddi.*' (p.95) This simple, terse sentence jolts one to be prepared for a series of surprises that challenge many of the negative stereotypes about the Sangh put into circulation by the political adversaries of the RSS.

Sharda's book is not a scholarly treatise on the RSS. Nor is it an autobiographical account, except for stray references scattered across the book to his own involvement in the Sangh right from his childhood. It is, however, an honest attempt to give the uninformed a realistic sense of its ideology, organisational structure, long-term vision and on- the ground engagements.

Ratan Sharda tells us that the Shakha is the core organisational strength of the RSS, '...the powerhouse that energises and powers ordinary people

to carry out extraordinary feats and create pan India organisations.’ (p.97) It is through them that the RSS has created hundreds of thousands of dedicated volunteers, called *swayamsevaks* (voluntary workers), who form the backbone of the organisation. For example, What began as a plan to set up a 1,000 social service projects during Dr Hedgewar’s birth centenary in 1989, has today grown to over 170 thousand social service projects. The little that one knows about them indicate that their quality varies considerably and some remain a fledgling effort, while others have grown into full-fledged, pan India organisations.

Unlike volunteers of foreign funded NGOs who are paid handsome salaries and perks, RSS *swayamsevaks* not only work without any remuneration, in fact they are also expected to dip into their own pockets and raise funds locally as and when required for the activities of the organisation.

What binds them together is not loyalty to any cult figure or supreme leader, but a fierce commitment to nation building, loyalty to Mother India and to reviving/nurturing its civilisational values, which it sums up in the term, ‘Hindutva’. One of the obsessive concerns of the RSS is to achieve ‘Hindu Unity’, a term that includes all faith groups with Indic roots. This is because the RSS is convinced that India suffered repeated enslavement by foreign invaders because Hindus remained internally divided.

Sangh members are oriented towards becoming a close-knit *parivar* (family) in every sense of the term. This is what gives the RSS deep social roots that has helped it grow into the largest membership-based social organisation in the world. Even those who may differ with the RSS viewpoint and ideology cannot deny the fact that it is one of the few genuine civil society organisations for the following reasons:

- 1) It draws its sustenance from the very society it claims to serve, in *mohallas* and villages of India. Its members are trained to be intimately integrated with the lives, the joys and sorrows of their local community.
- 2) Almost all its activities draw their financial sustenance from the self-same society instead of counting on external sources of funding.

- 3) Running a *Shakha* needs no money, no infrastructure. All it needs is human capital and the willingness to offer time.

The criticism of and hostility towards the RSS seem more rooted in envy and fear than its actual acts of commission and omission. No other political party or social organisation can match the vast network of the *Shakhas*, subsidiary organisations, networks, educational institutions, community projects and its army of full-time *pracharaks* who have voluntarily embraced celibacy and a life of poverty (owning no assets, getting no remuneration) so that every minute of their lives are dedicated to serving society and strengthening the RSS.

One of the important contributions of this book is to blast the oft-repeated charge that RSS members did not participate in the freedom movement. Its founder, Dr Hedgewar, an active leader of the Congress Party, took part in *satyagrahas* and went to jail twice for his involvement with the freedom movement. Contrary to leftist propaganda countless RSS workers, mostly as Congress members, braved all manner of repression for opposing British rule. While the RSS as a self-declared cultural organisation, took a strategic decision not to directly participate in the freedom struggle, its *swayamsevaks* and even top leaders were encouraged to be part of the Mahatma Gandhi-led *satyagrahas*. Although its workers form the backbone of BJP's electoral machine, they do so on their own terms and are not beholden to work for the BJP or be dictated by it in any way.

It is only under Nehru that the RSS came to be dubbed as 'communal' and 'fascist' and hounded systematically out of the Congress party as well as all positions of power. Ratan Sharda's book provides a brief overview of the calumny and persecution faced by the RSS at the hands of Nehruvian Congress ever since its inception.

The Sangh also continues to be stigmatised for the murder of Mahatma Gandhi even though it has come out clean in the enquiry commission reports as well as through the actual trial of Nathuram Godse. The left academics have ensured its place in history as a "fascist" organization by

describing it thus in their “scholarly” writings and political tracts. This stigma and defamation has been immortalised by inclusion in the curricula of colleges and universities not just in India, but internationally as well. This is an important reason why young people without prior family connections with the RSS, grow up with a strong aversion to having even the remotest connections with the RSS or Hindutva, which often extends to deep suspicion of any organisation claiming ‘Hindu’ identity.

I would put the blame for this in large part on the shoulders of the Sangh leadership. It defies comprehension why it has avoided filing defamation suits against some of the stalwarts of incessant hate campaigns against the RSS for decades. A few legal wins would silence such malafide criticism.

The second major flaw of the RSS is that it has chosen to be known to the world mainly through the accounts of its enemies. There is virtually no scholarly study of the RSS by any of its own, or at least those who are not pathologically averse to its very existence. Leading national and international publishers have been publishing ill-informed tracts against the RSS for decades on end, but there has never been an effective scholarly counter to such publications. As a result they are used in various universities of the world as the most authoritative accounts of what RSS represents.

Even with regard to its cause célèbre, the ‘Ram Mandir campaign, the RSS-BJP combine failed to disseminate the enormous body of archaeological and historical evidence made available by credible independent archaeologists and historians. Archaeologists like B.B. Lal, credited with path breaking work in digging out irrefutable evidence of the existence of a Ram Mandir underneath the Babri structure, and many other scholars, have not been promoted as iconic figures the way the Leftists and Islamists have promoted the likes of Romila Thapar or Irfan Habib, who provided intellectual fire power to the Islamist denial that a Ram Mandir ever existed at the site. Independent historians who documented the history of the Ram Mandir demolition and the centuries-long battles waged by Hindus to reclaim the shrine held sacred by millions worked without due

recognition and backing from the RSS. By contrast, the Babri Masjid Action Committee turned all those mediocre academics, who became its sepoys, who acted as foot soldiers of Islamists got anointed as cultural czars and czarinas, “award winning” writers, theatre persons, and film makers.

None of the books of independent scholars like Sita Ram Goel, Dharampal, Ram Swarup, Koenrad Elst, Meenakshi Jain, B.B. Lal and now Rajiv Malhotra, who challenged the Left-Islamist narrative are part of the curriculum even in BJP-ruled states. Ratan Sharda acknowledges this lapse, but understandably in a very mild tone of self-criticism. Failure to nurture high quality scholarship in the domain of education and culture—the two areas that the Sangh claims to hold most dear for the civilisational renaissance it wishes to bring about—has been one of its biggest handicaps.

An important reason for this could well be rooted in the language issue. The Sangh has rightly chosen to work through Hindi and regional languages. The core of its political base in the heartland of India mainly consists of Hindi and regional language speaking middle and lower middle class families. Therefore, most of its workers and ‘intellectuals’ are not from elite English education backgrounds; and in that sense, the RSS could well be said to represent the cultural subalterns of India.

Negative sentiments towards RSS are also in part due to the fact that its leaders live spartan lives and are not the kind to be part of elite cocktail party circuits. Their “*desi*” culture makes them very unattractive to the media. The total mismatch between the expectations and spoilt habits of media personnel and the value system and culture of RSS makes it unworthy of media attention.

Combine with it the chosen strategy of RSS leaders to avoid seeking publicity for its activities, because they believe in discretely conducting their work in the spirit of *nisvarth seva*,—you have a perfect situation whereby all the good work done by the RSS can be discounted and negative stereotypes allowed to hold sway. On the flip side, avoiding media publicity is one of its greatest strengths because it keeps individual egos under check and sustains the culture of giving to society without expecting anything in return. However, given that the world we are in, where demonic forces are

able to dominate public discourse with aggressive self-advancement, this strategy of avoiding self-promotion needs to be carefully reconsidered and re-crafted.

The selfless work of RSS volunteers during natural and manmade disasters is unparalleled. What is more, they do not practice the slightest bit of discrimination on the basis of caste, gender, class or religion. But neither do they give press releases nor have they ever documented their enormous body of self-less work. On the other hand, the media men covering such tragedies deliberately block out mention of RSS *seva*.. Similarly, their work among poor tribals and Dalits, and their consistent efforts to eradicate the curse of untouchability and bridge caste divides not only goes unacknowledged, but they continue to be damned for promoting upper caste domination.

One of the criticisms of the RSS has been that its ideology is inherently divisive, that it is rabidly anti-Muslim and anti-Christian. That its vision of the Hindu *rashtra* excludes people of both these religions. However, Ratan Sharda's account of the core principles of the RSS makes it clear that if evaluated on grounds of its own stated values, this charge is malafide. Neither its daily prayer nor the daily activities of Shakhas nor the relevant extracts from the RSS constitution or the principles around which RSS has sought to organize itself indicate a divisive mindset. However, as an organisation, which has taken to heart the wounds inflicted upon Hindu civilisation by Islamic invaders and British colonisation, and is obsessed with finding ways to avoid any further partitions or enslavement of India by foreign imperialists, its publicly stated mistrust of those who 'believe in extra national loyalties, or resort to violent and/or secret activities to achieve their ends, or which promote or attempt to promote, or have the object of promoting any feeling of enmity or hatred towards any other community or creed or religious domination' gets easily interpreted as being anti-Christian and anti-Muslim. These two religions systematically use demonization of Hinduism to persuade people to convert to Islam or Christianity.

However, it must be noted that the Sangh does not have a close door policy towards Christians or Muslims. It welcomes them into the *Shakha* and at all levels of the organization, though it is inconceivable that a Muslim or Christian can ever become head of the Sangh, just as it is inconceivable for a Hindu or a Buddhist to become the chief minister of J&K though there is a substantial population of both in the state. RSS has even set up a special platform for ‘nationalist Muslims’.

The stated aim of the RSS is *samajik samrasta* (social harmony). Unlike, the Communists and Marxists whose self-declared ideology is the class struggle and class war involving principled hostility and commitment to vanquish class enemies, the self-proclaimed aim of the RSS is to bridge social divides, whether of caste, language, ethnicity, gender or faith. And yet the RSS is demonized as a “fascist” organization. !

This is how I would explain the pathological hatred displayed by Christian and Muslim leaders as well as their Leftists, pseudo-secular allies towards the RSS:

- 1) RSS is not against ‘freedom of religion’ (FoR) nor does it want Christians and Muslims to be banished out of India. However, it is not willing to extend ‘FoR’ to mean freedom to convert Hindus to Islam or Christianity through means fair or foul.
- 2) RSS rightly sees Christianity and Islam as non-Indic religions that imposed themselves on India through military conquest and political domination. However, it does not insist that Christians and Muslims abandon their faith or have crippling restrictions on practicing their religion, as in China or the erstwhile Soviet Union. The sum total of the RSS message to these two groups is that they should not disown the history, culture and civilisational values of this land nor nurture extra-territorial loyalties.
- 3) RSS is not willing to be unconditional in its commitment to non-violence as was Gandhi. They reserve the right to violence in self-defence as in Kerala where the Communist-Islamist combine have used brutal violence, outright murders as well as the might of the state machinery to prevent the Sangh from gaining a political foothold.

- 4) RSS is firm in the belief that the road to *samajik samrasta* lies in treating Hindu faith and traditions with respect and allowing them a respectful place in public life, because only those parts of the Indian sub-continent survived as a multi-cultural, multi-faith, open society where Hindus are a majority and the Indic world-view is a vibrant force. Wherever Islam or Christianity have come to dominate, other faith groups are wiped out as in Pakistan or even India's Kashmir. In other words, RSS is rightly convinced that India's liberalism is rooted not in a copy-cat version of European secularism, but in Hindu/Indic values.
- 5) The speed with which the RSS is expanding its base among Dalits and various backward castes is a key source of angst and outrage for its political adversaries, because these groups are primary targets of conversion.

Its adversaries are petrified at the speed with which RSS is refashioning its orientation, adapting its ideology to the regional aspirations of India and embracing large communities that had hitherto remained allergic or indifferent to it. It is the Shakti that energizes BJP's spread into hitherto inaccessible regions.

Ratan Sharda has done a great service to his organisation by providing brief glimpses of the range of such engagements and achievements of the RSS in fields where it is most misunderstood. Hopefully, it will encourage independent scholars to carry out more in-depth research on the organisation.

Finally, so long as the Sangh Parivar continues to let the pseudo secular Leftists, evangelicals and Islamists monopolise the championship of human rights, women's rights, minority rights, environmental concerns and protection of vulnerable caste communities, RSS will not be able to become an effective catalyst for a Resurgent Bharat. For that, it needs much deeper engagement with academic, intellectual and cultural challenges facing India—that is Bharat.

Madhu Purnima Kishwar

Preface

For any author it is sense of great satisfaction when a prestigious publishing house shows readiness to publish a new version of a book already in market. I must admit that I had to work really hard on this version due to high critical standards of their editorial team. I had to revisit the entire manuscript with a fine sieve, edit out some repetitive ideas, tighten the content and most importantly, validate many of my views and references. I also updated a few chapters with information about new developments in RSS that I have gathered lately. So, I can confidently say that this is, indeed, a “New Improved” version! This is the reason ‘Secrets of RSS – Demystifying the Sangh’ has taken new form as ‘RSS 360° – Demystifying Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’.

I feel truly privileged that Ms. Madhu Kishwar agreed to write the foreword to this book. It was gracious of her to put her pen to paper for an author who is not an academic in a truly academic sense. My interactions with Madhu ji are quite recent, though I have been a fan of her sharp and well researched writings for quite some time. Her espousal of feminism from Indian perspective is path breaking, considering she began her work decades back in the backdrop of a highly hyped and dominant western world view. I regret that the foreword had to be edited to nearly half of its original size due to the compulsions of publishing conventions, though even this is much longer than the normal forewords! In spite of this, I and the publishers believe that we have been able to keep the spirit of her views alive.

Madhu ji’s foreword is actually a critique of the RSS, quite harsh in some places. Honestly speaking, more critical than I had expected! I did not

go back to her to counter her criticism or soften it. As an eminent intellectual with good of the nation at heart, she is welcome to express her ideas. This is in keeping with the spirit of open dialogue that I, as a person trained in RSS school of thought, believe in. Hindu philosophy is the bedrock of pluralism with respect for diverse views, not just tolerance. I believe that reading the foreword would be a good starting point for the readers to form their own opinions in a more critical manner as they progress with RSS 360°.

When I wrote the 'Secrets of RSS' I was virtually a nobody, an erstwhile RSS worker who had worked in various capacities in it for decades, known well only within RSS network. I had just edited a score of books with varied content, as a hobby. The book was born out of my urge to tell the people, not brought up in RSS milieu, about RSS. After Mr. Nitin Gadkari released it in Delhi, it got a very good coverage, but with a twist. The headlines said, "BJP President comes out to defend RSS"! It was the time when the sinister plot to implicate the RSS in so-called 'Saffron Terror' was in full flow. This was the most concerted government backed attempt to crush the RSS since the time of Mahatma Gandhi ji's assassination in 1948 and Emergency in 1975. RSS was virtually alone, yet again, in this battle to save its image as no media house or party wanted to be seen being sympathetic to it and get 'tarred'. None of them paused to think that if RSS was, indeed, a terror organization it would be impossible to stop it due to its intensive and extensive network. Political untouchability, coupled with already enforced intellectual untouchability had reared its head again.

By the time the second edition of Secrets was published, history had turned a new leaf. Mr. Narendra Modi, an erstwhile RSS pracharak, a dedicated BJP worker from a humble background had risen to the post of Prime Minister of the biggest democracy of the world with a massive mandate. By then, interest in the RSS had already risen sharply inspite of its political isolation with the terror tag pinned on it, proved by rising hits on RSS website with requests to become its member. However, with advent of Modi ji, this interest rose astronomically. One would meet people routinely

claiming earlier allegiance through family or childhood association! I too had been given new responsibilities in the RSS by then. I must add here that no one at any level of the organisation questioned me for my criticism of the organization in the book.

Now, as ‘RSS 360°’ is ready to go press, new motivated attacks on RSS have been mounted with renewed ‘Hindu Terror’ allegations. Old beaten to death allegations are being repeated by frustrated Left Secular cabal. The big difference is that there are many in electronic, print and social media who are ready to defend RSS against these attacks. Hindutva, Dharma, Cultural Nationalism has found new defenders and intellectual evangelists who have no relation with RSS. What could be a better tribute to its steadfastness to its objective of ‘Sanghmay samaaj’, that is – a society imbued with spirit of Hinduness! In the meanwhile, I have also become a much sought after commentator on RSS, Hindu society related issues and political scenario. When I meet people in TV studios, I am amused with comments like, “We didn’t know that RSS people are so knowledgeable and reasonable.” Some of them are like, “Are you real?” Thus, this period has been a roller coaster ride for me personally as a keen observer of socio-political scenario of India.

Response to this idea of 360° degree view of RSS has been very positive both from supporters and critics of the RSS, and most importantly from the people who had no clue what RSS is all about. This last segment is the one that was my primary target, and I feel deeply satisfied that this audience has found the book informative and quite objective. Some of the TV co-panellists to whom I present my book, warn me that they would send me a critical comments after reading, and I am still waiting for them!

These interactions revalidate my premise that there is big hunger among people to know the RSS and understand it better. It is good to see that my efforts to. present a 360° degree view of RSS in a simple form as an outsider in an as unbiased manner as possible though I am insider, has found wide acceptance. With a publisher like Bloomsbury, I am sure the book will reach much larger audience not only in India but across the globe and help people understand RSS better.

Ratan Sharda

14th Jan, 2018

Acknowledgements

I thank all my colleagues in Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) - each of whom was a source of inspiration in my life, and whose silent work motivated me to write this book.

I have given real life examples of many of my seniors and colleagues, without taking their consent. Many of them being publicity shy would surely grumble at their names being mentioned! But, I do believe, a story is heartening when it presents an individual in real flesh and blood, hence this liberty.

My friend Sandeep Singh deserves to be mentioned for pushing me to write this book. He seriously believes that there is a discernible gap between the public perception of RSS and the reality.

I thank senior pracharaks and leaders of RSS who encouraged me when I discussed the idea of writing this introductory book on RSS with them. The inspiration for presenting ideas in a simplistic way comes from the senior RSS pracharak Shri Ranga Hariji. I have quoted him extensively in the book. My heartfelt gratitude to this great noble soul, who represents the best in the pracharak tradition of RSS.

I would be remiss if I didn't express my debt to Shri Bimal Kedia who has greatly encouraged me take up writing and helping others as well to write over the past few years. He has also been an inspiration as a living embodiment of a selfless RSS worker to the core.

My acknowledgements are due to the great scholars and Indologists who gave me a firm foundation for expounding the philosophy of RSS in a way that is slightly at variance with the conventional way it is presented by RSS ideologues and theorists. I am specially inspired by Koenrad Elst,

Ramswaroop, Sitaram Goel, David Frawley and Rakesh Sinha for their meticulous way of presenting their ideas.

A great Gandhian, Shri Dharampal has thrown new light on what was supposed to be a mythical story of a prosperous India of yore and I must thank him for this hard labour he put in and to Claude Alvares who has brought his viewpoints out so well. I obliged to Dr Sadhana Modh whom I have quoted for a management perspective on the organisational philosophy of RSS. I have quoted many other authors and scholars as well, whose contribution I have acknowledged in my Index at the end of the book and thank all of them.

I express my gratitude to my uncle (Chacha ji) Shri Jagdish Chandra Sharda 'Shastri' who encouraged me to follow the path of selfless service for society through his own lifetime dedication to the cause of social service. He was instrumental in taking RSS work overseas, beginning from Kenya.

Last but not the least, my family who has borne with me all these years, never complained about my priorities in life and suffered silently with deep understanding; supporting me throughout.

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About the Author

Editorial Notes

Roman spellings of Indian words: I have avoided diacritical marks for Sanskrit and other Indian words throughout the book to make reading easier. But, to overcome the problem of pronunciation, I have used phonetic spellings being used by internet service providers in providing transliteration of Indian languages. e.g. Asha could be written as Aashaa, to help those uninitiated in Indian languages pronounce the words properly. But, commonly understood words like Bharat will not appear as Bhaarat as people generally read it correctly.

Terminology: I have not used typical words used in RSS but given them in brackets in most places so that reader may not have to sit down with a dictionary from page one, and also make things more familiar sounding. Thus, I have used words like volunteer, activist, swayamsevak interchangeably though purists from Sangh school, as also linguists may not like it. Worker is not as dignified a word as kaaryakartaa, nor does it lend due weight to this word that people in RSS give. It does not convey the commitment, seniority and experience of a volunteer (swayamsevak) who becomes 'kaaryakartaa'. I have taken this liberty to make reading easier. Similarly, I have not differentiated between India and Bharat, though a Sangh member or sympathiser generally prefers to use only Bharat. These two words have come to carry different connotations for the opinion makers but for common man they are same.

Annexure: There is a great deal of history that needs to be shared with the reader to give a proper perspective about RSS. This centres around 1942 to

1948 i.e. from Quit India movement to first ban on RSS and its revocation. Critics have flung lot of mud casually at RSS with reference to this period feeling secure that that common people would not tend do tedious research to find correct facts. I felt that these details might come in way of the narrative that is meant to give an overview of RSS, its ideology, its structure and its reach in various social fields across India and bog it down. So, those chapters from recent history have been included in Annexure, making it larger than I had hoped for. However, any serious student of RSS and current history would like to know these facts, so I decided to live with this larger than expected Annexure.

Prologue

“RSS is a revolutionary organisation. No other organisation in the country comes anywhere near it. It alone has the capacity to transform society, end casteism and wipe the tears from the eyes of the poor. I have great expectations from this revolutionary organisation that has taken up the challenge of creating a new India.”

–Shri Jai Prakash Narayan, 1977

After the emergency, on Nov.3, 1977, JP addressed a huge RSS training camp in Patna. Excerpt from that speech

I

Sangh's Fight for Democracy During Emergency

Let me begin from the middle. The Emergency imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 25 June 1975 was a watershed event in the annals of independent India. It was also a defining moment for the RSS. It was an event which brought together all anti-Congress parties to a single platform, led to incarceration of various political leaders in common jails and gave them a chance to know each other better. At the end of it all, the Janata Party was born which brought down the curtains on this digression from our democratic traditions. The Emergency is a landmark event in the history of RSS too. People of my generation look at this struggle for restoration of democratic values as our signal contribution to the society. The current generations are unaware of 'a collective memory beyond the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and the 2002 Godhra train burning and subsequent riots in Gujarat. To them Emergency is a distant non-event. But, for the independent India, it was one of the most significant episodes in her modern history. I thought it would be a good idea to begin from this milestone in the life of RSS and our nation.

For the people of our generation, who were in the prime of their youth, Shri Jai Prakash Narayan's (JP) movement for probity in public life had fired their imagination about 'sampoorana kranti' – total revolution – to throw out old decaying system and bring about a fundamental change in the

political system. That it didn't end up that way is a sad commentary on our political leadership and a deep sense of disappointment for us who dedicated their lives for the restoration of democracy, and fight for ideals personified by Jayprakash Narayan at that point in history. This pain is exacerbated further when we note that people like Lalu Prasad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan who have mocked at the ideals of JP by following a blatantly casteist and communal agenda to fulfill their political ambition are also the products of that struggle. The Hindu mythology of churning of oceans (*saagar manthan*) tells us that every churning that throws up nectar will also throw up poison. How true!

Let me not jump the gun and give a little idea about what this emergency was all about. After the heady days of 1971, with the decisive victory of India over Pakistan ending with liberation of Bangladesh, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and her courtiers raised her to a very superhuman pedestal. They presumed that they could do anything. This sense of arrogance, of absolute power was like an aphrodisiac for many Congress leaders who basked in the shadows of Mrs. Gandhi. Those were the days when the then Congress president Dev Kant Barooah declared that "India is Indira and Indira is India". All this led to various acts of omission and commission. This arrogance went overboard with the persecution of opposition wherever possible. With power going to the heads of the ruling class, corruption became rampant.

First, Gujarat came into the grip of 'Navnrimaan Andolan' led primarily by students who wished to displace the highly corrupt regime of Chimanbhai Patel propped up by Congress. It was essentially a non-political movement spearheaded by students. As it picked force, RSS, ABVP members, erstwhile Jan Sangh and other opposition groups also supported the agitation actively which ultimately led to the downfall of Patel and installation of the first non-Congress government in Gujarat headed by Babubhai Patel. The agitation inspired a parallel agitation in Bihar too. Jayprakash Narayan or JP as he was fondly addressed, was persuaded to come out of virtual retirement and lead the agitation fueled by idealistic youth and students. A forum called Lok Sangharsh Samiti was

formed and Nana ji Deshmukh was nominated as the General Secretary of this forum which had members from the whole spectrum of political and student organisations and a few non-political social organisations too. This was also the time when JP came very close to Jan Sangh and the RSS leaders seeing their great work on the ground. This intense ferment in the society shook up Congress and Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In interim, her election was declared void by Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha of Allahabad High Court which led to political chaos.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi's coterie played on her insecurity and convinced her on taking strong action to suppress this agitation and opposition. She declared a 'state of emergency' on the midnight of 25 June 1975, citing grave internal security threat to the nation. It was the first time that emergency was imposed citing internal security. A draconian act, the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was revived to quell any dissidence, which allowed detention without trial for atleast two years. All the important opposition leaders were arrested overnight and RSS was also banned for the second time since its existence. A few sundry organisations like Anand Marg and Jamat-e-Islami were also banned as tokenism to show that law was even-handed and there was no bias.

The Emergency pitch forked RSS into the battle for restoration of democracy. Just to give my readers an idea of RSS's contribution to this fight, nearly 100,000 of the 130,000 people arrested during emergency were from RSS ranks. Of the 30,000 people arrested under the dreaded MISA something similar to anti-terror Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999 (MCOCA), , approximately 25000 were RSS activists. We realised during this time that other political parties like Socialists of different hues had more leaders than cadres, so it was very rare to see a socialist activist take part in the satyaagrahas, though their leaders were arrested. Thousands of activists spent nearly 18 months under the MISA, or jailed for six months or more under some IPC sections for staging satyagraha; while some like me spent a month or so before being released thanks to a historic decision by Justice Lalit of Nagpur High Court who declared that Emergency didn't mean suspension of basic democratic rights.

It is interesting to point out that Justice Lalit was virtually blacklisted and did not get his promotions later. This beginning of 'committed judiciary', as propounded by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was heavily influenced by a Communist coterie in those days led by late Mr. Kumarmangalam. The Communist Party of India (CPI) had supported her actions to 'suppress and defeat forces of fascism'. It would also be appropriate to note at this juncture that the Communists had played a dubious role during the Quit India movement of 1942, and presented a petition to the Cabinet Mission of 1946 to divide India into 16 sovereign nations as it didn't believe India comprised of 18 nationalities. They also justified the Chinese attack of 1962. The pro-Chinese section of Communists indirectly supported it by engineering a transport strike in West Bengal. Honourable comrades like Jyoti Basu were put behind bars for a short duration during this time. This section later split from the CPI and formed the CPI-M.

RSS and its associate organisations' leadership in consultation with other political parties, who were part of democratic struggle, instructed volunteers of all the associate organisations to organise satyagrah across the country to create awareness amongst people about atrocities committed in the name of saving India. This agitation was backed by RSS across the length and breadth of the country. Satyagrahis would appear in the most unlikely of places during public functions with high security cordons. Many of these acts of defiance were reported in international media too.

In a small place like my college, Parle College (today's Sathaye College) in Mumbai, where I was the General Secretary of its student union and we had a very lively young band of RSS volunteers, we were able to sustain satyagraha for months and courted arrests nearly every week, much to the distress of the police. Our principal, Mr Potdar was so pained with the regular disturbance as also a college bandh following my arrest, that he threw me out of college like many students of my times. Eventually I ended up in St Xavier's college under the benign guidance of late Professor Oza, a well known Marxist economist. For this same crime a fellow volunteer, my friend Girish Bodas, a student of IIT Mumbai, was put behind MISA on the

grounds of a complaint filed by our college authorities. Incidentally, the whole Bodas family is a devoted Sangh family. While two brothers were in jail, their mother and father worked silently for their respective Sangh related organisations for women and teachers. Their only mode of communication in those days was leaving behind small notes on paper about their likely time of returning home. Such is the dedication of members of RSS and its associate organisations.

It is a telling commentary on the bias of so called scholars and of modern Indian history chroniclers like Ramchandra Guha that they simply gloss over these facts of history or write disparagingly about RSS contribution rather than highlight the exemplary way they bore the brunt of atrocities in and outside jail even as their careers, family lives and businesses were damaged or ruined.

Even RSS sympathisers and activists who were not active any more were picked up on the basis of Crime Investigation Department (CID) reports made years back. An illustrative case is the raid police made to search for my elder brother who had long since moved to Surat but his name appeared due to his activities a decade before. They didn't search for my belongings though I was very active at that time. We used to hear of such humorous mix ups in many places.

We in Mumbai were a little lucky and police generally behaved decently with the agitators, realising that we were disciplined and law abiding. I suspect that police probably also understood the nature of the struggle and was sympathetic in many cases. Only if burdened with political pressure did they behave boorishly with volunteers. But, we listened and read about the indescribable horror stories of torture of RSS activists in police stations and jails, especially in states ruled by overzealous satraps of Congress like Punjab, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala (where both Congress and Communists hated RSS volunteers' guts). But, the activists bore such insults and tortures resolutely. The tortures if described in detail would make the infamous Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp of US army look like a picnic!

Just to give an idea to this generation of how a supposedly democratic government and its bureaucracy behaves when it gets absolute powers, here's a glimpse of the torture heaped on to these political prisoners, often including ladies. It is an example of how a fascist state can behave under the garb of democracy. Remember they were not hardened criminals. Their simplest punishment involved parading activists naked and keeping them so for days, strangling their dignity thus. They would force them to pee into each other's mouths. They were also subjected to more sadistic treatment, that involved performing unnatural sexual acts in front of their colleagues and police, pushing rods, burning cigarettes into various orifices of human body. It could be plain torture by keeping a person thirsty for days on end, beating him or her, giving aeroplane treatment (tying hands behind back and letting the person hang from his hands for hours), pulling nails, and similar grotesque tortures. Most of these tortures are recorded by the victims and their colleagues while some are part of witness evidence in the Shah Commission appointed by the Janata Party government to enquire about the atrocities during the emergency. It is alleged that the Congress government upon winning power in 1980, destroyed all copies of the report. But, it was resurrected with one copy that was found. Its hard cover copy was available on Amazon.com, edited by late DMK leader Era Sezhiyan, but out of stock now. The working of this commission was disrupted by the party workers of the Youth Congress, led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay Gandhi. This in itself is topic of contemporary history that students should study. These are the same elements who are top Congress leaders today and lecture RSS about rowdy behavior!

My narrative won't be complete without mentioning the incarceration of George Fernandes who was put into jail in harsh conditions along with his brother Lawrence Fernandes and well known industrialist Viren Shah on charges of planning violence against the State. The case was famously known as the 'Baroda Conspiracy Case'. These people were alleged to have conspired to use explosives to create terror and bring down the government. Lawrence was so badly brutalised that he was a physical and mental wreck by the time he was out of the jail and died a sick man in 2005. George

Fernandes was paraded around in chains and these photographs were published in national newspapers to scare potential rebels. This case was closed after the Janata Party came to power in 1977.

The press at that time behaved in a very tame manner except for some great exceptions like the brave owner of Indian Express G D Goenka and journalists like B G Varghese. The government had clamped censorship on the press on the very day the emergency was declared. Everything that were to be printed in newspapers had to be vetted by an omnipotent censor committee. The press brought up on license quota raj and newsprint doles behaved more timidly than required. Commenting on it, L K Advani had famously remarked, It crawled when it was asked to bend. We were thrilled and inspired by Mr Goenka, when he chose to keep the editorial column blank as he couldn't write what he wanted to. The government then passed an order that you cannot keep a column blank. But, the *Indian Express* refused to crawl throughout the Emergency. It stood stoic against the volley of arm twisters initiated by the government. Goenka was harassed and indicted under various laws. Then, there was a famous classified in the *Times of India* which condoled the death of Democracy in a coded manner. The only way news could travel was through secret meetings, rumours, guarded telephone talks (even the telephones were tapped), people travelling around to carry news or undertake various activities. There were underground pamphlets which were distributed surreptitiously in thousands by the activists to spread news and information about the pro-democracy agitation and government's atrocities.

There were grand courtiers of Mrs. Indira Gandhi like famed author our famous Sardar Khushwant Singh who wrote laudatory articles about great changes that the Emergency had brought about and how Sanjay Gandhi was a great visionary leader, a wonderful engineer with his 'tin box' of a small car. Mr Singh was suitably rewarded with citations, awards and lucrative postings. There were many such worthies in media who curried favours with Congress party during those days. To round off the car story I may mention that realising that the car was not going anywhere with its backyard technology; though the idea of a people's car by itself was not

bad; government finally adopted this project and in collaboration with Suzuki brought out the trail blazing Maruti car.

The press, including the great old lady of Boribunder, the *Times of India*, used to be awash with great stories about how the Emergency had improved work culture all around (which was a partial truth) and how people appreciated the great disciplined era (which was not that true) ushered in by the great leader Mrs. Indira Gandhi. All this was eerily close to the Russian propaganda mills. Any act beyond a point can become counter-productive and leads to excesses. Disapproval of such acts the Indira government to curb the the freedom of people was clearly demonstrated in subsequent election results. I am not expanding on these points as the focus of the book is not the Emergency but the role of RSS in the struggle for democratic rights.

On a personal and organisational front, this meeting of people from other political streams during the struggle and exposure to their ideologies was a great learning experience. There was a clear directive to work with all political and social organisations to fight the emergency. We used to meet every evening to play in open grounds but not in a regular way the *shakhas* worked. We would meet even in the nights to plan our strategies under the leadership of our local secretary for satyagrah and other modes of agitation, like putting up posters and wall paintings to register our protests.

Fortunately, I was also part of the team of volunteers who would ferry central RSS leaders to different locations incognito for one of the earliest meeting of central committee hosted for three days on three different venues within Mumbai that planned the agitation against emergency. It was funny to see these leaders in western dresses and wigs et al. Not being media figures helped a lot too. They used to stay with families as their uncles, and would be constantly on the move. A colleague of mine, Jagdish Baliga used to move in different attires and facial changes for months before he was finally caught. He was in charge of Dr Subramanian Swamy's movements when he attended the Parliament and again disappeared to resurface in United Kingdom (UK). He was hosted in the UK by volunteers of Friends of India Society (FISI) a body floated to

support pro-democracy movement in India. Among the founding members of FISI were members of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh of U.K. a Hindu organisation registered in there. FISI played a prominent role in this struggle through out by lobbying for restoration of democratic rights in India and spread the true information about what was happening in India.

Big brother was watching everywhere, so there was a lot of thrill for us youngsters for underground work. The training we had received in shakhas since our childhood stood us in good stead. Not a single worker tried to stave off an imminent arrest for participation in satyagraha. Infact, it was the local leaders who would sometimes refuse to allow a person to take part in satyagraha because he knew the person had a serious problem at home or he was required for some other underground activity. It was simply another duty given by the Sangh and it had to be done, that was the attitude. For us, this was direct example of what could be achieved by praying to the motherland daily and pledging to serve her and the society unflinchingly and selflessly. This was also the time when lady members of sister organisations of RSS, mothers and sisters of RSS volunteers and young girl students also joined this struggle against dictatorship in good numbers. They also kept the morale of volunteers high by coming to courts during hearings carrying with them eatables and sweets.

The Emergency finally came to an end in 1977. One of the primary reasons for its end, was the political pressure that had built up on incarceration of over 100,000 political prisoners in jails. Protests, agitation and satyagraha had slowly gripped the country; coupled with the high number of political prisoners. This brought enormous pressure on Mrs Gandhi. Then, there was an international pressure built through various channels including the ones utilized by FISI. A critical factor was Mrs Gandhi's urge to legitimise her dictatorship by winning an election which many of her coterie thought would be a cake walk. "India is Indira and Indira is India" syndrome was in full flow. That the events proved her and others wrong reflects the strength of our Indian people wedded to democratic way of life for eons who went to polling booths with a determination that their leaders could not read.

We started off on a very low note when elections were declared, with instructions from the top to work whole heartedly for the victory of Janata Party. There were no resources and people feared coming out in the open even to the party offices initially. Polling booth level plans were devised. It is noteworthy that most of the senior and middle-level leaders were in jail at this time, and thus, we were leaderless going by the common political wisdom. The training in RSS shakhas was useful again. The young volunteers with the help of a few senior workers who were outside the jails soldiered on regardless of the possible outcome. We realised that an anti-emergency wave was building up only in the latter part of campaigning when people started thronging the election offices of the Janata Party. We got a shock of our life when an initial simple cycle rally turned into a strong rally of thousands without any major publicity. Even the local meetings would draw unprecedented crowds. It was a heady feeling. We went nuts when we heard the news of victory of pro-democracy forces in elections of 1977!

I would not like to digress detailing the dirty politics played especially by socialist groups within Janata Party to break it up under the guise of a manufactured controversy of 'dual membership' of ex-Jan Sangh members who had merged Jan Sangh into Janata Party. It was not that they were not aware this loyalty issue before the party was created. Infact, there are records of many such leaders singing paeans about RSS swayamsevakas for their role in restoration of democracy, their discipline and dedication. They had also gone on record saying that they had made a mistake in understanding RSS as they carried a bias within them for years. They had admitted that their close interaction with the RSS and Jan Sangh leaders had opened their eyes. The fact of the matter was that apart from the Communists and Jan Sangh no other political party had a structured organisation. They used this organisational power till it suited them. Once they were in power they felt that this cadre might capture Janata Party if and when internal elections took place. They had also noted that a sizeable chunk of MPs belonged to erstwhile Jan Sangh. Thus, followed the

disgraceful game of back stabbing; split in the Janata Party; its downfall; and, the return of Mrs Gandhi.

Regardless of the final political outcome, for RSS it was an epoch making change-over. From an organisation limited to running shakhas and some social service projects and string of associate organisations like Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and others, it extended its reach in new areas. In fact, a major push for social service projects was made during this time as the volunteers had to find ways of working for society while RSS shakhas were shut down. This period proved Sangh's mettle as a firm believer in democracy. Its acceptability reached new levels, and it grew rapidly after this, though RSS workers and workers of associated organizations had suffered hard during this period.

For us, the young volunteers of that time, it was a great learning period. Working underground, offering satyagrah in a virtual dictatorship being imprisoned were the learning blocks that we as the second generation RSS workers were introduced to, just as our predecessors were in 1948, following the ban on RSS. We learnt not just from each other, but from people outside the Sangh umbrella too. Opinions of others, including other political parties were of much value to us and we became well versed with the ideologies and working of electoral politics. Until this time our opponents would ridicule us, but after this phase RSS earned respectability and acceptability in socio-political field. Thus, it was a turning point for the organisation.

There is a small book in Hindi by RSS documenting history of RSS struggle for democracy. Unfortunately, it has not been widely distributed or publicised.

As politics has gotten pettier these days sullied with vendetta, it serves to remember that the then RSS Chief Shri Balasaheb Deoras had exhorted to the political class after 1977 Janata Party win to let bygones be bygones. He had advised against any sort of witch hunt against political opponents, including Mrs Gandhi. This was typical of RSS as it believes in all round growth of the nation, animosity towards none and wellbeing of all.

II

Major Defining Moments in RSS History

RSS was born in 1925 and it is now 92 year old. For an Indian Organisation, that too mostly of Hindus, to have not just survived as a united entity but also thrived over such a long time is indeed a tribute to its tenacity of purpose. The reason for its phenomenal longevity is also scripted in its ‘secrets’ described in the following pages.

The narrative that unfolds in the following pages gives a fair idea that RSS and its members have done much more than they are credited for, for their services to this ancient land. One wonders what would have been the state of affairs had it not intervened decisively or persuaded members of the society and leaders to take a different view of things, and take the right action.

In an organisation’s life that aspires to define the innate nationhood for the society it is operating in, one that strives to change a monochromatic pattern of thinking internalised over centuries of foreign domination; there would be some defining moments that played a catalytic role that in evolution of the organization.

Of the various ‘medals’ RSS has received, one that is most commonly handed out is that of being a reactionary and orthodox organization. I would say, slow to respond to various challenges or situations, yes; but reactionary or orthodox definitely never. The birth, the growth, its adaptation to

changing circumstances, coming up with newer ways of working through its evolution – all these indicate an organisation that is modern, pro-active and forward looking. Its urge to reform the society of its ills in its own way and help it evolve into a progressive society is recorded in this book briefly.

Dr Hedgewar chose to take a harder path of social mobilisation when he could have easily stayed on in Congress, taken up positions of power in it and enjoyed fruits of power. He chose a novel and innovative instrument of daily shakha for creating this organization. He understood well that it was a long drawn and tough path. The seeds of this thought were sown by Sister Nivedita's (disciple of Swami Vivekananda) call to give a certain amount of time every day to the nation if one wished to see its emancipation. Every aspect of organisation and its evolution was experimental. All the training processes were freshly designed and implemented. The only thing that carried him through was his abiding faith in the destiny of the nation.

Response to various situations right from the ugly days of partition and various challenges facing the nation saw the RSS take pro-active, and many a times, unpopular stance. For example, it opposed reorganisation of states on linguistic lines as it could lead to parochialism, but at the same time it exhorted Non-Sikh Punjabis to write Punjabi as their mother tongue during Census of 1961 as it was incorrect and could lead to disharmony in society. People understood the significance of the stand taken by the RSS only in retrospect after the noise, generally created by our comrades and the secular-Congress lobby quietened. The preceding pages have many such examples. In this chapter, however, I present the milestones in the life of the RSS. It is possible that my readers may not agree with my perspective. These milestones will be elucidated as we proceed to the subsequent chapters. I mention them at this point to enable my readers to gather some reference points as they read on.

The RSS has gone through various trials and tribulations in its chequered history. Given below are some points that I consider as the defining moments of this organization. Readers may form their own view as their understanding of the organisation becomes better after reading this book.

1. Partition of Bharat i.e. India
2. First ban on RSS in 1948
3. Construction of Vivekananda Rock Memorial
4. Second ban in 1975 and its struggle against Emergency
5. Ekaatmataa Yaatra
6. Dr Hedgewar birth centenary celebrations
7. Ram Janmabhoomi movement and Third ban

The evolution has, in reality, been more graded and the growth of RSS from being an organisation to consolidate Hindu society to a huge social movement over time has gone virtually unnoticed. There have been various campaigns and agitations that it has undertaken directly or with its associate organisations that have defined many a political agenda. I have chosen only the major sign-posts which have taken Sangh's work to higher levels in those respective times.

I have not considered the establishment of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in 1964 as a milestone in this listing. It is the first Hindu organisation in history of Hindu civilisation that brought hundreds of seers, sages, *mahants* and heads of various religious sects to a single platform in 1964 and it is a mass organization with its own members and programmes. I mention it here because it was launched and promoted by personal efforts of the then RSS chief Shri M S Golwalkar and full support of RSS in its fledgling years. I consider it an achievement of second Sarsanghchaalak, Shri Guruji who, due to his background as an ordained disciple of Swami Akhandaananda, commanded respect given his knowledge and humility. Only he had the moral and spiritual stature to persuade all Hindu saints, including revered Shankaraacharyas to declare that "All Hindus are brothers" and "No Hindu is fallen or untouchable"

I have also not mentioned RSS's relief work during natural disasters as a 'milestone', for such relief work is a regular activity in the Sangh swayamsevak's life. You will get a glimpse about these later in the book.

Some of the topics covered below, especially about our Independence struggle, the Partition and banning of RSS have a rather complex

background that cannot be elucidated at this stage, but will make more sense as one reads more about it in succeeding pages. So, I have listed detailed notes in the Annexure at the end of this book.

1. Partition of Bharat

The British were aware that any delay in declaration of independence could frustrate the conspiracy of Partition inspite of Congress leadership's capitulation, because they understood that RSS could lead a consolidation of forces opposed to partition. CID reports of that time show that British were wary of RSS. The presence in the RSS shakhas had swelled to huge proportions during pre-partition days. In the latter part of the book and annexure you will get a better glimpse of the RSS volunteers' sacrifices and death defying work during that period.

The chief of RSS, Sarsanghchaalak, Shri Guruji had taken up whirlwind tour of the country including politically sensitive and risky areas like Sindh and Punjab, exhorting the followers to be prepared for any sacrifice to save their motherland from partition. He was in Sindh just one week before the declaration of partition and Independence, while other so called Congress leaders had already fled the scene to safer places. Organisational skills of its members were put to test to the fullest in those trying circumstances when its members were not only involved in saving families and refugees from death, rape and plunder but also in organising relief camps. In fact, under instructions of the RSS Chief, a dedicated band of volunteers stayed back in Sindh to facilitate safe migration of Hindu families to India. These workers returned to India, only after they accomplished their mission.

Earlier, the Muslim League had waved its 'green flag' for 'Direct Action' on 16 August 1946, and Muslims butchered thousands of Hindus mercilessly before Hindus finally organized themselves to save themselves, with indescribable cruelty. The Indian National Congress was rattled by this incident to the core, showed total lack of spirit in putting up a fight. Then followed the pre-partition and post-partition riots led by Muslim League and its goons. Responding Congress's talk of 'non-reaction', Shri Guruji

said bluntly, “There is a lot of talk about not picking up arms and not taking revenge. But, I cannot agree with this current language of not reacting; it is not something arising out of bravery. It is nothing but cowardice and fooling ourselves. It is ‘*adharma*’, that is, immoral to inflict pain upon self. Appealing to be ready for self defence, he affirmed unhesitatingly, “It is our firm belief that every individual has a natural right to self protection and the society made of such individuals also has the same right. I had read a bizarre statement in newspapers which said, ‘An individual or society does not have the right to defend self, only the government has this right, and a person should take law unto his hands even if he is attacked.’ Only law has the right to defend an individual and society. Does it mean that we should sit quietly and wait for police if somebody attacks us? Should there be no attempt for self defence? How far can this be justified? Right of self defence is a right endowed by nature to every individual and society.

Hindu brethren, including Sikhs, started coming together with self confidence in cities and villages of Punjab like Rawalpindi, Lahore, Peshawar, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ambala, and many more places. Witnessing this phenomenon, the English Tribune wrote, “Punjab is the sword arm of Hindustan and RSS is the sword arm of Punjab.” Perturbed with this statement, the Muslim League mouthpiece, *Dawn*, wrote, “If Congress leadership wishes to receive co-operation from Muslims, then it must ban Sangh immediately.”

In short, the Hindus were not in favour of partition even after Jinnah’s ‘Direct Action’. Wherever the Sangh reached, Hindu youth power began gearing up for self defence. The Communist Party was also justified partition and supported Muslim League. It had also passed a resolution in favour of partition. At the same time, British rulers and other leaders were stealthily planning for it. Under a political settlement, Congress and Muslim League formed a government in Delhi in September 1946. Central Assembly (called Parliament now) went into session with this arrangement. As soon as that happened, the Muslim League began throwing tantrums. The first day witnessed unruly scenes both inside and outside the assembly, as the Muslim League exhibited its goonda power to good effect . It

continued the following day. But, some political leaders decided not to allow such rowdy behavior again. A top leader of Delhi state Congress, Lala Deshbandhu Gupta visited State Pracharak Vasantrao Oke at the Sangh office in Kamla Nagar to see how this could be done. Consequently, hundreds of swayamsevaks surrounded the Assembly hall the following morning to signal a strong response. It was due to the presence of the swayamsevaks that peace was maintained, and the assembly could carry on with its session in a dignified manner. Yet, partition of this ancient land was announced on 3 June 1947.

The Sangh set up the Punjab Relief Committee and Hindu Sahaayataa Samiti. Lahore was the centre of activity for both of these.

In his tours, the then Chief of RSS, Shri Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, fondly referred by all as Guruji went to Sialkot and Mintgomery after touring Multan in July, August 1947. A young volunteer asked Guruji during this tour, “Should we not collect arms to defend ourselves against Muslims? Guruji asked him, “Have you read the Bhagvad Gita? The Gita says, atman (soul) is immortal. Then what are we afraid of? Collecting weapons is a sign of fear.” Quoting a proverb, he added, “A person is afraid of a person who does not terrorise others nor does he fear for self. Understand this very well that fearlessness is the strongest weapon” The Sangh leadership always presented the facts of the unfolding situation objectively in their meetings and discussions. But, it was always cautious that it should not give way to any disorderly scenario. Brief was clear that one was to be ready for self-defence but not be hot headed or violent.

Situation had deteriorated so badly that even the Man of Steel, Home Minister Sardar Patel, had to admit, “It won’t be possible for government to defend everybody. Each person will have to try to defend self.” For the Hindus these words presented a helpless worrying situation. The Sangh volunteers took it upon themselves to protect the society at the risk to their lives. Sangh leaders, Guruji, Balasaheb Deoras, Madhavrao Muley, and Vasantrao Oke were on the battle field, namely Punjab and Sindh to guide the self defence teams, and did not scurry away to Delhi as the Congress leaders had.

Defending the valley of Kashmir from aggressors, its merger with the nation, role of swayamsevaks and Guruji have been recorded with undeniable facts by Manikchandra Vajpayee and Shridhar Paraadkar in their well researched book '*Jyoti Jalaa Nij Praan Ki*' (Lighting a lamp with of one's own life).

It was indeed the first time when the young organization of RSS was put to test. Hundreds of volunteers lost their lives. Being a Punjabi, I have heard such stories within Punjabi and Sindhi displaced families who lived through this period and were saved by RSS workers. I have with me detailed handwritten notes about swayamsevaks killed during these days. Books, Now It Can be Told and RSS – Vision and Mission too has information about these. their families or were injured during this period as they were busy with saving others rather than looking after their own families. Though, it succeeded in the limited mission of saving lives and helping refugees reconstruct their lives; the eternal regret of RSS leadership has been that it was too young and not big enough to stop the Partition.

2. First Ban in 1948

Congress leadership was scared and envious of the growing popularity of RSS and its organisational muscle. It could not wish it away as it had surrendered its moral authority by agreeing to the Partition. Mahatma Gandhi's murder was a God sent opportunity for Congress to suppress the organisation. Guruji was highly disturbed with this tragic incident and had condemned the assassination in unequivocal terms immediately on hearing the news. However, a ban was imposed on the RSS following the assassination without any shred of evidence. Guruji was arrested under Section 302, as if he had shot Gandhiji with his gun! The Congress government however removed this charge within 24 hours, realizing its folly. Congress leaders in various cities, especially in Maharashtra let loose its goons on the RSS and its sympathisers. Chitpavan Brahmins faced maximum violence as Godse was a Chitpavan Brahmin. We can find similar echoes in 1984 massacre of Sikhs after Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination.

RSS volunteers suffered in silence on directions of Guruji who appealed to them from jail to keep their calm in that hour of tragedy as it could lead to serious repercussions for the Hindu society.

It is a reflection of the political games that the Government of the day under the authority of Jawaharlal Nehru played, despite the investigation report submitted by Mr Sanjeevi a police official and head of the CID investigation within 17 days of the assassination that absolved RSS of any role in the plot, the ban was not lifted. The report was suppressed for a long time and it came into open decades later. Not only this, in the court case against Nathuram Godse, the accused, neither he, nor his accomplice or the judgement mentioned RSS even once.

It is a sad commentary on our political leaders petty mindedness that the same Congress politicians who had gone to RSS offices to seek protection during pre-partition days, and who had approached RSS to help them conduct Nehru's public meeting in Sindh peacefully were out to crush RSS now as they saw it as a rival power centre, inspite of its professed cultural and non-political work. I have mentioned in latter part of the book how RSS volunteers had foiled an attempt to kill all the ministers of newly formed government in September 1947 by reporting the conspiracy with detailed facts submitted to Sardar Patel.

Interestingly, Sardar Patel was ready to lift the ban on RSS if it had merged with the Congress. In one of his letters to Guruji, Patel had said "I have firm belief that Sangh people can do justice to their patriotism only by working together with Congress and not by opposing it or being separate from it." So, an apparently communal organisation accused of Gandhi murder and banned could be absolved of all its sins by merging with Congress! This was contrary to his views about the Gandhi assassination earlier as expressed to Nehru. It seems he decided to be on the side of Nehru in this instance and towed his line of not lifting the ban on RSS; although he did not believe in it, as the detailed historical records and correspondence of the time between Nehru, Sangh, Patel show.

Nehru had made up his mind about crushing the Sangh. It was clear from his speech in Amritsar on 29th January 1948, one day before the

murder when he thundered that he would see to it that the “RSS is totally uprooted from the face of India.” This was in line with resolutions passed by Congress committees and its Chief Ministers in some states demanding a ban on RSS a few months prior. They clearly saw it as the sole political competition to their monopoly over power given its huge popularity based on the work it had done for people who had suffered immensely during the Partition.

Finally, as the government of the day refused to see reason, a satyagraha was launched. It was one of the largest, and most disciplined satyagraha until then. Around 77,000 volunteers were jailed for coming together on grounds and offer prayer to the motherland. These numbers were more than the total political prisoners during freedom struggle including Quit India agitation of 1942. Incidentally, a senior volunteer of the Konkan region told me that in his jail, out of 900 inmates, 700 were agrarian families and of rural background. It shows that the support base at that time was also widely distributed and not as brahminical as is made out to be.

A large number of its supporters lost government jobs through a government directive inked in April 1948 based on earlier government circular no. 23 in 1932 in Central province that barred a citizen from joining RSS steered by the Congress government to stop the growth of RSS. Many members lost their businesses and jobs especially in institutions owned by Congress followers or their sympathisers. Many jails also saw typical police excesses that a fascist state can bear upon its dissenting citizens. The ban and the satyagraha lasted several months and ban was lifted in 1949. Later the Kapoor Commission appointed by the government released a report in 1967 that exonerated the RSS of any part in Gandhiji's assassination.

To save itself from further embarrassment, the government raised a flimsy objection that RSS didn't have a written constitution. Not a rare thing in those days. In fact, as Guruji pointed out in one of his letters to the interlocutors during the ban, even Congress did not have a written constitution for nearly for 14 years, from 1885 to 1899. Nor did Sarvoday Mandal and many other voluntary organisations of those times have had a constitution. The intermediaries requested Guruji to fulfill this simple

condition. The constitution of the RSS was then formulated, ending the ban on RSS. As Guruji pointed out in his covering letter, it was nothing but a written form of how the organisation had been running since its inception. On one condition, the Sangh leadership refused to budge, though the pressures remained till the end – that was admitting young non-adult members in Sangh, as that was the foundation of its work.

For a young organisation whose members had suffered grievously in this period, building up the organisation was a big challenge. Guruji received outstanding reception all over India wherever he went, showing the Hindu society's support for him and RSS. He appealed to the volunteers to dedicate atleast one year for nation building. His emotional appeal was so great that hundreds of RSS volunteers left their jobs and businesses to become pracharaks and vistaaraks to rebuild RSS. With such a ground swell of support and a renewed sense of sacrifice, RSS came out much stronger from this trial by fire.

Articles and relevant extracts from other sources in the annexure give more details about this period.

3. Construction of Vivekanand Rock Memorial

Building of Vivekanand Shilaa Smaarak by Vivekanand Kendra in Kanyakumari in 1970 can be considered as a defining moment for the RSS. It was a mammoth task for it to take up a project for which it did not have resources and the governments of the time had no interest in this project at all, even if some of them were not against it. One of the senior most pracharak and leader of RSS, Eknath Ranade, was assigned this task and he was freed from Sangh work for its fulfillment. It was a project that was to become the 'Pride of the Nation'.

It was a historic decision to involve millions of Indians in the noble memory of one of the greatest Hindu saints of our times, who led the renaissance of Hinduism in those dark times of nation's history. The manner of involvement was very simple – a request for donation of only Rupees one only through coupons. It had been resolved that the memorial will not

be built with large donations but with small contributions. If I am not wrong, the budget was around Rupees one crore, and it was managed through this novel resolve. Collection was done entirely by RSS volunteers moving door to door without any big hoardings or newspaper advertisements. And there was no television at that time either for promotion.

That the project faced many other hurdles and was a difficult engineering feat too, is a matter of minor details. Subsequently, the central and state governments, except the Government of Kerala (then ruled by Marxist Communists, contributed to the general funds.

This was the first major mass contact programme of RSS, much bigger in scope than the earlier ambitious programme like nationwide signature campaign for cow protection and the subsequent massive agitation in Delhi in 1966, when nearly 20 million signatures were collected demanding ban on cow slaughter. People from the lowest strata of society to the highest were made a stake holder in this national monument in this endeavour and the message of Swami Vivekanand was conveyed to them in a simple way.

4. Second Ban in 1975 and Emergency

I have dealt at length about this episode in the beginning so I will skip details. It changed the thinking at workers' level as well as the organizational. Its base expanded to hitherto untouched segments of the society. People witnessed the work and sacrifice of the RSS for restoration of democracy. This period saw the removal of so called veil of secrecy around the RSS to some extent, because media itself was harassed by the fascist policies of Congress government and had no choice but to give due publicity and respect to the work done by RSS. The taboo of virtual untouchability on RSS imposed by various interested lobbies for decades was truly broken. This was a big gain for the RSS as a movement.

5. Ekaatmataa Yatra

After the alarming mass conversions of Hindus, primarily Dalit brethren, in Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu to Islam, many activities were initiated by RSS, its affiliates, other conscious Hindu organisations and saints. It persuaded and activated many religious leaders, heads of various *mathams* to come out into the society and create a sense of oneness amongst the Hindus.

One of the initiatives that RSS took was to organise a nationwide movement called 'Ekaatmataa Yatra' in 1983. The idea was simple. Trucks carrying image of 'Bharatmata' (sacred motherland) and a huge vessel containing sacred waters of Ganga were to crisscross length and breadth of the country on four major routes with scores of supplementary yatras in internal regions. Holy river Ganga is a symbol of the uninterrupted flow of noble Indian traditions and culture over ages and evokes reverence and respect for our motherland. The trucks were to take various stop-overs on way and cover thousands of villages and cities. At these stop-overs, some religious functions and presence of local religious leaders were also planned. Holy Ganga water was especially packaged in bottles to be distributed through the yatra to the participants. There were hundreds of other smaller yatras to supplement these main yatras. The idea was to weave a theme of timelessness of our civilisation and unity in diversity around one of the most sacred symbol of India, namely sacred river of Ganga. The most seen iconic image of 'Bharatmata' that you find in thousands of places all over India was created during this campaign.

It is a tribute to the social sensitivity of the senior RSS leaders that they could judge the feelings of the Hindu society about the threat from mass conversions. I could actually understand the meaning of having your 'ears to the ground'! Local workers at various places were not at all sure of the reception that this yatra would encounter. Many of us tried to hunt for smaller grounds to avoid the embarrassment of seeing near empty grounds. One of the senior most RSS central leader and pracharak from the first shakha established by Dr. Hedgewar, Shri Moropant Pingley, in one of his meetings with workers said, "This yatra is going to succeed, we are 100 per

cent sure. It is upto you to take part in organising it well and be a part of its success.”

We were amazed at its success. The turnout of the people, spontaneous welcome programmes on way were as unbelievable as the scenes during the 1977 elections. It was an unforgettable overwhelming experience. An estimated eighty million people participated in this programme. For me, this event is a defining moment as it was the first RSS and its affiliate organizations’ programme at all India level with truly mass participation. It was a programme that brought the RSS in close contact with the Indian society as envisaged by its founder. This could be called the precursor the Ram Janmabhoomi movement that saw further consolidation of Hindu society.

6. Dr. Hedgewar Birth Centenary Celebrations

Dr Hedgewar’s birth centenary, the founder of RSS, was celebrated in 1989 with great enthusiasm and sense of dedication. One of the decisions taken by the leadership was to create a corpus of funds that would help launch large number of social service projects, or *seva* projects, as RSS calls it. This focus on *seva karya* (service to the society) and financial support to such activities through this fund mobilisation gave a new impetus to the social service facet of RSS work.

From an organisation focused primarily on organisation building, RSS expanded into another direction in social life with clear focus on an activity that was in desperate need of a proper structured approach. This aspect of RSS activity has become a huge network by itself. You will get a glimpse of some of the *seva* projects in later part of the book. With a beginning of targeted 1,000 social service projects, RSS and its affiliate organisations conduct nearly 1 lakh 70 thousand social service programmes now.

To feel the difference they make, one should visit some of these projects and understand what they have done for the society. The social changers like Ekal Vidyalay movement; Swasthya Rakshak (bare foot doctors or

primary health volunteers) movements; and, Graamoday (all round development of villages) are a spin-off of this initiative.

7. Ram Janmabhoomi Movement

Enough has been read and seen about Ram Janmabhoomi movement by my generation. However, the current young generation is only aware of demolition of Babri structure and riots that followed, because of the propaganda surrounding this movement. In later part of the book I have covered the intellectual exercise and efforts of the secular-Marxist *parivaar* to obfuscate real historical issues defaming the Sangh and Hindutva by pushing the truth successfully under the carpet that made the agitation what it was.

Never, in the history of India, has a public movement seen such mobilisation of people at large or witnessed the support of large sections of the society. People went to the extent of providing food and shelter to the satyagrahis who were stopped mid-tracks by railways and hounded by the police on the instructions of the secular governments during its first satyagrah or ‘karseva’ (voluntary religious service) at Ayodhya for rebuilding the Ram temple. Ram is the creator of the moral and ethical framework of the Hindu society. The message of Ram has permeated other societies around the world through migrant Hindus. However hard the secularists may try to insult Hindus and make them believe that Ram was only a mythological figure and forward arguments that he is there only in minds and hearts of the people, the faith of people built on oral history of thousands of years cannot be trifled with.

Never, was a mass campaign sustained and guided through so many phases involving more and more Hindus on a matter that shook their conscience, and firmed their resolve that their dearest Lord Ram must have a temple where it already existed for centuries. For a country where every fifth or sixth person’s name from South to North carries ‘Ram’ in it, it was a natural desire. Lord Ram is one of the three most popular deities in Hindu

pantheon viz. Krishna, Shiva and Ram. So, one cannot treat this eternal faith in a dismissive manner.

If the secular cabal had been more thoughtful and the political leadership more pragmatic, it could have created a deep sense of mutual trust and love by persuading Muslims to give up their claim on a defunct structure that signified the atrocities and insults Mughal invaders like Babar and rulers like Aurangzeb had heaped on Hindus by demolishing their temples, converting them into mosques. Insults were heaped on their most revered Gods in Mathura, Kashi and Ayodhya apart from thousands of other places. A section of Muslims had clearly shown an inclination to give up its claim on the Babri structure as a gesture of goodwill to the Hindu society and decided to balm centuries old wounds. But, their leadership chose the path of immediate gains, pandering to shallower sentiments egged on by anti-religious anti-Hindu intellectuals goaded by inverse communalism of the Marxist *parivar*.

The Ram Janmabhoomi Movement reached out various sections and strata of Hindu society across the country. For the first time, historians, social scientists, Indologists, and journalists aired their views on the subject courageously and honestly. The Marxist-secular cabal was exposed for its inability to confront the truth that didn't suit it. It is regrettable that the group of unbiased intellectuals suffered in the aftermath due to a vice like grip of the dominant Left lobby, as also for the failure of BJP, RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to support them. I shall return to the former's fascist ways later.

Koenrad Elst notes in his thesis '*Ayodhya, The Finale – Science vs. Secularism, the Excavation Debate*' that "the secularist historians have been bluffing their way through the controversy. In December 1990, the government of Chandra Shekhar invited the two lobbying groups involved, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Babri Masjid Action Committee, to discuss the historical truth of the matter. Misled by the media into believing that the Hindu claims were pure fantasy, the BMAC office-bearers arrived ill-prepared. They were speechless when the VHP team presented dozens of documents supporting its case. For the next meeting, they invited a team of

proper historians chaired by Marxist professor RS Sharma, who declared that they hadn't studied the evidence yet. This was a strange statement from people who had just led 42 academicians in signing a petition confirming once and for all that there was no evidence whatsoever for a temple. At the meeting scheduled for 25 January 1991, they simply didn't show up. In a booklet issued months later, pompously called '*A Historians' Report to the Nation*', they tried to save face by nibbling at the evidential value of a few of the numerous documents presented by their opponents (and of course, historical evidence is rarely absolute), but failed to offer even one piece of evidence for any alternative scenario."

Elst continues his observations: "During the demolition, an inscription tentatively dated to circa 1140 came to light. It detailed how it was part of a temple to "Vishnu, slayer of Bali and of the ten-headed one". Rama is considered an incarnation of Vishnu, and the two enemies he defeated were king Bali and king Ravana, often depicted as ten-headed in recognition of his brilliant mind. This evidence too was locked away and strictly ignored by the secularists until 2003, when *People's Democracy*, the paper of the Marxwadi Communist Party, alleged foul play. It seemed that the Lucknow State Museum mentioned in its catalogue a 20-line inscription dedicated to Vishnu, satisfying the description of the piece discovered during the demolition, and missing since the late 1980s. However, museum director Jitendra Kumar declared that the piece had never left the museum, even though it had not been on display, and he showed it at a press conference for all to see (*Hindustan Times*, 8 May 2003). In spite of many similarities, it differed from the Ayodhya find in shape, colour and text contents."

The judgement in the case has been delivered by the Allahabad High Court. It has vindicated the stand of Hindus that the place under dispute is, indeed, place of birth of Lord Ram. The judgement has tried to balance facts and faith in equal measure and has tried to achieve what political and religious leaders failed to achieve all these years, that is, try to bring about reconciliation that can heal the wounds of injustice – festering for Hindus for centuries because of destructions of their holy places of worship, and for Muslims for decades since demolition of the disputed structure. It is

amusing to see worthies like Irfan Habib crawling out of woodworks picking holes in archeological findings of scholars of Archeological Society of India. They forget that this team was appointed by the court and did its work in the presence of judges, experts and witnesses. Each and every finding has been meticulously recorded and presented as expected from such experts. This same group of historians had evaded meetings of historians and archeologists through good offices of central government two decades back when they found that the evidence presented by pro-temple historians and archeologists was overwhelming in comparison to their oft repeated posturing built around British and later leftist interpretation of history.

Another peeve of secularists is that decision seems to have been taken more on the basis of faith than facts, facts that they dispute too. Hinduism has lived its traditions, culture and religions mostly through oral propagation. Even the Vedas – the fountainhead of universal knowledge were carried through generations with oral traditions. It is the tradition of '*shruti*' that is oral transmission of knowledge. It is only now that so called myths of Hinduism are being proven through archeological proofs or, what law calls corroborative evidence. Limitation is with our current knowledge of research tools, not with Hindu history and its off shoots in field of science. One cannot hold this weakness of Hinduism against it. It is also true that every religion or belief system is basically born out of faith and sustains itself on faith. Going by the same yard stick of scientific evidence, should critics of Islam doubt whether Prophet Mohammad did indeed hear words of God or Allah? Should cynics doubt Immaculate Conception? Should we doubt whether Moses actually received Ten Commandments from the Lord? Should we doubt whether the hair recovered in Srinagar after its mysterious disappearance some years back was, indeed, Hazrat Saheb's hair? No Hindu would raise such doubts. Nor do our secular friends do so in case of other religions either. But, faith of Hindus can be challenged and ridiculed. Only secularists' interpretation of history or faith can be the gospel truth, as if they have a monopoly on truth. It is sad that instead of helping society move ahead with a positive spirit as indicated by

the judgement and close this chapter, they are out again re-opening wounds to prove themselves right and satisfy their egos. None of these secular worthies have countered the views expressed by fanatic Indian Muslim leaders who claim that no mosque can be shifted though their land of inspiration, the epicenter of Wahhabism, has seen umpteen mosques being demolished or shifted to new places in Saudi Arabia, and also in Pakistan. But, they do not tire of spouting ‘enlightened noble’ views like “Ram lives in heart, why are you fighting for a temple in his name?” It is but a small example of their biased mindset.

This movement brought Hindutva firmly on the centre stage of national discourse and it became a mainstream ideology. It is not a mere coincidence that the present phase of India’s growth story coincides with the new resurgent Hindu society that emerged out of this period of Janmabhoomi movement. This confidence was further bolstered by a government run by people close to RSS who went ahead with nuclear tests inspite of global pressure and got overwhelming support from global Indian community to overcome US sanctions. This accelerated growth strengthens the premise of RSS that a society can progress well only if its members are confident of themselves and proud of their culture and nation.

I am not sure if the by-product of all this mobilisation was as good. The rise of militant groups like Bajrang Dal could be called a necessity of times when there is a clear scenario of clash of civilisations. I don’t wish to quote lofty ideals of Hinduism to say that this clash is a mythical one as this clash is a reality. However, such groups tasted the muscle power at that time and its manifestation, sometimes, in undesirable agitations and actions. I could sense a departure from spiritual, reformist style of working to a more agitational and muscular way of working during those times. This may have led to addition of more people in the ranks of the Hindutva movement, however it also led to a dilution of the normal working style of the Sangh. But, I guess, this is a part of social churning that the society is going through. Ultimately, the constructive style of working in RSS will succeed and these groups will also channelise their energies in positive social work and reforms.

These years also saw many ‘outsiders’ getting converted to the cause of Hinduism. Leading Marxists like M G Bokare turned Swadeshi and wrote a book ‘*Hindu Economics*’. Many leading journalists and intellectuals openly spoke against the secular-Marxist parivar. Some nationalist Muslims like Muzaffar Hussein started working with RSS related organisations. Many Christians and Muslims joined different organisations too that were connected to the Sangh. In all, the Sangh grew out of its shakha structure and became a social movement in the real sense.

While studying various Sangh bans, I find some leftist and ‘secular’ writers deriding ‘duplicity’ of RSS in engaging the government in negotiations or launching ‘satyagraha’ democratically to lift the ban while sustaining its organisational work silently. Ironically, the same group of writers go to any length to ask government to ‘engage’ violent anti-state Naxalites in talks, advocate cease fire while decrying any action against them under the garb of human rights. In this case it is a matter of ‘strategy’ against an ‘exploitative state’. It is easy for the reader to judge who plays games of duplicity.

In recent years the RSS has networked with various other organisations working in the public domain: religious, voluntary and reforms movements. It believes that it doesn’t have a monopoly on nation building or man building. So, it co-operates with various organisations with an optimistic approach towards nation building and social awakening wherever possible. It believes that all well meaning positive forces of national re-construction must work together, because there is so much to do, and the speed at which this is happening is too slow. This is the vision that drives the RSS today.

PART I

THE SPIRIT

“This nation of ours is a Hindu Nation (Hindu Rashtra). We wish to rebuild its paramount status and a sovereign prosperous life for it. We are striving to this end only and this exercise will continue till we are successful in this endeavor. It is true that people try to create confusion about word ‘Hindu’. In many places, motivated by selfish motives Hindu is shown as being anti-Muslim, anti-Christian and now even anti-Sikh, anti-Jain, anti-Harijan. People perpetrating such propaganda do not do so with proper information. They have their vested political interests. It is not that they made these statements after studying dharma, culture and history.”

“....Hindu philosophy and systems of living one’s life have been present in this country, when Islamic and Christian communities did not even exist in this world. One may ask then, how can Hindu mean to be anti-Muslim? Similarly, Sikh and Jain sects etc. come within the purview of Hindu. If one were to think about opposing them when one speaks of ‘Hindu’, it would be akin to cutting one’s own limbs. Then, how is Hindu against them? All these are falsehoods. ‘Hindu’ is not against anybody. This is a completely emotional thought, not against anybody at all”

“....Therefore, we must assert with complete resolve that, yes, we are Hindus. This is our dharma, our culture, our society; and built from all this is our nation. That is all. Our birth is only to build a powerful, capable, grand, radiant sovereign life for it. Therefore, we must motivate people for this mission. There is no need to be embarrassed or be afraid in declaring this belief.”

– M S Golwalkar, 1972

Extracts from RSS Constitution

(Translated from original in Hindi)

Preamble:

Whereas in the disintegrated condition of the country it was considered necessary to have an Organization:

- (a) To eradicate the fissiparous tendencies arising from diversities of sect, faith, caste and creed and from political, economic, linguistic and provincial differences amongst Hindus;
- (b) To make them realize the greatness of their past;
- (c) To inculcate in them a spirit of service, sacrifice and selfless devotion to the Society;
- (d) To build up an organized and well-disciplined corporate life; and
- (e) To bring about an all-round regeneration of the Hindu Samaaj on the basis of its *Dharma* and *Sanskriti*.

Aims & Objective:

The aims and objects of the Sangh are to organize and weld together the various diverse groups within the Hindu Samaaj and to revitalize and rejuvenate the same on the basis of its *Dharma* and *Sanskriti*, so that it may achieve an all-round development of Bharat Varsh.

Policy:

- (a) Sangh believes in the orderly evolution of society and adheres to peaceful and legitimate means of realization of its ideals.
- (b) In consonance of the cultural heritage of the Hindu Samaaj Sangh has abiding faith in the fundamental principle of respect towards all faiths.

(c) Sangh is aloof from politics and is devoted to social and cultural fields only. However, the swayamsevak, as individuals, are free to join any party, institution or front, political or otherwise except such parties, institutions or fronts which subscribe to or believe in extra-national loyalties, or resort to violent and/or secret activities to achieve their ends, or which promote or attempt to promote, or have the object of promoting any feeling of enmity or hatred towards any other community or creed or religious denomination. Persons owing allegiance to the above mentioned undesirable elements and methods or working shall have no place in Sangh.

Other articles of the Constitution define its flag, swayamsevak, shakha, programmes, finances, appointment of Sarsanghchalak, Sarkaryavaah, elections – their periodicity and mode of election, e.g. qualifications for voters and candidates, delegates, its set up of its policy making bodies – Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha and Akhil Bharatiya Kendriya Kaaryakaarini Mandal, local *kaaryakaari mandals*, pracharaks, and methodology to be followed for amendment to its constitution.

III

What Defines India

Let us just think about what defines India in eyes of the world. The top global Indian brands are:

- Yoga
- Ayurveda
- Sanskrit
- Spirituality
- Matchless ancient literature – Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagwad Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata

All the brands and ideas noted above flow from Hindu or Indic civilisation. There is no dispute about it. While RSS was propagating and supporting institutions which supported these ideas for decades, only recently has our entrenched, established intellectuals and elite class reluctantly recognised this fact. This probably is a result of the international recognition of these contributions of India to the world civilisation. Today, India is also known as a global information Technology power. The success has come from our same age old knowledge pools of mathematics, science, astronomy, Manufacturing skills and culture. A recent book by an American author that tries to decipher the success of Indian Americans, notes that a robust family system is one of the key reasons for this success. The report of the United States Census Bureau also comes to the same conclusion that the joint family system has roots in ancient Hindu traditions.

India is recognised and respected for its non-aggressive way of life. It may have spread its influence far and wide with its philosophies, whether Vedic or Buddhist; but never did it resort to violence, looting, murders to spread its religions or faith. It has an innate inclusive nature that flows from its philosophy: “*ekam sat, vipraha bahuda vadanti*” (There is one truth, wise ones speak of it in different ways that adopts or absorbs other ideas and philosophies over time).

Why should we Indians or Hindus feel apologetic for being proud of these facts? There has been an intellectual exercise for some years to play around with facts that give identity to Hindu society. These intellectual gymnastics of our honourable leftist intellectuals propose that all things good belong to ‘ancient Indian heritage’ – not ‘Hindu’ and all things bad (casteism, untouchability etc.) belong to Hindus. Thus, Hindu spirituality is encashed with impunity by well known media houses professing to be ‘secular’ by selling mantras, bhajans, yoga CDs etc., as ‘Indian culture and Indian spiritualism’ and not as priceless Hindu heritage, as it is supposed to be. Yoga is presented as a ‘non-religious’ discipline though it is clearly a spiritual, rather than a physical exercise, rooted in highly evolved Hindu philosophy. Unfortunately many of such ‘secular’ media houses also broadcast programmes promoting half-baked beliefs that promote superstition. Such programmes are conveniently presented as Hindu belief systems. It is difficult to fathom what triggers such strange view point: is it a lack of understanding of Hinduism? Or maybe, it is a lack of sincerity in understanding ancient Hindu or Indian heritage and history, and owning it in its entirety – whether good or even bad

Prof D K Chakrabarty of Cambridge University asserts that there is subtle politics operating in archeology that denies the links between the Indus Civilisation and Vedic culture. To quote him, “The battle raging these days is whether there can be any relation between the life depicted in the Vedic literature and this civilisation. Without trying to pull down this debate to the all-too-common Indian level of ‘progressive vs. reaction’ syndrome which implies that any talk in favour of Veda-Indus civilisation relationship is ‘right reactionary’ proposition (a la Irfan Habib), we note that scholars of

the stature of M S Vats, R P Chanda, B N Datta and P V Kane had no difficulty in arguing for a relationship between the two.”

It is nobody's case that aberrations in customs and practices of Hindus should be negated. They definitely need to be removed. The RSS is foremost in efforts to correct these wrongs, contrary to popular perception created by Goebbelesian propaganda over years. The problem is that the RSS does not believe in a confrontationist or propagandist way of resolving problems but follows a reformist path of love and persuasion in silence. I will articulate a few examples of such work later in the book. But, it needs to be understood that both good and the bad are part of the Hindu society, Hindu way of life and one cannot play around with this fact to play with Hindu sensibilities.

Oneness in Multiplicity

All our leaders proclaim very proudly that India is a perfect picture of 'Unity in Diversity'. With hundreds of languages, scores of religious faiths, diverse geography, what is the thread which holds together this beautiful garland of diversity denoting Indian identity? Unity in diversity is an expression of a fact. In subjective experience it is 'Oneness in Multiplicity'. The only thread that binds people together from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Guwahati is the ancient Hindu Civilisation and its belief system. This deep running sap through the nation since eons is what has kept this sense of unity alive. Whatever else we talk of is built over this deep and strong foundation.

According to Shri H V Sheshadri, "Diversity is like leaves, flowers and fruits that grow out of a tree. But, the sap that nurtures all these diverse elements of the tree comes from the root of the tree." It is this sap that is the life-blood of this diverse looking tree. The diverse tree is Bharat, that is, India, this sap is the Hindu way of life. If sap dries up, the tree dies."

Hinduism is a way of life which happily encompasses so many other faiths and religions. Yet, if we talk of this common Hindu heritage, it is a challenging problem bearing upon the secular and Marxist parivaar.

If something other than Hinduness or Hindu culture has bound this nation together for centuries, then why is it that wherever the majority of population in an area converts to another religion, that area cedes or strives to cede from India? Whether it is erstwhile Afghanistan – at one time the cradle of Buddhism; more recently Pakistan or Bangladesh or Kashmir or the North East. Fact is, India keeps shrinking. People who proclaim that this is an alarmist view and there is no risk to Hinduism, close their eyes to this fact staring from the pages of history.

You need not invent an artificial logic or reason for this sense of unity. This deep sense of unity amongst Indians needs to be appreciated if we wish our people to feel connected to their ancient land. Every nation has its cultural identity and it strives to build itself around it. It doesn't mean that it should result in a violent or divisive nation. Many newly emerged Nations like the United States of America (USA) have forged a common culture successfully, often denoted as a melting pot rather than a salad bowl, while some like the erstwhile U.S.S.R. (United Socialist Soviet Republic) and Czechoslovakia failed. We have one common cultural thread running through multiplicity of our national life but we are trying to force an artificial hollow cultural identity based on pop icons – artificial constructs, and negating or trying to bury natural sense of oneness in the name of ill-defined interpretation of secularism!

Ancient Geographical Sense of Nationhood

According to political scientists, a sense of nationhood arises out of distinct geographical identity. Many modern historians claim that idea of Indian nationhood is a gift of the British. But, there are many facts that negate this theory. There are verses in ancient Hindu scriptures that describe this land '*aasetu himaachal*' – from the Indian Ocean to the Himalayas. A common chant in many rituals since Vedic times is "*prithviyaayai samudraparyantyayai ekaraat*" – from land stretched upto seas, one nation. Try to hear what your priest chants in the initial parts of a religious ritual or a *havan*. He chants "*jambu dveepe Bharat khandey*", when he is guiding

you through the rituals of a pooja. This is nothing but description of this nation since centuries.

There are shlokas in our Puranas which were not written during British or Islamic times but much before that. Vishnu Puran and Brahma Puran say:

*Uttaraam yatsamudrasya Himaadeshchaiva dakshinam
Varsham tad bhaaratam naama bhaarati yatra santatih*

~ That part of land, which is north of the seas and south of the Himalayas, is the great Bharata and her progeny are called Bhaaratiya.

Poet Kalidaasa, (fifth century CE), had also described this country in a similar vein. Chanakya, (third century BC), the great authority on political science, stated that the length of this country from seas in south to the Himalayas in north is one thousand yojanaas (an ancient measure of distance.)

Hindu, Indic or Vedic people

At this moment, let us also try to get a few semantics clear as far as possible. This play with semantics by interested lobbies is done to show that there is no entity called Hindu. A general understanding is that the word Hindu is more recent and is a result of Arabs describing people residing around and beyond river Sind as Hindus, because they pronounce ‘S’ and ‘H’. This is true also of many European and Indian languages.

Dr Murlidhar H Pahoja in his article “Antiquity & Origin of the term Hindu” says, “In the Avesta, Hapta-Hindu is used for Sanskrit Sapta-Sindhu, the Avesta being dated variously between 5000-1000 B.C. This indicates that the term ‘Hindu’ is as old as the word ‘Sindhu’. Sindhu is a Vedic term used in the Rigveda. And, therefore, ‘Hindu’ is as ancient as the Rigveda. Vriddha Smriti defines Hindu as, “*One who abhors the mean and the ignoble, and is of noble bearing, who reveres the Veda, the cow, and the deity, is a Hindu.*”

Similarly other Sanskrit works which use the term ‘Hindu’ are, Kalika Puran, Bhavishya Puran, Adbhut Kosh, Medini Kosh, Ram Kosh etc.

Kalidaasa has used a derivative form ‘Haindava’. In Brahaspati Agam, the word ‘Hindusthan’ appears in the following verse:

*Himaalayam samaarabhya yaavadindu sarovaram
Tam devanirmitam desham hindusthaanam prachakshate*

This country, created by the gods, that commences from the Himalayas and spreads out till Indu Sarovar – that is southern seas or Indian Ocean, is called Hindusthan. Thus, ‘hi’ is derived from Himaalay and ‘ndu’ from Indu Sarovar to create the word Hindu.

The word ‘Hindu’ carries more of a geographical connotation, though it also has a religious connotation too. It also means that people who do not follow traditional ways of worship of Vedic people can also be considered to be in this category. It is well known convention that people from India irrespective of their faith or religious practices are referred to as Hindustanis or people from Hind by people in Arabic lands. I could quote even from ancient Iranian and Middle Eastern literature, but the central purpose of this book is not to write a treatise on this subject.

The so-called modern, secular historians try to split hair by claiming that the Vedic people were not Hindus. So, what were they? They were not Muslims or Christians or from any other belief systems for sure. The continuity of evolution has unbreakable links from Vedic time to today, so this debate is infructuous and is only meant to create confusion in the discussion about natural Hindu nationhood that we have inherited.

I would like the reader to ponder a minute over why India is called a ‘sub-continent’ but bigger, massive geographical entities like Australia and USA are called countries? You would note that your mind is conditioned subtly to accept that we are not a natural country but have been brought together by the British through legislative efforts.

In essence, etymology of the word gives it strength but at this stage in history, it is not so important how the word ‘Hindu’ was derived. It is a word that has come to identify people living on this land spread from Himalayas to the Indian Ocean.

Many people feel that a more appropriate word is Vedic or Indic Civilisation. There has also been lot of debate that the RSS should substitute 'Bharatiya' for 'Hindu' and 'Bharatiyataa' for 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduness'. It would kill the whole case of Hindu bashing! I raised this query during a Q&A with a very senior RSS leader. He explained that the fight is not about the word, as Bharatiya is older than Hindu. It is nothing but hair splitting and typical intellectual subversion to obfuscate the main argument of the antiquity of our nationhood. The fight is for a unique identity of the soul of Bharat which the west educated dominant intellectual class abhors as it goes against the grain of what they have learnt in the laps of British historians. They would find fault with this word also just because it is promoted by the RSS. The problem seems to be more with the promoter of the concept and not with the content.

Cultural Sense of Nationhood

Another condition for a group of people in a given geography to be called a nation is a common culture or sense of identity. I would like to give a few examples that connote a common cultural identity. These are things that we experience in our daily lives and simply take them for granted without appreciating their significance.

We have 'Kumbh Melas' once in 12 years from time immemorial where Hindus from all the corners of Bharat come in millions on a pre-ordained day. All the saints of India come together at this time to exchange notes about their thinking, discoveries on spiritual plain, social issues and also to propagate their philosophies to the common people. These Kumbh melas are celebrated in four centres spread over India – Prayag (Allahabad), Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik. It has no director or promoter, nobody knows when and how it started apart from some Puranic tales. Thus, there is a sense of common identity that has transcended for eons. And, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad did not invent these massive gatherings.

Adi Shankaracharya set up four *mathams* (or centres of learning) 1800 years back – Shringeri (South), Dwarka (West), Joshimath (North) and

Jagannathpuri (East) to stress the geographical spread and unity of Bharat. Fortunately, His holiness was not indoctrinated by the RSS or VHP!

Hindus have a tradition m of carrying Ganga waters to Rameshwaram for *abhishek* (offering of water) to Lord Shiva. There is no known root source or time frame about this custom. But, it is there for ages. It has not been propagated by the RSS or VHP.

Hindus worship same Gods with different regional variations from South to North For example - Vishnu, Shiva, Krishna, Rama, Ganesh, Durga, Laxmi, and Saraswati. Anybody who has travelled different parts of Bharat, that is India can vouch for this.

There are same festivals all over India with different names with minor variations. Bihu, Baisakhi, Vishu, Cheti Chand, Yugadi, Poila Baishakh – all signify the beginning of new Hindu year with crop harvest. The customs are similar with some variations that bring forth the local culture and practices. *Vijayaadashami* (Dussera) is celebrated in different styles in different places. Worshipping of weapons and tools of livelihood on this day is not the insidious invention with fascist designs of RSS as some critics claim, but a well-entrenched practice in various parts of India. Nine days preceding Dussera, Navaratri, is one of the most pious days in different parts of India celebrated in different ways – in Bengal it is as Durga Puja);in Assam as Sharadiya Navaratri, in Gujarat as a ten day celebration of Garba and upawaas or fasting; in Northern India, Ramayana comes alive through the high-octane Ramlila plays as also fasting; and in the South in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as the festival of dolls or Golu.

While the North celebrates Diwali as the day when Lord Rama killed Ravana and returned home, in South it is celebrated to commemorate the killing of demon Narakaasur by Bhagwan Krishna. The central theme is victory of good over evil. Makar Sankranti is the day when Sun enters the sign of Capricorn and marks the end of winter. It is celebrated as Makar Sankraman in North and West; and, as Pongal in Tamil Nadu. Other regions celebrate it with different names. Holi is also celebrated in major parts of India in different ways as Holi or Basant Panchami.

Shri Ranga Hari, a senior RSS pracharak and central leader, once cited an interesting example of common traditions and cultural practices we share across this vast nation. For example, all over India, the shopkeeper adds a little amount of the goods over and above what he weighs for the customer before packing. The idea is, “if there is an error, let it be corrected from my side.” This custom has different names in different languages but it is prevalent right from South to North and East to West. I know that it is called ‘runga’ in North, I am sorry that I couldn’t make note of the words for this practice in other Indian languages.

Look at a very simple expression, in English. A devout person is called ‘God fearing’ but in Hindi and other Indian languages, he is called ‘*Prabhu premi*’ or lover of God. The undercurrent of this wordplay is that a Hindu loves and reveres God, but in Abrahamic or Semitic traditions God is feared. There is another very interesting and revealing insight into Hindu traditions. In English we say, “think of the devil and he is there”; but in Indian tradition, we say, “you will live for hundred years, we just remembered you.” This expression is the same across any region and any language in India.

I just recounted a few examples to underline some unique features of our national life which are common to all citizens living in India, whatever be their faith or religion. Such traditional practices all over this land define the Hindu culture that has evolved in this land called Bharatvarsh. Thus, it is not a matter of religion. It is part of *dharma* of the individuals, the society and the state.

The Ramayana talks of Ram’s visit to jungles and his stay with the tribals. It talks of Ram’s deep love for his brethren of all denominations and regions. Indians understand that language and customs change every ten miles and they accept it happily. Therefore, they are well tuned to accept these variations in language, behavior and still feel one as Indians. A true Hindu looks at commonalities and does not lay stress on differences – till politicians and vested interests violate this innate thinking process.

We have Common Ancestors

Does this sense of inherent unity exclude any group from celebrating the essence of Indianness? Certainly not! Nearly 98 per cent of Islamic and Christian converts in India are so, from only a few generations and have Hindu roots. There need not be any problem in their acceptance of the culture of their ancestors even while they profess a different faith or way of worship. Infact, we all know that Christians in Kerala or Muslims in many regions of Rajasthan do not find it difficult to blend their native or ancient traditions with their new religions or faiths. People in North East still worship their ancient tribal Gods though they also go to Church. We know of Indonesian people who still take pride in their ancient Hindu culture though they are now Muslims Ramlila is predominantly staged by Muslims there. Indonesian currency notes have Lord Ganesh imprints on them; but God forbid, if that happens in India, it will spell doom for our secularism! This acceptance that we are all one and we haven't changed our forefathers or our traditions can end all emotional and physical turmoil being foisted on them by the so called protectors of their faith.

I sense no communalism in any of the proposition above as it is based on well-known historical facts and realities of our nation accepted consciously or unconsciously by nearly all the citizens of India. So, when the RSS says that India is a Hindu nation, it is only stating the obvious without malice to anybody or any sense of negativity. We should, rather, celebrate this as a unique country in the world and the historical fact that Hindus don't fight wars or kill others to impose their faith or way of life on others. From times of the Cholas and Pandyas to Ashok the Great, message of *dharma* and religious faith has been spread with love and not sword.

Question of Secularism

Not once, in its eight decades of history has the RSS advocated a Hindu theocratic state. The political philosophy of secularism was invented to keep the Church off its ambitious designs about political control in Europe. So, the text book definition of secularism is separation of state and religion. Even this definition does not prohibit the rulers or the governments from

professing their religion. So, Britain and USA can be secular though their Queen, prime ministers, presidents swear by God and the Bible.

It is interesting that the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution did not feel the need to have the word 'secular' in the preamble of the constitution. Not that there was no debate on it, but this word was not mentioned because in their wisdom they must have seen it as a part of Indian or Hindu tradition with no need to stress it further. A picture of Bhagwan Ram is published on the first page of our constitution. At the same time let us remember that the Indian leadership of the time had steadfastly refused to call India a 'Hindu' nation inspite of agreeing to partition on religious grounds, while Pakistan declared itself a 'Muslim' nation state.

The word 'secular' along with another 'use-and-throw' term 'socialism' was inserted in the constitution with the help of steam roller majority that Mrs Gandhi enjoyed at the time during emergency in 1975; further helped by absence of opposition ranks who were then held in prisons.

Secular in India has come to mean an irreligious state which translates into '*adharmi*' or '*nidharmi*' (non-religious) state, as the term 'secularism' is translated as '*dharma nirapeksha*'. This is against Hindu or Indian ethos. Dharma as per Hindu tradition is 'rule of law' or ethical conduct. The RSS has only affirmed that India cannot be an irreligious state in the name of secularism. The other suggested term, '*sarva panth samabhaav*' (equal respect for all faiths) is more close to Hindu or Indian ethos, and should ideally be the conceptual framework for the country.

I can do nothing better than quote highly respected scholar and the second Indian President S Radhakrishnan, quoted in the *Times of India*, 27th June 2009, on this aspect: "It may appear somewhat strange that our government should be a secular one while our culture is rooted in spiritual values. Secularism here does not mean irreligion or atheism or even stress on material comforts. It proclaims that it lays stress on the universality of spiritual values that may be attained by a variety of ways. Religion is a transforming experience. It is not a theory of God. It is spiritual consciousness. Belief and conduct, rites and ceremonies, dogmas and

authorities are subordinate to the art of self-discovery and contact with the Divine. Even those who are the children of science and reason must submit to the fact of spiritual experience that is primary and positive. We may dispute theologies but we cannot deny facts. The fire of life in its visible burning compels assent, though not the fumbling speculation of smokers sitting around the fire. While realisation is a fact, the theory of reality is an inference. There is difference between contact with reality and opinion about it, between the mystery of godliness and belief in God. This is the meaning of a secular conception of the State though it is not generally understood. This view is in consonance with the Indian tradition. The seer of the Rig Veda affirms that the Real is one while the learned speak of it variously. Asoka in his Rock Edict XII proclaims: “One who reverences one’s own religion and disparages that of another from devotion to one’s own religion and to glorify it over all other religions does injure one’s own religion most certainly. It is verily concord of religions that is meritorious.”

The endless breast beating of secular-Marxist parivaar about RSS wishing to impose a Hindu theocratic state is nothing more than a falsehood repeatedly propagated over decades to deride Hindu philosophy of ‘many paths – one truth’ that is truly pluralistic and republican.

Composite Culture vis-a-vis Dynamic Culture

Another oft-quoted term is ‘composite culture’. The argument is that Indian culture is not essentially a Hindu culture but made up by contribution of many other elements. My simple submission is, Ganga remains Ganga even as hundreds of streams merge into it. It doesn’t become a ‘composite’ river. A silk coat remains a silk coat though it may be embellished with golden embroidery in a few places. English remains English even as it absorbs hundreds of foreign words, because the inherent spirit of the language remains English.

Thus, the essential innate quality uniting Indians is the deeply running sense of Hinduness, and is shared consciously or unconsciously, knowingly

or unknowingly by all Indians. It, in no way, deprecates the contribution of other cultures and traditions that embellished it later on.

Ideal word for the Indian society should be ‘dynamic culture’, rather than “composite culture”. Composite denotes a patchwork, howsoever colourful. Dynamic denotes culture that is always on the move in a positive sense, not holding back fossilised ideas, or not open to new knowledge. A culture that is open to assimilating new ideas and thoughts, shown dynamism in moving with times, reinvented itself based on changing times. While going through this process, the core essence doesn’t change. The rainbow becomes more colourful, more inclusive. This dynamism is the inherent Hinduness of our culture.

Some Distinguishing Features of Hindu Thought

Hindus believe that all roads lead to absolute truth and that they have no monopoly over this route. None of its belief systems, avatars or gurus say that unless you follow my path you will go to hell nor do they enjoin their followers to save the ‘non-believers’ from hell by converting them. There is no concept of ‘non-believers’ and their deliverance through either conversion or elimination. It does not say, ‘my way alone’ but says ‘your’s too’. Such a frame of mind rules out any chance of bigotry or hateful persecution of ‘others’.

Osho (Rajneesh) points out that Hinduism is the only belief system in the world that worships not just the God of creation but also the God of destruction. It has created a symbol of a Supreme Being as *Trimurti* (an image with three heads) signifying different aspects of the Divine: Brahma – the creator; Vishnu – the sustainer; and, Shiva – the destroyer. It believes that destruction is an integral part of creation; just as death is the other side of birth. There is no separate concept of ‘Satan’ who disrupts the scheme of things created by God. Good and bad are part of human life. Osho also points out the inherent problem with the logic of God and Satan. If Satan succeeds in his schemes to misguide people or commit sin, then, is God weaker than Satan?

In prophetic monotheist religions born in Abrahamic faith system, the understanding is that God creates human beings in his own image, while in Hinduism the belief is that human beings create God in their own image. Since God has no form, a Hindu tries to see him or her as per their inner nature. So, someone sees the supreme being in the calm continuance of Bhagwan Buddha, some see it in the dancing Krishna or others see it in the just and moral king Ram; while, a devotee sees that supreme being in fiery Goddess Durga. Interestingly only in pre-Abrahamic era do we find women worshipped as Goddesses. In India, Goddess Durga and her different forms is the most powerful God. Any stone can be consecrated as God because God is basically formless and the '*murti*' which is consecrated as God is the representation of that Supreme Being.

Hindu sages and gurus never force their opinion onto their disciples. They encourage questions and give answers till the doubts of the disciple are removed. Take the example of Geeta where Lord Krishna himself goes through an elaborate exercise to satisfy Arjun in as many ways as possible and finally tells him "I have tried to address all your doubts, now you decide what is the best path for you. And then, Arjun says, "All my doubts are cleared and I am ready to fight for dharma." In all the Upanishads, the most complex knowledge is passed onto the disciples through question and answer. God himself doesn't ordain blind faith; skepticism and questioning is welcome. Compare this to monotheist Abrahamic religions brought up on a single "Book". One is supposed to follow it totally and not question any of its premises. Any criticism becomes blasphemy. This is one of the reasons why the Hindu philosophy stands up to newer discoveries of modern scientific age much more easily and does not have to get into convolutions of explanations to get out of tight situations created by science. Nor did its followers or religious leaders ever have to apologise for persecuting scientists for heresy when their discoveries went against a 'Book'.

The Vedas and the Bhagwad Geeta speaks of millions of *brahmaand* (universe) eons back when it was a blasphemy for others. Now it is an accepted fact. Hindu scriptures tell you 'Though art that' (*Tat twam Asi*)

and guide you to become ‘I am Supreme Being (*Aham Brahmasmi*). The spiritual journey begins from “You are that Supreme Being” and ends with “I am Supreme Being”.

It would surprise readers if I were to suggest that the famous shloka, ‘*poorna midah, poorna midam, poornaat poorna mudachyate, poornasya poorna maadaay, poorna mevaavashishyate*, which translates to: ‘That is Absolute, This is Absolute, Absolute arises out of Absolute, If Absolute is taken away from Absolute, Absolute remains, is the best possible enunciation of Einstein’s famous formulation, $E=mc^2$, which is “total of energy in the universe remains constant, whatever you produce, transform or destroy.

Fritjof Capra in his book ‘*Tao of Physics*’ notes with amazement, the similarity of experience of ancient sages at micro level and the experience of scientists studying both at the sub-atomic level and the level of the universe. He says, “Later came the experience of Dance of Shiva which I have tried to capture in (a) photomontage. It was followed by many similar experiences which helped me gradually realise that a consistent view of the world is beginning to emerge from modern physics which is harmonious with Eastern wisdom.”

In a book published in 1990, Prof Klaus Klostermaier wrote: “Hinduism will spread not so much through the gurus and swamis, who attract certain number of people looking for a new commitment and a quasi-monastic life-style, but it will spread mainly through the work of intellectuals and writers, who have found certain Hindu ideas convincing and who identify them with their personal beliefs. A fair number of leading physicists and biologists have found parallels between modern science and Hindu ideas. An increasing number of creative scientists will come from a Hindu background and will consciously and unconsciously blend their scientific and their religious ideas. All of us may be already much more Hindu than we think.”

A philosophy so much in tune with scientific thinking cannot be anti-modern, nor can an organisation which strives to strengthen such a society can talk of going back to medieval times. Medieval times are a gift of our

history of enslavement, not of Hindu civilisation. We need to move away from the dominant thought that being modern is being ‘western’ and that a critique of ‘western way of life’ implies that one is ‘orthodox’ in a negative sense.

Some thinkers have drawn together a few strands of thought that run through all the faiths born in Bharat. These are: theory of karma; immortality of soul; principle of re-birth; worship of nature in all its elements; remembering and worshipping elders and forefathers; the belief that all paths lead to one God, and that God is beyond gender (God can be He, She or even It)’ and finally, ultimate goal to achieve *nirvana*, *moksha*, state of *shunya*, and treating entire world as one family.

A seer in Atharva Veda declares: “*Maataa prithvih, putroham prithvyaaah*”(The earth is my mother, I am her son). On the same lines, an ancient Dakota tradition in America proclaims, “*mitakuye owasin*” (All are my relatives, that is, we are all related.)

The worship of nature logically means that one must preserve the environment, using it only to the extent that is necessary for self preservation. This alone can lead us to sustainable development based on sustainable consumption. This is, a more practical model that can preserve both nature and mankind. This thought leads to chanting of *shaanti mantra* or mantra of peace at the end of any prayer which proposes not only peace for the mankind but animal kingdom (*dwipaada* and *chatushpada* – two legged and four legged creatures) other elements of nature too, that is, environment as well as mother earth.

I would like to add at this juncture that all pre-Christian and pre-Islamic traditions and cultures, dismissed as animist and pagan religions, also have similar philosophy about nature, integral view of human beings and nature, sanctity of nature and forefathers. They too do not have tradition of conversions or proselytisation like Hinduism, because of their firm belief that ‘all roads lead to one supreme truth.’ This universality of enlightened ancient traditions needs a separate treatment so I conclude this part of the discussion, though incomplete, and leave it to the readers to explore it further.

This stress on self-restraint has led to the model of consumption unique to India where every item is recycled to its last fibre and not thrown away. We all have enough examples to it in our own homes, right from recycling a packing thread to each and every thing that can be reused till it simply gives way. This principle goes against the avowed consumerism of the West. The fact that eight per cent of world population in the US consumes nearly thirty three percent natural resources, tells us its own story of bottomless hunger for consumption, driven by capitalist thirst for profits and more comforts. This endless longing for more is the source of 'green house gases' and 'global warming'. We are now well aware what happens when there is unbridled avarice to acquire things at any cost. The collapse of US economy and the domino effect on other economies has reminded us that there is still time to go back to our own traditional model of living life satisfactorily with only sustainable consumption.

At personal level, Hindu philosophy talks of four fold aspect of a successful and fulfilling life, called '*purushaartha chatushtaya*', viz. *dharma* (living moral life as per one's innate nature and duties); *arth* (economic wellbeing); *kaama* (personal desires); and ultimately, nirvana or moksha or liberation by following the path of *dharma*. It talks of four phases in an individual's life. The broad division of a human life in *brahmacharya* (period of learning and personal discipline and restraints); *grihasth* (worldly duties, raising the family); *vaanprasth* (getting detached from the family affairs even as one follows worldly affairs and moving one's attention towards outer society and God); and, *sanyaas ashram* (giving up worldly affairs and focus totally on one's spiritual life). It is very difficult to find such a clear enunciation about one's progressive path to live life to the fullest as a normal family and social person in any other culture or religion.

When a Hindu uses word like '*dharmic*' or '*adharmic*' it is not like religious or irreligious. It means a person who follows just laws of the society or his own duties as '*dharmic*' and a person who acts contrary to what is his duty as per his nature of social customs is '*adharmic*'.

At a personal level, the *dharma* is that which is as per his or her nature or duty. So we talk of '*pitri dharm*' (duties of a father); '*matri dharm*' (duties of a mother); or '*putra dharm*' (duties of an offspring). At a societal level *dharma* is that which holds society together with just laws and ethical behaviors. *Dharma* of fire is to burn, *dharma* of a tiger is to attack a prey for satiating his hunger and *dharma* of a merchant is to provide products and services honestly. Conduct at social level as per set norms and laws of a particular society are *dharma* at social level. It helps create systems that would allow a person to attain his full potential. Word '*dharma*' in social context is more close to 'ethics'. *Raj dharma* is the rule of law. So, the *dharma* of a school is to impart good education, *dharma* of government is to provide righteous rule of law in which citizens can live a dignified life.

These are just a few illustrative ideas with which we can easily identify, and at the same time feel happy and proud that we belong to such an enlightened culture born on this land. Hindu society is comfortable even with an atheist philosopher like Chaarvaak and calls him '*rishi*'. One of his shlokas (paraphrased) says, "You should drink *ghee*, even take loan for it if required. Who has seen next birth?" It can adjust deviants in its society much more easily than other civilisations. It may be the only place in the world with a district named 'Kinnaur' denoting a place where '*kinnars*' (people of alternative sexuality) resided. It adopted the path of foster motherhood or fatherhood, thousands of years back without any stigma attached to it. There are many Puranic and Mahabharata stories that mention such practices quite openly.

There are volumes written on this subject by learned sages and scholars. When a Hindu says that India is a Hindu nation, it encompasses all the above thoughts and ideas, which in no way can be compared to the theology driven nations like Islamic nations, where any person not following Islamic religion has a secondary status. The way a professed Islamic country suppresses or oppresses non-followers is well known right from Saudi Arabia to newly Islamised countries like Malaysia.

Thus, Hinduism and Hinduness connotes national identity of Bharat not merely religious faith – but identification with national mainstream – that is

Hindu. Hindutva means policies and practices based on this spirit of Hinduness.

Addressing the Ills of Hindu Society

Hindu society is facing lot of problems and lot of self correction is waiting to be done. It is a society split on basis of regionalism, sects, castes and languages. There still are social ills like untouchability which plague us. Some community specific customs like child marriage also must end. The inhuman customs of dowry is common to all communities in India, whether it is Uttar Pradesh or Kerala, irrespective of the religion they follow. Casteism deeply rooted even in the Christian and Muslim communities. It is well known that ‘high caste’ (ashraf) Muslims do not easily marry into ‘artisan’ (azlaf) castes. Many people who convert to Christianity hoping to get out of this vicious cycle often complain that they cannot get away from the discrimination even after conversion. There are separate churches for different groups, just as there are separate gurudwaras, if not overtly. Stratification of society is not just based on economic conditions but also on political power of various groups in the society. This division of societies is common world over, in different names and different guise. Koenrad Elst proposes that “castes and caste systems have developed in very divergent parts of the world. For example, ethnic division between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, or the endogamous hereditary communities of blacksmiths, musicians and other occupational groups in West Africa. The European division in nobility and commoners was a caste system in the full sense of the term: two endogamous groups in a hierarchical relation. When the Portuguese noticed the Indian *jaati* system, they applied to it the term *casta*, already in use for a social division in their homeland: the separate communities defined by religion, viz. Christians, Jews and Muslims. In practice, these were virtually endogamous, and there was a hierarchical relation between the top community (first Muslims, then Christians) and the other two.”

Various Hindu scriptures including the Bhagwad Geeta talk of caste being based on one's profession, mental and intellectual inclinations (*prakriti*) and not based on birth. Scriptures also talk of possibility of vertical movement from one caste to another Sage Valmiki and Ved Vyasa were from so called 'low castes' but became highest ranking Rishis. Even the critics of Hinduism agree on it. It is unfortunate that this system got corrupted and ossified into a label by birth. It requires a much more patient approach driven by heart to overcome such divisions and not agitational and vote bank politics which exacerbate the differences and create fissures. The current politicians' approach has done precisely that. Mandalisation is the most known example, but this game has been played subtly, and at times not so subtly for many years in India since independence by short sighted and cynical politicians. It is ironic that parties based on caste are labelled secular but parties talking for Hindus are communal. Muslim League of partition fame is secular, sharing governance with Congress but BJP is communal. The bitter truth is that any attempt at splintering Hindu society is considered 'secular'.

Dr Hedgewar and every chief of RSS have consistently criticised the caste system. There are sterling examples of total absence of caste system in RSS and its associate organisations bereft of big talk or egalitarianism. National leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Ambedkar wondered about this achievement when they visited RSS camps. Only thing is the RSS doesn't make a song and dance about, reforms it, and carries on silently. Balasaheb Deoras, the then Chief of RSS had, decades back, declared, "If untouchability is not bad then nothing is bad in this world. Untouchability must go – lock, stock and barrel."

RSS has been working silently to remove inequalities in Hindu society and bring about a sense of brotherhood. We shall come to the work done by RSS in this aspect in subsequent chapters. The guiding principle of RSS is – concentrate on unifying factors, ignore differences. India and Hindus cannot be subject to constant hammering and sanctimonious lectures on these issues beaten to death by the so called liberals. It is the job of Hindus to

solve these problems and also their privilege to celebrate Hindu contribution to civilisation.

Dharampal on Pre-British India

Before we proceed further, I would like to digress a little and bring on record certain facts about the all-round deterioration in social, economic and scientific field that Indians suffered with arrival of the British.

Dharampal, a renowned Gandhian, has done remarkable research work in this field. His research is jaw dropping for the new generation which has been brought up on the staple discourse about India being held back by archaic, backward and caste ridden Hindus before British rescued this country from its downhill journey. His works suggest that the harshness of caste divisions and resulting social deterioration that crept into India were actually the gift of the British.

S Gurumurthy in his tribute to late Dharampal notes, “Before the British rule in India, over two-thirds, yes two thirds, of the Indian kings belonged to what is today known as the Other Backward Castes (OBCs).” “It is the British,” he said, “who robbed the OBCs – the ruling class running all socio-economic institutions: of their power, wealth and status.” Thus, it was not the upper caste which usurped the OBCs of their due position in the society.

By meticulous research of the British sources over decades, Dharampal demolished the myth that India was educationally or economically backward when the British entered India. Citing the Christian missionary William Adam’s report on indigenous education in Bengal and Bihar in 1835 and 1838, Dharampal established that at that time there were 100,000 schools in Bengal, one school for about 500 boys!

Gurumurthy quoting from Dharampal’s works tells us that, during 1822-25 the share of the Brahmin students in the indigenous schools in Tamil-speaking areas accounted for 13 per cent in South Arcot, to some 23 per cent in Madras while the backward castes accounted for 70 per cent in Salem and Tirunelveli and 84 per cent in South Arcot. The situation was

almost similar in Malayalam, Oriya and Kannada-speaking areas, with the backward castes dominating the schools in absolute numbers. Only in the Telugu-speaking areas the share of the Brahmins was higher and varied from 24-46 per cent. Dharampal's work proved Mahatma Gandhi's statement at Chatham House in London on 20 October 1931 that "India today is more illiterate than it was fifty or hundred years ago," completely right.

In his celebrated book, *Indian Science & Technology in 18th Century*, Dharampal notes, based on the documents of East India Company, that the British found the Indian education system of the time far superior to that of Britain.

Dharampal's major works were published in 1971. In fact, he started his research on the subject only in 1965-66. I cannot understand why discovery of these achievements and their acceptance took so many decades in independent India. Even now it is difficult to find his books in shops or in academia. It is a tribute to the control that secular-Marxist parivaar has over academics that these facts have been successfully hidden from Indians and have never got a respectable place in official publications or text books on humanities. This kind of information actually would give our youth a great sense of pride in our nationhood, a sense of patriotism based on solid knowledge.

That India had a grand past; that Indian sages and teachers had done a wonderful job of research and discovery in various sciences and arts is a well established fact now. Many of us would have read that many of the scientific theories named after Western scientists were already known to Indian *achaaryas* (or teachers) and established by them much earlier. The theories in trigonometry, algebra, physics; highly accurate calculations in astronomy, achievements in chemistry, medical sciences are being brought out with painstaking re-discoveries and proofs from various old texts, and are accepted worldwide. We don't have to go far back and can talk of scientists like J C Bose who were not given due credit till recently. If India were to raise claims against MNCs and research organisations for various

IPRs that rightfully belong to her and damages for their violations, all of them would go bankrupt.

Dharampal quotes Col Kyd, “It appears that Indian medical men (with whatever names they may be termed at the end of the eighteenth century) made considerable use of surgical techniques in different parts of India. In ‘Chirurgery (in which they are considered by us the least advanced) they often succeed, in removing ulcers and cutaneous irruptions of the worst kind, which have baffled the skill of our surgeons, by the process of inducing inflammation and by means directly opposite to ours, and which they have probably long been in possession of.”

British spoke in awe of the indigenous medical system that included inoculation against small-pox. They refused to believe the advanced astronomy of the ‘brahmins of Varanasi’ or acknowledge that the algebraic and geometric theorems that they claimed to be their discovery may have found their way from India.

Contrary to what we have been taught for years, Dharampal’s study indicated existence of a functioning society, extremely competent in the arts and sciences of its day. Indians’ interactive grasp over their immediate natural environment was undisputed and praiseworthy. This was reflected in both agricultural and industrial production. Until around year 1750, together with the Chinese, India was producing some 73 per cent of the total world industrial production, and even till 1830, what both these economies produced still amounted to 60 per cent of world industrial production. Even in a moderately fertile area like that of Chengalpattu (Tamilnadu), India’s paddy production in a substantial area of its lands in 1760-70 amounted to some five to six tonnes per hectare. This is nearly equal to the production of paddy per hectare in present day Japan, the current highly productive region in the world. The critical feature of the set-up was the elaborate fiscal arrangements made for its upkeep in perpetuity, if required. From the gross produce, amounts were allocated by tradition for the upkeep of the system, from the engineers who looked after the irrigation tanks and channels to the police and school teachers. In technology, we produced steel that was

superior to Sheffield steel. We also produced dyes, ships and hundreds of other commodities.

Says Dharampal, “By their methods of extortion and other similar means, the British were able to smash Indian rural life and society by about 1820-1830. Around the same period, the extensive Indian manufactures met a similar fate. Because of deliberate British policy, the famed Indian village communities so eloquently described by Thomas Metcalfe around 1830, and by Karl Marx in the 1850s, had mostly ceased to exist.”

Voltaire considered India ‘famous for its laws and sciences’, and deplored the mounting European preoccupation (both individual and national) of those in India with the amassing of ‘immense fortunes’. This quest for riches intensified the struggles and plunder during his own time, and made him remark: “If the Indians had remained unknown to the Tartars and to us, they would have been the happiest people in the world.”

Imagine our economists demeaning Indians by talking of ‘Hindu rate of growth’ for a country that suffered worst economic slowdown and exploitation after British overran India and later when our government chose half-baked Nehruvian Socialist policies. We have witnessed how the Indian economy has boomed once Hindu genius was unshackled. Thus, what was derided by economists as ‘Hindu rate of growth’ was actually ‘Nehruvian socialist rate of growth’ and what you see now is the real ‘Hindu rate of growth.’ Poverty in India is a legacy of the British rule and the earlier phase of tangled socialism grossly undermined, as also suppressed the innate genius of India.

Even if we go by only the available data, about 2800 years back Indians had overcome the basic issues of hunger, day-to-day rules of social behaviour as articulated in the Ten Commandments; and, were discussing metaphysical issues like purpose of life. Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavir were amongst us to further refine thoughts on living and liberation from the cycle of life and death. At that moment in history Christianity and Islam were not yet born, and Western civilisation was comparatively primitive. It is awe-inspiring when one thinks of the antiquity and maturity of this civilisation. Osho reminds us that a society leans towards spirituality only

when its basic economic and social requirements are met. Then, the members of that society ask, “What next?” We can see these words in practice in West which seeks its soul through spirituality.

When I state this, I am not assessing either superiority or inferiority of either civilisations. I am preparing my quarry for an informed debate. Shri Dattopant Thengdi was one of the most respected ideologue of RSS and founder of many mass organizations like Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh. He termed these historical cycles in different civilisations as ‘*kaal chakra*’ (wheel of time). We also need to acknowledge that due to various historical reasons, some of which arise out of the pacifism of Hindu culture, the same West took lead in the next cycle of economic progress and geographical dominance while India was left behind.

To paraphrase Claude Alvares, “All histories are elaborate efforts at myth-making. Therefore, when we submit to histories about us written by others, we submit to their myths about us as well. Myth-making, like naming, is a token of having power. Submitting to others’ myths about us is a sign that we are without power. After the historical work of Dharampal, the scope for myth-making about the past of Indian society is now considerably reduced. If we must continue to live by myths, however, it is far better we choose to live by those of our own making rather than by those invented by others for their own purposes, whether English or Japanese. That much at least we owe ourselves as an independent society and nation.”

RSS does not talk of going back in times, but wishes our society to move ahead with confidence. This society born of the knowledge that we belong to a civilisation and a country that should lead the world not in negative connotation of domination, but with positive power of knowledge and spirit of ‘*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*’ (whole world is one family). It has been famously said that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

“We have to discard the status quo mentality and usher in a new era. There is no need to cling to past institutions and traditions which have outlived their utility,” Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay, the foremost ideologue

of Bharatiya Jan Sangh, forerunner of Bharatiya Janata Party, wrote in his exposition of 'Integral Humanism'.

IV

Need to Organise Hindus

Critics of RSS and others in India who have developed a great sense of comfort with existing status quo, feel there is no reason to organise, unite or consolidate Hindu society. If this society has survived eons of material and spiritual plunder and still exists due to its innate strength, it will survive and thrive in future too. They claim that RSS is only creating fissures in society with its agenda.

Hindu society has a fatal disease of collective amnesia, which has been aided and abetted by the secular-Marxist axis of historians and sociologists. There has been a systematic, sometimes, brazen attempt to castrate history to such an extent that facts become myths and new myths are created. In West Bengal, even the school history books have been sanitised to cover up history of pillaging of Hindu temples by earlier marauders and Mughals like Aurangzeb. To make history palatable, their textbooks project Jaichand, who allied with foreign invader Mohammed Ghori to defeat Prithviraj Chauhan, in a better light.

What our present generation reads is a neutered, amoral if not immoral version of history. The effect of all the moral posturing of the dominant intellectual elite is that our people seem to treat the Partition as a bad dream of our own making. They fail to note that whenever Hindus become a minority in a territory, that territory cedes from India; and, thus we see an India which has shrunk considerably over centuries. I, for one, would not like to see Hindus and Hinduism reduced to museum pieces like aborigines

of Australia, Red Indians of US or ancient pagan communities of Europe, Canada or Latin America – to be dusted and brought out on special occasions in all their fineries.

We just have to look around us in very recent history how once avowedly secular countries Malaysia, Libya, Iran, Bangladesh and Sudan have become Islamic theocratic countries once Islamists have become a majority there or have come to control the ruling apparatus. How the liberal secular laws have been given a silent burial and Sharia resurrected that treats ‘non-believers’ as second class citizens with very limited rights. The disappearance of Hindus in large pockets in Bangladesh and Pakistan from 20-30 per cent to mere one to three per cent over the past fifty years is an indication that should not be viewed casually. Let’s not forget either, the pogrom against the Kashmiri Pandits and their cleansing from Kashmir valley.

If we prize our heritage then we need to nurture and preserve it and see it flourish to offer the world a truly universal thought. This requires some organised efforts. Nurturing one’s heritage can, in no way, mean destroying somebody else’s. This thinking does not fit into the Hindu ethos, as we have noted.

Uncomfortable Questions that Seek Answers

Some uncomfortable questions always bother me, being a Hindu lectured about secularism and tolerance. Whenever I feel a little distant from jingoism of Bajrang Dal types, I am driven back to a firm reaffirmation of my Hindu faith by ruckus raised by secular fundamentalists over some supposedly communal issue and their barely camouflaged hatred for assertive Hinduism -A friend of mine in Chennai told me that he was grateful to ‘Communist card carrying’ N Ram of ‘*The Hindu*’ (what an irony of name calling!) for berating and condemning Hindus to such an extent that a typically carefree ‘secular’ Hindu has become a conscious and insecure Hindu!

I raise just an illustrative list of questions below and I would like to remind readers that RSS was born only in 1925 and was strong only in select pockets of India even till 1947, while VHP was born in 1964.

- What factors led to India's partition and who led this move? Should we subscribe to the new theory being subtly promoted through various fora of Marxist-Islamic historians that Congress was perceived to be a Hindu party and Muslims felt that they will never get justice from it; so they chose partition of the motherland rather than live under Hindu hegemony of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel? It is well known that Communists gave strong theoretical and political support to Muslim League in its quest for an independent nation for Muslims. This separatist movement had started even before RSS was born. Clearly, RSS didn't influence this politics.
- Gandhiji supported Khilafat (1919-1924) movement in India to restore Caliphate in Turkey, presumably to promote Hindu Muslim unity. Hindus participated enthusiastically in this movement. But, when the movement fizzled out with some clever handling by British, why did Moplah Muslims turn against Hindus and perpetrate indescribable atrocities on their Hindu brethren including murder, rapes and forced conversions of nearly 200,00 Hindus? There was no RSS to foment this so called 'revolt'. (Marxist-secularists don't call it a communal pogrom).
- Direct Action of Muslim league to force the partition of India on 16 August 1946 that led to thousands of deaths in Bengal had no element of Hindu provocation. Why did it happen? Did Congress of that time force it upon the hapless Muslim League supporters?
- Kashmir was a virtual paradise for centuries and a centre for sages and saints, fountainhead of Hindu knowledge. With aggression from Central Asia, it slowly converted to Islam. But, there is still enough history to connect it deeply to India and Hinduism. Revival of separatist forces with violent vengeance has led to Hindu and Sikh exodus from their own homeland. There was no provocation from them, they were a peaceful minority. The RSS had a weak presence

in Kashmir when this tragedy overtook Hindus. Who provoked this exodus? It is alleged by separatists, ably supported by secularists, that the then governor of J&K, Jagmohan is the culprit. Did he send threatening messages over loudspeakers, through newspapers, posters and pamphlets to Hindus to vacate the homes of their forefathers? (One can read Jagmohan's side of the story in his book '*Kashmir: My Frozen Turbulence*' on the subject for better insight.)

- I am always troubled to read about 'communally sensitive areas' in matters of and law and order issues. At what point of inflection does an area become 'sensitive' and why? Why Hindus cannot celebrate their festivals or take out religious processions in such 'sensitive' areas? Why is no Hindu majority area 'sensitive'? What kind of politics has created this sense of isolation amongst minorities? Obviously in Muslim dominated areas RSS would be weak, so it has no power to convert such areas into sensitive areas.
- If Muslims or Christians are treated as minorities in various states, why are Hindus not given special status in state of Jammu & Kashmir, states of North East region where they are in a minority? Any sense of natural secular justice would assume a uniform application of laws.
- Why can Hindu religious institutions be taken over with impunity and even allowed to have trustees from other religions, while no government touches any minority institution or tries to take over the management of their places of worship? How does our secular polity justify diverting funds of these trusts donated by pious Hindus to other communities rather than use it for the betterment of the followers of that religion? His Holiness Shri Shri Ravi Shankar has got the data compiled and brought it to public attention.
- Why is it that the Hindu community's grievances are heard on matters like wrongful presentation of its faith in the US, and force its education department to make changes in their school curricula, while the community has no voice in India on the negative

presentation of Hinduism's universal philosophy across educational curricula?

- Why a law like 'Freedom of Religion Bill' becomes a 'controversial' issue? This bill is nothing but a reassertion of Indian philosophy that a person is free to choose his or her belief system, as one among many paths. Such bills only state that conversion cannot be done through lure or misrepresentation of facts. (Interestingly, it was the Congress government of Madhya Pradesh that decades back first saw the danger of such mass conversions to exclusivist monotheist religions and appointed the 'Neogi Commission' to establish the seriousness of this issue.)
- Why is a call for Uniform Civil Code communal in a country being run on the basis of a secular constitution that has put it in its "directive principles"?
- How come according to critics of RSS, 'semitisation' of Hindu society, allegedly tried unsuccessfully by RSS is bad; but these same critics certify the 'semetic' religions as good with a straight face? If 'semitisation' is bad then how can the religions running on supposedly negative semetic principles be good? Is it purely a case of intellectual dishonesty or diabolic argument to keep Hindu society always in a state of internal conflict?

This is not an exhaustive list of grievances of Hindu community, nor is it an attempt to promote a 'divisive agenda'. I had to resort to this negative way to bring out the hypocrisy that has been internalised into our polity in the name of secularism, thus promoting a polity charged with negativity. For some, this way of relooking at many vexed issues through a different glasses may bring better clarity. Answers to such issues are obvious but reasons behind them are not so obvious.

A truly secular government should assert that all citizens of this free country have an equal right to its resources, or that all deprived sections of the society should get a priority in distribution of resources. An atmosphere has been created that any pro-Hindu talk or any opposition to policies of

appeasement of minority automatically becomes anti-minority, hence communal. The present political discourse has an in-built bias which is promoted by negationism of Indian society.

Negationism of Hindu Society

Koenrad Elst, the renowned Indologist, has written an illuminating book, *"Negationism in India"*. He cites examples on how the Hindu society wishes to forget its bitter past of being victims of violence, massacres, rapes and pillage; how it avoids the bitter truths and hence lessons from history to avoid pain; in the process inflicting more pain on self. I am quoting extensively but selectively from Koenrad Elst's essays on negationism below -

"Negationism means the denial of historical crimes against humanity. It is not a reinterpretation of known facts, but the denial of known facts. The term negationism has gained currency as the name of a movement to deny a specific crime against humanity, the Nazi genocide on the Jews in 1941-45, also known as the Holocaust (Greek for fire sacrifice) or the Shoah (Hebrew for disaster). Negationism is mostly identified with the effort at re-writing history in such a way that the fact of the Holocaust is omitted."

".... Leftist negationism regarding the Nazi holocaust is, of course, only a footnote in the much more general negationism practiced by most leftists, hard and soft, regarding the crimes of Communist regimes."

It would be educative to note that number of people killed by the Soviet regime between 1917 and 1985 is estimated at between 34 million (on the basis of official figures), while Alexandra Solzhenitsyn puts the figure at 67 million. Around the same time, Mao Tse-Tung's brand of communism – the Great leap and the Cultural Revolution – sets number of victims are estimated to be at some 30 million. Over a million Tibetans have died because of Communist massacres and organised famines; and forced sterilisations. These numbers are hotly debated or denied by its supporters.

About Indian negationism, says Elst, "In my study of the Ayodhya controversy, I noticed that the frequent attempts to conceal or deny

inconvenient evidence were an integral part of a larger effort to rewrite India's history and to whitewash Islam. It struck me that this effort to deny the unpleasant facts of Islam's destructive role in Indian history is similar to the attempts by some European writers to deny the Nazi holocaust. Its goal and methods are similar, even though its social position is very different: in Europe, Holocaust negationists are a fringe group shunned by respectable people, but in India, *jihad* negationists are in control of the academic establishment and of the press."

"... A section of the Indian intelligentsia is still trying to erase from the Hindus' memory, the history of their persecution by the swordsmen of Islam. The number of victims of this persecution surpasses that of the Nazi crimes. The Islamic campaign to wipe out Paganism could not be equally thorough, but it has continued for centuries without any moral doubts arising in the minds of the persecutors and their chroniclers. The Islamic reports on the massacres of Hindus, destruction of Hindu temples, the abduction of Hindu women and forced conversions, invariably express great glee and pride. They leave no doubt that the destruction of Paganism by every means, was considered the God-ordained duty of the Moslem community. Yet, today many Indian historians, journalists and politicians, deny that there ever was a Hindu-Moslem conflict. They shamelessly rewrite history and conjure up centuries of Hindu-Moslem amity. Now a growing section of the public in India and the West only knows their negationist version of history. It is not a pleasant task to rudely shake people out of their delusions, especially if these have been willfully created."

The American historian Will Durant summed it up thus: "The Islamic conquest of India is probably the bloodiest story in history. It is a discouraging tale, for its evident moral is that civilisation is a precious good, whose delicate complex of order and freedom, culture and peace, can at any moment be overthrown by barbarians invading from without or multiplying within."

Suppressing and Negating Historical Facts

Sitaram Goel has written some thoroughly researched books on Indian history. One of the books, '*Hindu Temples – What happened to them*' would rattle your views about history, or rather the falsification of history being perpetrated by the lobby of historians who are controlling the academia for years now. Whenever such evidence is discovered or brought to light, it is ridiculed by established lobbies; if not possible then it is hushed up as being 'sensitive'. In the previous chapters I have quoted Dharampal and Claude Alvares extensively and noted how historians controlling the establishment try to brush aside or hush up such information.

The first volume of the '*Hindu Temples*' book subtitled '*A Preliminary Survey*', was published in 1990 and played an important role in the political debate over the controversial Ram temple in Ayodhya. It contains a competently compiled list of about 2000 mosques in India that have forcibly replaced Hindu temples. This list is not complete, and does not cover Pakistan and other countries where temples have been violently replaced with mosques. Moreover, the number of temples of which material has been used in these 2000 mosques far exceeds 2000. For the single Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque in Delhi, has an inscription at the entrance which proudly proclaims, 27 Hindu temples had been destroyed. These 2000 are only the tip of an iceberg. Muslims have raised a hue and cry over the demolition of the Babri structure (which they had not used since decades), but few people seem to realise that destruction of the religious places of minorities is a routine affair in Islamic states.

This book also contains articles by Ram Swarup, Jay Dubashi, Prof Harsh Narain, and Arun Shourie. Ram Swarup, like editor Sitaram Goel, traces the incidents of Islamic intolerance and iconoclasm to the exclusivist theology of the Quran and the Sunnah (tradition). He also deals with the role of Marxism in recent negationist efforts: "Marxists have taken to rewriting Indian history on a large scale and it has meant its systematic falsification. The Marxists' contempt for India, particularly the India of religion, culture and philosophy, is deep and theoretically fortified. It exceeds the contempt ever shown by the most die-hard imperialists. Marx ruled out self-rule for India altogether and in this matter gave her no choice.

Marxism idealises old imperialism and prepares a people for a new one. Its moving power is deep-rooted self-alienation and its greatest ally is cultural and spiritual illiteracy. No true history of India is possible without countering their philosophy, ideas and influence.”

The second volume of Sitaram Goel’s book, subtitled ‘*The Islamic Evidence*’, and published in May 1991, takes a step further with its revelations of the Islamic campaign to destroy Hinduism. It deals with the controversies over Krishna’s birthplace temple in Mathura and the Rudramahaalaya temple complex in Sidhpur in Gujarat, both forcibly replaced with Islamic structures and exposes the negationists’ machinations to distort or conceal the facts. The chapter ‘From the Horse’s Mouth’ provides quotations from Muslim documents that describe and glorify the destruction of Hindu temples very explicitly. Elst feels, “It is only an anthology, and the already very impressive material collected in this chapter is again only the tip of an iceberg.”

We know of Ram Mandir agitation and how Hindus are eternally shamed for the destruction of the Babri structure. But, the facts are being glossed over. It was agreed that if the structure below Babri is found to be a temple, it will be handed over to Hindus. But, when the scientific ASI led research under the supervision of Allahabad High Court resulted in a report that pointed to a large number of properly laid out pillars of typically Hindu designs discovered under the mound that proved the existence of a temple, the report was quietly buried by media till it was resurrected with the Allahabad High Court judgement delivered on 30-9-2010 on the matter.

To quote Elst again, “It is worth recalling that the negationists have also resorted to another tactic so familiar to our European negationists, and to all defenders of untenable positions: personal attacks on their opponents, in order to pull the public’s attention away from the available evidence. In December 1990, the leading JNU historians and several allied scholars, followed by the herd of secularist pen pushers in the Indian press, have tried to raise suspicions against the professional honesty of Prof B B Lal and Dr S P Gupta, the archeologists with impeccable credentials, who have

unearthed evidence for the existence of a Hindu temple at the Babri Masjid site.”

We have to accept Koenrad Elst’s criticism that there has been very little intellectual exercise by major sections of Hindutva School to counter the leftist secular onslaught on history and their efforts creating a negative image of Hinduism. Nor have there been enough efforts to sift truth about its so called myths and realities. It has not been pro-active and has not been able to support people bringing out historical and scientific facts about ancient India and Hindu contribution to world in various fields whole heartedly.

The acceptance by the ruling group of historians of evidence of ancient city of Dwarka has been rather reluctant. Doubts were raised about the academic qualifications of S R Rao too, who did the research. Even now, it has not been accorded the importance it should have been in revalidating Indian history through ancient Indian texts. When researchers like Dr S Kalyanaraman and N S Rajaram have researched extensively on subjects like Saraswati river and studies countering the theory of Aryan invasion, as these hold special significance to Vedic period, they have been thwarted by leftist and secular historians. If nothing, they found their scientific background objectionable.

One of the first acts of Arjun Singh on his appointment as Human Resource D minister was to stop grants to Saraswati river research. I wonder what the Marxist-leaning historians are afraid of – that they sought the support of the government to suppress it. There is, now, enough new historical evidence to suggest that the story of Aryan invasion may not be the true account of history. Srikanth Talegari and S. R. Rao’s book “Aryan Invasion Theory (A Reappraisal)” is an important book on this subject. It is ironic that US academia provides an alternative view point about Aryan invasion theory, but Indian history books remain monochromatic. Elst asserts that the evidence available so far on which the edifice of this theory is built, can equally be used to provide convincing arguments why this violent aggression theory is flimsy. The latest study done by Indian scientists from Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in collaboration

of Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health, Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT, on a common genealogy of Indians from all parts of India negates racist theory of Aryan aggressors from Europe. It demolishes with one scholarly stroke the mythical North South divide.

Michel Danino, in his essay 'Genetics and Aryan Invasion Debate, on archeologyonline.net concludes "None of the nine major studies quoted above lends any support to AIT, and none proposes to define a demarcation line between tribe and caste. The overall picture emerging from these studies is, first an unequivocal rejection of a 3500 BP arrival of a 'Caucasoid' or Central Asian gene pool. Just as the imaginary Aryan invasion/migration left no trace in Indian literature, in the archaeological and the anthropological record, it is invisible in the genetic level. The agreement between these different fields is a remarkable by any standard and offers hope for a grand synthesis in the near future which will also integrate agriculture and linguistics."

We are aware how the Central government stonewalled a suggestion by Supreme Court of India to do an archeological survey of 'Ram Setu' and the possible ecological disaster it might entail. Compare this to the utter sense of supplication of the Central government and West Bengal government with which they agreed to change the alignment of the newly-constructed Kolkata airport runway as it had a small make shift, hardly in use, masjid on the proposed runway. The *Indian Express* report says that they spent crores of rupees to change the alignment and also change town planning of new upcoming buildings which came in way of the new alignment. The problem is not with this realignment but the difference in approach to problems which are similar in nature for respective communities, Will any intellectual of substance simply refuse to allow new facts to come to light? Why does the government want to steamroll an issue like the Ram Setu, which are very close to a Hindu's hearts without any application of mind?

Only those whose bread and butter depends on regurgitating the information created by colonial mindset, and who are now full of inertia, lack intellectual objectivity and integrity would oppose such exercises. The

simple reason is that such discoveries would demolish their citadel built on outdated theories that the whole Vedic and Puranic literature is cock and bull story; or at the best, a bundle of mythical stories. It would open a flood gate of new truly Indian view of history that would spell ‘finish’ to their cosy careers built painstakingly through JNU kind of networks.

Many friends of my generation will recall how casually our college lecturers would tell us that ‘people consider Kalidasa as Shakespeare of India’, forgetting that Kalidasa was born nearly 1000 years before Shakespeare when English language was not even born. How we were given to understand that Mahabharata was probably influenced by Greek classics Iliad and Odyssey, forgetting that antiquity of Mahabharata far exceeded that of Iliad. In fact, both are classics in their own right. This mental slavery went to the extent that it used to be hinted that the Hindu concept of Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh – signifying the supreme forces of birth, sustenance and destruction) was borrowed perhaps from the concept of ‘Trinity’ in Bible, conveniently overlooking the fact that Hindu civilisation was born thousands of years before Bible was written.

A French journalist Francois Gautier has been pointing out, insistently, that the Hindu society carries deep scars because of its nearly 1000 years of subjugation under Mughal and British rules, because of which Hindus have developed an inferiority complex about their religion and nationality. They wish to put up a show of being a ‘good boy’, whatever the cost to the society or nation. This sense of guilt has been perpetrated by western historians and so called Indic scholars, most of whom had never referred to original Sanskrit texts or learnt Sanskrit, but depended on second hand translations by a very few people who had studied a little Sanskrit and did some half literate translations.

Unless we face the bitter truths of history and then move on, we shall only be talking of cosmetic unity and not unity of heart. Francoise Gautier points out, “The argument that looking at one’s history will pit a community against the other does not hold either. French Catholics and Protestants, who share a very similar religion, fought each other bitterly. Catholics brutally murdered thousands of Protestants in the eighteenth century; yet

today they live peacefully next to each other. France fought three wars with Germany in the last 150 years, yet they are great friends today.” Countries like Germany, Great Britain, the United States of America, Japan – all have faced bitter history, learned lessons, apologised to people, nation or communities where required and moved on together.”

Recently, the Pope has apologised to a few nations for the difficulties they faced due to evangelisation drives of the Church. Our avowed liberals applaud these moves but any demand for sense of regret for Hindus who faced genocides for centuries.

Some people have asked me to qualify numbers of Hindus killed to label killings of Hindus as genocide. I do not wish to make this book into a hate literature and lose focus. But for readers who are curious, I would request them to read RC Majumdar’s book ‘The Mughal Empire’. The numbers of Hindus killed just on the basis of this book and a few more original testimonials by Turk and Mughal historians would cross a million or more. Infact, Indian historian K. S. Lall estimates that India’s population between 1000 AD to 1525 AD decreased by 80 million for centuries. The persecution and wanton killings of Goan Hindus through inquisitions by Catholic evangelists abetted by Portuguese colonialists, is called digging the past or resurrecting ghosts from the past. Unfortunately, we wish to simply negate facts and talk of superficial rhetorical unity based on myths and not facts.

“No nation can move forward, unless it squarely faces its past. The courage to remember helps us not to repeat the same mistakes and to build a better future for our children,” says revered Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

An Organisation for Hindus

With this historical background, let us appreciate the fact that RSS is an organisation wedded to the wellbeing of Hindu society. Hindu society forms 79.80 per cent of the population as per Census 2011. Therefore, it is equally true that unless Hindu society reforms itself and organises itself in a

positive way, India as a nation cannot grow and develop into a vibrant country.

Many people believe that the figures are flawed and Hindu population, actually, could already be much lower than this. There have been conflicting reports about actual Christian population. John Dayal in his 24-8-2014 article on his website, johndayal.com, notes – “Statisticians Todd Johnsons and Kenneth Ross estimate that India’s Christians constitute 4.8% of the population. Jason Mandryk puts the figure even higher at 5.84% while reports and reports that others estimate it as high as 9%.” The reason for this apparent discrepancy is that in census form only Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists can write their caste as SC. So, many Christian converts write their religion as Hindus to take advantage of SC reservations and other facilities. Such Christians are called ‘Crypto-Christians’ by evangelists and Christian Missionaries.

As I revise these figures, Jains too have been hived off from Hindu numbers. If we go by the ‘secular’ definition of Hinduism then these numbers would be much lower, as Hindus then get dispersed into castes and are not a monolithic community!

Koenrad Elst reiterates, “But for Hinduism, there would not have been an Indian Union. Suppose that, as some foresaw a century ago, all Hindus would have been converted to Islam or Christianity. What would happen then, can be seen from such happy Muslim-Christian bhai-bhai countries like Lebanon, Cyprus, Sudan, Kosovo (Yugoslavia), Nagorny-Karabakh. The country would have been split at the very least into a Muslim North and a Christian South. In that sense, Hinduism is the cultural reason for India’s very existence, India cannot exist but as a Hindu Rashtra.”

There is no reason why Hindu society needs to be apologetic about this mission or why self-styled secular thought contractors and critics of RSS should certify it as communal because it professes to work for Hindu community. If a Christian organisation working for Christianity or Muslims holding various congregations for nurturing their religion are not communal; or for that matter any organisation working for a particular community is not communal or casteist; then this communal stamping on

any person or organisation which talks or works for Hindus is nothing but hypocrisy.

Elst mentions a Hindu-friendly India-watcher of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a parastatal world-watch bureau in Washington DC, remarking that this alleged semitisation, which is but a pejorative synonym for self-organisation, may simply be necessary for Hinduism's survival. He points out that in Africa, the traditional religions are fast being replaced by Christianity and Islam precisely because they have no organisation which can prepare a strategy of self-defence. African traditionalists are not denounced as 'semitised fundamentalists' because in effect, they submit to the liquidation of their tradition by mass conversions.

Establishment of RSS - Dr Hedgewar's Objective

Having covered various aspects of Hindu society, its mindset and the political implications of such a mindset, let us return to the reasons behind establishment of RSS by Dr Hedgewar.

Dr Hedgewar was a staunch nationalist who worked with organisations associated with revolutionaries, like the Anusheelan Samiti while he was in Kolkata to study medicine. He was hot-headed as well as clear-headed about independent even as a young boy and was rusticated from the school for inciting his class fellows to chant 'Vande Mataram' when the education inspector came to school.

After completing medicine, he returned to Nagpur, turned his back on the medical profession and started working as a party-member in INC, taking up different responsibilities as an office bearer. He was senior office bearer of regional Congress committee including the committee that organised the Congress plenary session in 1920. He took part in freedom struggle through various satyagrahas and agitations and was also imprisoned. His association with Congress and activities continued even after he had begun RSS work. Many of his colleagues in Congress also became members of RSS and worked for both organisations. He suffered imprisonment twice. One in 1919 during 'Non-cooperation movement' and

again in 1930 for 'Jungle Satyagrah' which ran parallel to 'Salt Satyagrah'. He was in prison for 19 months in these two stints. Many of the swayamsevakas also went to jail with him.

Being a serious student of history, Dr Hedgewar realised that Hindu society was deeply divided on various counts like caste, region and language. He saw a total lack of self-discipline, social commitment and lack of self-confidence and found that Hindus were driven by self-interest and not by love of motherland. He realised that unless this society was organised into a well-knit and disciplined patriotic society with selfless members ready to do anything for the nation, the freedom that was imminent would be useless. It would only mean change in the rulers and not the rules. The common man may not enjoy the fruits of this independence and public discourse would be devoid of meaning as it would be driven by self-interest, not national interest.

Dr Hedgewar had firm conviction that Bharat i.e. India had a unified national consciousness, that freedom is indivisible and society is an organic integrated body. Guruji, his successor saw the society as, "*Viraat Purush*, single unified colossal personality with an organic relationship, where each individual is the limb and arm of this Viraat Purush". Just as the whole body reacts to a problem in any cell of the body, society should feel the pain and respond to it without any discrimination.

Dr Hedgewar envisioned an organisation that would look beyond immediate gains, which would be non-political and its only job would be to create extraordinary human beings out of ordinary members of the society, who would be selflessly dedicated to the cause of nation building and service to the society. People who would lead a highly disciplined life based on high thinking and simple living, moulded with great character. He knew it was not an easy job and nor was it a job which could be done with only preaching or propaganda. Moulding of character and human beings and filling their heart with passionate love of motherland is not a matter of short training sessions, but requires regular nurturing. His goal was Hindu unity and creation of a self-confident Hindu society. It was a long haul.

In the dark days of British rule when calling oneself a Hindu was an embarrassment for the educated class, Doctor Hedgewar stood up in 1925 and said, “Yes, I, Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar proclaim that I am Hindu and this is a Hindu nation.”

Thus, was born Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its shakha, vehicle for propagating this philosophy. He started off with half a dozen school going kids on a playground. He was already a middle-aged man at that time. He chose to remain unmarried by his own volition for he knew that he would dedicate his life to the nation, and the thought of family had no place in it. It was an arduous task, he put in his all.

He worked so hard that a person of his wonderful physique and health burned out within years and died of extreme exhaustion in 1940 at a comparatively young age of 51. Within this short period of 15 years, he had already laid the foundation for the RSS across the country in all the states. The participant of that year’s third year Officers Training Camp (OTC, now called Sangh Shiksha Varg) in 1940, for the first time, represented every state and princely states of India. In his last speech before these young people, a frail founder of RSS said with a sense of satisfaction, “I see before me a miniature picture of Bharat today.” The rest is history.

Minorities and RSS

Contrary to common belief, there are many examples of Christians and Muslims becoming members of RSS and being active for many years. It is a sad fact that most of them leave the organisation because of peer pressure, as society denotes this as ‘wayward’ behavior. There are large numbers of religious minorities sympathetic towards the RSS ideology and connected to it through a large number of affiliate organizational. There also have been quite a few Muslim and Christian senior workers in RSS.

The RSS has been running disaster relief camps during each and every disaster or natural calamity. It has been well documented that not a single disaster centre has ever discriminated against minorities in those camps. In fact, such people have been offered facilities for Namaaz and Ramadan

fasting. No relief camp organizers supported by RSS have tried to convert people to Hindu faith. In places like Jammu where Seva Bharata is running residential schools for orphans of terrorist violence, young Muslim children remain happily Muslim with no compulsion or persuasion to change their faith.

None of the social service organisations run by people inspired by the RSS has ever discriminated between the beneficiaries of those schemes, whether it is a dispensary, hospital or a micro-finance scheme or a school. An RSS volunteer has learnt offering Namaaz and helps patients in critical care in the Dr Hedgewar Hospital in Aurangabad and offers to recite it with a patient to boost his morale. These are recorded facts. Thus, working for Hindus does not mean working against some other people.

The stories of Parsis fleeing Persia from Muslim persecution and Jews from Israel persecuted by Muslims settling in India with full support of local people are well known. Syrian Christians persecuted in Syria found refuge in Kerala. They have lived and thrived for hundreds of years without any persecution from local kings and populace. There is the story of a professed Hindu king like Shivaji, who saw his mother in a beautiful Muslim lady captured by his forces and gave full freedom of worship to people to whichever faith they belonged to. Here too, there was no religious persecution. Shivaji is one of the biggest icons in Sangh pantheon of great Indians.

The RSS and other Hindu organisations have no problems with Christians and Muslims. Hindu society's problem is with the institutionalised efforts by their evangelist leaders who try to convert their members by devious means and seed their hearts with hate and embarrassment by misinterpreting their Hindu faith.

At policy level, the RSS view has been that all citizens must be treated as equal and public policies should not be biased against or in favour of any particular community or religion. India is firmly secular as per Indian ethos, but cannot be irreligious or non-spiritual. The RSS offers terse opposition to the policy of appeasement and cult of inverse communalism that passes off in the name of secularism. It believes that it should be natural that its

minorities own up the ancestors and ancestry of this land as they share a common heritage, though method of worship may have changed. In no way does it wish to throw or crush minorities out as alleged by its critics.

It believes that the spirit of Bharat is Hindu, though other streams may have enriched it. Unless, policies and public discourse on various issues take this basic reality into account, we shall have arid rootless policies producing rootless citizens who may be flag waving kind of patriots, who understand pop-patriotism in a jingoistic manner, but have no idea about the spirit behind it.

Leftist Secular Fascism, Hindutva and RSS

It is not a closely guarded secret that an academic or a media person not conforming to leftist and secular lobby's ideas is simply shut out of the whole system. Such a person doesn't get a job easily. If he or she gets it, his or her career prospects are blocked until the person drops out of the system with sheer frustration, or compromises his views to get into the limelight. Their works are not allowed to be published easily. If they manage to get published they are blacked out of academic discussions, various fora and censored in every possible way. If nothing there is character assassination, ridicule and isolation. There is a very interesting e-mail that under circulation detailing the internal networking of this lobby across print and media journalism. Some of them are related by blood, some by marriage, others are friends and some in business relations. It is a closed incestuous network. Though, the mail is not wholly correct, it has a big grain of truth in it. All this in the name of liberal thoughts!

This Nehruvian-Left bias began right from the days of independence. For example, scholars, especially in humanities, like Sita Ram Goel, Ram Swarup and many others found themselves without employment. As mentioned above, if a scholar found some academic job, he or she would be hounded out if there was suspicion about his or her loyalty to the Red cause. The existence of a 'JNU lobby' is a well-known fact in academia and the media. Scholars like B B Lal and others can be insulted and doubts raised

about their antecedents built over years of hard work if they change their views which are not in conformity with their friends' established views. He was put out of charmed circles and slandered for his discovery of Ram Temple below the Babri structure. K. Mohammed a senior ASI director was trashed because he confirmed B B Lal's discovery as part of his team in 1978 during discovery, and because he declared that Ram Temple issue was complicated by Left historians who egged on extremist Islamists to go against the truth. Journalists can reach the level of bureau chief or assistant editor but can never become chief editors. Editors who developed sympathies for Hindu cause, like Girilal Jain, were squeezed out his job as editor of Times Of India. This is just a very-very small glimpse of the vice-like grip these groups have over these two institutions of democracy.

This suppression of opposing views is nothing but intellectual fascism. The use of force to enforce your view point and suppress other view point is the first sign of fascism. This network is intertwined in very complex personal and professional relationships. Here is a most recent nugget. I am quoting part of a report in *Times of India* dated 10 October 2010 titled 'HC exposed Waqf board experts (in Ayodhya case)' - "To the court's astonishment, some who had written signed articles, found themselves withering under scrutiny and the judge said they were displaying an ostrich-like attitude to facts. He pointed out how the independent witnesses were all connected. One had done a PhD under the other, another had contributed an article to a book penned by a witness. Some instances underlined by the judge are: Suvira Jaiswal deposed, "whatever knowledge I gained with respect to the disputed site is based on newspaper reports or what others told (other experts) (sic)". Once you understand this networking, you will understand why supposedly independent media houses act in near unison on the question of so called secularism. A prominent Congress leader during a television interview had boasted recently that Congress and its supporters owned 159 newspapers all over India.

When these lobbies are in power, they don't mind using state apparatus to silence their critics. Emergency was a manifestation of the same mentality. Attacks on commoners by Marxist goondas in Singur and

Nandigram is another sign of this fascist way of implementing one's ideas. Attacks on RSS volunteers and their murders in hundreds wherever the Communist and Naxalite monopoly is threatened is indicative of this intolerance as well. Tragedy is that in places like Kerala where RSS volunteers have suffered most, the sufferers are members of underprivileged or weaker sections of the society, the people whom the Communists claim to be working for.

As I write this book, I am reading about the new wave of violence in West Bengal when TMC of Mamata Banerjee began using violent tactics used earlier by CPM. The violence began around 2009-2010. It is amusing but sad to see the late realisation by Congress that Communists have been practicing Lenin's terrorizing policies of killing their opponents for last 17 years and they have killed thousands of their own volunteers. These same seculars closed their eyes conveniently when they colluded with these fascists for five years at the centre. Communists have, in turn, called Congress and its supporters fascists. We should remember that Naxals and Maoists belong to the same Marxist parivaar, a fact that that media has shied away from mentioning. The way Marxists have criticised the ban on Maoist outfits in Bengal clearly shows which way their sympathies lay. Clearly, big brother is trying to shield the errant and violent younger brother, current violence against each other being only an aberration. To be fair to Congress, it began the cycle of state sponsored violence against Communists in Bengal in 1970s under Shri S S Ray as CM, in retaliation of violence wrought upon Bengal by Marxists/Naxals since 1950s. Thus, fascism is no more than an invective which can be hurled at anybody at will, nothing more.

And what does much maligned RSS have to show for its so called fascist designs? In spite of numerous enquiry committees, not one report could blame RSS for any riot. If there were firm allegations or proofs, I am sure it would have been permanently banned. Though, there have been unproved allegations against RSS in Gujarat riot, it would be relevant to recall that the worst riots in Gujarat took place during the Congress regime when there was a continuous curfew in its cities for 65 days in 1969. This

cycle of violence was routine in Gujarat. In 1985 under Congress riots began in February 1985 and continued till October 1986.

Petty violence by a fringe group, criticised even by RSS leadership in unequivocal terms, becomes the face of Hindutva to defame RSS and Hindu society but when Muslim turns out to be a terrorist, it is an aberration not representing true Islam. Rightly so, but why are there different yard sticks? There has been a lot of breast beating about attack on MF Hussain's painting by Hindu groups as being against liberal values and artistic freedom. Interestingly Hussain's same artistic freedom becomes coy when depicting Mother Teresa, his mother or other Muslim women. The stark contrast in his artistic impressions can be seen through various presentations of Hindu gods and goddesses. You can see these images floating around on the net. Many of them are so obscene and hurt our sensibilities so deeply that I won't describe them. Same liberals are in the forefront for banning Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen. They keep quiet when extremists force Taslima out of India. They are quiet when a Muslim lecturer is terrorised and stopped from taking lecture without burqa in West Bengal, when a Christian teacher's hands are chopped off by Muslim bigots in Kerala, both supposedly a bastions of secularism of the Marxist variety. They wish to pass over ruthless burning of unarmed pilgrims in Godhra but are not tired of breast beating about the post-Godhra riots. They are stung into silence when their stories of rape of nuns in Jhabua turns out to be a case of rape by followers of Church or when their arch secularist like Teesta Setalvad turns out to be a master in tutoring witnesses to implicate some people. As I go through the manuscript, I read the news of another 71 year old nun's rapist, a Bangladeshi being convicted, but till this happened entire Left lobby went into overdrive about 'intolerant' Sanghis for the horrible act. In spite of all this, RSS is the sole claimant to the title of being fascist, courtesy our honourable liberals.

RSS has always tried to use opinion building, a valid tool of democratic way of life to put forward its points. It has launched mass agitations on various issues of national importance. It has not retaliated with violence even under worst of provocations; on the contrary it has been a target of

persecution by the government and Communists at different time. It has not burnt offices of press or killed leaders or intellectuals who have insulted its leaders, or degraded Hinduism.

The Leftist-secular lobby has been repeatedly quoting two paragraphs of Guruji's views on minorities for last 60-70 years from a book which was published in 1938-39 before he held any important position in RSS. This book was discontinued after 1947 and disowned by the RSS and Guruji many years back. After this, the opponents have not been able to find a single other quote from Guruji that could support their claim of Guruji being a fascist. Imagine, these 'verbal terrorists' and secular fundamentalists could not find anything even remotely fascist in the speeches of the head of an all India organisation for 33 years inspite of tracking and pouring over his each and every public interaction and writings.

Worst charge that they could put even based on his quote of 1938-39 is that he advocated that no group should have any special privileges (which the leftists translate as the minorities being given a status of second class citizen). Even if this view is taken at its full face value, it is not in anyway, different from the stated Islamic rule (evident in all Muslim majority states) that gives status of second class citizen to 'non-believers', claiming it to be as per The Book. If this proposition is true, then are they accepting that Islamic rule is fundamentally a fascist rule?

Even when these invectives are thrown at the RSS and its associated organisations in general, we must remember that both the Hindu Mahasabha (born in 1906) and the RSS (born in 1925) came into existence before any one in India knew of Hitler. Savarkar's *Hindutva* (1923) was published three years before Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Savarkar was inspired by the sacrifice of Chaphekar brothers who were hanged in 1899. His views about modern nationalism were moulded by Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini. Savarkar's *Hindutva* was inspired by Shivaji; activism for social equality; and, fight against casteism was moulded by thoughts of Sant Tukaram and Samarth Ramdas. Clearly, the inspiration to organise and

defend Hinduism at the political level does not stem from Hitler or Mussolini, and this philosophy did not need any outside impulse.

If we look at the way Doctor Hedgewar developed RSS and its philosophy, we can surmise that Doctor Hedgewar's methodology was more close to and influenced by Lokmanya Tilak's use of Hinduism and its symbolism to channelise and organise the Hindu society, than by Savarkar's Hindutva.

Koenrad Elst in his book 'Saffron Swastika' asks, "Have they sided with Hitler? Have they (Savarkar, RSS) even called on its followers to follow Subhash Bose and join the Axis war effort against the British? But of course, since the Hindutva people are at the receiving end of all the blame, their non-support to Hitler is being turned against them. The Communists opposed the British in 1940 (under Stalin's pact with Hitler) and supported them after 1941, yet after independence they have not been branded as collaborators with either fascism or colonialism. They can get away with it, while the Hindu parties are covered with abuse regardless of the stand they take. The RSS has not glorified Hitler. When he was successful in any larger measure than most Indians at that time (the facts of the extermination camps were not known until 1945, and for the rest most Indians, were skeptical about the British propaganda."

I was too young to understand Guruji's lectures when he was living. But, I had the opportunity to translate a summarised version of Guruji's complete works of nearly 320 pages, called '*Guruji – His Vision and Mission*'. My detailed study of this book, and the speeches and other writings of Guruji does not in any way hint at fascist leanings. So, this bogey of fascism needs to be buried alongwith all the invectives thrown at RSS. The conduct of Marxist parivaar and the secular lobby vis. a vis. conduct of RSS during all these years is much better testimony of this organization's faith in democracy than the certificates issued by these self-appointed guardians of democratic traditions.

A Christian Priest's Views on RSS

To Father Kundukulam goes the credit for being the first Christian priest to do a doctoral thesis on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, that too in a foreign university. He is also the first clergyman to author a book on RSS titled '*RSS: Enthu? Engott?*' (What is RSS and Where is it headed for). In fact, a former clergyman, Anthony Elenjimmittam, had published a book titled *RSS: Bharathiya Samskruthiyude Kavalsena* (RSS: Watchdog of Indian Culture) way back in 1951, but he had ceased to be a priest and had taken to social service when the book was published.

The phenomenal growth of RSS in post-Independent India, firmly rooted in all walks of life, all nooks and corners of the country kindled Father Kundukulam curiosity. In Madhya Pradesh, he came across a European who had been doing a doctoral thesis on 'Hindu nationalism' in the Sorbonne University. In an interview in Pontifical Seminary, Father Kundukulam confesses that when he broached the idea of writing a book on his research findings on RSS, some of his co-religionists cautioned him that the RSS men would beat him up if he wrote something against them. He submits that he has tried to remain as objective as possible in his assessment of the RSS. He was pleased that it was well-received in the church and RSS circles.

In his view, RSS is a multi-faceted organisation which is political, cultural, religious and voluntary in nature and approach. Different facets gain an upper-hand at different times depending on social and political exigencies.

At the same time, Father. Kundukulam argues against branding of RSS ideology as fascism, Nazism, fundamentalism and communalism. He said the terms fascism, Nazism, and fundamentalism are much abused terms in India. They have a distinct connotation in the European context that can hardly apply to the Indian milieu. The term fundamentalism was first coined in the context of the emergence of the Protestant movement in the Churches of America. According to him, the ideology of RSS and the way in which it is interpreted by the Sangh leaders borrowing modern terminology have no comparison to the sense in which the term fundamentalism was used in America. So also, fascism and Nazism do have

distinct meanings in the socio-political contexts that prevailed in Italy and Germany which have no bearing in the Indian context.

Father Kundukulam feels that BJP – the political arm of RSS, during its rule at the Centre had not committed any acts that could truly be described as fundamentalist, fascist, or communal. He notes that one of the first acts of A B Vajpayee after taking over as Prime Minister was to call on Mother Teresa and the Delhi Archbishop.

One admirable aspect of RSS, Father Kundukulam says, is its flexibility to move with the times and to adopt the best from other socio-cultural-religious movements. It learnt the rudiments of social work from the missionary organisations of the church and mass mobilisation techniques from the Communists. He admires RSS for the dedication and discipline of its cadres, the simple life style of its pracharaks, the moral teaching it imparts to the younger generation in its daily shakhas, and the voluntary labour put in by its cadres at critical times such as natural calamities.

The Indian society, Father Kundukulam feels, is in a ‘vicious circle’ with the majority Hindu community suffering from a ‘psychological inferiority complex’ on account of its failure to have a proportionate say in the governance of the country in spite of its numerical superiority and the minorities being always suspicious of the majority community. The growth of minority fundamentalism would only strengthen RSS, he observes. “India can prosper only by strengthening the forces of democracy and secularism and ensuring economic justice to the people,” he concludes. Currently he is working on the second edition of his book.

Need to Organise Hindus

After going through the preceding two chapters, one would come to a conclusion that the RSS has filled in a vacuum in the thought process in this country at political and social level. When the whole establishment, under the influence of Nehru’s Fabian thoughts and impractical political ideas tilted towards an alien leftist ideology and wrongly interpreted secularism, RSS survived and grew as an organisation rooted in Bharatiya thoughts and

traditions. It was the period of internationalism promoted by Nehru on one side and Communists under their flagship Communist International or 'Comintern' on the other; providing cover to the Communist designs of international hegemony by which they tried to spread Communism in various nations by force or political means. At such a time when nationalism was criticized and abused as a violent concept of Nation State of Germany and Italy, RSS kept the flame of Indian philosophy of cultural nationalism, alive with its indigenous roots. It was much different from the western concept but is, even today, mixed up with it. If RSS had a better word in English for it, it would have used it. However, Indian concept of "Nationalism", quite different from the western definition of "Nation State", is older than "Nation State". RSS differentiates between the State and the Nation. While State is governing apparatus, Nation is a cultural concept.

RSS gave a sound underpinning to the feeling of patriotism which was based on positive pride for the motherland, founded on its heritage and knowledge and not on airy ideas. It gave muscle to the nationalist ideology in politics which Nehru had once threatened to crush in January 1948 in a public meeting in Amritsar. We shall look at the other aspects of its organisational methodology, systems of building a good human being and the manifestation of its ideology in various social dimensions later in the book.

V

Daily RSS Prayer and its Meaning

The prayer that an RSS volunteer recites daily in the shakha is the essence of the RSS mission and a daily reaffirmation of how a swayamsevak should act in personal and public life. Its daily invocation strengthens the resolve of the volunteer at spiritual level.

Below is the complete prayer in the original form that is originally written in Sanskrit, and its simple English translation.

Namaste sadaa vatsale maatrubhoom
Twayaa Hindu bhoomey sukham vardhitoham
Mahaamangaleya punyabhoom twadarthey
Patatwesh kaayo namaste namaste ||1||

Prabho shaktiman Hindurashtraang bhootaa
Imey saadaram twaam namaamo vayam
Twadeeyaaya kaaryaaya baddhaa kateeyam
Shubhaamaashisham dehi tatpoortaye

Ajayyaancha vishwasya deheesh shaktim
Susheelam jagadeyna namram bhavet
Shrutam chaiva yatkantakaakeerna maargam
Swayam sweektritam nah sugam kaarayet ||2||

Samutkrash sanishreyasasya aikamugram
Param saadhanam naama veeravratam
Tadantah sphuratvakshyaya dhyeyanishthaa
Hridyantah prajaagartu teevraanisham

Vijetree cha naha samhataa kaaryashaktir
Vidhaayaasya dharmasya samrakshanam

Param vaibhavam netumetata swarashtram
Samarthaa bhawatvaashishaa te bhrisham ||3||

|| Bhaaratmaataa kee jay ||

English translation

I forever bow to thee, O loving Motherland!
O, motherland of us Hindus, thou hast brought me up in happiness.
May my life, O great and blessed Holy land, be laid down to thy cause.
I bow to thee, again and again ||1||

We, the children of this Hindu nation, bow to thee in reverence, O almighty God.
We have committed ourselves resolutely to carry on Thy work.
Give us Thy holy blessing for the fulfillment of this purpose.

O Lord, grant us such might that no power on earth can ever challenge,
Such purity of character as would command the respect of the world,
And such knowledge that would make easy the thorny path
That we have voluntarily chosen ||2||

May we be inspired with the spirit of stern heroism,
which is the sole and ultimate means of attaining the highest spiritual bliss,
with greatest temporal prosperity.
May intense and everlasting devotion to our ideal ever inspire our hearts.

May our victorious organised power of action, by Thy grace,
fully protect our Dharma and
lead this nation to the highest pinnacle of prosperity and glory ||3||

|| Salutations to Bhaaratmaataa ||

The prayer is inspiring, humbling and arouses the most noble and selfless thoughts to serve the motherland and *dharma*. It is not against any one, and doesn't have a single line or word that ignites hatred or any negative feeling. It is a positive prayer.

But, to me, the most important line which is embedded in the heart of RSS worker's and influences his day to day thinking and style of working is – “I have taken up this task voluntarily and I know that it is full of thorns (not easy).” Therefore, no volunteer can claim or assume that he is doing anybody any favour by working for the society and the nation. In the first para a swayamsevak commits one's life to the nation. This reaffirmation

every day persuades him to take everybody along without fear or favour, be open to others and work together with people, regardless of difference of opinion, for a supreme goal – that of making his motherland prosperous and strong. It is his bounden duty which he has accepted. This is the spirit of selfless service. He repeats this prayer every day until his death.

In every training camp, special sessions are earmarked for explaining the prayer in depth and detail. These are the sessions, a RSS volunteer does not forget easily.

In his last moments as Guruji's soul was to leave his mortal remains, he recited this prayer. Sangh volunteers feel that this is the ideal way of walking into the sunset of one's life.

PART II

THE FORM

Secret of RSS Work

“There are only two secrets of our work – first is that there is no secret. And, second is, kabaddi. This programme, even today, has the same character. Motherland beneath, God created skies above, and Hindu society all around us – based on these elements, kabaddi has been successful. So much power was generated by this kabaddi; power that saved lives, honour and wealth of lakhs of people during partition of Punjab.” From where did we get this power? Did we have manifestos at that time? Did we have rosy pictures of the future? Or did we organise conference or publicised our views? We only played kabaddi. This is absolutely true. The foundation of our unified soul in that kabaddi came to signify ‘organisation’. We need to understand this well.”

Shri Guruji Golwalkar, Biography – Ranga Hari

VI

Shakha

Shaakhaa (shakha or local branch) of RSS is the public face of RSS. It is the powerhouse that energises and powers ordinary people to successfully carry out extraordinary feats and nurture pan-India organisations.

People often wonder how a small group of 10 to 20 people who come together for an hour and while away their time in playing games, doing some physical drills, singing patriotic songs or discussing some social issues and praying together, can build an organisation with 56,000 shakhas all over India with a daily collective attendance of more than half a million. If you consider approximately 100 members per shakha who don't attend it every day this figure would come to nearly 5.6 million regular members. This network is spread upto district level all over India and in most of the places to Tehsil level. You can find village level shakhas in many states. Incidentally, Kerala has the highest density of shakhas in Bharat, more than 5000 in this small state. Then, there are a large number of people who are not directly involved in Sangh shakha but are active in its other social organisations motivated by RSS ideals, these figures run into multi-millions. For example, today there are around 170 hundred thousand (1.70 lakh) social service organisations inspired by RSS, working in different parts of India; and there are associate or sister organisations that do not figure in this count. Of these some are mass non-political organizations like

Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram with very large membership.

Thus, one is talking about millions of people fired with selfless urge to do something for the nation and ready to leave the comfort of home for the organisation and the country. One can easily understand why our secular-Marxist parivaar is so frustrated and mouths all kind of political profanities and throws wild allegations at RSS. These people realise that they cannot match this organised force with mere talk and misuse of propagandist machinery at their command.

The thought behind this unique set of tools or working style of RSS through daily shakha is that a person should willingly dedicate atleast one hour in one's day for the nation. Once, this thought becomes a part of his personality, he will, willingly, increase his participation as the nation demands. Ultimately he reaches a state of mind reflected in a Sangh song that says, *"tan samarpit, man samarpit, aur yah jeevan samarpit, chaahata hoon maan, tujhe kuchh aur bhee doon"* (i.e. I have dedicated my body, soul and life to you, O' motherland, I long to give you something more)

A shakha programme is held daily for one hour divided into various periods that include games, physical drills or yoga, songs, some intellectual inputs and prayer. All the activities ultimately tend to create a team of fun loving, hardworking people who share common ideas and ideal, and a sense of oneness. A volunteer is reminded time and again that the values learned in this one hour should reflect on his conduct in balance hours of his day. There have been some modifications to this system as times change. There are weekly shakhas and even monthly get-togethers for people who find it difficult to attend the daily shakha.

Any person who has grown through this shakha culture can become a successful manager. A management thinker, Sandeep Singh, submits that a well trained RSS worker could easily qualify for Social MBA as enunciated by management guru, Mintzberg.

Induction into RSS

We have heard a lot about the need to ‘Catch them young’. Educationists and social scientists confirm that you can educate young children and inculcate good value systems (a much richer word in Sanskrit is “*samskaar*”) in them more easily. They carry these values through their life. Sangh has internalised this lesson right from day one. It is pertinent to note here that RSS refused to budge on the issue of inducting or allowing young RSS members, not just adults, when lifting of the ban in 1948-49 was being discussed.

Doctor Hedgewar, the founder of Sangh was 35 years ‘young’ when he started the first branch (or shakha) of Sangh with a group of young boys on an open ground where they played some interesting Indian games together. Even today the most common mode of recruitment in RSS is the open play fields. The common theme running through any of these games is importance of team or working together other than the sportsman spirit. A young boy slowly gets involved into this fun loving group effortlessly. He also ends up learning importance of discipline, time management and physical fitness. This is a daily activity, thus reinforcing good habits regularly.

Throughout this induction process, never is a member asked about his caste, his faith and social status etc. I had with me students belonging to Marathi, Gujarati and Marwari communities from various castes and religious groups about which I found out much later, that too during idle chat, not within confines of shakha. I had in my group, boys belonging to slums, small chawls as well as higher middle-class. We would be snacking together on the grounds once a week consisting of ‘chanaa kurmuraa’ (gram and puffed rice). We would visit each other’s homes and be equally at ease whether we were together in a chawl or in a big apartment. This intense mixing together with all strata of society without any class and caste distinction has helped me throughout my life in working with any kind of person, irrespective who they are and where they come from.

Through all this, we would be guided by one or two simple, loving teachers or instructors (shikshaks) who could be working or studying in the day and spending their entire evenings with us, virtually all days of the

week. We never felt the need to ask them how they managed their other worldly affairs or kept their families happy. I know of my teacher, Mahendra Shringi, lovingly called Mahiji, who chose not accept a promotion at the bank where he was employed, that would entail transfer to a new area which would not allow him enough time with his young wards. Incidentally, he was a film aficionado and would see a movie every Saturday with one or the other young members of his shakha.

The very process of induction is so simple and fun that before one realises, he is adopted into the saffron brotherhood. The intellectual inputs come much later and they are not anywhere near, heavy stuff like Dialectic Materialism, let me confess. Since, these inputs are based on Hindu ethos and ancient traditions, understanding and appreciating them is much easier. They strike a chord immediately in one's heart. I don't know of many people who joined RSS as active volunteers after being convinced about its philosophy and ideology. Such numbers are minimal. In Vile Parle in Mumbai, where I was inducted in shakha, I can count such examples on finger tips. Yes, there are a huge number of sympathisers who are late converts. In this era of the Internet, I do find more and more people seeking ways to join RSS through Social Media.

I once asked a very senior pracharak of RSS, Bapurao Moghe, during emergency period, "No other country in the world has such mass level social organisation just to provide cultural values, inculcate a positive sense of patriotism and selfless love for the society. Why is RSS carrying on such an activity in Bharat?" His answer was, "World over these values are inculcated in schools but they are amiss in our schooling system due to perverted ideas about secularism and moral education. Thus, RSS is fulfilling a social obligation. If and when these duties are taken up by the government and schools, there will be no need for RSS."

Physical Training

Though, the stress on physical drills is declining slowly over the years, it is still an integral part of RSS training methodology. RSS is on a man-building

mission. i.e. nurturing ordinary human beings into a disciplined and cultured, socially dedicated citizens of India who would go to any extent to serve their motherland, help build the nation even at the cost of personal discomfort and harm. These drills are used as means to nurturing the basic qualities like discipline and ‘falling in step’ to march together and work together. When we see mass physical drills in various games opening ceremonies, it is sheer thrill and every one wishes to see it live. For example, the sheer logistics of bringing two columns of march past from two parts of the city to match steps and merge into one at a precise minute with a band that could match the best in the world is something that should earn respect from any person. It is a thrilling experience to witness it. It is equally exhilarating experience when one performs or sees mass yoga, surya namaskar, physical drills for the sheer finesse of it. Ironically, when done by RSS, such drills become ‘dangerous’ and ‘violent’ para-military activities.

The teachers or ‘shikshaks’ themselves are generally very proficient in the drills or games they teach. If they are not, they are encouraged to gain that skill from experts or through workshops and camps. Idea is to lead by example. We had excellent instructors or teachers – some in games, some in physical drills. My first teacher, Shivram Ghate, lovingly called Ghateji was an ever smiling relatively short, lean and sprightly gentleman who was a champion in Kabaddi as well as mock sword fight. He could exhibit a drill with swords in both hands. Till a few years before his death in his 90s he could be seen moving around on a cycle with the same alertness and loving smile on his face. He too had refused promotion to get more time for RSS work.

Many critics are not happy that ‘offensive’ martial arts like exercises with wooden stick (*dand*) or *niyuddha* (adapted from Kalaripayattu of Kerala – the mother of all martial arts) are taught to the members of RSS. Incidentally, Kalaripayattu was taken to China alongwith meditation technique of ‘Chan’ that became ‘Zen’ later and there onwards by a Buddha bhikhu Bodhi Dharma. It evolved into independent martial art later. There are many sources confirming this history, but most interestingly a Pakistani

website def.pk dedicated to Pakistan defence also confirms it. It would suffice to say that many people learn martial arts for self defence and more importantly to gain self-confidence and improve concentration.

Many of my liberal friends are mighty scared of the semi-military drills that are undertaken in RSS shakha and its other programmes. They feel RSS uniform indicates a regimented mindset. They find simple wooden sticks or lathis as intimidating as AK-47s. For them, this semi-military activity puts RSS into the bracket with para-military organisations.

Critics also look rather derisively at the Indian games that are preferred over western games in shakhas, considering them ‘backward’. Critics do not understand that all the games played in shakha hardly use any resources, thus can be played by any person irrespective of his or team’s financial condition. Most of the popular games being played in shakha like kho-kho, kabaddi and other similar games inculcate team and sportsmanship. They also help build strong body and endurance. There are hundreds of such games and there are small booklets available to physical instructors of shakhas that explain these games. Once the instructor says – Stop – one must stop, how so ever interestingly the game may be poised. So, even here, instilling discipline is of prime importance. One of the tricks taught to the teachers is to stop the game when it is at its peak and not when it was really over.

One hour of shakha is divided into periods which may be of three to ten minutes each, based on the subject. Following one’s time table and appointments to the minute is the hallmark of RSS and its members. Utilisation of 60 minutes in small sections trains a swayamsevak to use every minute of his time productively and efficiently. This self-discipline and time management skill is one of the most important lessons one learns at a shakha.

Remembering National Heroes Regularly

For a person to feel inspired or motivated, he needs a role model. It is important that he thinks positive and works in any adverse circumstance. To

keep up this spirit of nationalism and selfless work, RSS through its shakha programmes, reminds volunteers about various great personalities that Mother India has produced.

‘Bharat Bhakti Stotram’ – a hymn of national integration - is a virtual roll of honour that recalls all such great sons and daughters of India, starting from Vedic to contemporary times. They include ancient sages like Valmiki and Ved Vyas, the mathematicians and scientists from antiquity to modern time like Bhaaskaracharya, Charak and J C Bose, inspiring women like Gargi, Laxmibai and Channama, patriots and freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh, holy places of pilgrimage, our rivers and mountains etc. Famous poet Ras Khan also finds a pride of place in this recitation. It is recited regularly in shakhas to invoke inspiration from these personalities, and the greatness of this land. Shlokas in form of booklets provide significant information about these personalities and places. ‘*Ekaatmataa Mantra*’ explains the inherent unity among different faiths born from Hindu dharmic traditions.

The personalities that generally adorn the stage during any special programme are Shivaji, Rana Pratap and Guru Gobind Singh. All three dedicated their lives to fight for Hindu *dharma* and protect it. Though stories are recounted about various great personalities to impress upon the young members the contribution of countless great sons and daughters of India made for its progress, these three occupy the place of pride.

The person most quoted is Swami Vivekanand, who revived Hindu dharma at a critical juncture in history and gave it a modern perspective. He exhorted thus, “Too much of inactivity, too much of weakness, too much of hypnotism, has been and is upon our race. O’ ye modern Hindus, de-hypnotise yourselves.” Swami Vivekanand can be considered as the pioneer of Hindu missionary work. His Guru Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa saw god in every poor and he called the poor – ‘*Daridranaaraayan*’. RSS is walking the path that Swami Vivekananda has shown.

Intellectual Training

Truly speaking, there is not much of a stress on heavy intellectual training at shakha level as the RSS is more action oriented, and a volunteer is supposed to become an activist working on ground, interacting with people and spreading the good word through personal contacts. There are sessions for intellectual training with activities like imparting training in patriotic songs, singing together, learning and understanding RSS prayer, discourses on Indian history, culture and social issues. These sessions have an important place in creation of a swayamsevak or a volunteer and are given lot more time during workshops and camps.

There are other regular rituals like reciting '*Bharat Bhakti Stotram*'. It is meant to recall and pay homage to the great Indian souls and the greatness of this land. An '*Ekaatmataa Mantra*' comprising of a single Sanskrit *shloka* or verse was introduced a few years back which reminds one of diversity of faiths in Hindu civilisation and gives a message to respect them all, and reiterates that all of them lead to one - the ultimate truth.

Songs (called Geet in Sangh parlance) invoking patriotism and reminding of one's duty to the society are an integral part of the Sangh shakha. There are hundreds of such songs, some can be sung in unison as group songs while some are classical-based and are sung by a swayamsevak who knows his music better. These songs can be broadly categorised as songs for march pasts, energising songs of patriotism, songs about devotion to motherland, songs about social harmony and social reform. Some songs are composed for a specific occasion and people remember an occasion through a particular song for years. Many volunteers, enamoured by such classical music have got into serious music training and become accomplished artists. For volunteers well versed in such songs, there are enough 'geets' to have regular 'antaakshari' competition that can last hours.

It is interesting to see a subtle shift in themes of the songs over years as national and social issues emerge and evolve. Most of the songs are written by some RSS activists or pracharakas, while a few are adopted from existing literature. They can be Sanskrit, Hindi or local languages. In line with its philosophy of avoiding personal fame, names of poets are not known. Only once in a while one comes to know about the author of a song.

There is another small activity of narrating a ‘*subhaashit*’ i.e. great words or saying. Generally, they are *shlokas* from ancient scriptures, or speeches of great leaders. Most of them are in Sanskrit. These are pithy commentaries about Hindu philosophy, principles of ethical living for individual and society, relevant and contemporary even today. A volunteer preferably learns it by heart and also speak its meaning in the local language. Having heard many of them over the years, one wonders why the newspapers in their ‘quotable quotes’ rarely give place to such *shlokas* or words of wisdom rather than quotes mostly from Western scholars!

Honestly speaking, this intellectual training becomes tiringly repetitive as one grows over years. There are some occasions when one gets to hear a lecture that is off the routine and highly enlightening. I don’t recall many sessions where I was told about the scientific strength of Hindu philosophy that makes it a unique living faith even with passage of 5000+ years. For example, I hardly remember any lecture on the deep philosophy behind Hindu symbols and figures of Gods; nor were many references provided for scientific or technical achievements of our ancient scientists and sages. Such things were to be discovered by self. Yes, we were told about greatness of our scriptures, our heritage, our civilisational values etc. but for anything different, an activist had to find his own path. However, I have seen major shift in intellectual discourses in last few years, where topics mentioned above are regularly introduced and discussed in camps and workshops.

There have been serious efforts to generate literature on the scientific basis of Hindu thought, its rituals and mantras, and well documented literature with critical references on achievements of Hindu civilisation in science and technology since ancient times, that would appeal more to today’s generation.

A participant is encouraged to study various subjects and if he is good at it, also give lectures after proper preparation. Many of the RSS workers are very well read and write well too, but since they are very busy running a shakha or taking care of multiple activities of the localities they don’t get time to write or study. Sometimes I feel unhappy in a case where an

individual is really good at intellectual pursuit and active on field too, his energies are preferably channeled to field activity. There are some good examples, on the other hand, of some volunteers I know, who became established writers under the tutelage of their seniors who persuaded them to study certain subjects.

When I reflect upon this training, I realize that it is not just intellectual training but it is also a sustained exercise in raising the “Emotional Quotient” that makes a volunteer sensitive to his society, his nation and his fellow beings. These exercises sensitise him about the problems of people around him that make a society. For example, an activist is explained about the Hindu philosophy of a human being incurring various kinds of debts (*rin* or *ruun*) when he is born on this mother earth and nurtured by society, not just the family. Society contributes to his or her growth in personal as well as social sphere. Thus, when a person does something for the society, he or she is only trying to pay back that debt as a duty, and is not actually doing any charity or favour to anybody. A volunteer brought up on a song like “*Uchch hai wah shikhar dekho, main nahin wah sthan loonga, poojya hai wah matri-mandir, neev ka main ek kann hoon, puja maan ki charan raj ka ek chhota dhool kann hoon*” (See that high summit of Mother’s temple, I shall not take a place there, I am just a small piece of stone in the foundation of this temple, just a speck of dust in the feet of revered Mother) will not forget his moorings easily.

Various intellectual exercises strengthen one’s conviction that only a united and disciplined Hindu society can take care of its ills that can result in all round growth of the society and country. Lessons of history taught to the members stress the fact that Hindu civilisation, though glorious, faced reverses primarily because the society was not united, people fought on petty issues and differences, and withdrew into a shell under assaults from outsiders rather than face them unitedly. Since, the majority Indian society is Hindu, unless it takes care of its ills, its divisions and sub-divisions, and stands united, one cannot dream of a prosperous India. The focus is more inward looking to understand weaknesses of Hindu society rather than find scapegoats for its decline. If foreign invaders have weakened this country

and corrupted its systems, it is a historic fact that it was allowed to happen by a disunited Hindu society. Similarly, if caste system weakens Hindu society, it alone can correct this historic distortion of its social structure.

Many of the pracharakas have been great thinkers and analysts. Their understanding of the Indian society is astounding. I have heard some of the most perceptive and dispassionate analysis of social issues that confront Hindu society from such thinkers. Generally, the approach is not to get into confrontationist barren arguments or debates, but concentrate on an inclusive approach. Highly revered Shri Gururji who built up RSS over his 33 years of stewardship from a young fledgling organisation to an all India powerhouse drew attention to the limitations of intellectualism, pointing out that you may score some debating points with a person who opposes you intellectually, but you cannot win him over. He himself was a towering intellectual who had a photographic memory and tremendous spiritual depth. He had, probably, cautioned his followers to be more concerned with actual work rather than get bogged down by fruitless debates. One of the favourite quip the senior leaders is, “every Hindu you meet is a prospective swayamsevak, so try not to antagonise him or her. Listen, even to your opponents with open heart and be ready to learn.” We have seen many examples of diehard opponents joining RSS later on.

The most important part of regular intellectual and mental training is the prayer that is written in Sanskrit. It asks for Mother India’s blessings so one can dedicate one’s life for motherland’s glory and prosperity. It reminds the participant that it is he who has chosen this difficult path of sacrifice for his society on his own volition so he seeks her blessings to make him strong to bear difficulties in his path with equanimity. Daily invocation to Motherland creates an emotional bond that is close to one’s heart throughout life and always guides one’s actions.

U R Anandmurthy has noted somewhere that Hindu militancy is more political than spiritual. Though, nearly all the RSS volunteers are religious and spiritual, I doubt if most of them perform regular rituals that go with visible Hindu practices. There is no training at all about Hindu rituals and practices or influence to follow the so called Brahminical samskaaras,

though the RSS is supposed to be a citadel of orthodoxy that is ready to take Indians to middle ages! Guruji was an ordained Sadhu of Rama Krishna Mission order, but lived in normal worldly clothing. He even carried the typical pitcher of a sadhu gifted to him by his guru, and followed regular rituals of pooja, meditation etc. But he would admonish people that putting ‘tilak’ on forehead, reciting shlokas or scriptures blindly and garlanding the statue of one’s God is not true religiosity or spiritualism. To him, all this was of no use, if the person did not take care of his fellow human beings and society. For him patriotism, surrender of self for motherland and service to fellow human beings were the highest form of spiritualism.

Team Management

Simple meaning of swayamsevak is the one who is self-motivated to serve the society. The earliest responsibility that a young person is entrusted by the time he reaches his teens is that of a ‘*gatnaayak*’ or a team leader. This group could be staying in the same area, or it could be from similar age group, but never on linguistic or income basis. From these early days of life he is supposed to bring this team to shakha every day, lead it in shakha activities, visit homes of its members, talk to their parents, ask about their studies – in general be their coordinator and lead member, at an age when their contemporaries indulge in fun and games.

A swayamsevak could be planning and executing games in the shakha while another could concentrate on learning and singing patriotic songs, reciting the daily prayer and training others. A senior member may be asked to do some study and present a talk on some social issue or even narrate an informative story to the members of that shakha. A person may be given a temporary responsibility of managing a picnic. Small responsibilities mature a person slowly into a responsible person and a leader. So, you are being groomed as a disciplined team leader, in a very unobtrusive manner, who can handle multi-disciplinary activities naturally. And this is just a beginning.

As a member matures, he would be asked to be in-charge of a shakha as *mukhya shikshak* (chief instructor or teacher) or *kaaryavaah* (secretary) who looks after the whole group and is the guardian for all the members of that shakha. Mukhya shikshak is in-charge of physical education and games, while *kaaryavaah* is expected to guide all the team leaders and also attend meeting with other volunteers of other shakhas in the vicinity for planning programmes. The two together are responsible for running the shakha.

Unity through Purpose

The secret of unity in an organisation is unity of purpose. An ingrained respect for consensus based decision making comes to every volunteer through his experience in the organisation. Right from the day a young volunteer starts attending a meeting in RSS, he experiences consensus building. I have seen real hot heads who could easily loose temper on minutest of things, finally calming down and coming to a common decision. This decision making is also tempered with respect for seniority in the hierarchy as an organisational discipline.

It is not strange sight in an RSS shakha to see a 50 year old swayamsevak saluting a young instructor half his age. At times it may happen that a father could be saluting his son, or a teacher in school saluting his student in shakha! There are jokes abound in shakhas that a son receives more respect than the father because he happens to be a responsible member of the RSS! This training through simple acts in shakha results in respect for any person who has been given responsibility and who holds a higher post in the organisation. Since, nobody is promoted out of favour or fear. Members respect the authority and not the individual representing that authority. This mutual respect for each other and admiration for the work a person is doing filters down to a vibrant consensus based decision making process.

Though, this style of working leads to delays many a times and many activists crib about it, this is a small price that an organisation has to pay to

take everybody along. Once in a while, many impatient members complain that there are too many meetings and less action. But, this is a hallmark of RSS way of working, for better or for worse.

We had a very senior activist, Rajabhau, in our local district level team that I headed. He is still active at 85. At that time, he might have been nearly two and half times my age. He had been a full time worker (pracharak) in his youth and a very accomplished activist. He was so fit even at sixty five that he could do a handstand and walk on his hands! His neat notings in his diary and follow ups, his relentless social work over and above shakha work even at his advanced age, would be a lesson for anybody. One tough and emotionally draining social work he keeps doing year on year without fail since the age of 16 is to guide a family about various funeral rites whenever he gets to know of a death. I believe he may have guided thousands of such unfortunate families in their hour of distress. Rajabhau would put forth his views very strongly in meetings. If they were overruled by others or me, so be it. There would be heated arguments too. But, after the meeting was over, he would come to me and pat my back, saying, “Son, very good. You are doing a great job!” I have not seen such dispassionate and objective working in any other organisation. The RSS is basically fueled by passionate hearts inspired by philosophy of personal sacrifice.

Respect for Honest Work

One important lesson I learnt at the RSS was to always respect a person performing genuine work, regardless of the ideological background of that person. This is the reason an RSS worker can co-operate and work with any organisation or person if situation demands. There is no concept of any kind of ‘intellectual or organisational untouchability’ that plagues many of our social organisations. Therefore, RSS workers tend to have good relations with other organizations too. The open discussions that take place in meetings also encourage one to keep an open mind for a different way of thinking. Having interacted with extreme left to centrist and socialists, I

dare say that they are more fundamentalist in their beliefs and closed to hearing other ideas than a Sangh activist. They shy away from any interaction for the fear of being stained by saffron!

Even a leader of the stature of late Jai Prakash Narayan had to be persuaded very hard by a person like Sitaram Goel to meet RSS leaders and attend an RSS programme till late in life due to his bias about RSS in his mind built over years. But, after attending one such meeting, his apprehensions were totally washed away and he was all praise for the RSS and its members. It is his greatness that he admitted to his earlier unfounded bias and also like a true Gandhian changed his views with courage, at the risk of being ridiculed by his erstwhile colleagues.

Bringing the Best Out of a Person

Personality development and character building through all these activities happens effortlessly and unknowingly. One learns to sing, give speeches, discuss issues, work together, relate to and talk with people belonging to different age, social status or education. In a few years, he becomes a better personality emerging from this system that hones his personality. Traditional Indian values like respect for women, holy men and elders are inculcated through visits to each other's homes and various lectures and examples given during shakha hours. "*Nirmanon ke paawan yug mein, hum charitra nirman na bhoolen, swarth sadhana ki aandhi mein vasudha ka kalyan na bhoolein* (Let us not forget character building in this new pious era of reconstruction, let us not forget about the upliftment of mother earth in this mad rush of self-aggrandisement)," says one of the Sangh songs.

I have seen keen students from socially and economically deprived strata being trained lovingly by their more fortunate friends and senior colleagues going on to become successful engineers and doctors. I recall young friends like Manik and Deepak who rose from slums and went on to become an engineer and an accountant respectively. Some have become successful political leaders. I have seen the son of a humble poor tailor, Ramesh Patange – who used to be our senior in shakha in a neighbouring

area and secretary of a much larger area later – maturing into a leading thinker and writer. He is an opinion leader of repute in literary field. I had a young school going colleague deputed as my junior for running a shakha. It turned out that he was a compulsive liar and also indulged in petty thefts once in a while. He generally cleared his examinations in second attempt. His family was fed up of him. To my surprise, he not only gave up such practices within months of taking up new responsibilities, but also managed to clear all his subsequent classes in single attempts without a single lecture from me. It just happened.

There is a Marathi proverb which is repeated often, lest an activist forgets it – “Accept a person as he is and mould him into what you want him to be.” A great lesson for any human resource manager too. It is easier said than done, but I have seen large number of lives being moulded this way. Daily renewal of one’s faith and social commitment is the cause célèbre of shakha.

Shri Rameshwarlal Kabra, a highly successful industrialist and Chairman of RR Kabel ascribes his success in business and social life to the art of recognising a person’s abilities and his/her character through the practical experience he had gained in meeting and handling various kind of people during his days in shakha. There are hundreds of such successful businessmen who have similar views. Dr Ravindra Khedekar in Mumbai, a renowned orthopedic surgeon always credits his rise from a very average student to a successful surgeon, without falling into the trap of short cuts that many people fall into, to rise fast in the profession, due to his training in Sangh. In his long career, he has never charged fee from any RSS volunteer, his friend or his family, whatever the pressure from the beneficiary. A person like Dr. Vinay Sahasrabuddhe has risen from a typical middle-class family to be a pracharak of ABVP and headed Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini, and now Vice President of BJP. He never ever took advantage or boasted his close political relations with the high and mighty. I am talking of examples around me. Needless to say, at all India level, such examples would multiply in thousands.

Simply put, it is all about simple living and high thinking, following high values and traditions. All efforts are to build character of the swayamsevaks or volunteers through easy to absorb ideas. These values imbibed in the years in shakha are so strongly embedded in one's heart and mind that a person that has come out of this system will sooner or later come back to his roots and beliefs, and devote his energies for nation building.

Moropant Pingley, one of the earliest pracharakas, a remarkable organiser with keen understanding of Hindu society's psyche and one of the senior most ideologues used to conduct 'laugh a minute' kind of meetings. He used to say, "Work of the RSS is serious but we must do it with light heart, with laughter."

Thus, this humble shakha is the power house of RSS, the training ground for future social leaders who can take up any job with natural ease. All that I have described above happens in open grounds without any bamboo curtains or secrecy. Reading about this man making programme run through the shakhas of RSS, you would agree that my friend was not too far off the mark when he suggested that a well trained RSS worker could easily qualify for Social MBA.

VII

Inculcating Values and Sense of Nationhood through Festivals

Doctor Hedgewar, the founder, had a different view about celebrating customary festivals of Bharat. He chose festivals that carried some message for the swayamsevak and the society. RSS celebrates six festivals through a Hindu calendar year. They are –

1. Varsh Pratipadaa
2. Hindu Saamraajya Din
3. Guru Poojan
4. Rakshaa Bandhan
5. Vijayaadashamee
6. Makar Sankraman

I will elaborate a little about all these celebrations and the basic thought behind each.

1. **Varsh Pratipadaa** – This is the first day of most widely accepted Hindu new year and based on ‘Shaalivahan Shak’. It falls generally in the second week of April and is called ‘Gudi Padwaa’ in Maharashtra. The festival is celebrated in most parts of the country in different names – Bihu, Poila Baishakhi, Cheti Chand, Ugadi, Yugadi, Puthandu etc It is now well established fact that the calculations of Hindu calendar based

on astronomy are most scientific and accurate. Celebrating this day also connects you to your own ancient civilisation which is one of the oldest living civilisations in the world. To the RSS volunteers this day has another emotional pull too. The founder of the RSS, Dr. Hedgewar was born on this day. The festival begins with a special salute in the memory of its founder.

Since it is the beginning of the new year's organisational set up, new postings and new responsibilities are declared on this day in the RSS. Hand over to the new team begins on this day.

This day is being slowly adopted by Hindu society all over India with large colourful rallies and festivities greeting this day. An RSS inspired organisation 'Sanskaar Bharati' has played a great role in popularising this festival.

2. **Hindu Saamraajya Din** – This day commemorates the coronation of Shivaji, the most celebrated of Hindu kings who fought against all odds with limited resources at his command through direct and guerilla warfare. In the dark gloom of Mughal era when the Hindu society had gone into a shell believing that the only way to survive was to live a peaceful life, not bothering about the society and *dharma*. Aurangzeb's power was at its peak and Hindus saw no hope of deliverance from his atrocities. At that time Shivaji rose to declare, "Hindavi swaraajya whaave – hee Shreenchi ichchaa"; meaning "Let there be a independent kindgom of Hindus, this is the will of Supreme God." In that atmosphere of gloom, he had the courage to break out of shackles of slavery. He was the first Hindu to declare a kingdom based on Hindu tenets. After his coronation by Gaga Bhatt from Kashi, his kingdom was designated '*Hindu Pad Padshahi*' as long as Marathas reigned supreme. In terms of size it was not a very large kingdom. But, Shivaji was the one who rekindled the spirit of bravery in the hearts of Hindus and showed that it is possible to fight become independent. Subsequent Maratha kings finally reached the gates of Delhi. This is the greatness of Shivaji.

It is the tragedy of our secular polity that he has been reduced to a Maratha chieftain, thus pulling him down from the pedestal of a national hero, putting him in a smaller straitjacket of a caste-based hero and dwarfing his personality.

The RSS chose this date to awaken the spirit of bravery and self confidence. It may be underlined that RSS does not celebrate the birthday of any personality as a festival. Because it believes that the work done by an individual is greater than that individual. Thus, members of the RSS may celebrate Shivaji Jayanti along with other citizens and participate in it, but the RSS considers his coronation as the defining moment of his inspiring life and in the life of this nation and has made it into a national celebration.

3. **Guru Poojan** – I have already explained the philosophy behind this festival earlier on. It is important to note that the volunteer is not only supposed to sacrifice his money for the cause, but his other resources too. There is popular term in Hindi – “tan, man, dhan” i.e. serve your motherland whole heartedly with body, soul and material resources. This festival is the day when a volunteer renews his pledge to serve the motherland and society with all the means at his command. The status of a person in the organisation is decided more by his contribution of time and efforts than anything else. It is the most solemn festival of all. A volunteer may bunk daily shakha, may not attend other festivals, but he makes it a point to be present for this festival come what may, indicating the strong sense of dedication this day invokes.
4. **Rakshaa Bandhan** - We all know that Hindu society is divided in so many ways; be it caste, religion, class or language. The lack of unity and spirit of brotherhood is the bane of this society. Rakshaa Bandhan is a traditional festival in which a weaker person would tie the ‘thread of brotherhood’ or ‘Rakshaa bandhan’ to the stronger person to seek his support or protection. So, a priest would tie it to his host, citizens to their soldiers, and a sister to her brother. In fact, the first known story on

rakhi talks of Indraani, wife of mythical god of heavens – Indra, tying the thread on Indra's wrist. Though the festival has become more of a family function between brother and sister in recent times, the RSS has chosen this festival to send forth the message of universal brotherhood. On this day, volunteers not only tie this sacred thread of unity and brotherhood to each other but also go out to tie it to members of the society and reach out to under privileged sections of the society too. Thus, it becomes a social festival of brotherhood and social amity at all levels.

5. **Vijayaadashamee** – We all recognise this festival as the day that celebrates the victory of good over evil. It is a victory of forces of the good over the evil, of light over the darkness. It is a festival that by its very names celebrates the spirit of triumph and bravery. It is the day when Hindus worship arms and workers worship their tools of production since centuries. The RSS has adopted this tradition and worships arms (*shastra pooja*) on this day. It is a day to rekindle the spirit of courage and fortitude by remembering the epic battle between Rama and Raavana, with the former fighting with limited resources. We also remember that Rama was able to achieve this remarkable victory with the help of his tribal friends and unarmed forces of monkeys. It was a remarkable job of social organisation.

There is significance to this day. This is the 'foundation day' of the RSS. The RSS was established on Vijayaadashamee in the year 1925. The day is marked with RSS members taking out parades dressed in uniform with its martial music band all over India. On this day, the *Sarsanghchaalak* or RSS chief is always present in the traditional parade in Nagpur, its Head Quarters and the place where this movement came into being. RSS chief is not known for giving too many interviews or press statements, so this address to the volunteers at the end of the parade is taken as a pointer to the RSS policies, and direction for the coming year. Thus, his annual address is much awaited event for media

and socio-political analysts too. As times change, we now see nearly entire electronic and print media covering it well.

6. **Makar Sankraman** – This is a day celebrated throughout India under various names. It is the day when Sun enters North Solstice. It is the day, when the nature, and with her, the people throw off the inertia of winters to become active again with a change in the season. It is a festival that celebrates revival of activity in every aspect. Thus, it has a message for the whole society. It is celebrated all over North as Sankranti or Sankrant, while in Tamil Nadu it is Thai Pongal, in Assam it is Magh Biho and so on.

In Maharashtra there is another custom linked with this day. People exchange sweet made of sesame seeds (til) and jaggery (gul/gud). At this time they greet each other with “*til gul ghyaa aani gode gode bola*”, meaning, let us exchange this sweet and speak sweetly with each other. Thus, there is a message of social amity and sweet relations in this exchange.

Since, it is the last festival of the calendar year it is also the time within the RSS when stock taking or peer review begins informally that would result in new responsibilities and postings, re-organisation of certain activities etc. at the time of new Hindu year.

You will note that conventional Hindu festivals like Diwali and Holi do not appear in this official list of festivals. You will also find that all the six festivals have some social significance and some message. A few of the festivals are inward looking for the and the swyamsevak, while most others are outward looking and are meant to reach out to the members of the society with some message.

It goes without saying that all the activists celebrate all other festivals as per their geographical and local norms and traditions with full gusto and local shakhas also take part in arrangements of many such festivities in their own areas. For instance, our shakha used to look after the arrangements on the day of ‘*Mahaashivraatri*’ in the temple which was in the compound where our shakha used to be held. The day would

witness high numbers of visitors and our job was to regulate crowds throughout the day. Our reward for the work done was snacks from the pujari at the end of the grueling day.

There have been lot of insinuations that RSS didn't celebrate Independence Day or Republic Day all these years. This is not true. RSS has been celebrating 15th August as 'Akhand Bharat Din' as long as I know, to remember the tragedy of the partition. As a tradition set by Dr. Hedgewar, RSS swayamsevaks have been taking part in these national festivals including Republic Day as common citizens alongwith the society, like they do for religious festivals. Reader would have understood by now that RSS, as a rule, never did anything for publicity, nor did it take photographs to advertise its patriotism. Hoisting the tricolor was not allowed in non-government buildings till 2002 when a Congress MP won a judgement against the government order. It hoists its specific Bhagwa flag only in shakhas and special programmes. RSS volunteers have sacrificed their lives for this land in peace time and war time. It wouldn't be possible unless its swayamsevaks were totally devoted to their Motherland. Talking of photographs and records, for a different RSS related book, it took me nearly 6 months to collect some photographs, especially old ones, from scores of personal and official sources as not many were available.

VIII

Supremacy of Mission Over Self

Right from his entry into the RSS fold through a shakha, each volunteer or swayamsevak has clear understanding that the mission and the organisation are bigger than the individual. And, that nation is bigger than the organisation. Work is organisation oriented, not person oriented. This message comes through time and again in meetings, decision making and conduct of individuals.

There was a camp a few years back. A senior activist and head of Sangh's Juhu area, Vasudev Valecha, a successful industrialist and also a major supporter for local organisations in many ways, was to participate in the camp. While rushing from the airport, he was caught in a traffic jam, and was delayed by an hour. This delay cost him dear, as he was not allowed to enter the RSS camp. His junior colleague went to the senior most in-charge of the camp, Bhaskar Rao, and requested him to make an exception for him, trying to buttress his argument by mentioning his dedication and benevolence. Chief of the camp was unmoved and said, "How does it matter? Discipline is discipline", and Valecha ji was sent back. In keeping with true traditions of a swayamsevak, he returned all the way back to city without raising a ruckus and never did he complain about this incident, kept on working with full energy till his last breath.

There are such examples at all levels. The activist is trained through out to sublimate his ego for higher goal of nation building for which organisation is the medium. It is not easy to ingrain this state of

‘egolessness’ or genuine humility in an age when even the friend’s friend of a nephew of a municipal corporator can threaten a police on duty with “don’t you know who am I?” I know of friends like Milind and Ravi who dedicated gave prime 4-5 years of their lives as prachaaraks and are on back-slapping terms with many ministers, but are back to their humble life styles and working selflessly for the society, not expecting anything for the years devoted for nation building. This overall simplicity and humility of the activists from young to old is a humbling experience for any person.

When the ego of a manager becomes bigger than the purpose of the organisation, even commercial organisations fail or suffer badly. Case of Lehman Brothers is too new to be recounted here. We are aware that ego of the CEO in not agreeing to terms of rescue of the beleaguered corporation led to the collapse of not only Lehman but the whole financial system of US, leading to an unforeseen major global disaster.

Social organisations split or become dysfunctional because of this curse. Ego is further boosted by propaganda or personality promotion. This is the reason why RSS members shun propaganda and media consciously. Though, this has affected its image as its critics’ comments have gone unchallenged. It has also resulted in sustained growth of organisation, human resources and a sense of joyful brotherhood which is envy of its critics.

Subsuming Personal Choices to Organisational Goal

I have seen people giving up on their pet hobbies due to their pre-occupation with a responsibility RSS has given them. I have endless anecdotes about such change in a person’s priorities. I will just recount one interesting story. A renowned painter and art director of Raj Kapoor era, Shanti Dev tells us that he refused to go to shakha in Lucknow as it clashed with his flute classes. One day his pracharak, late Deendayal Upadhyay jokingly told him, “Shanti, don’t listen to your shikshak and carry on with your music lessons. After all, when the country is on fire, you can play your

flute!” This was prior to independence. Young Shanti dropped his flute lessons from that very day and resumed his attendance in shakha.

Most of the pracharaks, generally, have great academic credentials and could have been highly successful professionals had they not given up their worldly pursuits. Many a talented senior activist are subdued towards the greater goal. There are very few exceptions to this philosophy and such people have done very well in the fields they have gone in. I can talk of late Sudhir Phadke, a highly respected music director and singer from Maharashtra as an example. Though, I personally believe that such talents should be allowed to grow and make a place for themselves in the society and serve society in a different way. But, if such people heed to a higher calling, well I am in a minority. And one has to admit that unless there is focused devotion to nation building exercise and readiness to sacrifice self-interest in any way, it is not an easy task. Call of a higher goal will ultimately override all other considerations.

Seniors remind young workers that service to the motherland cannot be a ‘time pass hobby’, to be taken up at a ‘suitable free time’. Things will happen only when this service itself becomes the prime goal and every other pursuit is tailored to that end. An evocative Sangh song reminds one that, “it is easy to be a moth and burn oneself over the glowing flame of love, but it is very difficult to be a lamp that burns self, atom by atom, to give light to others. Path to dedicated service is, indeed difficult.”

I recall a gentleman, Vijay Swami, a post graduate with a decent job and a good life in Pune. He went to hear a talk by a missionary of Vivekanand Kendra. After hearing him talk about Arunachal Pradesh and Vivekanand Kendra’s work there, he felt that there was a higher calling than the mundane life he was living. He quit his job for greater pursuit of social upliftment, living there for more than a decade now and is like a citizen, working with locals, running schools, dispensaries etc. Currently, he is heading a new project Research Institute of World Ancient Traditions Culture and Heritage (RIWATCH) there.

Nurturing and Promoting Talent

One of the secrets behind the sustained growth of the RSS as an organisation, is recognising a talent and nurturing it. The promotion of a volunteer through the organisational ranks as an activist and a senior worker is strictly based on performance and his dedication. The senior activist (*kaaryakartaa* or worker) of a particular locality or region keeps a watch on the work being done by junior activists and recognise their talent on different parameters. The next job is to persuade that person to take up a responsibility. It is amusing that the RSS is the only organisation where a promotion is dreaded by an activist! The reason is that he would have to work harder and dedicate more time out of his day-to-day life.

Never in my experience, have I found a person being promoted due to his closeness to a senior. Nor have I found a deserving person being overlooked because of his social or economic status. Yes, there can be some mistakes when an unsuitable person is picked up. But, all concerned people understand that it is human to err. When something like this happens, the affected person jokes that “he was falsely accused of having a quality which he didn’t possess!”

It is possible that a person may be given a responsibility sometimes because there is nobody better available at the time. But, it is striking that the person ‘accused’ of having a particular quality, then works hard to acquire that talent and deliver results. It doesn’t surprise anybody when a physical instructor is promoted to be an intellectual trainer; or a good singer is made responsible for catering arrangements of a camp. The underlying lesson is that if a person has decided to dedicate a considerable part of his life for the society, he will surely work hard to acquire any talent that is required to fulfill his mission. This horizontal movement across the different disciplines is not very common in other organisations though there may be exceptions.

Shunning Organisational Politics

Sometimes, two people in a team do not see eye to eye on many issues, nor does their style of working match. They may have heated arguments during

meetings which sometimes carry on outside too. But it is amazing when a worker proposes the name of the same person, with whom he has had serious differences, for an important assignment, because one must choose a person best suited even if one may have personal reservations. I have gone through such moments myself. It is a lesson for any management team. Organisational politics is firmly eschewed. A Sangh poem says, “*path ka antim lakshya nahin hai sinhaasan chadhate jaaana*”, that is, “The ultimate goal of this path is not rising to higher positions of power.”

There are cases where a person was removed from a post if he was found to be behaving in a way contrary to expectations from his position. The case of late Vasantrao Oke, a dynamic pracharak of Delhi during and after partition is well known in Sangh lore. He was one of the most powerful public figures in those times. He had an imposing personality. But, when it was felt that his ego was getting better of him and he was treating himself as bigger than organisation, he was transferred by Shri Guruji, to another position. He was so incensed that he resigned and left the organisation. The reconciliation happened after decades. Important footnote is that Shri Guruji kept in touch with him during all these years, another important lesson in human relations.

According supremacy of organisation and the mission, conquering personal ego for higher objective, promoting talent irrespective of personal likes and dislikes has led to a robust organisation and a team of workers difficult to find in any other social organisation. Shri Balasaheb Deoras, the third Sarsanghchaalak of RSS, used to call swayamsevaks, ‘dev durlabh’ team of workers, i.e. a team that even gods would find difficult to build.

IX

Human Relations and Management Training

Beginning from the rank of a ‘gat naayak’ – group leader – a volunteer goes through HR and management training all through his working life in the organisation at different levels. After all, the RSS is built on ‘Human Relations’ in the purest sense of the term. The young volunteer gets the basic lessons in inter-personal skills, communications and also dealing with people from diverse cultural back grounds right from his first responsibility.

A swayamsevak or volunteer learns to overcome his own personal likes and dislikes, even modify his basic personality traits to have better relations with people. He learns to work with people from diverse backgrounds. As he moves up the ladder of hierarchy, he learns more lessons. He learns to co-ordinate between different teams and work without bias and prejudice with different kinds of people.

How the human relations can be maintained through heartfelt but effortless behavior is illustrated by an incident that was narrated by a budding singer Sanjay Pandit in 1980s. He was supposed to sing the main song during the valedictory function of a state-level camp in Maharashtra held in Pune in 1983 with an attendance of over 10000 volunteers. Naturally, he put in painstaking efforts with active help from a senior pracharak, late Nanarao Dhobale. However, just a day before this event, a message came that Sudhir Phadke, the great singer and composer of

Maharashtra, would be coming to the camp and be on stage in full RSS uniform to sing the song. Naturally, since this renowned swayamsevak had made time for this event, the seniors asked Sanjay to stand back. Sanjay was heartbroken, but as a swayamsevak he too understood the importance of the event and took it in his stride. Anybody else could have forgotten this small incident in such a massive three day event, but, not Nanarao. Sanjay received a letter within a week from Nana, sharing his pain, apologising to him for this last minute change and heart break that he must have felt, blessing him with a great future. Sanjay says that an incident that could have embittered his heart, turned him into a lifelong swayamsevak with this simple heart to heart communication.

Dr Hedgewar, himself, was the best example about a person moulding one's personality to suit his or her goals. He had a fiery temper that was a gift of his genes. The whole family was known for its temper. His testimony in the defence of his act as a satyagrahi in front of a British judge in 1918 Non-cooperation Satyagrah so alarmed the judge that he said, "your defence is more seditious than your speech!" But, once this doctor decided to build an organisation like the RSS, he changed himself so much that nobody ever heard him shout or lose his temper later in life. He could joke and play with people one third his age and also work with the most respected leaders of those days in political and social arena. He spoke simply, without any flourish, but effectively as his words came directly from heart.

This self-driven motivation for a mission leads one to modify one's own personality traits to work with other people. I was an introvert who would move to the other side of the road to avoid running into known acquaintances. But, the compulsions of working with people made me a far open person, even if it meant crossing over to the other side of the road to meet a person!

Personality Development

A volunteer learns to recognise inherent skills in his colleagues and nurture them. As a swayamsevak becomes a *kaaryakartaa* (more active volunteer

or activist), giving more time and energy to organisational work, he hones his skills further. From being a member of a local shakha he graduates to being a senior worker who handles the co-ordination of various activities of RSS. He may look after physical training, intellectual training or special workshops, meet celebrities in his locality and so on. This interaction with people of varied backgrounds, sensing their problems or their likes and dislikes, taking them along, persuading them to work for a cause by dedicating his time and effort builds up his managerial and Human Resources (HR) skills.

Purushottam, my friend who joined RSS at a comparatively older age during the Emergency, was a typical carefree young man playing street cricket, getting into arguments or street brawls; having a team of friends who would play and gossip at street corners. Once, he plunged into Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) work, (ABVP was not banned during emergency) and later became its pracharak, his transformation was amazing. Initially, it was not easy for him, he admits. But, as he settled down, his aggression and skills were channelised into positive and disciplined act of organising students, meetings and networking with teachers, professionals and industrialists, and being helpful to people. These same skills made him a successful businessman later. I rate him as one of the best PR men today in our circles.

A highly respected teacher, Prof Mohanrao Apte, is another name that I can recall with awe for his sheer energy and a great eye for talent. He may have moulded and brought in more young people into social arena on strength of his inspirational personality, right from national level to local level. He finds time to write highly researched books on foreign affairs, defence and science inspite of being busy on field with his students with something or the other. Such is his impatience with any kind of lethargy that all his students humorously recall his oft used word, “useless” for anybody, any activity that drops in pace.

The most difficult part of working for an organisation which has nothing to offer but, on the contrary, which demands more out of you in terms of time, efforts and even money; is to motivate people to work harder

for a cause that does not offer any personal rewards in any way. To motivate people to do something in which there is no self interest is the biggest challenge a person in social field faces and this changes his whole perspective about life, people and work. People working in voluntary work can appreciate this aspect. An RSS worker learns these persuasive skills as he learns to manage people.

Immaculate Planning

Apart from regular shakhas, there are other programmes – like six regular RSS festivals that are celebrated with much more organised effort, with larger numbers of Sangh volunteers and members of public. There are occasional local or regional programmes that do not fall under these six all India festivals, say a picnic, a social gathering for a lecture, a cultural programme, organising sports events from different shakhas or a larger territory, organising workshops, being part of a team that organises camps. A camp arrangement can mean putting up tents, surfacing the playground, organising the space for different units of volunteers, plumbing, electrical job, looking after kitchen including cooking, cleaning of utensils, preparing for intellectual and physical programmes or even digging ditches for toilets.

A young member who is graduating to be a worker, or *kaaryakarta* in RSS terminology, finds it extremely exasperating the way his seniors pore over each and every detail of a programme or an event, delegating the smallest to critical responsibilities to different team members as well as work out a back-up procedure. No detail is too small for the seniors. Right from the arrangement of flowers, flag, chairs, lights, sound to taking care of *chappals* – nothing is left out. While working on the book, I met Rajabhau, about whom I have mentioned earlier too. He took out an old sheet of paper casually from his carefully maintained files with minute detailing of the arrangement to be made for a RSS festival (utsav). This detailed arrangement is called ‘vyavasthaa’ in RSS parlance. The senior colleague or co-worker guides the organiser of any programme to chalk out details of

each component of an event from start to finish, each person is told about his role diligently.

The effect of all these exercises can be seen in everything a volunteer does. I was wonderstruck when I was shown the stores management of a huge relief camp by a young student who seemed to be hardly a school pass out, during Gujarat earthquake in Raandhanpur in Kutch in 2002. Same approach works wonders for every event or programme a swayamsevak manages. More a worker rises in ranks, more people he interacts with. It is not a surprise that an RSS trained person can organise any programme in a very systematic way with a calm efficiency as if he was trained in it. Having organised so many events, he becomes an effortless event manager who takes up any kind of job like a fish takes to water, whatever be the situation.

This immaculate planning is a hallmark of 'RSS School of Management'. Naturally, you hardly find any press coverage of RSS programmes as there are no gaffes, no stampedes, no scuffles, nor complaints of leaders coming late or programme stretching beyond yawns and disorder. Our media, after all, is trained only to report negative news.

Consensus Based Decisions

All decisions in the RSS are taken through consensus, even the election of the General Secretary at the top is based on consensus. No wonder that this 92 year old organisation has not split even once, contrary to Indian traditions of a social organisation. In a lighter vein, one can say that till RSS launched its mission of uniting Hindu society, four Hindus would look in the same direction only when the fifth one was on their shoulders. In our yonder, the joke on socialist groups used to be that three socialists can have four opinions and they can split like an amoeba!

Normally, each activist or worker having a record of selfless public service should have ego which should be more than that of a housing society secretary or local social worker. Since he is under nobody's obligation and is entirely self driven, there are more reasons for him not to

listen to another colleague or senior. But, the RSS working ethos defies this conventional logic. This lack of personal ego is one reason why decisions can be taken with consensus.

The stress on consensus-based decisions does not mean there is no democracy in RSS. Infact, I have yet to come across a social organisation which has more internal democracy than the RSS. But, it is tempered with an organisational culture – respect for consensus arrived through a very high majority in a given situation, with a belief that no one in the discussion has a vested interest and that everybody is thinking and working for the society. There are heated debates and discussions that may end up in an unanimous decision or a decision even being put on hold for lack of consensus.

A person brought up and trained in such an environment can definitely manage a group or a team of colleagues and bring them round to a consensus-based decision where everybody feels that he is a part of it; and it is a win-win situation for all.

Evolution of a Manager

A swayamsevak, thus, gradually gets involved in management, managing team(s) and building teams right from his teenage years as he matures into an activist. He learns how to motivate his team members and get tasks done with a sense of joy. He is trained to identify a problem, study it and resolve it. He learns how to manage things by taking people together.

Review of the work done by each activist is done regularly in periodic meetings and also informally. Final review is once a year when he may either be asked to continue, or maybe shifted to another responsibility, based on the reading of his seniors, or be promoted to higher responsibilities. It is also possible that a person be relieved of his responsibility due to his request or perceived inefficiency.

Sanjay Hegde, founding director of a social service organisation, Sewa Sahayog Foundation and Executive Director of Price Waterhouse Cooper India, attributes his rise from a humble village in Goa to the select ‘who-is-

who' of the corporate world to the readiness for hard work, discipline, character and management lessons he imbibed during his RSS training.

This is also the training that has produced a highly efficient administrators and ministers like Nitin Gadkari who could build more bridges, fly-overs and highways in five years than Congress ministers could build in 50 years. This system produced Chief Ministers like Manohar Parrikar who put a small state like Goa, known only as a beach destination till then, firmly on a growth path through industrial development and by plugging loop-holes in the system; Shivraj Singh Chauhan, current Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Dr Raman Singh, current Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, whose welfare schemes for the neglected strata of society are being keenly watched and replicated by other states. Narendra Modi rose from a humble beginning as a canteen boy to be a pracharak and then become a Chief Minister to launch so many innovative schemes for social and economic development that it has won him national accolade, and governments from other states send their officers to study them. Media may deride and demonise him, but his hard work and vision have made him the darling of the people. Today, ofcourse he leads a new confident India as its Prime Minister. Atal Behari Vajpayee, one of the best and the most popular Prime Ministers of India, gave a vision to planners that resulted in networks of national highways and rural road network schemes changing the way men and material move in this vast country. This has also brought in economic dividends to backward areas. I recall that the so called progressive economists had laughed derisively at Atalji's vision and called it a scheme for the rich that would not get any funds. Only an Atal Behari could explode the nuclear bomb, face sanctions, motivate people including PIOs and NRIs to contribute liberally to India's funds to face those sanctions, and finally bring America to a situation where it would look at India as a friend and an ally. All this happened because these fiercely proud nationalist people trained in this disciplined organisation were close to people, to the society and have had a dream of a well developed, prosperous India they visualised every day in simple shakhas; where they smelt and rolled in Indian soil.

Probity in Public Life

An RSS volunteer nearly always has a strikingly pleasant experience when he approaches people for any cause. It is the implicit faith people have in Sangh and its volunteers about financial probity. Swayamsevaks are conditioned from day one to deal with each other in total faith. Each and every penny is accounted for very transparently. This habit is fortified on as a volunteer graduates to higher posts and takes up more responsibilities. The amounts may change over years but there is never a doubt that accounts will be handled scrupulously, with complete honesty.

When we used to go door to door to collect funds for various disaster relief programmes, people would remark that they give funds to the RSS unquestioningly because they have full faith that money would be utilised properly. It is pertinent to note that the administrative cost any RSS-run social service organisation is the lowest, or zero in many cases, as compared to other NGOs. From the beginning, an activist has been tuned to spend out of his own pocket for any activity, right from refreshments to picnics and camps. So, it does not come easily to him to get his expenses reimbursed or spend lavishly on himself. He has been trained to be frugal with himself as well as the organisation.

Ram Ratna Vidya Mandir School was being built in Keshav Srishti near Mumbai. Rajju Bhaiyya (Professor Rajendra Singh) was the chief of the RSS at the time. Since, he had laid the foundation stone of the school he would enquire its progress whenever he visited Mumbai. He was being regularly informed that the school would open in June 1997. But, on this particular occasion he was told by the concerned trust member that the committee had decided that the opening will be shifted to the year next as there were some practical difficulties. Rajju Bhaiyya was highly perturbed. He gave an earful (in his own soft loving way) to the trustee on importance of accounting of public money and its cost, which is not just interest in funds but the public trust you lose not keeping promises. Naturally, trustees took the lesson to heart and worked very hard to start the school on a near impossible original schedule.

Lead by Example

One of the most important secrets behind the success of RSS is that a person is expected to lead by example. People listen to a person who puts into practice what he preaches. People are not trained by mere talks, but with living examples of their leaders and colleagues. Respect in the organisation is commanded by conduct and not demanded by position in the hierarchy.

One of my senior colleagues, Bimal Kedia, took a conscious decision on the very first day he joined his family business that he would devote only eight hours out of the 24 hours of a day to business and nearly every other waking hour will go for Sangh work. I have not seen this conduct change in 40 years that I have known him, come what may. In fact, the actual time contributed to business has only reduced over years. Even when the family demanded more from him to promote the booming business further, he firmly refused. Such is his moral influence on his colleagues that nobody can say no to him, whatever responsibility he requests a person to take up.

Each and every teacher (*shikshak*) and *pracharak* is a living model of this code of conduct. This is what makes an ordinary person into an extraordinary achiever in social field.

I am not convinced with the argument that today's generation is not motivated to do selfless service because it does not find role models in political or social leaders. One could find such role models around one's own homes or institutions if one were to look carefully. Media can also play a positive role by giving important place to such caring personalities in its coverage. We do not easily forget a very good teacher we met in our school days, or a social worker in our neighbourhood.

Before I close this chapter, I will talk of another instance of setting example with one's own conduct. Mr Valecha, about whom I wrote spoke earlier too, decided not to move to the new plush bungalow in Juhu the family had built for all the brothers. He explained, "If I move into such a fancy home, my young friends from the shakha who from poor families may feel shy to come there. So, I better stay in my old flat." In earlier years,

he had allowed Vidyanidhi School trust to run its initial classes from his garage and drawing room. I am deliberately quoting from my next door colleagues and friends so we realise that any ordinary person can become an extraordinary soul when he goes through the unobtrusively simple training through Sangh work.

I have noticed that cadre based organisations, be it RSS or others, cannot retain all brilliant members because they are too fast or too impatient for an average member. RSS has, generally, been an exception though I have seen some of the brilliant people drifting away. However, it is equally true that organisations are generally built by the brilliance of a few. Building an organisation requires the patience of a farmer. Jim Collins, author of *From Good to Great*, has come to the conclusion that it is not brilliant individuals but the average steady hardworking team of individuals who take the organisations to greatness and consolidate it over long years. This unsung and unnoticed ability of the RSS that brings extraordinary achievers out of ordinary souls is the biggest source of its strength.

RSS Volunteers through the Eyes of a Management Theorist

Dr Sadhana Satish Modh, whom I also know now as a managing committee member of Sangh inspired Vidyanidhi group of educational institutions in Juhu in Mumbai, did her doctoral research on ‘Understanding Human Response in Organisations: A study of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh with a Management Perspective’. The research concept drew its inspiration from the theoretical work done by Dr S K Chakraborty (IIM, Calcutta) which provides a normative framework of *Gunas* (*Satwic, Rajasic and Tamasic*) in his book *Human Response in Organisations*. Her transformation from a research student to an active member of an RSS inspired educational institution was, to an extent, also the result of this study.

Her research was inspired by a study by celebrated management guru Peter Drucker on the famous international movement of Scouts. Peter Drucker lists the reasons why one should study non-profit organisations for advancing one’s knowledge in organisational theories:

- 1) Non-profit sector is one of the largest influential factors in society.
- 2) Non-profit sector is growing at a much faster pace.
- 3) Effective endeavour of 'non-profit' is commitment to their management that is dedicated to "doing good".
- 4) As a rule, 'non-profits' are more money conscious than business enterprises but they do not base their strategy on money. They start with the performance of their mission.
- 5) Mission is one of the most important part of any non-profit organisation. It has clear-cut implications for the work its members have to perform.

She says, "The RSS has over 140 frontal organisations and they are the front runners in their respective fields. What keeps the saffron brotherhood together? The answer lies in the crucial fact that it has evolved a unique style of operation. When many organisations copied the western style of functioning, the RSS developed its own system, which is indigenous. Many may differ on Sangh's world view and its solutions to problems but no one can question its organisational skills, ideological rectitude and unequaled discipline."

Her research questionnaire was designed after initial response to a pilot study with 25 selected RSS workers in Mumbai. Based on more inputs, the final questionnaire was sent to more than 1500 senior activists by mail in Madhya Pradesh and Mumbai; and 351 of these responded. The age group wise distribution from the received responses was 62% per cent between the age groups of 26-55; 15% per cent below 25; and, 23% per cent above 55 years. Similar care was also taken in distribution in terms of occupation.

Characteristics of the RSS Volunteer as per Data Analysis

Dr Modh had devised the questionnaire that would lead her to draw her conclusions objectively about the personal behaviour of an RSS worker, as also to analyse his personality. For example:

- Is RSS worker, really, a devoted Hindu? Does he believe in doing Puja/Meditation?

RSS claims to work for uniting Hindus. It would be interesting to find out whether those who work for RSS are traditional Hindus, doing Puja or meditation regularly or just using this platform for some hidden agenda as the critics allege. It was found that almost 65.8 per cent of the RSS workers in the sample were religious by nature.

- How dedicated is an RSS worker?

One touch stone for a dedicated worker is how much time he dedicates to his social work. The questionnaire said almost 47.8 per cent workers devoted more than two hours daily. Nearly 24 per cent said that they were able to do so sometimes. Quarter of the workers in the sample (28.2%) found it difficult to devote so much time regularly.

- Is RSS activist a staunch 'Swadeshi'? Would he buy 'Swadeshi' products even if inferior in quality?

More than half the workers in the sample (53%) agreed that they would.

A Unique “Micro Unit Management” System: The Shakha

Dr Modh observes, “The RSS has evolved a management system where the smallest unit gets the maximum attention. The organisation structure of the RSS is created in such a way that it facilitates the smooth running of a “Shakha”. Even during its Annual General Meeting of ‘Pratinidhi Sabha’ the focus is on the number of shakhas, its average attendance and the issues associated with its functioning.”

“.... Various functions of Shakha are distributed, and for carrying them out there is an arrangement. There are no officers, there are office bearers (*kaaryakartaa* with responsibilities). Each responsibility is structured to carry out some task during the Shakha hour. Bereft of that, all are equal, all are friends, all are brothers. This unique feeling of comradeship is the characteristic of the RSS and it is the outcome of the RSS methodology of running a Shakha.”

Continuous Training for Teamwork and Leadership

Continuing with Dr Modh's analysis, "The RSS believes that there are no such things as 'leadership traits' or 'leadership characteristics'. May be, some people are better leaders than others. By and large, though, we are talking about skills of leadership that can be learnt by most of the people. There are continuous programmes throughout the year which keep on honing the organisational skills of a Swayamsevak. There is also an opportunity for organic development of RSS and its workers. When, the *kaaryakartaa* is going through planning and organising such events, year after year, he keeps on acquiring leadership skills, without his knowledge."

Empirical Testing of Guna Framework

The most interesting part of this research was analysis of RSS workers on the parameters of *Gunas* to explain the human responses as expounded by Dr S K Chakraborty. These Gunas are: Dull (Tamas), Passionate (Rajas) and Balanced (Satwa). A classification of factors (obtained from factor analysis) was carried out by Dr Modh based on prior characteristics of Gunas, that is: (a) Satwic Guna: Commitment to Mission and Ethical; (b) Rajasic Guna: Passionate, Authoritarian, Motivated and (c) Tamasic Guna: Inflexible, Indolent, Distracted, Disinterested.

She noted that the RSS workers scored more than average on Satwic and Rajasic Guna variables and less than average on Tamasic Guna variables. In conclusion, she says, an RSS worker can be called a "Satwo-Rajasic" type personality according to the Guna theory.

Conclusions of the Study

To paraphrase her conclusions: "Philosophy of the RSS covers Hindu value system and the need to organise the entire Hindu society. The RSS uses the synthesis of religious construct, Hinduism and Nationalism in its philosophy and has crystallised it as Hindutva." To my mind this use of religious construct is more close to Tilak who directly linked it to nationalism than Gandhi.

She believes that Dr Hedgewar's major achievement was that he succeeded in changing certain deep-rooted wrong conceptions in the people's mental make-up prevailing about social work at that time. She writes, "An ordinary person thinks that it is sufficient for him to provide some financial assistance to one or the other social cause, or when he has free time he should participated in social programmes. Majority of people would either keep themselves entirely unconcerned or are contented with only expressing sympathies. Dr Hedgewar had designed and organised Shakha programmes so as to overcome such mental blocks about social activities and to unhesitatingly participate in them."

Importance of Mission

To quote Dr Modh, "A non-profit organisation exists for its mission. The mission of the RSS is to unite and rejuvenate Indian nation on the sound foundation of *dharma*. This mission can be achieved by a strong and united Hindu society. Therefore, the RSS has undertaken the task of uniting the Hindus. Rejuvenation of the Hindu nation is in the interest of the whole humanity. From Dr. Hedgewar's time till today, Hindu Unity has been the sole, unfaltering mission of the RSS."

She concludes that "Lesson to be learnt by organisations is that the mission statement should be simple, clear and direct. A mission statement has to be operational, otherwise it is just good intentions. A mission statement has to focus on what the institution really is trying to do and then do it so that everybody in the organisation can say; this is my contribution to the goal. The mission is forever; the goals are temporary."

X

Organisational Structure

Physical structure

The RSS has a highly federal structure that is defined clearly in its constitution. Though the policies are controlled centrally, the execution of different ideas and plans is left to the regional, state or local level depending upon the scale of a plan.

An RSS volunteer is the basic cell of this huge network of the organisation. A ‘gat’ or team is the smallest unit of operation in a shakha. Shakha is a complete local level unit by itself headed by a *mukhya shikshak* (chief instructor or teacher) and *kaaryavaah* (secretary).

Various shakhas are organised at the level of ‘tehsil’ in villages and ‘mandal’ that form part of a ‘nagar’ in case of urban areas. The next level is District (*jilaa*) level committees, followed by State (*praant*) and Region (*kshetra*). The final organisational block is Central Committee (*Kendriya Kaaryakaarini*) that is chosen from its Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (All India Delegates Council) that is an elected body.

Organisational units from Tehsil or Mandal to Central level have *karyavah* as the executive head of the team and in-charge of overall activities. The guide and philosopher at each level is ‘sanghchaalak’, that is President of the organisation of a particular area). He is accorded great respect and dignity but has no constitutional executive power except the moral authority to persuade the team to take a certain view or help bring

around consensus for a policy decision. He does not take part in day to day functioning or decision making of the organisation; this falls under a *kaaryavaah's* domain. His most important role is that of a guardian to all the volunteers and workers. He is the public face of RSS in the locality. *Sanghchaalak* commands high respect and his word carries weight. Though, he does not have executive powers, his word, as and when he puts it, is taken as final word on a matter.

Committees at all the levels have members for physical training, intellectual training, social service, co-ordination for other associate organisations and a few other members assigned to some responsibility depending upon the size of the organisation in that area.

Regular elections are held every three years for the central body where local delegates in different geographical regions vote for members to the national committee (*pratinidhi sabha*), and these members vote for the post of General Secretary (*Sar Kaaryavaah*). The delegates need to have a good record of organisational work to qualify as delegates. The post of *Sarsanghchaalak* (All India President of RSS) is non-elective. As a convention and part of its constitution he is nominated by his predecessor after due discussions with the most senior members of the central committee (*Kendriya kaaryakaarini*). So, it is not one man's decision though he carries the final responsibility of this nomination.

Resolutions passed in the Pratinidhi Sabha and Kendriya Karyakarini Mandal truly reflects RSS views of various issues facing the nation and Hindu society at a given time. A serious student of the RSS should read these resolutions which are made public immediately and sent to media for publication. He or she will, then, be able to appreciate the clarity of thought, assertive and uncompromising views on various national and social issues which are guided by a long term vision of this great nation rather than short term political exigencies of the times. It has supported any government whole heartedly in case of any foreign aggression through resolutions and on ground. In its resolutions, RSS has criticized or supported the government of the day purely on issues and policies. Even while criticizing a policy or situation, it offers solutions to the situation and its full support

for such measures. In most of the difficult situations, it appeals to swayamsevakas to come forward to resolve it and then exhorts citizens of India to come forward to help resolve a problem. If governments were to give a little importance to these resolutions they could gain much from the accumulated wisdom from the field.

Communications

A special feature of RSS is that all its shakha commands are in Sanskrit. The senior office bearers and select seniors of the RSS who sat down to give a formal shape to day to day working of the RSS after a few years of its inception, decided to opt for Sanskrit to take care of the problem of multiplicity of languages in India. Sanskrit, being the mother of Indian languages, was the ideal choice. It is a different matter that even this integral approach is a grudge point for its critics. Though, Hindi is the most spoken language, the RSS gives equal respect to all languages. This has resulted in a harmonious growth of the RSS and a sense of oneness between the volunteers of different regions.

There is a structured way a communication or an instruction passes from the headquarters to a local shakha or from a state level or district level to the local level unit. It is an unwritten protocol that any directive or information must pass through the designated hierarchy. There is no short cut from top to bottom or bottom to top. There is formal and informal system of information sharing that flows both ways. This two way flow of information and feedback helps its leaders to remain firmly grounded on social and political issues from local to national or international level.

Communications in any particular region generally happens in the local language. Even English is used where required. Patriotic songs that are sung in shakhas are either in Hindi or the local language. There are a few Sanskrit songs also. The daily prayer that is recited as the concluding activity of a shakha is in Sanskrit.

Personality Neutral Organisation

A unique feature of the RSS is that the ‘Guru’ i.e. the supreme teacher of RSS members is not a person. It is ‘Bhagwaa dhvaj’ or ‘saffron flag’ (like we see on the temples). Doctor Hedgewar realised through his long social career that no person can be perfect. A Guru has to be as perfect as possible. Even a perfect person can make mistake and fall from grace. There are a number of examples about fall from grace right from Sage Vishwaamitra to modern times. The supreme guru needs to be above reproach. A human being as a Guru can also lead to personality cult where a person becomes more important than the purpose.

The Guru must also reflect all the qualities that the organisation wishes to imbibe and remind one of its ideals. Considering all these factors, Dr Hedgewar decided that ‘Bhagwaa Dhvaj’ should be the supreme teacher or the Guru of the RSS activists. It symbolises all that is noble, all the qualities worth imbibing - glorious heritage of Bharat, spirit of sacrifice as well as courage. From time immemorial, this flag has had a pride of place in India, used on the chariot of various warriors since the times of Mahabharata to Swami Ramdas (Guru of Shivaji) and worn by great saints from ancient times to current times. Most inspiring of these in modern times is Swami Vivekanand, named ‘the Saffron Monk from India’ by the mesmerised Americans. Saffron reminds one of all that is great and noble about this country. In that sense, ‘saffronisation’ of country is a desirable objective.

This far sighted idea of Doctor Hedgewar has stood the test of time. Every time one its illustrious leader passes away, press and critics write obituary of RSS. But, organisation keeps growing irrespective of the person who heads the organisation. The activist is so clear about his mission that it does not matter who is heading the organisation. If he has a problem with any pronouncement of the Chief, he will criticise or complain to his seniors or colleagues, but will keep working nonetheless, knowing that mission is bigger than any person. No person is bigger than the organisation or the ideology. RSS calls its work ‘vyakti nirapeksha’ and ‘sthiti nirapeksha’ that is, not dependent on a person or a situation.

Self Financing of the Organisation – Guru Dakshina

RSS has a unique system of financing the activities of the organisation at all levels of operations. It has been criticised and targeted for legal actions many a times by many governments that are envious of the smooth working of the organisation. It is the only organisation which, has not asked for donations or grants to run its organisation in its entire existence. It is the only organisation where members spend out of their pocket to enjoy any activity or face any hardship of winter camps, or training camps, and even social work. For any activity, the members contribute to the cost themselves, ‘going Dutch’ as we call it today. If a member cannot pay for his camp fee, another member may help him out without any other people in the group knowing about it. It is like a family.

There is an annual function (or festival or utsav) named ‘Guru Poojan and Guru Dakshina’ (worshipping the Guru) which takes place on the auspicious occasion of ‘Guru Purnima’ a festival dedicated to worshipping and expressing one’s gratitude to one’s teachers and is celebrated all over India since time immemorial. This day is also called ‘Vyas Puja day’ in the memory of ancient Guru Ved Vyas. In this programme, all the members bow before the Guru – Bhagwaa Dhwaj, offer flowers and dedicate their own contribution for the organisation in an unmarked envelope. There is no discussion afterwards about who donated what amount. There is no distinction between a rich and poor member; nor are the organisational posts offered on the basis of one’s financial clout or on the basis of this once a year contribution. This contribution is deposited with the local branch and is used for various activities of RSS and sometimes offered for some other activities where it is needed. It is also used to support the pracharak’s expenses who works in that area. Thus, RSS is a fully self-financed organisation. This independence from favours gives RSS the moral strength to stand up to any persecution and not to bow to any pressure.

Training Camps and Workshops

There are annual winter camps of two to three days for all the volunteers – for all age groups: 12 to 80 years. Participants in these camps are members

who attend shakhas regularly. These camps have physical as well as intellectual sessions. These are intensive, highly exhausting and physically challenging camps that act as refresher courses and renew the energies of hundreds of volunteers who come together. This coming together of similar minds creates very positive vibes for the attendees. The atmosphere is of military like discipline with a command structure and generates an energizing experience, though facilities are very sparse.

There are monthly or periodic workshops for the budding activists and young workers who have taken some responsibility already. They generally take place on weekends and are conducted at local level, tehsil or district level, depending on circumstances and organisational strength in the area. These have emphasis on skill enhancement in dealing with people and situations, intellectual training and physical drills.

Sangh Shikshaa Varg

The most important training that an activist goes through is Sangh Shikshaa Varg (or Sangh Training Workshop). This used to be called OTC (Officers' Training Camp) in earlier days. These workshops are conducted in summers and last for three to four weeks. They are held, at state or regional level as making various arrangements for such a long period is not an easy task nor is it easy to get training faculty for a month. The entire physical and intellectual training faculty is voluntary. People take special leaves to attend or contribute to arrangements (called *prabandhaks*) or as instructors. I know of a volunteer, Apte ji who left for his training camp on the very next day of his marriage.

The participants need to qualify for training camp through a primary training workshop of one week which takes place once a year at district level. The attendee also needs to have some RSS related responsibility i.e. he should be an office bearer. There is an age bar and young activists below 16 years are not allowed as the person needs to be mature enough, and these camps are very strenuous.

The training is done over three such summer camps. They are called *pratham varsh* (first year), *dwiteey varsh* (second year) and *triteey varsh* (third year). The final training or third year training is conducted centrally at Nagpur. This is the ultimate qualification for an activist, referred to, in lighter vein, as post-graduation.

For all these workshops, the physical instructors are supposed to be third year trained activists and intellectual training sessions are conducted by senior workers and pracharaks. The senior all India office bearers or pracharaks travel relentlessly all over Bharat for atleast two to three months as the training camps have to match with local summer vacations of colleges, making it necessary to spread them over this period. These camps have very tightly organised time tables. The sessions are divided into physical activities and lectures with discussions. The early mornings and evenings have tough physical regime while rest of the day is devoted to intellectual training.

Activists who attend these one month camps or workshops remember them long after passing out of them. The duration of one month is not easy for the members of a family as one has to manage vacations and sacrifice holiday fun. The very fact that not many people go beyond first year underlines this difficulty in making time for it. People who come for third year are, ofcourse, very well seasoned. The third year being centrally held, meeting people of all regions right from Kerala to Bengal to Jammu to Gujarat is an experience itself. People who reach this stage cherish this experience through life. For people who come from outside Nagpur, it is like a pilgrimage to visit the place of its birth and place of birth of its founder.

Thus, the image that blind critics of Sangh create – that of lumpen elements, riotous mobs and blood thirsty fanatics – is far removed from the reality of enlightened, highly trained, dedicated, selfless activists who sacrifice their most loved interests to work for the society, their motherland. By virtue of this kind of training over years, they can never be irresponsible street fighters or ruffians.

I have already explained the working of shakha. It is through these activities that the future managers and activists are trained in all aspects of organisation, management, creating and sustaining networks; and also trained in personal values of integrity, patriotism, spirit of sacrifice, selfless service to the society and burning urge to be ever ready to offer one's service to the nation in any capacity.

RSS is a self-propelled movement, powered by selfless citizens; and is a power house for all the activities of nation building.

XI

Institution of Pracharak

Pracharak system is a unique institution within the RSS. A pracharak is a full time volunteer of the RSS. He receives no salary or honorarium. So, he is different from the full-time paid workers of other social or political organisations. He stays in the RSS offices (called kaaryaalay in RSS terminology) or sometimes at sympathisers' homes. He lives within very simple and bare necessities of life and leads the life of a celibate or *brahmachaari*. Though he lives amongst families and in the society as a normal worldly being (*grihasthi*), he is a *sanyasi* or monk for all practical purposes. There are some exceptional cases where a person returned to family and professional life but, went on to work full time for Sangh like any other pracharak again.

This system of offering oneself for some years or for entire life for the nation was initiated during the times of Dr Hedgewar, the founder of RSS, and subsequently nurtured with care and love by Guruji who, more or less, created its institutional norms. The first batch of foot soldiers of Dr Hedgewar comprised of students who had passed school and were about to join college. He asked each of his talented students to go to different colleges in different states to study and work for Sangh there. Some went out of Nagpur as professionals, teachers etc. Though they were not designated pracharaks officially at that time, most of them became pracharaks subsequently, after completing their studies. and created the foundation of this system. Credit of initiating the second RSS chief Guruji

into shakha goes to one such student of Banaras Hindu University whom Guruji used to teach.

The RSS work is mostly carried out by members of society who carry out their normal duties of a student, a worker, a professional, an artisan or a farmer and a family man. They give their time and dedicate their efforts voluntarily to strengthen the organisation and spread its message. But, pracharak is the soul of the organisation. He is respected by every volunteer. He has a moral authority over and above the authority he is given officially. His sacrifice of the prime years of his life puts him up on a higher pedestal above the other normal volunteers and citizens. This is in keeping with hoary Indian tradition wherein a rishi or a sage commands more respect than a king or a businessman.

A pracharak starts out with a commitment of minimum three to four years but many pracharaks give their life time for this work. There is no compulsion to stay a pracharak for life. But, once the soul is enlightened with this sacrifice he perhaps, feels more fulfilled in this role than any other. He may extend his commitment upto any period as he wishes. Thus, thousands of such noble souls have surrendered their lives for the upliftment of the society and motherland. There are a few stories of some pracharaks who have actually turned *sanyasis*. May be, they become so spiritual through regular practice of yoga, meditation and service to the society that it leads them to this path. But, primarily a pracharak is a karmayogi who firmly believes that serving the motherland and the society is the best way to spiritual salvation. For example, there is an ordained *sanyasi* like Dr Vigyananand of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), IIT alumni, a Sanskrit scholar with multiple research degrees, who is a VHP pracharak. Guruji had taken 'diksha' to become a *sanyasi* through Ramakrishna Mission under Swami Akhandaananand but the emotional call from Dr Hedgewar to serve the society rather than look for his own '*nirvana*' in Himalayas pulled him back into active social life. This aura of a spiritual personality may have rubbed off on other pracharaks, and they too developed a spiritual outlook in life. This is the environment in which the first and subsequent generations of pracharaks were moulded.

The tradition of a pracharak being a *brahmachari* is more rooted in practicality of working full time for the society without any worldly responsibilities of his family rather than any spiritual or organisational dogma. We see simple family people give so much of time and resources to Sangh work that many times, families suffer and resent this focus on social work rather than family. This is true even for other dedicated people in social life outside the Sangh fold. Though, the passion for serving the motherland is fine, it is not practically possible for everybody to be as 'impractical' about his or her other duties to family. Thus, there is a need of a fully dedicated person without any family obligations. This simple ascetic like celibate life also makes him immune to any kind of corruption.

There is a shorter period version of pracharak called *vistaarak*. Here the commitment is for a shorter period of a few months to a year. The duties and style of work is same as that of a pracharak, but duration is lesser with clear understanding of the duration. As the word 'vistaarak' suggests, he is a person who takes up the task of expanding the work of the organisation in a new area to help the organisation grow there. There is an anecdote of an activist whose family was opposing his move to become a vistaarak. A senior Pracharak told him, "You should tell your family that you are going on probation as a trainee manager in a company called Hindustan Construction Company. The company provides lodging, boarding, free travel and clothes but does not offer any remuneration. They will surely agree!" Though, said in a lighter vein, how true! We would happily allow our dear one to take up such a chance but recoil at the thought of giving away our family member for an abstract idea of nation building even for a short duration.

One of the outstanding traits of the RSS pracharak is his utter simplicity and humility. An interaction with an evolved pracharak is a humbling experience in itself. For me, meeting Late Chamanlal ji, a very senior pracharak who used to stay in the Delhi office of the RSS was a pleasure for the aura that this ever smiling pure personality with a spiritual aura he exuded. It also used to be a humbling experience. He was very well known through his vast network and painstaking correspondence to keep in

touch with hundreds of people when there was no Internet, and post cards and inland letters were the way of life. But, as in case of all prachaaraks, he was not a known 'public' face. Once, some industrialist with a reference letter from an RSS worker was to come to Delhi to meet Chamanlal ji and the message was received in Delhi. On reaching Delhi station, this gentleman found a thin pyjama kurta clad simple looking man waiting to receive him. He was greeted with a warm smile and folded hand, and this simple man picked up his bag to take him to the *kaaryaalay*. The guest did not talk on way and kept busy with his own thoughts. On reaching the office, he asked Chamanlal ji, "where is Mr. Chamanlal." Our humble man, said with a smile, "Shrimanji, I am Chamanlal!" This Chamanlal ji had come from a very well to do family in Punjab, was a person who could walk into Mr Vajpayee's or any other leader's home unannounced, whose call would be answered with respect by one and all. He was a keen student of international affairs. He would never take anybody else's chair without permission, would stand up and offer water or tea to a visitor himself. He was an inspiration, beyond words.

Generally, all the prachaaraks are notable achievers in their field before they choose to give it up all. Many of the prachaaraks are gold medalists and university toppers. Most of them would have been great achievers in the field they chose because of their skills and academic qualifications. I am aware of a case where young activist wished to become a pracharak but he was not given permission as he hadn't finished his graduation at that time.

I cannot name current generation of prachaaraks. As an unwritten code of conduct they shun any kind of publicity about self. An attempt to do so will become, literally, a long calling list! But, I cannot resist giving a few examples to expand on this point.

One of the earliest pracharak of RSS, late Yadavrao Joshi was an accomplished classical singer. Dr Hedgewar once heard him in a concert where he had won '*Bal Gandharva*' citation. He called him later and told him that he would teach him (Yadavrao) a patriotic song. Yadavrao used to say, "That song later became the song of my life", and that is, he offered his whole life to the service of the nation. He was instrumental in establishing a

robust RSS network in South India. Such was his magnetic pull that out of 13 young people who went to a forest trek with him 8 became pracharakas, Ram Madhav disclosed once. Late Nana Palkar and Shivrai Telang were great writers. Nana Palkar wrote the popular autobiographies of the first and second RSS chiefs, as also one of the earliest books on Israel in India in late 1950s. Atal Behari Vajpayee was writing poetry since his pracharak days and his name as a poet came to light only when he entered politics. He has written some of the most soul stirring patriotic poems. One of such poem is, “Hindu tan man, Hindu jeevan, shat shat Hindu meraa parichay” (Hindu body and soul, Hindu life, cent per cent Hindu – this is my identity.) This is not the opportunity to quote the full poem, but it is the best exposition about what being a Hindu means and Hinduism is all about – an affirmative statement extolling the non-aggressive and enlightening role Hinduism has played in the world. Bachcharaj Vyas, a pracharak for two years, later on President of the then Jan Sangh was another great poet and many of his poems find place in RSS songs. Shri H V Sheshadri was a Karnataka state literary award winner. Most of the pracharakas, generally, become great linguists as a part of their job when they work in different states and regions. The pracharak in my area in Mumbai, now posted in Delhi, is a Gold Medalist, M. Sc. (Tech) from IIT. Late Shri Rajendra Singh, erstwhile RSS chief was a great teacher of physics. A renowned nuclear physicist once complained that RSS had taken away a promising nuclear physicist of India. He used to go straight from his RSS related tours to his class room to take his lectures in dhoti-kurta with his trade mark RSS pracharak jhola.

A pracharak cannot choose his place of work or field of work. He may be deputed to any area in India. He may even be assigned to another sister organisation if there is a request from there. Many people are aware of Deendayal Upadhyay, Nanaji Deshmukh, Sunder Singh Bhandari and Atal Behari Vajpayee etc. being deputed to the then Jan Sangh on request of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukerjee, founder of Jan Sangh. Eknath Ranade was relieved of his very important duties as *Sarkaaryavaah* (Secretary General) of RSS to take up the work of Vivekanand Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari. It is a national monument now. Dadasaheb Apte was released to organise

the fledgling Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Shyam Gupt who pioneered the Ekal movement of one teacher one school is another example. There are hundreds of such inspiring individuals.

A pracharak is supposed to adopt to the local environment and become one amongst the people with whom he works. There are cases of pure vegetarian pracharaks turning non-vegetarians when they started work in North East region of India as that is the way of life there.

In early days, pracharaks used to be sent to a totally new area with an introductory letter from Dr Hedgewar to a friend or contact there. Doctorji commanded such respect that this pracharak would atleast get a place to rest his back on reaching there. He had to adjust to whatever kind of support he could get, even sleep in the open sometimes. Pracharaks would travel by foot or in better circumstances, by cycle for miles and could end up with sparse and irregular food or no food at all. I suspect that the reason why many first generation pracharaks have serious health problems is that many a times they had to live on raw grams, skip food and lead a very tough life till some sort of network was raised in their area of operation. The travelling that this group does is beyond imagination. Guruji, the top leader of RSS used to say, "Railway bogey is my second home". He had toured the entire country from East to West, from North to South 66 times in his 33 year tenure, including the last two years of his life when he was terminally ill with cancer.

Since a pracharak is like a *sanyasi*, he is not supposed to have any attachment to any organisation or area. So, you find a pracharak from deep South becoming almost an UP-wala or a pracharak from Maharashtra becoming a Tamil over years. Since, the Sangh initially grew up in Maharashtra, the first batch of pracharaks and workers were Marathi speaking but some adopted Tamil, some Punjabi and some Gujarati as their preferred language. In early days, Dadarao Paramarth was sent to Madras Province, Tamil Nadu of today. Later Datta ji Didolkar and Shivram Joglekar were sent there. These three laid the foundation of Sangh work there. They not only became one with the local population but also mastered the language and were proficient in writing books and essays, not

just reading and speaking. Similarly, Madhavrao Muley practically becoming a Punjabi and Laxmanrao Inamdar, the mentor of current Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi settled down in Gujarat since his young days. This, again, is only a glimpse of a pracharak's life style.

Some of the pracharaks, who were deputed to political field, have also become mass leaders and hold political power with élan. Shri Narendra Modi is a recent example. Shri Atal Behari and L K Advani reached the pinnacle of power and simply said, "I am a swayamsevak."

This institution of pracharak has also been adopted by other RSS related organisations like ABVP, VHP and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) etc. Sangh is generally requested to loan a pracharak by any new Sangh inspired organisation that starts work in a new field. Later that organisation is expected to create its own band of workers, volunteers and even pracharaks. Thus, there are thousands of these quality people all over India spreading the good word about Hindu heritage, national unity, equality, social amity, dedication to society, its upliftment and citizen's duty in nation building. In general, helping India become a better place for all its citizens.

No wonder that inspite of virulent propaganda and campaigns of calumny against the Sangh school of thought the critics cannot stop its growth. The silent work by these virtual monks cannot be matched by hysteric outbursts of its critics. Positivity will always win over negativity.

PART III

THE MANIFESTATION

*Shalabh ban jalna saral hai sneh ki jalti shikha par,
Swayam ko til til jalaa kar deep bananaa hee kathin hai,
Sadhana ka path kathin hai.*

It is easy to be a moth and burn oneself over the glowing flame of love, but it is very difficult to be a lamp which burns itself, atom by atom to give light to others. Path to dedicated service is, indeed, tough.

– **From a Sangh song**

“All religions and sects are mine, all castes are mine, people living in hills and forests are mine. If they are unhappy then it is only because of our weaknesses. Our tribal society, lying neglected because of a big section of Hindu society that considers itself clever, is my inalienable part. I will do whatever is necessary to correct the wrongs perpetrated over years, awakening within all this kind of strong resolve; Hindu society will rise in a unified way; a strong society that would stand in its place of birth, in its own land from Himalayas to Oceans with its head held high in the world.”

– **M S Golwalkar (Guruji), 1966**

XII

Off Shoots

Sister/Associate Organisations

I have mentioned earlier about the gradual evolution of the Sangh in its working and its organisation over years as the situations emerged that demanded something more from RSS and its members. Interestingly, the term Sangh parivaar is a media invention. The Sangh leaders judiciously labelled the organisations inspired by the Sangh as sister or associate organisations. They didn't deal with them in terms of parent-child relationship, hence this term 'Sangh parivaar' was eschewed consciously. But, somehow by the grace of the media this term of Sangh parivaar has struck roots. I will attempt to give a better idea of the major organisations of this family or 'parivaar' in this chapter.

Late D B Thengdi described this evolution in the organisation as 'gradual unfoldment' of Sangh work. This unfoldment began with Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), followed by Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA). Bharatiya Jan Sangh was not actually an off-shoot of RSS. It was loaned some of the best talents at request of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukerjee by loaning him his best talents for Bharatiya Jan Sangh. Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) was born next, followed by Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Saraswati Shishu Mandirs (schools) for providing high quality value based education were started much earlier in 1952, though a formal structure of working under a parent body of Vidya Bharati took form much later. All

these organisations grew up to become the number one organisations in their respective fields. These are mass all India level organisations with their own networks, autonomous working structure, constitution and even, full time volunteers.

Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) is a distinct organisation in student movements of India and is known for its nationalistic approach and agitations in support of issue related to education and national security. A charismatic teacher, Prof. Yashwant Rao Kelkar, an ex-pracharak, founded ABVP in 1948 along with some other colleagues, including Dattopant Thengdi. In a way, this was an offshoot of the ban on RSS in 1948-49 when many senior activists decided to create new organisations for national renaissance rather than sit idle. Within years it became a dominant student organisation, winning over young students with its agitational but positive approach to student problems, national problems and due to its nationalistic orientation. It went on to win most of the student council elections.

Incidentally, ABVP was the first organisation to start the trend of beginning a function with '*jyoti prajwalan*' or lighting of the lamp. Till that time, ribbon cutting was the norm. Among many agitations it conducted, one was against infiltrators from Bangladesh much before it had taken alarming proportions. I could mention many more of their agitations but there is no space here. After the initial help it took from RSS with full time organisers or pracharaks, it was successful in creating its own methodology to influence young students to become full time volunteers or pracharaks for ABVP. At a time when there is a unifocal approach of most students on careers, to be able to persuade them to give precious years for the nation is quite an achievement. ABVP was one of the rare RSS related organisations not banned during emergency and all of us used this platform to carry on the struggle for democracy. Arun Jaitley was one of the star student leaders of ABVP and toured India extensively. Prof Bal Apte, vice president of BJP in last active phase of his life, was one of the key activists during Emergency.

ABVP's most important contribution to national integration is its trail blazing programme 'Students' Experience in Interstate Living' or SEIL. Under this scheme, young students from North East Indian states were escorted to places like Mumbai and Pune etc. They stayed with ordinary middle-class families who hosted them and put them to schools along with their own children. They would finish the schooling and return to their native land, taking with them lovely memory of India as their motherland and affection of other citizens of the country for them. They carried with them the message of national integration. We are aware that many of our friends talk of North East and its citizens as if they are from another country and refer to them in a derogatory manner. This movement attempted to reverse the trend and succeeded to a large extent. Many politicians of these North Eastern states have gone through this experience and their approach to local problems is more nationalistic, to whichever party they may belong. Bringing to the fore the plight of Arunachal Pradesh and the Chinese policies to dominate the region was possible due to such elements in North East. There are hostels now in Maharashtra catering to North East students. Thus, today we have a large contingent of such youth who fight with separatists and terrorists in their regions and keep the flag of national integration flying.

Bharatiya Jan Sangh (Indian People's Organisation) was born in 1951. I do not consider it as the first off-shoot of RSS in the sense that it was not initiated by it or its members. However, it was the first experiment for the RSS to send out its tried and tested people into another organisation to help them organise their activities outside its scope so far, in another sphere of social life. Some key RSS leaders did toy with the idea of floating their own political party as a strategy when the ban on RSS was not lifted inspite of being given clean chit by CID and the courts. on Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, a peaceful satyagrah by its members and presentation of written constitution as demanded by the government. A background paper for it was circulated within senior members and also deliberately 'leaked' to mediators and police to give an idea how they could hit Congress where it hurt most – decimation of monopoly politics of Congress. They had also

noted that during the fierce political onslaught on RSS after the Gandhi murder there was hardly any support from any politician when RSS was banned and falsely implicated in assassination of Gandhiji. In this backdrop other senior members persuaded Guruji to help organise the proposed political party that Dr Shyama Prasad Mukerjee wished to float. Thus, when Dr Mukerjee approached Guruji to help him for the proposed political party Bharatiya Jan Sangh, Guruji agreed to support him in his endeavour, though rather reluctantly. He firmly believed that politics or government is not the answer to the development needs of this country, and this required social action and dedication of the society itself.

Dr Mukerjee was a fierce nationalist and had resigned from Nehru cabinet as the Railway Minister on the issue of the 1949 Delhi Pact with Pakistani Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan. He wanted to hold Pakistan directly responsible for the terrible influx of millions of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan, who had left the state fearing religious suppression and violence aided and abetted by the state. He opposed Nehru's decision to allow Kashmir to be a special state and have its own flag and prime minister. In order to oppose this decision, he announced, "*Ek desh mein do Vidhan, do Pradhan and Do Nishan nahin challenge*" (A single country can't have two constitutions, two prime ministers, and two national emblems). He was incensed by Nehru's virtual abdication of responsibility on integration of Kashmir with India even as he took over Kashmir issue from Sardar Patel, stopping the march of Indian troops to trounce the first attack in 1947 through infiltrators by Pakistan and then taking the issue to United Nations inspite of the opposition from leaders like Sardar Patel. Later, after the formation of the Jan Sangh, he organised a protest march to Kashmir in 1953. He died an unnatural death due to lack of treatment, rather, due to mistreatment of the state government run by Sheikh Abdulla, the then Chief Minister and grandfather of the current Chief Minister, Omar Abdulla. L K Advani is quoted in a Zee News report 11-7-2011, Nehru did not even set up an enquiry to find out exactly what happened to his former cabinet colleague.

The involvement of young pracharakas led by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay led to steady consolidation and growth of Jan Sangh over years. With more and more involvement of the RSS pracharakas like Jagannath Rao Joshi in Karnataka, Bachcharaj Vyas in Maharashtra and more in other states it became a sister organisation of RSS. It was merged in a newly formed entity, Janata Party in 1977 following the Emergency and on advice from Jai Prakash Narayan. Its new avatar, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came into being in 1980 as the erstwhile members of Jan Sangh had to leave the party due to shenanigans of the socialists within the then Janata Party. Many non-Jan Sangh members of the party also left Janata Party and joined BJP as they felt that the Janata Party had not stood by its principles.

It is worth noting that Jan Sangh was not founded to establish 'Hindu Rashtra' or Hindu nation. There was a hard-core Hindu party like Hindu Mahasabha with illustrious leaders like Veer Savarkar to advocate 'Hindu Rashtra'. Infact, Dr. Mukerjee was a member of Hindu Mahasabha before he charted his own course. He laid strong stress on nationalism and non-partisan politics where policies were not based on religion and all citizens got an equal opportunity of progress.

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay gave the Jan Sangh a truly Indian economic theory of Integral Humanism based on his years of study of Hindu ethos and working at the ground level as a Sangh pracharak. If I were to summarise the theory, Integral Humanism sees the individual as the centre of an outgoing spiral where the individual is a part of family, society and the nation in an integral manner. All these units are interlinked and do not form concentric circles, disjointed with each other. It says that all economic policies should take into account not just physical needs of the individual, but also his all-round progress and spiritual and emotional fulfillment. They should reach out to the last individual standing in the societal hierarchy. It talks of total development of human beings of the society on the basis of 'chaturvidh purushartha' – four fold fulfillment of an individual – on the basis of fulfilling 'dharm' (spiritual needs and ethical practices) 'arth' (economic needs), 'kaam' (physical and material needs), and 'moksha' (nirvana or liberation from the cycle of birth and death).

Before this philosophy could be turned into a practical theory of development, he was murdered and case was never properly investigated by the government. Inspite the efforts to create a viable economic model by various scholars and research on the subject with the help of Deendayal Research Institute it has not taken a concrete shape yet, though DRI has used it to create its own applied model of development with various successful experiments in rural transformation, under the leadership of late Nanaji Deshmukh.

Deendayal Upadhyay used a term '*chiti of the rashtra*'. An equivalent term in English would be a mix of inherent spirit, intellect and soul of the nation. He proposed that every nation must have an economic and political system which is close to its '*chiti*', only then will that model succeed. You cannot impose a system which is alien to its '*chiti*'. We can understand now, why the half-baked socialist system failed in India and why communism has not been able to grow and infact, shrunk to two-three states. It also explains why unbridled Capitalism will not succeed in India. Marx gave a theory of historic evolution of economic model but even in his case, there was no practical model. Many models were developed but no successful model has come by so far. In case of the Sangh school of thought, the application of this theory was in the domain of Jan Sangh and then BJP has at the most, paid it lip service. However, a plethora of inclusive economic policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi tell us that he is trying to put Integral Humanism into practice by reaching out to the last man in the queue with various schemes.

Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) was established in 1955 by Dattopant Thengdi, a rare combination of an organiser who was also a hands-on leader with feet firmly on ground and a theoretician. He came up with a dynamically different philosophy in trade union field. Its basic philosophy is "Industrialise the Nation, Labourise the Industry and Nationalise the Labour". Dattopant Thengdi worked in first INTUC on invitation from its President Mr P Y Deshpande to gain experience of the trade unions before he launched BMS. From day one it was visualised as a trade union whose base sheet anchors would be - Nationalism, working as a

genuine trade union, keeping itself scrupulously away from party politics. It is a known fact that all the national trade unions were, at that time, linked to one or the other political party, overtly or covertly. Another differentiator of BMS was that they considered themselves as stake holders in a company so, as a policy; they would not damage any machines or premises where they worked even if they went on a strike. It struggled its way up slowly in an area highly dominated by Communists and Congress party. It speaks volumes about its staying power, long term vision and depth of its work that it held its first national convention only in 1967 after 12 years of hard work on the field. At the time the number of its affiliated unions had reached five hundred forty one and total membership was nearly two hundred fifty thousand.

The BMS insignia symbolises the rhythm between human controlled industrial development and agricultural prosperity. This is clearly depicted by impression of strong, confident and erect thumb of fist in between moving wheel and sheaf of corn. Incidentally, BMS is the first of all trade unions to use a human organ as a part of its logo. It promoted a dynamic and daring economic stance that the income-ratio in India should be one and ten.

Over years it became number one trade union in India rising against the labour unions entrenched in the field for decades. It has its presence in all sectors of economy. Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (Indian Farmer's Organisation) was born out of BMS, with specific focus on farmers' issues. It has a major presence across several states of India. Bharatiya Shram-Shodh Mandal' (Indian Labour Research Group) formed by BMS is a research based institution, established in 1980, to promote objective studies based on objective examination of facts and developments in the industrial field. An important practice initiated by BMS is to observe traditional Vishwakarma day, celebrated traditionally by artisans of India, as the Labour Day for Indian labour. According to BMS, Vishwakarma had more significance for Indian labour than May Day.

It would be interesting to note that D B Thengdi had written an epitaph of Communism way back in sixties when it was at its peak. He predicted

the breakdown of Russian system somewhere in late 1960s or early 70s. I heard him in an RSS training camp in 1973 giving a detailed analysis about his thesis. I believe that his monograph on the subject is still available. He had a firm belief, based on his in-depth theoretical analysis and available data, that Communism will fail and so will Capitalism in its present form. The second part of the prophecy has also turned out to be correct as the events of last few months show. He gave theoretical underpinning to the RSS view that only Hindu philosophy has the right answer to civilisational problems of coming times as it is the most scientific and integral thinking on temporal issues that govern human behaviour. This is the only philosophy which talks of material needs as well as spiritual needs for all round happiness of a human being. As famous Russian author Dudintsev said, man does not live by bread alone. Other economic theories of the left and the right treat a human being only as a consumer with physical needs. This is the prime reason they fail to give a complete solution for happiness. His enunciation of philosophy of 'Integral Humanism' (*Ekaatma Manav Darshan*) espoused by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay used to be the high point of any camp or workshop.

Media has, for years, been talking of ABVP and BMS as student and labour wings of the BJP, either out of ignorance or bias. I had been active in ABVP during the emergency period and had been attending its meetings, known many of the members and teachers associated with it for years. Similarly, I have been meeting BMS leaders during some joint meetings of associate organisations, where all these make presentations and discussions are held. Never can anybody doubt that these are autonomous organisations and BJP has no influence over them in matter of policies or programmes. It is possible in highly politicised cities like Delhi that some BJP members, especially former ABVP members, may be helping ABVP members in student body elections. But, to imagine these big organisations as wings of BJP is baseless and laughable. It is true that many ABVP activists who leave ABVP and wish to have a political career end up in the BJP because, for them, BJP is a natural party to enter politics. They couldn't possibly go to socialist groups which have more parties than members; or to the INC as

they had fought its erratic and pro-Communist and communal educational policies for years; nor is it easy for parties following political apartheid to accept ABVP members easily. Many of them have gone on to occupy powerful positions in the BJP. The fact remains that ABVP, as an autonomous organisation, does not listen to BJP on its policy and programme and is in no way its subsidiary. There has been lot of cross traffic between RSS, ABVP and BJP, yes. Many ABVP pracharakas have joined RSS after they passed their college years that forced them out of student life and have naturally taken up responsibilities in the RSS.

BMS is a fiercely independent body and it resisted all attempts to merge with other trade unions as suggested by Janata Party after the election win of 1977. Its opposition to BJP on many policy issues is in public domain

A media created myth says that **Rashtra Sevika Samiti** (Indian Women Volunteers' Association) is a subsidiary organisation of RSS. All such critics have missed the dynamics of the RSS. If they took care to read the history of Rashtra Sevika Samiti, they would realise that it was started by a self-motivated lady Smt Laxmibai Kelkar, popularly called 'Mausi ji' in 1936. A lady with a modern outlook, who had lost her husband at a young age, she was highly appreciative of the work of RSS. She wished to start a similar organisation for women in times when tradition bound a woman to her home and hearth, and she nurtured no independent identity. Smt Kelkar wished to fight this marginalisation of women, and chose to end it with the establishment of the organisation. She was convinced that the woman of the house was the one who initiated and nurtured value system or *sanskara* in the society. and she needs to be made aware of her responsibility. A woman is more than only a wife, mother or sister. With this in mind she had met Dr Hedgewar and argued for an organisation on lines of RSS. Doctorji conveyed his inability to organise such an organisation for women as it was beyond his knowledge and talent. But, he assured full co-operation to her if she were to start such a parallel organisation for women. Thus, Rashtra Sevika Samiti was born.

Rashtra Sevika Samiti has its own intellectual training material and methodology which is different from the RSS, though it borrows the

physical training from RSS. The Samiti is totally focused on women's issues. It has presence across India, though not on a grand scale like the RSS. It is a cadre based organisation too, and is doing a great service by defining their important role in the society. It runs a large number of social service projects running in hundreds, focused on women welfare. It has its own pracharikas who take the bold step of dedicating best years of their youth for social cause. In Indian society it is not easy for bachelors or single women to leave home and work for the society. When we consider the Samiti's work and the sacrifice of its activists, it is foolish to accuse the members of this organisation as backward looking. It is unfortunate that in the name of progressive thoughts any organisation or women who preserve traditions of Hinduism and bring in modernity to these values, can be abused or tarred imperiously by the so called progressive feminists.

It may be the right place to give a very straight answer to the accusation that the RSS is anti-woman and male chauvinist since it doesn't take women into its fold. The RSS is not a misogynist organisation, just because women do not comprise their cadre in shakhas. But, that does not mean that they are not allowed to participate in all RSS and associated organisations. The truth is that the number of women activists working through Sangh inspired organisations would be much larger than all other social and political organisations put together. The RSS sees women as playing a very pivotal role in imparting the right value systems in the family and providing moral and physical support to social development of the society in every sense of the word. RSS volunteers show the highest respect to women and no programme of the RSS has ever seen any misconduct of any kind with any lady. A swayamsevak is moulded with noble thoughts, and deems every woman of a household he visits either as a mother or a sister. I saw a very straight and simple reason behind it as I grew from a child to a senior worker in the RSS. The intense physical activities and games played in shakha cannot be done together. Nothing more should be read behind the decision of Dr Hedgewar to organise RSS as a male organisation. As the times change, as noted above, apart from daily shakha and its related

activities, women are invited to all RSS programmes. Monthly or festive gatherings see families come together for celebrations.

Late Prahlad Rao Abhyankar, a very senior Sangh functionary, is quoted as saying, “Shakhas don’t have women members but Sangh has.” We should note that the RSS affiliated organisations had more powerful women at the top much earlier than the self-proclaimed progressive organization like the CPM. Its politburo got its first woman member, Mrs Brinda Karat, after decades since its inception. It is an amusing subtext that the lady happens to be the wife of the General Secretary of the party. I have underlined this strange paradox not to deride anybody, but to underline the fact that this is a social phenomenon because of the late start Indian women got in the social and political life of the nation.

I may use this place to express another paradox of Indian socio-politics. That is, all, yes, all political parties for years had been dominated by Brahmins, without exception. Whether it was Congress (starting from Nehru to most of their powerful regional heads like G B Pant etc.), or communists (recall late S. A. Dange, E.M.S. Namboodiripad or socialists (Madhu Dandavate, Madhu Limaye et al) You would be surprised how long the list can be. We are proud that none of these great people played casteist politics and fought for an equitable society all through their lives. So, to keep painting RSS as an organisation dominated by Brahmins is nothing but a perverse play of casteist policies and refusal to accept that this was a result of the educational advantage that Brahmins had centuries back, given the curious ways of history, rather than a devious plan by Brahmins to dominate national political life. Now, we can see that there has been a vast change in socio-political conditions after decades of democratic polity. Within the RSS and its associate organisations, large number of leaders come from depressed categories like the Other Backward Classes (OBC) or SC and ST. BJP is derided as a ‘*bania*’ party by the Left, but the fact is that it has one of the largest numbers of members amongst all elected bodies from these very categories.

Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) is the largest Hindu organisation working for tribal welfare. Tribal population as per Indian census of 2011 is

approximately ten crore. It was founded in 1952 by Ramakant Keshav Deshpande, popularly called Balasaheb Deshpande who left his legal practice under inspiration from Guruji. He established a small hostel in a dilapidated building donated by Raja Vijaybhushan Singh. Before that he had worked in Jashpur, Madhya Pradesh on government deputation on request of Thakkar Bappa, a renowned Gandhian, who headed this mission devised by the then Chief Minister Ravi Shankar Shukla for tribal welfare. He was able to open 110 schools in a short time and ran many innovative welfare schemes. He went back to Nagpur after the death of Thakkar Bappa but was persuaded by Guruji to return to Jashpur and dedicated his life for tribal upliftment.

The effort of VKA like all other social service projects of RSS is not to offer charity but to make local populace self-reliant and generate self confidence at individual and societal level. The effort is also to help them gain confidence about their ancient traditions and practices and bring them closer to the mainstream national thinking. This means work in all segments of social life – education, health and rural development.

VKA faces a lot of opposition from Church, which feels threatened by this inroad into what it perceives as its monopoly area and ideal ground for doing God's own work: evangelism. It is unfortunate that media plays into the hands of this lobby and portrays work of VKA only as a counter to Church activities. People like Mathew S J, accuse and criticise the RSS and its associates for ignoring the less privileged. But, raise a storm when these RSS affiliates carry out welfare programmes. They should appreciate that finally the Hindu society is waking up and coming to the rescue of its brethren, rather than hating it for doing its duty. Does the Church alone have a birth right to 'serve' this segment of the population? Why is conversion freedom to choose, but a re-conversion back to original faith is communalism and is a divisive policy? There is enough evidence available about the hate campaign run by evangelists, funded from similar organisations and entities from across the globe. There is official FCRA data available that tells us that biggest share of foreign donations goes to Church supported organisations.

Saraswati Shishu Mandir, one of the largest chain of schools in India with nearly 27,000 schools was founded in 1952 in Uttar Pradesh with the initiative of Prof Rajendra Singh, Nanaji Deshmukh, Deendayal Upadhyay and Nanaji Deshmukh; all of them young RSS pracharakas at that time. These are all un-aided schools with very reasonable fee that provide Board level education with traditional Indian ethical value system. The teachers of these schools are known for their passion for education and national service.

Vidya Bharati, an apex body of many educational trusts, was established in 1977. Saraswati Shishu Mandirs have been brought under the umbrella of Vidya Bharati recently. Vidya Bharati works as a nodal coordinating agency for these schools and also other institutions right from primary schools to post-graduate institutes. The schools follow NCERT syllabi, but apart from this, they also provide education on moral and nationalist values to turn them into duty conscious citizens. 1-6-2016 edition of *The Indian Express* gives the news of an Assamese Muslim boy topping the standard X board results. While 2-7-2009 edition of *The Hindu* reported about the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs topping Odisha Board examinations. *The Indian Express* report in another issue noted that the consistently better than steady above average results of these schools prove that teachers and students have a high emotional quotient and commitment towards education and inspire better results.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) the most maligned organisation from the Sangh fold has, actually initiated many far reaching actions for reforming Hindu society and these should have been recognised as its signature achievements. However, the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation changed its focus and also the image of VHP. The VHP was founded to bring together all sects and faiths that traditionally fall under Hindu fold, and persuade various heads of mathams and temples, trusts etc. to come on a common platform to address serious problems of Hindu society. It was probably the only Sangh associated organisation to which the head of RSS, Guruji paid huge personal attention and devoted lot of time and efforts. He

delayed even his last phase of critical radiation therapy for cancer to attend state level conference of VHP in Gujarat.

Its agenda also included improving the working of temples and making them a vehicle of social change by taking more active role in temporal affairs that affected their followers' live or affected Hindu unity rather than only rituals. Till then, trust members generally did not look beyond the temple and its maintenance, that too poorly. Many such trusts would become personal fiefdoms. Effort was required to bring in some social angle and dynamism in religious affairs of Hindus, so that the saints would not just give sermons from their mathams or trusts alone, but come to the common people and inspire them to reform their faith and make it inclusive by taking in all sections of the society, regardless of caste and creed.

The Sangh felt that the objective of the VHP was very critical for the Hindu society; hence Gururji took upon himself to meet various gurus, saints and holy men. H. H. Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmay Mission along with Shri Shri Vishwesh Teerth of Pejawar Peeth played a major role in this initiative. A Sangh pracharak Dadasaheb Apte was deputed for this work. He was a scholar in his own right and could reach out to the Hindu saints and gurus with his sincere work and humble approach. VHP was officially established in 1964 at Sandeepani Ashram, the headquarters of Chinmay Mission in Mumbai and Swamy Chinmayananda presided over the first meeting of VHP in which many other great saints of various Hindu faiths and sects were also present. Its theme is "Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah", i.e. Dharma protects those who protect it. Swami Chinmayananda was the first president of VHP.

The first plenary session of VHP was held during the Maha Kumbh of 1966 at Prayag (Allahabad) that came up immediately after its formation. VHP organising committee had an enviable task of bringing together the leaders of all sects and faiths that shared umbilical relationship with Hinduism. It was not an easy task. Never had the Hindu saints and leaders and gurus of other sects had come on a single stage. Many of them had huge ego issues, some of them based on age old customs. There were many such other complexities. But, such was Gururji's saintly persona and so hard

he worked on them in his own inimitable gentle style that slowly, nearly all the saints agreed to attend this session. I have mentioned earlier that Guruji was an ordained *sanyasi* under the tutelage of Swami Akhandaanand, a guru-bhai (with common guru) of Swami Vivekanand. Such was the power of passion in Doctorji's simple speech that it is said that it pierced his heart. Naturally, Guruji could not say no to him. He sought permission from his Guru and was granted his wish to return to Nagpur and work for RSS. He was a sanyasi in normal worldly clothing all through life. It is said that he literally lay prostrate before many saints to persuade them to come on to a single platform.

This first grand conference saw, for the first time, the Shankaraacharyas, Achaaryas of all the major sects and mathams attending the session; and so did Jain munis, Sikh saints and Buddhist monks. It was a veritable Kumbh Mela of great evolved souls. The biggest and the historic achievement of this session was a resolution negating the division of society on lines of castes and the practice of untouchability. The persuasive power of Guruji and Swami Chinmayananda, venerable head of Pejawar Peeth, made this historic declaration possible, urging the holy men to break free of age old taboos and a rigid mindset. It was nothing less than a revolutionary moment for Hindu society.

Subsequently, many reformist programmes were taken up by the VHP. This included helping non-brahmin people to learn rituals and work as priests. VHP also supported initiation of women priests against generally established norms. It was able to mobilise masses for improving conditions of temples in various cities and towns. Thus, VHP has been a highly progressive organisation.

The biggest and defining event in its organisational life came with Ram Janmabhoomi agitation. The subject had such passionate appeal that it subsumed all other work and agenda of VHP at that time. The movement was about constructing a temple that befitted the status of Ram as one of the most popular and venerable God of Hindus. There are historical facts that prove that the site where the disputed Babri structure stood was the site of an ancient Ram temple. There were enough local and historical accounts of

various battles fought for its restoration. As is the practice of victors of Semitic or Abrahamic religions who destroyed all centres of faith of local population, this temple too had been destroyed. It is not a coincidence that even Krishna Janmabhoomi and the most venerable Shiva temple at Kashi faced the same fate. It was natural for Hindus to feel the need to have the temple which they believed was the birth place of Bhagwan Ram and where a temple existed before it was destroyed. Unfortunately, the secular cabal with strong lobby of Marxist historians like Romilla Thapar, Irfan Habib, R S Sharma etc who control all academia in India would simply dismiss the proofs submitted by scholars who presented the facts as a mere myth!. Like true cultural fascists, they decide what is the truth – only that which suits their world view is truth, everything else is ‘*mithya*’.

It is indeed tragic that this politics of vote bank and noisy posturing backed by ever obliging fifth columnists of the Marxist school in media, forced Indian Muslims to identify with a marauder like Babar and not with their cultural hero Ram. Their culture and traditions even today are more close to Hindus and naturally so as they also belong to the same stock. Most of the Indian Muslims have, after all, been converted to Islam by sword of attackers like Babar. For Hindus importance of Ayodhya is similar to that of Jerusalem for Jews, Muslims and Christians, or Mecca for Muslims.

The movement was able to convey the message that Hindus do not get justice even in their own land without resorting to extreme forms of agitation. The unfortunate events like destruction of the Babri structure that followed were not expected by anybody. Since, this subject is sub-judice cannot make comments on it in detail. But, it seems improbable that if the destruction was pre-planned then kar sevaks would not arrange for some good tools but perform this superhuman task in a few hours using things like uprooted steel rods of barricades as tools. Speed with which the structure came down speaks of the extreme passion that these kar sevaks carried in their hearts. Debris of that size would have taken days if not weeks to clear even with some implements. They were cleared overnight without any mechanical equipment. It must have been made possible only by dedicated and passionate volunteers who were there in lakhs, not by a

few hundred conspirators. There is no way a conspiracy hatched by hundreds and thousands of people can remain a secret.

The continuous stone walling of various proposals for a peaceful resolution led to such a militant exception. There is a whole series of events which shows why tempers reached that pitch. One needs to remember that this was the second time a mass of people came together for the issue. The first event in 1990 saw brutal police action which left hundreds injured and scores of people killed. People had braved all kinds of persecution and oppression to reach Ayodhya at the time. They had returned the first time with assurance of fulfilment of their agenda. It was natural that the tempers ran very high the second time around.

During this period of high pitched agitation, the more militant wing of VHP, Bajrang Dal was formed. Durga Vahini for young women was also established who were trained about Hindu ethos and also taught martial arts to generate self confidence. Many youth who found the inclusive and reformist style of RSS too mild joined Bajrang Dal. Once in a while they go overboard with some half-baked notions of Hindu culture and act as self-righteous protectors; and end up alienating people rather than bringing Hindus together. They are born out of circumstances created by secular extremists. If only their energies could be channelised to constructive reforms within the VHP, their positive potential can be utilized.

It is interesting that Naxalites and Maoists are not called members of Marxist parivaar but Bajrang Dal is called a part of Sangh parivaar. Even fringe organizations like Ram Sene are stamped as Sangh parivar, though disowned by it. By this yardstick, Naxals and Maoists too are by all means, members of Marxist parivaar. The ambivalent approach of CPM government of West Bengal towards Maoists and protection to Naxalites through various human rights lobbies is a more eloquent testimony than anything else. It is only now that they are on the receiving end that their language is changing.

It is a sad fact that negative actions of the Bajrang Dal attracts more media attention than the positive, constructive and peaceful work done by other organisations like RSS, ABVP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Vanvasi

Kalyan Ashram. I have never seen any decent news coverage of wonderfully organised reformist conferences of VHP, highly disciplined protest march or camp of ABVP, nor have I seen coverage of a grand and flawlessly organised camps or parades of RSS. Such coverage is a rarity.

In this massive disturbance over a time span of nearly a decade, the more positive agenda of VHP took a back seat for many years. But, gradually these issues are coming back on the action plan of VHP. VHP has thousands of social service projects in cities as well as tribal belts for economically and socially disadvantaged section of the society.

VHP too has its own systems of inducting full time volunteers or pracharaks and has a good organizational set up. I feel very sure that VHP will remain a major catalyst in reforming Hindu society and make various institutions more society oriented with service to the society, removal of inequity and promotion of social amity, promoting learning of ancient scriptures, getting rid of archaic customs as their primary goal.

Swadeshi Jaagaran Manch (National Awakening Forum) that burst upon the scene suddenly in 1992-93 with the advent of globalisation in India had clear economic agenda of opposing unbridled globalisation before Indian industry and commerce was internally liberalised. It did not work systematically for creating a practical economic model. Though, it was meant to spell out a strong nationalist economic agenda, it came out as a defensive organisation fighting the aggressive western capitalist imperialists that was not confident about success of Indians in that environment. As the scenario unfolded, we realise that lack of confidence was unfounded. The Indian industry, including much neglected small and middle-sized enterprises (SME) segment emerged from the rough patch with flying colours, barring those who did not focus on upgrading skills and quality to move with the times.

Prof Vaidyanathan of IIMB has in various lectures and articles notes that, our economy can be broadly summarised as 20 per cent agriculture – mainly small and medium farmers; 20 per cent government – central, state, municipal, PSUs, etc; 15 per cent corporate (companies governed by the 1956 Companies Act, of which some 8,000 are listed and 200 or so are

traded and five or so are influencing the entire market); and 45 per cent non-corporate sector, consisting of partnership and proprietorship firms. Even in manufacturing, these firms have more than 40 per cent of the value addition. The non-corporate sector is the dominant player in all the service sectors apart from IT which is a small part of this total service sector. SME segment has clocked a compounded annual growth rate of more than eight per cent in the last decade.

SJM could have given ideological strength and a new model to the government for this segment. It is sad that SJM ended up frittering away its energies in sloganeering and agitational approach to economic issues. Thus, a golden chance to define an economic policy based on Indian ethos was lost.

During this period, for once, the Left and the Right (by conventional idiom) were on the same side. The importance of SJM lay in raising a note of caution against unbridled liberalisation for external MNC giants without corresponding support to Indian industry that hobbled on a three legged race of red tapism and license raaj.

As history unravelled in free India, newer organisations were born, supported by RSS with generous help of organisers and pracharakas. All these are cadre based organisations and extension of RSS vision in action in different social spheres

Other organisations

Many other organisations were born in different social sectors in subsequent years. There are also organizations working in different social sectors like co-operative movement, teachers. Infact, there is hardly any facet of society that the RSS inspired organizations have not touched. The situation today is that even active members of RSS and associate organizations, sometimes, do not know which new organisations have come up and what they are doing in different sectors. People trained in the RSS or influenced by RSS philosophy are present in nearly all social fields.

Kushtha Nivaarak Sangh, established in 1962 by Sadashiv Katre, is a lesser known organisation that is doing some sterling work in the tribal area of Champa, Madhya Pradesh. He was a simple, common swayamsevak who was cured of leprosy but suffered hugely due to this disease. He used to volunteer at a local Christian missionary charity that worked for leprosy patients, but did not like the fact that missionaries converted those who sought treatments. Guruji asked him to put this resentment to good use and rather than fighting missionaries, start an organisation with a positive approach of '*seva*' or service. That is how this organisation was born. He was supported by local swayamsevaks and state pracharak in this work. Today, swayamsevaks of Uttaranchal, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Punjab are working in this neglected field with compassion. Many noble souls and good people are supporting this organisation.

Ekal Vidyalay movement is one of the most dynamic and fast growing young organisations that has come up in recent times. This movement is supported by many associate organisations like Friends of Tribals (FTS) and Van Bandhu Parishad. A senior RSS pracharak Shyam Gupt heads this initiative. Within a decade of its working, it established 30,000 schools, predominantly in Eastern part of India. It is poised to move into other regions also. These are single teacher schools. These teachers set up the school in a single room or under trees or in a room provided by some good samaritan or the panchayat; and teach underprivileged children at a time suitable to them. Now, they are also being trained to provide primary preventive healthcare support and simple medicines with primary health kits, this initiative is called '*Aryogya Mitra*'.

Sanskrit (Samskrita) Bhaarati under the guidance of Shri Chamu Krishna Shastri, an RSS pracharak, has done a great service of promoting Sanskrit by simplifying its learning. It has created thousands of Sanskrit speaking Indians with its scientific and simple technique of learning Sanskrit. Sanskrit Sambhashan Shibirs run by Sanskrit Bharati and other associates which train you in conversational Sanskrit have been hugely popular. Sanskrit is the mother language of all Indian languages and many an Anglo-European languages also.

We are aware that the most important Biotech research in MNC laboratories is happening on the basis of Ayurveda knowledge. The Guardian dated 22-2-2009 reports - In the first step by a developing country to stop multinational companies patenting traditional remedies from local plants and animals, the Indian government has effectively licensed 200,000 local treatments as “public property” free for anyone to use but no one to sell as a “brand”.

The move comes after scientists in Delhi noticed an alarming trend – the “bio-prospecting” of natural remedies by companies abroad. After trawling through the records of the global trademark offices, officials found 5,000 patents had been issued — at a cost of at least \$150m (£104m) — for “medical plants and traditional systems”.

“More than 2,000 of these belong to the Indian systems of medicine. We began to ask why multinational companies were spending millions of dollars to patent treatments that so many lobbies in Europe deny work at all,” said Dr Vinod Kumar Gupta, who heads the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, which lists in encyclopedic details of 200,000 treatments.

It is accepted well now that Sanskrit is the most scientific language and most suitable for computer programming due to its perfect syntax. It is unfortunate that we Indians still believe that it is a language for priests. Parents and schools virtually force children to take French as it is more ‘scoring’ In this scenario an organisation like Sanskrit Bharati has trained thousands of people in a few days to get preliminary grasp on the language, even helped villagers to speak Sanskrit. It has published 40 books and cassettes for easy Sanskrit learning. Around 1985, Mattur, a village in Karnataka State became a Samskrita village when a large number of families, irrespective of their caste and creed and profession, started to speak Samskrita in their homes. BBC covered this village in its reporting December 2014. According to news portal Detechter there are now 7 Samskrit speaking villages in India. Sanskrit Bharati is also active in many cities in United States now

Itihaas Sankalan Samiti is another smaller and relatively lesser known entity, floated in 1972 by people who view Indian history differently and do

not wish to colour their views by what has been put up as gospel truth by British historians and lapped up by our Marxist historians. It is possible that intellectual inertia does not permit these well entrenched intellectuals to do some original research at this age. This organisation was responsible for giving much required support to people who wished to do research on various non-researched and undiscovered aspects of Indian history.

A research work began under eminent archeologist Dr Wakankar that has used latest scientific tools including satellite imagery to establish the existence of river Saraswati, based on Vedic descriptions and verses, a river that British historians claimed was a myth. This thesis has claimed on the basis of scientific proof and evidence from Vedic verses that Saraswati was indeed the life line of Vedic civilisation along with river Indus, identified earlier with Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilisations, later extended to hundreds of sites in the same riverine area. It was identified with a dried up river bed which seems to be that of river Saraswati. This discovery would also challenge the theory of Aryan invasion and large scale violence to send Dravidians packing to South. Truth would be established that the people living on banks of Indus and Saraswati shifted or migrated to other areas on Ganges river and further South for reasons other than aggression by Aryans. Thus, effectively burying the pet theory of British school of historians and their followers putting all ‘outsiders’ from Aryans to Chengiz Khan to Shaka and Huns and progressive historians’ darlings – Mughals – at par.

The prevalent theory wishes to assert that India is a veritable highway stop over or settlement where all other travelers, hunters and aggressors came and settled, so there is no difference between Aryans or Hindus and Mughals. This theory is being challenged by historians with researches like the theory on river Saraswati and discovery of scores of other archeological sites along the Indus and Saraswati river course to the utter dislike of the left lobby. Website Defenceforumindia reported on 9-3-2016 that in 2002 – The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government gave the job to a high-power panel headed by the Culture Minister Jagmohan with 36 months to complete the project. Two year later, the UPA came to power and scrapped the project. The HRD minister at the time was Arjun Singh. Incidentally, the UPA

government in its response to a question in Lok sabha in December 2009 has confirmed that research proves the existence of this ancient river. Now, what should we call this attempt at falsifying the history in a bid to prevent its saffronisation?

Interestingly, Babasaheb (Umakant Keshav) Apte, the inspiration behind Itihaas Sankalan Samiti wrote a monograph on possible history of ancient India, *Hamaare Rashtra Jeevan kee Pramparaa* (Traditions in our national history) juxtaposing the Puranic stories of Dashaavataar (stories of ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu) onto archeological and geographical evidence. It is quite a riveting view based on his analysis. I do not know if RSS agrees with this line. It is a theory that seems to have led to a fresh line of thinking about history of India since antiquity and gave Itihas Sankalan Samiti a sense of direction.

Itihas Sankalan Samiti has local district level committees that are working on documenting historical facts of area where they operate, thus compiling a comprehensible district level documentation of possible historical facts on a micro level that may lead to some interesting macro-level historic model not evident so far.

Sanskaar Bharati is an organisation which promotes Bharatiya art form and culture through various activities and events. Dr V S Wakankar, world renowned archeologist was the moving spirit behind this movement. Its two main objectives are – promoting originality, creativity and social and educative content of art and second to realise in Man – Nature’s greatest piece of art – the fulfillment of “Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram”. It promotes folk arts in all its facets and conducts various training classes to expose people, particularly young children to rich cultural heritage of India.

The most notable of its activities that has caught the popular imagination is its promotion of the Hindu New Year which is being celebrated very enthusiastically by all the sections of Indian society. Humungous, record breaking rangolies in Thane city in Maharashtra, early morning cultural programmes including dance and music recitals on banks of the Ganga in Kashi, huge colourful processions in Mumbai and many other places in India are the manifestations of this event. Another

innovative and inspiring programme which attracts thousands of school children all over India is its national competition of patriotic songs. They hold talks and cultural programmes linked to Indian culture.

Vivekanand Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari run by Vivekanand Kendra is an associate organisation of RSS. It is an autonomous and large organisation by itself now. Vivekanand Rock Memorial project was initially supported and nurtured by RSS under a senior pracharak Eknath Ranade. It has developed and trained its own missionaries. The memorial at Kanyakumari was built with great difficulty and against strong protests from Christian clergy of the area which abetted local fishermen against this memorial. But, RSS volunteers of the area fought all this off with resilience and inner strength. Finally, the grand and solemn memorial that we see today was born under the able leadership of Ranade. It is now a national monument and major tourist attraction. Vivekananda Kendra established in this campus runs its own relief works, schools and yoga training schools across India with special focus on the North East. Scientific study and research on Yoga is another of its forte.

There are thousands of organisations that operate at local level all over India in fields like education, health, rural development and environment. I have tried only to give an idea about all India organisations. In all there are approx. 28 all India organizations in different social segments. This itself is a subject or has within it, possibility of a number of subjects for doctoral thesis. I have only tried to give a fleeting view of the manifestation of RSS work in different social and geographical segments of India in form of organisations that span the entire social landscape of Bharat. One would be surprised to note that research on RSS and its allied organisations as a Doctoral thesis is discouraged. I know of only of one such thesis done by Dr Sadhana Modh whom I have quoted earlier. She had to go to Jabalpur University to do this thesis as she didn't get a positive response in Mumbai. There may be a few exceptions but I have not come across any so far. However, there are hundreds of doctoral thesis on RSS done overseas.

I may add that major organisations listed above like BJP, ABVP, VHP, BMS, VKA etc. have grown big over the years and have their own cadre,

sympathisers and supporters. They can no more be seen through the prism of parent-child organisational relationship. I feel that RSS no longer guides them as much as advise them or collaborate with them. It is like a son growing big enough that his feet now fit into father's shoes. In Indian tradition it is said that once child's feet fit into father's shoes, he should be treated like a friend. I have reasons to believe that RSS does not play a guiding or dominant role in these mass organisations but advises and tries healthy co-ordination between various sister organisations. In corporate terms, RSS equity in these subsidiaries has diluted and they have become independent corporate entities themselves with RSS having only a critical holding but not controlling stakes.

XIII

Nation, Society and RSS

Second Line of Command

Many people of this generation are aware of the social service work of MRSS or seva, as RSS defines it, though not the spread and depth of this work. But, not many are aware of the sterling role RSS volunteers have played in the defence of the country and fought the fissiparous and centrifugal forces right through pre-partition days to present. It has acted like a strong second line of defence. It has been around even when the state apparatus hasn't worked in time or failed; so we might say it works virtually like a second line of command.

I will try to provide only a 'fast forward' view of many of the stirring tales of struggle and sacrifice. 'RSS – Vision in Action' by Shri Sheshadri Chari, provides a vivid account of such fight backs in the interest of national integration by dedicated unsung national heroes. Most of the information and incidents have been taken from this book as it is an authentic account narrated by the erstwhile Sarkaaryavaah of RSS. I have used references from this book in earlier parts of the book too.

When the Partition became a real possibility people thought only RSS could avert the tragedy and there was a huge groundswell in its base. The RSS volunteers prepared themselves for the worst, to fight this idea of partition and also be ready for any eventuality. The declaration of independence was, in fact, brought ahead by ten months by the British. The

original date declared for declaration of freedom of India was June 1948, but it was brought ahead to Aug 15, 1947, fearing strong backlash and popular support against partition, in which RSS too was playing the role of catalyst. RSS Sarsanghchaalak Shri Guru ji toured Punjab and Sindh provinces frequently and RSS work grew there rapidly.

There was a grand conspiracy by Muslim League supporters to assassinate all members of the government and all Hindu officials and thousands of citizens on 10 September 1947 and hoist Pakistani flag on the Red Fort. This incident was averted due to timely information to the government of India by young volunteers of RSS. I have given details of this incident in the annexure.

At the time of partition, hundreds of swayamsevakhs lost their lives defending their Hindu brethren, stuck in areas that were to go under Pakistan, from Muslim plunderers. Many volunteers lost their own families and fortunes while they defended Hindu community in the chaos of the Partition. A very moving account on the loss and painful plight of volunteers and pracharakhs of the time has been captured by a Marathi writer, Neelkanth Deshmukh in his small novel, '*Naahee Chira Naahee Panati*' – Neither ray of light nor the lamp. A N Bali who has written a well-documented book '*Now it can be Told*' published in 1948. He says, "Not a single survivor of partition can, but pay his respect to RSS volunteers for saving their lives and safe passage to India as well as taking their care when they landed in refugee camps."

Infiltration of Pakistani tribals into Kashmir was stoutly resisted by Sangh members during July-October 1947. Prof. Balraj Madhok was the chief organizer of RSS in Kashmir at that time. In his account of the times in form of a novel in Hindi – '*Kashmir Jeet ya Haar*' he has given date wise account of dare devil work of RSS workers in those days. There were major riots in Jammu city when around 20,000 Muslims of that region decided to take control of Jammu as a part of annexing J&K with the help of tribal Pakistanis supported by the Pakistani army. Right from holding onto their villages, providing intelligence to army, supporting army movement, they worked relentlessly, oblivious of their own safety or of their family

members. Many lost their lives and members of their family. This was a period when the Maharaja of Kashmir Hari Singh was still not sure about the accession of J&K to India. Finally Hari Singh signed the treaty. During this interim period of chaos, the RSS volunteers held fort at the risk of their lives, until the Indian troops arrived. Prof Balraj Madhok's account is confirmed by K C Agnihotri in his book – 'Jammu Kashmir ki Ankahee Kahani.'

Supporters and erstwhile workers of the RSS formed a new political party – Praja Parishad to fight separatists in J&K, and struggle for full integration with India. The struggle saw major phases in 1948, 1950-51, 1952-53. The oppression of people who wished full integration of J&K and opposed Article 370 was unimaginable with the central government unyielding to the calls of patriotic Indians in the fond hope that Sheikh Abdullah would get it out of the mess, not realising that his National Conference was playing this game of separatism through various moves. There was heavy censorship on news, thus information on J&K was limited. This obviously stalled the broadcast of the agitations and human rights violations against the volunteers of Praja Parishad. Senior leaders were put behind bars. The agitation reached its peak when Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee led a march to J&K in May 1953 but was arrested at the J&K border on 11 May. The arrest ended in his medical murder through negligence on 23 June 1953. Another spate of atrocities on agitators was let loose. Suddenly, on 9 August 1953, GOI saw the light and the J&K government was suspended by the centre, and arrested Sheikh Abdullah. Having succeeded in its mission of stalling Congress and National Conference machinations, Praja Parishad merged with Jan Sangh. K C Agnihotri has given a well-researched account of those days in his book Jammu Kashmir ki Ankahi Kahaani.

Many of us are not aware that territories under Dadra, Nagar, Haveli were 'liberated' in a satyagrah led by a hundred RSS swayamsevaks who raised the tricolour on the government buildings on 2 August 1955. They were feted years later and recognised as freedom fighters. The RSS swayamsevaks were involved in the freedom struggle for Goa in every

phase. They were part of satyagrahi teams that included prominent leader like Jagannath Rao Joshi, who later went on to join Jan Sangh. They arranged for the food and shelters of satyagrahis who came in thousands during this struggle. In 1955, a swayamsevak raised the Tricolour in Panaji and was in prison for 15 years even after Goa was freed from the Portuguese in 1961.

During 1962, the Indian communists had supported the Chinese aggression. Their leaders like Basavaponaiah went to the extent of saying that India was the aggressor, while a section of the party claimed that Chinese forces were liberating India from capitalist exploitation. Some of them were arrested for anti-national activities. There were major fissures in party on this issue which ultimately led to its break up. As an abetment to Chinese, communist trade union controlling water transportation services in north eastern region went on a strike impacting supply of materials to Indian army. Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) fought this tooth and nail. It took a decision to have very strong unions in all defence establishments to stop any such blackmail in future. As noted above most of the incidences noted here are taken from 'RSS – Vision in Action'.

A massive movement was organised to oppose transfer of 9000 sq km of Kutch to buy peace with Pakistan. The RSS fully supported an agitation of the Jan Sangh to fight it tooth and nail. One of the biggest rallies was witnessed in front of the Indian Parliament in August 1965. Similarly, transfer of land of Tin Bigha signed in 1974 was also fought on the borders with Bangladesh in which Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) played a key role. Hundreds of agitators were beaten up; put behind bars, a worker was killed in police firing. After years of struggle the Centre finally understood the strong sentiments of people who would have been isolated in Bangladesh due to giving up of this strip of land and the agreement was modified in 1992.

During wars against India, from 1962, 1965 to 1971, the Sangh volunteers were there – running free canteens for army men, supporting the army by holding on to the supply lines. There are soul stirring stories of these from different wars on how swayamsevaks led by their local leader in

Rajouri, Fazilka and Ferozepur refused to vacate a village or a town inspite of Pakistani shelling. This did indeed raise the morale of local people, the local administration and extended the support to the army in every possible way. RSS has provided support right from Kutch to Rajasthan, Punjab, J&K to the borders of Bangladesh.

Recognising the role that the RSS played in national emergencies, Pandit Nehru invited them for Republic Day parade in 1963. A 3000 strong RSS contingent in uniform participated in the parade with just three days' notice.

From early days of East Pakistan and then Bangladeshi citizens' infiltration RSS and affiliates have been agitating, petitioning, raising concern about this dangerous infiltration. It would surprise the reader that this Muslim infiltration to Assam valley by design started way back in 1921 when the Assam government formed in 1921 with the support of Assam Mohammedan Association gave implicit support to this migration from Muslim areas to Assam valleys in the guise of 'Grow more Food' what was described by British as 'Grow more Muslims'. ABVP and the then Jan Sangh were in the forefront of such agitations. In 1950-51, Jan Sangh formed a committee of highly influential citizens which finally forced the government to push back two lakh infiltrators. ABVP supported All Assam Students Union in the agitation to stop Bangladeshi infiltration in Aug-October of 1983. It is sad that the then West Bengal government headed by Communist parties had covertly supported this Bangladeshi infiltration to augment its vote bank. Similar agitations were conducted by ABVP in Bihar in 1981, which was also a hotbed of this active infiltration. The conversion of the border districts in Bihar and West Bengal into Muslim majority areas is not a result of growth in local Muslim population, but a part of plans of maulvis under the thumb of extremist elements of Pakistan and Bangladesh to control these border districts. This has been a matter of many studies on census reports. A report in India Today published on 21-2-2014 corroborates this conclusion.

During the building of the Rajasthan canal later named Indira Gandhi canal. years back, local people saw a sudden spurt in Muslim claims in

Barmer and Jaisalmer areas. Sangh and ABVP got into action and it was found that a large number of Pakistanis had crossed over to Indian side to file false complaints and grab land. Even local Muslims supported Sangh in this work to identify these people and thousands of them were pushed back.

We are well aware of the recent 2008 agitation about Amarnath Yatra facilities conducted by the local people in Jammu who were fed up with continuous marginalisation of their role in government both in government jobs and role in governance. and step motherly treatment to Jammu and Ladakh region. All the talks of political settlement are centered around Kashmir valley and its separatist elements; as if Jammu and Ladakh and their Hindu and Buddhist citizens don't exist. It is strange that Jammu has less number of seats in the J&K assembly though it has more area and more population. This decision about number of assembly seats was ad-hoc decision of Sheikh Abdullah government supported by Congress. The state apparatus controlled by Kashmiri politicians saw skewed government priorities in favour of the Kashmir valley. It is a set convention that J&K will never have a Chief Minister from Jammu region, whatever be the result of an election. This sense of being exploited and treated as second class citizens exploded in fury when the land given for temporary use for Amarnath yatra was taken back under threat from extremists and terrorists. It was an agitation which had entered each and every home of Jammu and people fought at every street corner. Women, children and men – all came onto the streets. The RSS provided organisational backbone to the agitation that was totally run by citizens of Jammu. The markets were shut down for weeks and people lived in great difficulty but refused to surrender to the whims of the state government that professed to be that of J&K, but worked only for Kashmir. Finally, the state and central government buckled and an agreement was signed. It is sad that these patriotic agitators who waved tricolour flag were often compared with extremists who waved Pakistani flags in Kashmir.

ABVP volunteers, RSS workers, VHP and many Hindu missionaries have paid a heavy price with their lives working in Naxalite infested areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and the North East. RSS volunteers

have been murdered and maimed in broad day light, in front of students in class, in markets by communist goondas in Kerala for years. Finding no support from the government hostile to it, sometimes RSS volunteers have also retaliated in self defence as newspaper reports tell us. Even teachers of the schools run by these organisations are not spared. Murder of Swami Laxmanaanand in Odisha became news because of the popular backlash of the local people against the administration. There are heart breaking instances of violence against RSS volunteers like one in which they were picked up in Tripura by NLFT extremists supported by the Baptist Church and taken to Bangladesh border never to be seen again. This incidence was covered in India Seminar, Feb 2002 issue.

This fight for national integration continues even today. Local village defence committees in Jammu region are fully supported by RSS members. at risk to their lives. This is the reason why J&K People's Democratic Party (PDP) and J&K National Congress (NC) are unhappy with the RSS and label it communal. Associate organisations of the RSS have set up special schools for displaced Kashmiris and people affected by terrorism. These schools have members of all communities including Muslim children, and there have been no attempts to convert them.

It has been rightly said, price for liberty is eternal vigilance. And RSS, as an organisation has been the vigilant arm of this nation all these years.

This would be the right place to recall that Dr Hedgewar suffered two jail sentences during the satyaagrahas in 1918 and 1930 totalling 19 months. As a member of organising committee of the INC session held in Nagpur during this period in 1920, he had proposed a draft resolution in the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920 stating that the party's aim was "to liberate the countries of the world from the vicious circle of exploitation by the capitalist countries." This resolution shows that his priorities were very clear at that time too. The vision was not religious but nationalist and economic. In 1930s, members of the RSS were also part of his contingent. In keeping with his philosophy, before he chose to offer satyagraha, he gave up the post of RSS chief and passed it on to another senior worker before he went for satyagraha.

The RSS volunteers supported the 1942 agitation by whatever means they could. Many agitators were given protection in homes of RSS swayamsevak and supporters including that of Lala Hansraj Gupta, who headed RSS in Delhi during those times. I quote here from a mail I received from a senior citizen and longtime RSS worker who was a young swayamsevak at that time, “I was around 19 years old. At that time there were two choices: either to join the movement for freedom struggle or unite the Hindu Samaaj. I thought the masses had no discipline. I strongly felt that if the society is well disciplined and well united, it can achieve the goals faster. I felt that the youth should work toward uniting the Hindus, while the middle-aged people and mature adults should join the freedom movement directly.” I have given more information about the 1942 movement in the annexure.

Doctor Hedgewar was clear from the beginning that the RSS was a man-making mission and part of the society. Any action outside its scope should be done by the volunteers themselves either individually or with another organisation. The RSS thinking was that unless there is a strong and disciplined organisation with substantial number of self-motivated people that could influence the society to act in a united manner, the struggle may not result in desired results. He had sensed that a weakened Britain due to World War II in 1940s provided an opportunity to free India. with an organized, disciplined and patriotic force. He worked very hard to bring RSS to that strength. It is said that even in sleep he would murmur, “Time is fast running out and yet we have not reached our goal.”

Positive Force of Social Harmony

An RSS swayamsevak is trained from the day of his induction in such a way that caste and sects. have no meaning for him. He sees all members of the society as his brethren. He has a much larger identity of a Hindu. As he gets more involved in this work, his world view becomes more compassionate and all inclusive. No person is small or big by his profession or riches, nor by caste. All his actions are in tune with this mental makeup.

He doesn't need preaching about equality and social harmony. The initiative taken by the VHP to declare untouchability unacceptable by various saints of Hindu community, open criticism of casteism and untouchability by the RSS heads is to be seen in this context.

RSS has undertaken conscious steps to break the caste based divide and reform people's thinking to rise above caste and religious divide. Organisations like Saamaajik Samarasataa Manch (SSM) have worked hard to remove this sense of discrimination and bias between communities. But, most touching is the way individual activists have brought about a sense of social harmony effortlessly through their individual behaviour and actions. '*Malaa Umagalele Doctorji*' (Doctorji, as I understood him) is a poignant account by Ramesh Patange about a Scheduled Caste person's rise (himself) from being a tailor's son living in slums to becoming a respected literary authority through the portals of Sangh. It explains how a person from low rungs of the society can realise his potential without any outward act of charity

I recall the charged atmosphere of our nation when then prime minister V P Singh implemented the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, which suggested 27 per cent quota for the backward classes. This implementation drove a caste cleft in the Hindu society that was marked with widespread agitations nation over. Cleavages that were disappearing, re-emerged given the nature of Mandal Commission recommendations. This was V P Singh's most cynical ploy of implementing the commission's recommendations which were lying in the cold for decades. There was no public debate, there was no attempt at creating a consensus or sensitising people about the problems that scheduled castes, tribes and backward caste people face. The issue of reservations suddenly became a burning topic which created long-term bitterness.

In this highly charged atmosphere, senior leaders of the Sangh decided that the volunteers must be sensitised to the plight of their less fortunate brethren and to reason with right perspective. Swayamsevakas being a part of the society were also upset with these developments. Special three to four hour long workshops were conducted at various places, addressed by

senior RSS workers and pracharaks, some of them belonging to Schedule caste and OBC groups and some from higher castes. The lectures were followed by heated discussions. Dr Balasaheb Ambedkar's life and works and his tribulations were explained all over again and swayamsevaks were asked to be compassionate and understand what their other less fortunate brethren were going through. It changed my perspective too. Whenever the subject of reservations comes up, I put forward the view of less fortunate members of the society even at the risk of being shouted at angrily by family members or others in the group. I can only say that it was not easy, but the Sangh leaders managed to calm the turbulence to a great extent at the risk of even losing some members.

I recall similar sacrifice of RSS members who worked hard to keep the Sikh-Hindu unity untouched at the height of the secessionist movement and terrorism in Punjab. Since, the RSS was the biggest obstacle in the militant designs of creating a wedge between Sikhs and Hindus, its members were targeted by the terrorists. Twenty-one RSS workers were gunned down in a terrorist attack in Moga, Punjab on 25 June 1989. More swayamsevaks were killed in Dabwali. Individuals were also targeted. But, activists were asked keep calm and continue to work towards the organic unity of the Sikhs and Hindus Rashtriya Suraksha Samiti was formed that held public meetings and morchas explaining strong bonds between Hindus and Sikhs. The RSS formed special relief committees and offered help to widows and other members of the families affected by terrorism with financial help and occupational training. Of course, this feeling of brotherhood was equally nurtured by the Sikh community and they too paid with blood for this effort of not letting anything break centuries of kinship.

Inspired by RSS, another organization during this period, Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, was launched to spread the message of Hindu-Sikh brotherhood in India. Incidentally, alternative terms for Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab used to be 'keshdhari' and 'sahajdhari' people. Many families since the times of Guru Gobind Singh would offer their eldest son to the '*panth*' as it was considered the sword arm of Hinduism since the earliest days of the birth of Sikhism. Many Gurus sacrificed their lives to protect *dharma*

which is Hindu *dharma*. Who can forget the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur who was beheaded brutally in Delhi while his three disciples were cut, burnt and boiled to death by Aurangzeb's soldiers when he refused to convert. Sons of Guru Gobind Singh who were buried alive in the walls of the fort at Sirhind by Mughals? It is said in Punjab that the relationship between Hindus and Sikhs is like nail and the skin. It is not easy to separate them. Finally, peace returned to Punjab with firm action from the security forces and Punjab police and the forces of nationalism and national integration won.

The 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom in the aftermath of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's tragic assassination was an acid test for the Indian citizens and the Hindu society. Contrary to the short public memory which only conjures up Delhi, the violence against Sikhs was abetted by Congressmen across India. Various commissions of enquiry have pointed this out, though the perpetrators have not yet been punished. We cannot call these as riots as it was totally one sided pogrom in which nearly 3000 Sikhs in Delhi and 8000 all over India were killed. RSS swayamsevaks not only hid Sikh families in their homes but also challenged rioters to go back and spare Sikhs. These attempts at mass homicide were done in nearly all the cities of North India. Balasaheb Deoras, the then chief of RSS strongly condemned the carnage. RSS chief of Punjab cautioned Hindus not to fall prey to anti-Sikh reactions. In places like Patna, Bharatpur, Ranchi and Kanpur, swayamsevaks and their seniors played key role in defusing the tension. In Deoband, the local RSS Sanghchaalak, stood in front of local Gurudwara challenging people to stop and calm down. In Kanpur, RSS volunteers actually fought with ruffians to stave off their attack on Sikh families. In South, in Coimbatore, VHP workers gave shelter to several Sikh families whose shops had been attacked and burnt down.

I would like to digress a little here and remind you that it was not the first time that Congress hooligans went on a rampage. In the aftermath of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, Congress-supported hooligans had taken to streets and spit venom of hatred against Sangh volunteers and also Chitpavan Brahmins as he was a Chitpavan Brahmins. This violence was

more severe in Maharashtra which was home to RSS movement. They burnt and looted homes and shops of RSS workers recklessly. Famous Marathi producer Bhalji Pendharkar's studio in Kolhapur was reduced to ashes in this mindless vendetta. Guruji urged his followers not to get provoked as any retaliation could lead to serious consequences for Hindu society. So, they suffered silently with forbearance.

The recent celebrations in 2008 commemorating 300 years of Guruta Gaddi were supported whole heartedly by Sangh parivaar with active participation in it. Guruta Gaddi celebrates the declaration of Guru Gobind Singh ji that Holy Guru Granth Sahib would be the Guru of Sikh faith and there won't be any other Guru after him. This participation included a grand langar at Hazur Nanded Sahib, the place where Guru Gobind Singh ji breathed his last and was marked by festive programmes across India. The Rashtriya Sikh Sangat took initiative to explain to the society at large that Guru Granth Sahib is one of the most egalitarian holy book with collection of words of wisdom of not just the Sikh gurus but also of saints from all over India.

The Proactive action of BJP Chief Minister Yediyurappa of inviting Karunanidhi to unveil the statue of great Tamil poet philosopher Thiruvallur in Bangalore was a landmark event that scotched an unseemly controversy hanging for 18 years. It heralded a new era of mutual respect through this effort to bridge the political and cultural divide between Kannadigas and Tamils, a consequence of mischievous politics. This resulted in Karunanidhi reciprocating and inviting his counterpart to unveil the statue of the great Kannada savant Sarvajna. One can always expect such positive action for social harmony from Sangh members.

The RSS volunteers have arranged for all sections of society to attend social festivals like Ram Navami, Gita Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti etc. Examples abound in places as diverse as Gadegaon and Akola in Vidarbha, Mallapally in Tamil Nadu, Udupi in Karnataka and many more places. Many swayamsevaks have taken personal initiative to educate or guide lesser fortunate and neglected brethren toward better life. RSS has taken the lead in celebrating Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's birth anniversary across the

country. The centenary celebrations were organised with all organisations of Sangh parivaar taking part in them enthusiastically. Other similar functions are regularly held by organisations like ABVP and Saamaajik Samarasataa Manch and local associations.

As a part of celebration of Golden Jubilee of satyagraha in October 1982 to allow '*harijan*' (this word had not yet been replaced with now widely used term 'Dalit') entry into Guruvayoor temple in Kerala, VHP organised a public reception of 27 surviving satyagrahis. At the same time, one hundred harijans decided to start a 200 mile march to end century old custom of not allowing harijans to have food in main meal hall of Krishna temple. Contrary to expectations of Communists and their cohorts, RSS decided to give full support to the move. The marchers were accorded warm welcome all along the way. RSS leaders also were able to persuade the temple authorities to break from the past and allow this common food partaking. They agreed. It was incredible and soul stirring to witness members of the Hindu society come together keeping aside caste lines. Many such events have taken place all over the country with many sadhus and acharyas taking lead in breaking centuries old shackles.

Provincial conference of VHP in Udupi, Karnataka in 1969 was attended by thousands of people and *dharmacharyas* from all shades of Hindu faith. They declared in the conference – “In pursuance of the objective that the entire Hindu society should be consolidated with the spirit of indivisible oneness and that there should be no disintegration in it because of tendencies and sentiments like ‘untouchability’, the Hindus all over the world should maintain the spirit of unity and equality in their mutual intercourse.” The conference gave a stirring call, “Hindavah Sodaraah Sarve” (All Hindus are brothers).

Guruji's silent persuasion to all saints and *matham* heads and swayamsevaks' ground work led to this transformation. Saints like Swamiji of Pejavar Math went into backward colonies in Karnataka to bless them and the movement slowly picked up pace with many other math heads joining the movement.

Sanskrit teaching was taken to the ‘harijan’ locality in Mysore. A one month long Veda Shikshana Shibir was taken in Hariharapura near Shringeri where boys from all sects and casts learned together and stayed together. And opponents of RSS call it ‘*manuvadi*’!

Similar initiatives have taken place in Andhra Pradesh too. People from so called low castes were trained with the help of Tirupati Tirumala Dewaswom Board in Hindu rituals.

Under auspices of VHP, a massive conference was conducted in which training was given to socially backward sections at Advaita Ashram in Alawaye near Ernakulam, in presence of chief priest from Ezhava community, assisted by a Namboodiri priest. This programme was personally blessed by His Holiness Swami Jayendra Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham.

There are instances of happy inter-caste marriages between a swayamsevak’s sister or daughter and a SC/ST colleague, adoption of children of slums by senior swayamsevaks to look after all their needs from food to studies, going out of way to invite such community members for marriage. Though there are many examples in this regard, most people would recall the marriage of Pramod Mahajan’s sister (a ‘brahmin’) to Gopinath Munde (a member of ‘Scheduled Tribe’). Even in rigid caste-based society like Haryana, swayamsevaks have attended weddings of their SC colleague and helped in every way as if they were part of the family. I know of an ABVP pracharak who married a Muslim girl about 25 years back and he was blessed by his senior leaders. All his friends from RSS and ABVP attended the marriage in full force. Such examples also tell us that the Sangh members are as human as you and me, and they too fall in love and have love marriages. But, they believe this to be sacred and profound emotion that should not be commercialised and trivialised.

To promote social brotherhood and sense of equality and self-respect for all sections of Hindu society, RSS volunteers in Delhi organised ‘devi poojan’ of nearly 10,000 girls of which 5000 were from slums. Bimal Kedia in Mumbai has been celebrating Diwali continuously for nearly twenty years with the young boys of a local orphanage by offering them dinner at

home with his family and friends. Knowing about compassionate social consciousness of the RSS members, examples of such individuals could be in thousands.

About 2500 years ago, Bhagwan Gautam Buddha was denied entry into Kashi. To current days, there was an atmosphere of confrontation. However during the VHP World Conference in January 1979, His Holiness Dalai Lama was invited for the conference and accorded welcome by the mantra chanting Vedic scholars. It was a moving experience for His Holiness Dalai Lama and a historic moment for Hindus and Buddhists.

Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, swayamsevaks have celebrated Rakshaa Bandhan festival in a Christian schools too. The principal was present for it and said emotionally, “I too am a Hindu - a Christian Hindu.” Christian scholars have been called to be part of some the RSS festivals and programmes in Kerala.

Seva Bharati runs *sanskaar kendras* in hundreds of slums all over India to impart good values to children who don't get a chance to have such an education. The effect on them and their family is electrifying and gives them an entirely new dimension in life. There are cases where fathers have given up drinking because their sons or daughters would come and touch their feet in the evening while they were drunk. It sparked an emotional upheaval in them Rashtriya Seva Bharati has recently launched its website, called ‘SewaGatha’ and also an MobileApp in which such experiences are being shared.

Bhatke Vimukta Samaaj Parishad is an organisation which works with the most neglected and sidelined brethren who are condemned to lead worst life with a stamp of criminals put on them since the time of British. Known as Pardhis and similar other communities, they are social outcasts eking out a living somehow in the dark periphery of this civilised society – unseen, unheard. They are scared of so called normal society generally tend to maintain their distance from them. Girish Prabhune, a pracharak, started work amongst them in a village, Yamgarwadi near Solapur. Members of these communities, most of whom are hinterland people, suffer broken families, runaway members, some in jail for some crime, or others only on

suspicion. Given the legacy that their tribes have been awarded, they are the first choice for the police for questioning. Undoubtedly an easy prey! Children in these communities are forced to do odd jobs and not encouraged to study. Breaking all such internalised habits, this organisation has persuaded them to look forward for a better tomorrow. Today, a number of facilities have been created for their schooling, including a school where they can study with flexi-timings because of their odd jobs. After years of efforts, the first batch of Senior Secondary Certificate (SSC) passed students graduated the school in 2016. In last elections in Maharashtra, one lady from this group, Rajashri Kale, was elected a corporator in Pune Municipal Corporation.

In Tamil Nadu, Dravid Kazhagam (DK) had picked up the now largely discredited theory of Aryan-Dravidian/North South divide and racial disharmony floated by the British, and ran campaigns in the name of reforms to run down Hinduism under the guise of anti-Brahminism. RSS did not have a large base like in Karnataka or Kerala till 1970s in Tamil Nadu, so the DMK cadre (political arm of DK) didn't have any real exposure to RSS and its swayamsevaks. However, when they were thrown behind prisons during emergency, they got to know RSS closely and it changed the view of their cadres. DMK followers were surprised with the warmth with which they were met by RSS volunteers in jail and the way they maintained ties with their families keeping their morale high during imprisonment.

Hindu Munnani and others have been organising various programmes and marches to bring harmony between various caste groups within Hindu society. Soon it had to join battle with DMK and DK for revival of Hindu religion and fight against divisive and hate politics of these groups. Nearly all Hindu saints and missionaries in Tamil Nadu, and various temple committees joined in these efforts. There was a time when DK would take out a procession of Lord Rama, Sita and Laxman with chappals and shoes around their necks in Tamil Nadu. But, with challenge thrown by Hindu Munnani by announcing that people should not vote for those who insult Hindu gods, DMK had to eat a humble pie. Now, the scenario is that the

biggest processions are seen at the time of Ganapati visarjan in Chennai. With the rise of the RSS through its shakhas, many disillusioned DK and DMK members have also joined RSS. Their efforts to drive a wedge between the supposedly higher and lower castes failed to cut ice when they realised that the Sangh members give same loving treatment to all children irrespective of their caste or faith.

A senior colleague of E V Ramaswami Naicker, founder of DK and referred to as EVR; quit DMK disillusioned to join RSS. He disclosed that EVR had written to Dr Ambedkar when he was thinking of forsaking the Hindu fold, but was advised against it and instead was advised to fight for dignity and rights within the religion.

Thus, RSS has been striving silently and selflessly for social harmony in a political atmosphere where people very often follow divisive tactics to fragment society with an agenda to create separate vote banks.

Duty Towards Society- Seva

Doctor Hedgewar, the founder of RSS had responded to a question, “What will RSS do in future just by building up its organisation?” by saying, “Sangh will not do anything, but swayamsevak will do everything.” When he said this, people did not understand what exactly he meant. But, as Sangh work spread and grew beyond the mandatory shakhas, the nature of work and methodology of such work also changed or evolved. New organisations inspired by Sangh philosophy of unity, discipline, nation building and service to the society came into being as activists branched out into new areas and activities.

The founder’s instructions were clear. RSS was to work as a part of the society, taking society along, and not stand as a separate organisation, whenever taking up any task. Therefore, as far as possible, RSS does not take up any work outside its own day to day activities in its name, nor is a volunteer or swayamsevak supposed to publicise his name for any work he has done. So, though many volunteers were working in many fields, they did so as common people or as a part of some other organisation. In today’s

language, they were already social activists, but did not publicise themselves as per RSS code of conduct. Many of its self-motivated activists in social service were working, before the Sangh officially added '*seva*' as one of the activities at shakha level.

These social service activities are called '*seva karya*'. Definition of Seva in Sangh philosophy is different from charity. Seva is giving back to society, in whatever little way, something in return for what society gave you. It is not a favour you do to others, but a return for the favour the society has done unto you by giving you all that made you what you are. To quote Swami Vivekanand, "Look upon every man, woman, and everyone as God You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege."

During subsequent years, many inspired activists started work in various segments of the society for social upliftment. They multiplied in hundreds and thousands. All these people were inspired by Swami Vivekananda's exhortation to serve the downtrodden, as each was an image of god (*Daridra Narayan*). Soon it was needed to create a better framework that could organise the social service activities.

H V Sheshadri was the Sarkaryavaah (Secretary General) when this framework was given a structured shape. Central leadership exhorted each shakha, specially the shakhas which are attended by adults or senior people to adopt atleast one social service project in its area. This focus on social service became a source of social reforms that the RSS envisaged. The seriousness with which this subject is taken is shown by the fact that a member of the central committee, a senior prachaarak is given charge of the '*seva karya*' for monitoring and supporting the seva activities.

The Centenary celebrations of Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar were conducted with great enthusiasm in 1989. This occasion was used to create funds for *seva karya* and projects were initiated in several parts of India in thousands. Today over 170,000 social work projects are underway across India – from low profile ones like libraries, cheap rented medical equipment to poor and needy, to path breaking ones like Ekal Vidyalay and Arogya Rakshak in remote areas of the nation; to hospitals, blood banks,

orphanages, schools, hostels, environment, projects for fishermen, and rural development projects and small local level programmes.

There is no segment where people inspired by the RSS are not serving the society. Seva projects cover education, healthcare covering medical, child welfare, social harmony, tribal welfare, environment, rural development and disaster management. In terms of geographical spread, these activities are operational in all corners of Bharat, from Kutch to Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu to Kanyakumari, with hardly any district untouched by them.

It would surprise many to know that except for a few rare exceptions, these seva projects do not draw any government grant. They are entirely supported by the society at large. It strengthens one's belief that if the work is genuine, society is always willing to lend its helping hand.

It is a telling commentary on the state of affairs of our country that inspite of so much of work being done by thousands of NGOs, apart from the work done by the RSS affiliated organisations, the effect on ground seems to be minimal, a mere drop of elixir in the ocean of despair. I feel the major reason for this is that the governments run by petty politicians have abdicated their responsibilities and have been playing only politics for short term gains. Thus, these activities which should have been a supplementary service to the society have taken up RSS and other socially conscious voluntary organisations.

The numbers of seva projects run by the RSS and RSS inspired people are huge. It is a herculean task to explain the working of all of them, so here are few I could do some justice to. For this task I have taken the help of '*RSS – Vision in Action*'; and Dr. Shantaram Hari Ketkar '*Seva – Amrit Kumbh*' in Hindi details more projects which he collated travelling to several places where these were being run. Now many of the organisations have their own websites. Since last few years the RSS started compiling data of various activities, and releases a summary of it in its annual conference (Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha).

Frankly, record-keeping and data collection and documentation has not been the strong point of RSS, much like our Hindu society. However, RSS

and RSS affiliates have come recognize this weakness and are working constructively fill this gap in information dissemination, I recall the comments of a young swayamsevak in Gujarat where I had gone with a team to study disaster management work done after the Gujarat Earthquakes of year 2002. As the group showed us some photographs of rescue and relief including clearing debris, carrying the dead bodies out of it, providing relief in relief camps etc, this young teenager smilingly remarked “we have learnt some lessons. Now we take photographs to record our work, because we know press will not give coverage to work done by Sangh.” It pains my heart that even in noble work, press plays a partisan role.

Sewa Work – Summary Numbers as on 15 February 2017

Organization	Rashtra Seva Bharati	Affiliate Organisations	Total
Year	2017	2017	2017
Seva Sthan	28137	80901	109038
Education	15178	71520	86698
Health	19857	6970	26827
Social Service	19804	10783	30587
Self Reliance	21975	4613	26588
Totals	76814	93886	170700

This summary table does not include 1225 village development projects and other 170 projects like regular support and visits to jails, children correction homes, hostels for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe.

**Figures presented in Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) of RSS held in March 2017.*

- Total projects in 2016 were **164138**, showing a continuous upward trend over years.

- I have not quoted state-wise figures as it would become too cumbersome to read.
- This summary table does not include 1225 village development projects and other 170 projects like regular support and visits to jails, children correction homes, hostels for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe etc.
- Highest number of Sewa projects are in **Kerala – 16,911**, followed by **Tamil Nadu with 11,854** projects.
- Worth noting that Kerala is in the news for sustained persecution and killings of RSS swayamsevaks since decades, but it has the highest concentration of Shakhas compared to other states in India and also maximum seva projects. Tamil Nadu is relatively weak in Conventional RSS organization work (shakhas) but has shown big growth in sewa projects. It has largest network of Women's' Self Help Groups.

A few illustrative examples

I would like to note that the above compilation does not cover disaster management and relief work as it is done on ad-hoc basis, as and when a situation demands. However, it contains long-term resettlement projects taken up for the disaster affected people. I will touch upon a few of the disasters that were so mammoth and terrifying that people still remember them. It is a well accepted fact that, the RSS volunteers reach every place where they can, even before government agencies or other NGOs reach. Thus, there are countless disasters that have seen the RSS workers risk their lives and limbs to save people and give them immediate relief.

The **mega disasters** like the famine of Bihar in 1966-67, the tidal waves in Andhra Pradesh in 1977, dam break and subsequent flooding in Morbi in 1979, the earthquake in Maharashtra in 1993, cyclone in Kandla port in Kutch in 1998, Gujarat, followed by the most devastating earth quake in Gujarat in year 2002, draught in Maharashtra in 2013, the Tsunami in South India in 2004, Uttarakhand flash floods of 2013, and floods in Bihar in 2017 are some of the incidents that people recall. RSS volunteers take up tasks that others avoid or don't have stomach to do, like picking up decaying and deformed dead bodies from debris with high risk of contracting some infection. They set up relief camps in shortest possible time with least resources, all contributed by local Sangh volunteers and other members of society in that region. A young volunteer shared his experience rather morbidly, "we had the experience of picking up decaying bloated bodies

after the Kandla cyclone, so job during the Gujarat earthquake was a little easy as the bodies were dry and light.”

These boys are not disaster experts nor are they paid workers, but the love for society and its members drives out any fear or feeling of inadequacy as they rush to help fellow members. I have heard of some super human feats from normal men with inspiration they draw from their daily shakha work. Individuals afraid to from heights, risked their lives by taking stairs upto 3-4 floors in decrepit earthquake-hit buildings to rope down stranded people in sarees. There are several such examples of valour. If you were to hear more you would get goose pimples. If you were present in Gujarat, for example, during those days, you might have collapsed out of sheer emotional exhaustion moving in an environment of death and decay.

All the relief camps are run without any religious bias. There are examples of Muslim families being given special space to perform Namaaz. During one such disaster, efforts were made for them to perform their Ramzan fasts well. On an earlier occasion Guruji had said, “Let our workers work in the right spirit of *dharma* making no distinction in doing service to whoever he may be, a Christian or a Muslim or any other persuasion. For calamities, distress and misfortunes make no such distinction. They afflict all alike.”

Many senior RSS workers realised that disasters are part of life and the swayamsevakas have worked in these situations for years. Every time there is a re-learning process. So, it was decided to have some structure for disaster management work. With this in mind and the learnings over year, a disaster management module has been introduced in the annual Sangh Shiksha Vargas.

I have spoken of thousands of schools running in cities, towns, villages, tribal areas from South to North and West to East. Of the educational projects, Ekal Vidyalay is a unique project which I have mentioned in another chapter describing it as an associate or sister organisations of RSS. There are organisations that run mobile laboratories for schools in remote villages as also vans that educate children and expose them to science education in an innovative way. In most of the places, RSS offices double

up as study centres for poor students in an area as also unofficial hostels or sleeping arrangements for students who come from villages to study in towns. Gopinath Munde, a prominent leader of the BJP stayed in the RSS office in Pune for a few years while he was studying for his graduation.

A new initiative by Sewa Bharati, called 'Swasthya Mitra' is a kind of 'bare foot doctor' primary health project. Within a span of two years, there were around 2500 health volunteers who are recruited from local villages, trained in primary healthcare – both preventive and curative; recognition of some critical diseases of those areas and assisting the affected people in reaching the right place for medical attention. Today the numbers would be much higher as some other groups have also picked up this idea. Approximately 60 per cent of these volunteers are women. Currently, the major focus is in the North East. The volunteers are paid a nominal amount per month. As and when they get time, they also run small '*balwadis*' for the children and inculcate value education to them as well as assist them in their schooling. The results are outstanding. This could be a major movement in coming years.

Deendayal Research Institute and a few others are focused on self-reliance through rural development, afforestation, horticulture, farming using of traditional systems with innovations in new environment for better returns, indigenous technologies etc. Its Gonda project in UP is considered a must visit project for people who wish to work for integrated rural development. It empowers people to utilise various facilities floated by government and banks, instead of giving out doles or funds. It encourages initiatives taken by local people in farming activity, seed development and irrigation.

Seva Sagar project by swayamsevaks of Sagar tehsil in Shimoga district of Karnataka state has carried out many a movement of social transformation. But, most interesting is their project of afforestation which started with a resistance movement against felling of trees in a 90 acre area, followed by a 'Vriskha Laksha Andolan' (movement for lakhs of trees) under which, each village is encouraged to have its own forest land with gifting of saplings on auspicious occasions. They have fought off

destructive planting of eucalyptus for plywood industry as they are harmful to the local ecosystem. Such projects are coming up in different states now. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar trust, Aurangabad has also adopted this idea.

The RSS is carrying out a number of Integrated Rural Development projects across India. The villages under rural development projects are divided in two categories – the Udaygram is where the movement has just begun and Prabhat grams are those which can be considered Model Villages. Rural development is one of the focus development area in RSS seva projects. Late Rajju Bhaiyya, the then Sarsanghchaalak of RSS outlined three priorities for this initiative. The villages should be '*kshudha mukta*' (hunger free), '*rog mukta*' (disease free) and '*shiksha yukta*' (literate).

Dr Hedgewar Seva Samiti begun work in Nandurbar, identified by Government of India as one of the most backward of the 50 of Maharashtra districts. Today, this trust is running 270 flexible timing schools for tribal boys and girls. Tribals here move to Gujarat for livelihood after Kharif season is over. To take care that children do not miss their education, a residential school has been started. The trust has done tremendous work in agriculture including new agricultural practices in collaboration with scientists who visit local sites to guide farmers; research in agriculture; creation of seed banks; conduct environmental protection that improves land productivity; farmer clubs for exchanging technology and other information with each other; and community production centres for oil and '*aamchur*' (dried mango powder) production. All this will undoubtedly reduce work load on women folk, as also micro-banking groups. This project is taking support from various government and non-government bodies including Sir Ratan Tata Memorial Trust in its endeavour.

Gau Vigyan Sansthan, near Nagpur has been doing lot of research on utilising various products made out of cow produce. It is fashionable to laugh out and ridicule at this kind of research. It would be foolish to write off medicinal cures defined clearly in Ayurveda. When the world is accepting the Vedic wisdom, it would be tragedy to laugh it off till westerners actually copyright these cures! This organisation has already got

two patents for two products. Other researchers are also getting patents on cow based products. It is now well established that organic farming is best for man and land. People are ready to pay more to get organically grown food. Various organisations working on these principles have proven that cow is productive and economically viable animal from its birth to death. It is not just milk and ghee producer but also organic manure and medicines. Sikkim has become 100 percent organic farming state. Worldwatch Institute article dated 17-11-2017 says, “A fair number of agribusiness executives, agricultural and ecological scientists, and international agriculture experts believe that a large-scale shift to organic farming would not only increase the world’s food supply, but might be the only way to eradicate hunger”. As usual, we shall accept this knowledge only when it comes from West! Gaushala at Keshav Srishti near Mumbai runs a self-sufficient project selling various kinds of products made of cow produce. It doesn’t depend on donations to take care of non-milk producing cows who are not milking.

Some organisations are working on urban renewal. Janaadhaar Sewabhavi Sansthaa in Latur takes contract for garbage collection and disposal. It employs educated boys and girls as supervisors and uneducated ones as workers. Employees are also chosen amongst the cured leprosy patients, who have been members of Mahatma Gandhi Kustha dhama in an adjoining hamlet. It has spun off women’s savings schemes under micro-finance banking as also self-help groups. Needless to say, these individuals are happy to be included into the society. The glow on the faces of these brethren is seen to be believed after they have become productive assets to the society. The project is led by a young engineer swayamsevak who gave up his profession for this programme. The vision of this organisation states: Self Employment, Co-operation, Education, Security leading to Dignity.

There are some outstanding examples of institutions working in public health too. I would just talk of one – Dr. Hedgewar Hospital run by a trust, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Trust, in Aurangabad. Started 20 years back by a team of dedicated doctors with RSS background who raised personal loans and pawned their wives’ jewellery, their hospital took roots in a house given to them by a local RSS leader. Today this organisation has a 370 bed

hospital. It is arguably the best in the region and had treated 2.5 million patients in initial 15 years at nearly 1/3rd the cost of private hospitals. Its blood bank has been adjudged one of the best in Asia. The most important part of the narrative is that it runs 40 other projects under its wings in slums and nearby villages ranging from education, computer training, water harvesting, women's self-help groups, micro-financing, HIV/AIDS, afforestation, horticulture – leaving out hardly any section of the society in the region. Inspired by it, another group of doctors fresh from colleges have started a similar project in Nasik called Shri Guruji Rugnalaya. It took six to seven years of sustained visits by the doctors of Dr Hedgewar hospital to motivate this young band of aspiring doctors through their exposure to social projects and other activities that led them to this new direction in life. It shows that it is possible to create and recognise local role models and inspire people.

Swami Vivekanand Yoga Anusandhana Samsthanam (Svyasa) University, Bangalore headed by Dr H R Nagendra is a well known name that conducts basic research on yoga and Indian knowledge beneficial for physical and mental wellbeing. Svyasa University has full time bachelors and masters courses on Yoga. This project was initiated much before Yoga became fashionable and a money making business.

There are more than 5000 women self-help groups (SHGs) and micro-finance groups in Southern Tamil Nadu alone, supported by Sewa Bharati. Such self-help groups and micro-finance schemes are being run by women successfully in thousands of villages and poor colonies across India, giving them new hope in life.

Then, there are local institutions around India running schools and other social projects. I can talk about 'Asmita' in Jogeshwari, Mumbai which was established during Emergency in an economically backward area. Today it is housed in a well-designed building, running ISO certified schools, vocational guidance centre and various other including special facilities for handicapped run very efficiently by the people from same locality.

With approximately seventeen hundred thousand (1.70 lakh) projects all over India, you can well imagine the quantum of work done. The narrative

above is not even a representative list. It is upto you to know more about them.

Defending and Nurturing Hindu Faith

Insidious attempts to convert Hindus to Christianity and Islam by force or lure have been going on for centuries. Revered Swami Dayanand Saraswati asserts that conversion is not just an act of violence but an act of violence against people are committed to non-violence. It is indeed a harrowing experience when such conversions also mean relinquishing or forced to relinquish old ways of life, customs and rituals. Thus, conversion is not just a change in mode of worship, but it also means severance from one's roots. In such chasms grow sectarian ills.

Conversion by force is recorded in history, especially during the Mughal period is a truth recorded in many historical accounts. Another truth is the fact that nearly all conversions to that faith in India was by the sword. This is the bitter truth, and we must accept it. Yes, there were a handful of the landed class like the *zamindars* or *jagirdars* who may have changed their religion for the lure of lucre. So, does a conversion that has become the new religious practice, a reason strong enough to forego a cultural legacy of thousands of years? They would be happier if they accept their ancient legacy. Even Pakistanis is trying to appropriate the culture of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro and Taxila University to legitimise its nationhood. Then, why should we give up on our rich and great heritage? Indonesia, inspite of being one of the largest Islamic countries today, hasn't disowned its ancestors. They proudly display it through their names and arts in public life. Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist country, but proudly displays its Hindu heritage through display of Puranic tales like '*Samudra Manthan*' as the centre piece in its new airport, significantly called Swarnabhumi airport. It also has statues of Rama and other displays of Mahabharata in and around its capital city.

Forced conversions by Church, specially backed by Portuguese colonialists in Goa, Daman and Diu are too new to be recounted all over

again. There have been attempts to wipe away the memories of torturous inquisitions, but only records can be wiped off not the memories. The American Baptist Church under British patronage entered North East via Meghalaya in 1829 and used guile and subtle force to convert majority of tribals in North East by the time India was independent. Special laws like 'Inner Line Permit' were made to suit missionaries in North East while Indians from restricted from visiting these areas. Some restrictions still remain.

Nothing much can be done on what is history. The RSS resolved that conversions – forced or by allurements or fraud should not be allowed any more in independent India; and, it has worked with its associate organisations ceaselessly stop these practices. This resolve is not a propaganda against Christians, Muslims or any other community, but against the attempts at changing the demographic structure of India which plants seeds of unrest in our society. It has also helped thousands of people to return to their original beliefs with programmes like 'Ghar wapsi' or returning back home.

Following is a small account of work done by Hindu organisations, supported by RSS to fight the multi-billion dollar evangelisation agencies of the West and Saudi Arabia. A report in Firstpost online news portal dated 1-2-2015 gives following statistics –

A majority of donors, including the top three, are church-based organisations such as Compassion International USA (Rs 183.83 crore) followed by Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, USA (Rs 130.77 crore) and the Kindernothilfe e.V. (KNH) Germany (Rs 51.76 crore). Of the top 15 donor agencies, 13 are related to some or the other Christian sect. Over 90 percent of the top 30 recipient organizations are engaged in missionary activity. The highest amount of foreign contribution was received by the following Christian organization namely World Vision India, Chennai (Rs 233.38 crore), followed by the Believers Church India Pathanamthitta, Kerala (Rs 190.05 crore) and Rural Development Trust, Ananthapur, Andhra Pradesh, (Rs 144.39 crore). To put this in perspective, India's total defence allocation (2011-12) was Rs 1,64,000 crore. Thus,

foreign-funded NGOs (FFNGOs) in 2011-12 received seven percent of India's then defence budget.

Though RSS has been working in this direction for decades, the nation woke up to these harsh realities in 1981 when 800 Hindu families converted enmasse to Islam in Meenakshipuram. Isha-ud-ul-Islam, the body spearheading this drive boasted that they expected around 100,000 'harijans' to come to (the liberating religion) Islam. Whole of South Tamil Nadu was targeted in this drive. Every week, vernacular newspapers talked of some mass conversion ceremony in villages. The RSS swung into action and formed the Hindu Ottraumai Maiyam (Centre for Hindu Unity) which was a forum for various Hindu organisations like Hindu Munnani, VHP and others. The leaders of the organisation moved around and persuaded the heads of various mathams in this region to secure justice for 'harijans'. The movement to stall such forced conversions gathered force with this unity amongst all Hindu organisations.

The North East, for decades, has been a major centre for conversion especially by Christian missionaries, earlier supported by British and later by non-action of 'secular' government. Since, the those pre-independent times, there were efforts to separate them from Hindu mainstream by labeling them 'animists'. Gururji challenged this notion and pointed out that the root of animist is animus which means principle of life. Not only that, Hindus too worship the nature and animals. '*Naag*' or cobra is worshipped by Nagas as also all across India. In Tamil Nadu it is worshipped along with Lord Subramanya, while *naag panchami* is celebrated too all over India. Animals and birds form the back ground of the Hindu pantheon and serve as their vehicles. Though, the Sangh in reaching out to the North East, due to limitations of manpower and resources, it picked up the gauntlet by 1970s.

Naga freedom fighter Rani Ma Gaidinliu, founder of Harake Conference was invited to the World Hindu Conference in 1979 in Prayag (Allahabad). She was overwhelmed and she pointed out how Naga leaders had fought the British. "Her organisation represented three major tribes of the Nagas. Harake means pure faith." Bharatiya Janjaati Samskriti Manch

(Indian Tribal Cultural Forum, also known as ITC) was formed soon after which worked hard to enlighten the tribal brothers about their ancient heritage and their own methods of worship. Saraswati Shishu Mandirs were set up in 1981 in Nagaland and Manipur. Till then, the only education they were receiving was from Christian missionaries where Bible was taught in local language or in government schools which offered 'secular' education that resulted in their ignorance about their own culture, traditions and practices. Medical centres by Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram were also started.

Translations of Ramayan, Bhagwad Gita, Buddha and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's lives were released by the ITC forum in Khasi dialect in Meghalaya, while Adi Research Centre was started in Arunachal Pradesh. Karbi tribals rediscovered their Vaishnav roots and traditional poojas and *yagyas*. Karbis now trace their ancestry to Bali and Sugriv, Tiwas trace theirs to Sita and Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh to Rukmini (hence Krishna). In year 1988, a Christian principle of Aizwal College talked about Ram Katha in tribal customs. Vidya Bharati encouraged studies in local tribal languages. Today, there are more than 200 schools in this region. Apart from this, Ram Krishna Mission and Vivekananda Kendra have been doing exemplary work as also many other Hindu organisations. All this has hindered the tide of Christian conversions and also strengthened nationalist feelings amongst various tribes and local population.

Years back, the RSS and VHP fought to remove Muslim encroachers on the tribal lands in Cachar ranges of Assam and fought against Church designs on cremation grounds of Karbi and Anglong tribes. All this also went a long way in strengthening the morale of local people and push back the attempts to brow beat them into accepting other religions. ABVP campaigned aggressively to declare Sardar Tirot Singh as a Khasi freedom fighter and finally the Meghalaya government recognized his contribution and declared his birthday as a holiday.

During all these activities, Hindu activists and missionaries have faced immense hardships and hurdles from leaders of the Church, including threats of murder. Even the locals – some of whom have also lost their lives – who offer shelter to these workers are threatened directly or through

extremists. This has been recorded by me from personal conversations of pracharakas who have returned back from there. But, movement carries on with grim determination.

In Madhya Pradesh, the game of missionaries was first exposed by the Niyogi Commission established by state's Congress government in 1951. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram was established in 1952 and has grown from strength to strength with genuine social support system for tribals through various programmes. It has also reversed the conversion game of missionaries. In Jashpur, the struggle to return grabbed land of tribals by Church authorities was initiated with the help of Raja Kumar Singh Judev, descendent of the royal family there. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and VHP have led the movement of '*ghar wapsi*' (return back to faith) with some success. Tremendous amount of work has been done in the form of Bhajan mandlis, yuvak kendras, satsang samitis, schools etc.

M L Kaul in *Kashmir – Past & Present, Unraveling the Mystique*, writes in chapter eight, "The Hindus not given to the campaigns for proselytisation outright rejected the suggestion of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, a scion of the Dogra dynasty, to reconvert the Muslims to the fold of Hinduism as they were forcibly converted to the faith of Islam and were willing to hark back to their original faith and creed. Even the influential elements among the Hindus of Kashi are said to have turned down the suggestion of the Maharaja." This supposed act of tolerance can be seen as one of the crucial factors behind the disastrous state of affairs in J&K. Learning lessons from history, the Sangh took proactive action in following in the footsteps of Swami Dayanand, founder of Arya Samaaj movement, Swami Shraddhanand and Veer Savarkar who had worked through '*shuddhi* movement' for people who wished to return to Hindu fold. Shri Guruji, called for a fresh '*shuddhi*' movement on the occasion of his reception on the completion of 51 years. He called for converts to come back to their original faith.

The VHP, in its first plenary session in 1967 in Karnataka witnessed an unforgettable moment in history when revered head of Pejawar Peeth declared "na Hindu patito bhavet" i.e. no Hindu is ever fallen. With one

stroke the stigma of caste based discrimination and reconversion was removed. Then on “paraavartan” and “ghar wapasi” became a watch word for Hindu organisations working in various parts of Bharat.

The VHP took out a Jagannath Rath Yatra across tribal areas of Odisha which covered close to 1000 places from March 1986 to May 1988 in which around three to four million people participated. Dilip Singh Judeo led hundreds of converts back into the Hindu fold by washing their feet in presence of various religious heads.

There are thousands of Chauhan Rajput Muslims in Rajasthan who converted to Islam after the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan. Though they are Muslims by faith, they follow all the customs of Hindus. They were being pressurised by local *maulvis* to drop all Hindu practices and become staunch Muslims, but instead chose to return to the Hindu fold under the aegis of the head priest of Pushkar temple who is also the Sanghchaalak of RSS there. He organised their return to faith with full honour. Similar kinds of customs are also seen in Jammu where Muslims recognise their Hindu antecedents with love and pride. Reconversions have also happened in north east in places like North Cachar with support from VHP. In Valsad, in Gujarat, there is an annual Maaval Mata Yatra in which all citizens irrespective of their religious practices participate. Some of them have come back to their original faith now. A few years back a massive congregation of tribals from all over India participated in a religious festival named ‘Shabri Kumbh’ at a place in South Gujarat, which is believed to be the place where mother Shabri lived when Lord Ram visited her during the search of his wife Sita. It was attended by around 60,000 tribals and other Hindus, and was deemed a fulfilling pilgrimage for tribal brethren.

The humungous task of removing the stigma attached to conversions and bringing converts back to their ancient faith has been supported by the people. Infact, people in North East told RSS pracharaks, “you came nearly 30 years too late.” But, historical compulsions, shortage of resources, active opposition and persecution by ‘secular’ lobbies exploited by Church and Islamic organisations still leaves a lot to be done.

XIV

Current Scenario

Note: When I wrote the first edition RSS was targeted in the name of Saffron Terror by the then government. The book was written to counter the negativity created by Congress since 1947-48. By the time the second edition came up, Shri Narendra Modi had led BJP to a decisive victory in 2014. By the time this refreshed and revised version is going to print, the national scene has changed drastically. Nationalist forces are on the rise and the Left, pseudo-secular forces are facing irreversible decline.

As an analyst of current affairs, I would have been tempted to update this section with some fancy, hyperbole about the progress of the RSS. There have been big stories in newspapers about growth in RSS membership since the victory of Mr Modi. To put it mildly, these stories are not based on facts. RSS has never grown on the backing of any patronage. Nor can RSS shakhas be increased simply with a spurt in popularity. Readers would have noted from the previous chapters that creating an RSS worker or karyakarta is a painstaking process. It requires years of training before he can take up a responsibility of running a shakha or taking up more responsibilities. Even if there is a perceptible increase in popularity of RSS, on ground it takes much longer time to harness it in structural form of RSS. Definitely there has been huge growth in people willing to join RSS in last 3-4 years. I surmise it has more to do with the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda celebrations, when RSS and its associate organisations reached each and every nook and corner of India to spread his message on

Hindu dharma, with special focus on youth. Huge rallies, constructive programmes, door to door campaigns through these celebrations have brought the youth closer to RSS. This has been at the root of higher visibility and growth. Popularity of Mr Modi, a pracharak, has definitely added to the charisma of RSS. Still, I have preferred not to change this section drastically because the basic social realities expressed here have not changed much so far.

From a small beginning in Nagpur as a group of young boys playing in playgrounds, the RSS grew into a protector of Hindu community before and after the Partition, a sword arm of India during various attacks and a saviour in various calamities. With its expansion into nearly all the fields and segments of society after 1948, its presence is all pervading.

As seen earlier, social service activities inspired by the RSS cover nearly the entire spectrum of social structure – from a cultural organisation it has grown into a movement of Hindu renaissance and nation building. It is no more restricted to RSS shakhas, but new grounds for accretion to its strength and ideological spread have emerged.

Inspite of this steady but strongly rooted growth, question marks have been raised about its achievements during all these years of existence. Any person in social domain in today's fast moving life becomes impatient and despondent when he or she cannot see changes happening fast enough. It is like a parent looking at his/her child every day and not sensing any real change, till he looks at some earlier photographs or some neighbour or relative exclaims, "Oh, how has she grown and changed!" The activists who have dedicated their lives, or their best years and moments of their lives to this cause would surely be going over their lives once in a while and thinking, "Was it worth it?" In the ebb and rise of history, such questions do arise. The initial chapter about landmark events in the life of the RSS has given the reader an overview of its evolution and contribution to national life of Bharat.

Critics, as also well-wishers, talk about the decline in RSS sometimes reflected through its shakhas on open grounds and its presence in the middle-class areas in urban localities, its natural recruiting ground in its

earlier phases. Even as recruitment to its ideological school of thought is taking place through different associate and sister organisations, visible presence through shakhas on playgrounds is not as impressive as it was once, especially in cities. I view it as a change in the whole social dynamics in the past few decades.

The social atmosphere that followed independence and the preceding generation laid stress on commitment to nation, social causes and moral values. That generation worried less about material gains and did not mind foregoing material growth for social good. Middle-class of the time embodied this approach. One could find even elite citizens sacrificing their comfortable life to do something for the society. But, in the intervening period, with high influence of consumerist culture, success has come to be measured in terms of money and political power, resulting in a near amoral society. The middle-class of the present has become so enamoured by the career of its offspring and earning good money that sometimes it appears that there is no time or inclination to sacrifice some time or comfort for social good. There will always be exceptions and there still are. But, it doesn't detract from this basic submission.

Children are put into coaching classes right from secondary school and they do not get out of this vicious circle of coaching, entrance exams, hunting for best colleges and courses until they are a job and get married. Thus, the best productive years of youth who contributed to major social movements earlier, are today buried in various coaching classes and institutions. This alarming lack of interest in the country and its affairs is also reflected in large number of vacancies in officers' cadre in the armed forces.

Reuters report dated 17-1-2015 tells us that in USA about 2.4 million youth participated in the nearly 105-year-old Texas-based scouting program, representing a 7.4 percent decline over 2013 enrollment of 2.6 million youth, Boy Scout officials said in a statement on Friday. Enrollment declined by about 6 percent in 2013. BSA officials said that decreasing participation is a trend that most youth organizations are facing. Here in India, I quote two reports about Scouts & Guides – Telegraph report dated

16-12-2016 from Kolkata tells us that Sushila Birla Girls' School has opted out of the guides course, only offerings bulbul training up to Class V. "Senior students hardly opt for guides, " said Sharmila Bose, principal. Apeejay School, Salt Lake, discontinued the programme because the trainer "failed to ignite interest among the girls", said principal Rita Chatterjee. A report in thehansindia.com dated 5-3-2016 reports that in Telangana there were 58582 candidates in Scouts and Guides in 2009-10. The number reduced to 47124 in 2013-14 and then to 27510 in 2014-15 after bifurcation. Today, the government schools are in no position to setup the Scouts and Guides units

In the backdrop of this scenario, let me share a simple fact. Each year nearly 20,000 new volunteers go for Sangh Shiksha Varg (one month training workshops for workers) across the country. They are always fresh, new members, as there is no provision of repeat course in this. Generally, these are people who have gone through the one week primary training workshops. It is estimated that only 1 out of 5 swayamsevak who passed from these primary training go for first year training. This means that nearly 100,000 new volunteers qualify each year to take up some responsibility or the other in the organisation. These are young people who have decided consciously to dedicate their time and energy for the society. I am not sure if there is any other organisation in the world, let alone India, that can boast of addition of one lakh active dedicated volunteers each year, year on year. And these numbers are rising each year.

I may submit that one more factor leading to the falling number of youth joining social movements and or careers like armed forces or less lucrative fields like teaching is the kind of education that our Nehruvian 'secular' lobby has thrust upon this nation. It is totally amoral, bereft of any ethical, moral and patriotic content. Media, in line with same thinking, is more interested in projecting negative images – whether in the socio-politics or pop culture. It is not interested in positive stories about very large number of people working silently for social upliftment and growth of the nation. Thus, young boys and girls grow up in self-centered environment

soaked in consumerism without any moral values or sense of pride or attachment for the motherland.

On the other hand, the lesser privileged sections of the society have become more conscious of their surroundings and want to be a part of democratic process for improvement in their individual lives as well as their society. Therefore, youth from this segment of the society are more active in social movements of different hues. This is the section that is increasingly getting involved in RSS work. Visibility of RSS on playgrounds like yester years has reduced but its presence in the lower strata of society, in lesser privileged localities has increased tremendously. That is why the number of shakhas has kept growing though not where we are used to see them. Similarly, the growth has continued in rural areas where there is a huge social churning. Thus, this talk of decline in RSS ranks stems from a comparison with its own earlier image that doesn't take into account this changing societal pattern.

The RSS is finding new ways to engage with youth from middle and upper income group through other alternative means. Due to the sheer size of the organisation the corrective action or new approaches seems slow. During last few decades, recruitment through other associate organisations has grown hugely. Social service projects have got a large number of educated youth from all segments of the society involved with social causes.

If we look back, RSS and its organisational set up in form of shakhas was a novel and innovative concept. All through its decades of its existence, RSS has not shied away from experimenting with different methods of social mobilisation, and opinion building. There have been innovative attempts in form of new concept like IT-shakhas which reach out to young people through the internet. These are shakhas where people meet on the net and discuss various issues. The members meet periodically and also take part in camps. There are nearly 100 IT shakhas in hubs like Bangalore, Hyderabad and Pune alone that meet weekly, conduct training camps and undertake social service activities. Many activists have taken to social service in a big way and they have attracted surprisingly large number of

young boys and girls in thousands who volunteer to work for different social service projects not only in their own areas but also in other parts of the country. Many sympathisers and volunteers have taken to creating blogs and websites that espouse the cause of Hinduism, Hindutva and present alternative views on Indian history etc.

An effort has been made recently to reach out to the youth through the Internet and through campaigns in colleges and public places to encourage them to serve the society by contributing their weekend time or one week in a year during vacations. Message is 'one week for the nation'. This idea was experimented recently in Vidarbha region, and evoked highly encouraging response.

These new experiments and their success show given the right motivation, today's youth are ready to be involved in social service and nation building. The Sangh workers are continuously in search of innovative ideas to involve more youth in nation building.

The RSS has networked with various other organisations working in public domain, religious, voluntary and reforms movements. It believes that it does not have a monopoly on nation building or person building. So, it co-operates with other organisations with positive approach to nation building and social awakening wherever possible. It believes that all well-meaning positive forces of national re-construction must work together; because there is so much to do and speed at which this is happening is too slow. The response from other organisations in various social fields has been encouraging too. This is the vision that drives RSS today. We can look forward to more velocity and momentum in its work in the coming years.

EPILOGUE

Shuddh satvik prem apne karya kaa adhaar hai
(Pure spiritual love is the foundation of our work.)

– From a Sangh song

XV

The Ultimate Secret

I must confess that, so far, I was only giving you information in a dry mechanist way by talking about form and structure and philosophy of RSS. Yes, I talked about its reach, its philosophy, its work in different dimensions of national life, some live examples of people who make up this organisation. But, I feel that these details may not have adequately brought out the essence of what makes it all possible. I have given strong hints about what keeps it going and growing through various real life anecdotes. But, I have not clearly stated the ultimate secret of RSS which has more to do with spirit and heart, than with intellectual understanding of this phenomenon.

RSS, like most successful social or cultural movements, is ignited purely with fire emanating straight from the heart – heartfelt pain and compassion for the society and a burning desire to do something to improve it. The aura of patriotism and searing desire for a strong nation envelopes all its activities and programmes.

Unalloyed love for motherland and readiness to do anything for it is passed on by the seniors to the juniors through their conduct. This passing on is purely through example. Recently, a colleague of mine shared a story about his mentor in his shakha, who had unfortunately died falling prey to cancer at a relatively young age. This gentleman Yashwant Prabhudesai had come from Ratnagiri on a bank job and joined the same shakha that I used to attend as a boy. Like any ambitious married young man, he managed to

purchase a house with some loans. When he was about to shift to his own home, he came to know that a few of his junior wards in shakha were appearing for engineering exams and they did not have place for studies as their houses were too small. Without a second thought he decided to postpone his house warming and pooja till after their exams. He gave the house over to those four young boys for three months. Not only that, but he would come personally on many nights to look after their wellbeing and never failed to make tea for them before returning home!

The spirit of sacrifice that the RSS invokes in its members translates in such simple acts that one does not even note it. What value would you attach to an RSS worker Bhaurao Belvalkar's sacrifice who went as a teacher to the annual month long Sangh Shiksha Vargas without a single break for 36 years, foregoing his summer holidays and simple pleasures of family life?

As I mentioned in the initial chapters of the book, I don't know of many people who became members of the RSS after understanding of its goals and objectives. It is a more recent phenomenon with the advent of internet-based social networking. An overwhelming majority of people came to the Sangh shakhas attracted with its games, songs, disciplined and a very cultured environment. But, they graduate to more serious subjects influenced by selfless love of their seniors, their conduct in personal life and their honest dealings with others. Simply, a case of leading by example. It is an irony that people talk of the need of towering icons that could influence us positively, but overlook examples around us that could transform the way we look at our own lives and society around us.

The sense of brotherhood in RSS is infectious. In this era of purely career-driven, self-centered life, you do not easily believe that such people, with only unselfish love to give, exist. The sense of being part of a very big family is all pervading. This is what keeps a person going in worst of times. Pure selfless love that RSS members radiate for each other and society, sense of joy with which they sacrifice for the society and nation brings more people into its fold than anything else.

Nearly all the people who have kept working through life for long years in the RSS, those who went on to become pracharakas have generally been influenced and mentored by their teacher (or shikshak as RSS members call him), a senior activist or a pracharak. I have recounted many stories in preceding pages that illustrate this point. It reminds me of a light hearted Sangh geet (song) in a Marathi village dialect which says, “We have been moulded, you too should get moulded. A touch of paaras has turned us into gold, and gold has become one with paaras.” (Paaras is a mythical elixir or magic stone that is supposed to convert a base metal into gold with its touch.)

The total faith that this brotherhood generates is seen to be believed. This faith pervades all relationships within the Sangh ecology. A good swayamsevak is supposed to have excellent relations not only with his fellow members but with his whole family. So, one’s family members become family members of the other and they too adopt him as one of them. Volunteers are told that if they wish to be a good kaaryakarta or worker, they should be able to enter the kitchen of his colleague as a son, as a brother.

The spotless character developed in Sangh shakhas is a cause of envy for all other social organisations. While some appreciate it, for others it takes the form of visceral hatred. People of any ideological leanings are much more comfortable contributing to various social causes when approached by RSS swayamsevakas. This character building is through living role models and the motivation one receives, and persuades one to set up higher selfless goals for one’s life.

A thinker has noted that any ideology and organisation passes through three stages – ignorance, ridicule, and acceptance. RSS has passed through all these phases successfully. Its members are told not to react to irritants, nor to sap energy by responding to pointless criticism and keep working silently. Ultimately the positive results of its work would result in acceptance of its philosophy and its approach to national re-construction. They understand that today’s critic can turn into a supporter once he sees the RSS closely.

While people and organisations, supposedly equipped with much better intellectual armoury, who ridiculed the RSS have fallen by the sides in the march of history, RSS has kept pace and grown with each stride. This, in no way, means that intellectual rigour is not required by a social organisation like RSS; it only underlines the fact that intellectual knowledge by itself does not guarantee the success of a movement. Any movement must appeal to the heart to grow and succeed; and its participants must be motivated with live examples to drive them to give off their best with compassion.

XVI

Secretiveness of RSS and Media

I had noted in the beginning of the book that the exercise of writing this book began with a news story that talked of secretiveness of RSS. I am sure, by now; any unbiased reader would have realised that there is nothing secret about RSS's working and its organisation. It is more a problem of lack of familiarity with the idiom and language that RSS uses that is different from the ones established by the dominant intellectual elite and media. It is also a problem to understand an organisation which doesn't work on established norms of a typical Indian social organisation, its non-interest in publicizing itself or its work.

I quote below an interesting passage from Guruji's biography written by veteran pracharak Shri Ranga Hari. It provides an insight into the mindset of an average Sangh worker and why RSS reacts to publicity and media the way it does, especially the previous generation of party workers. The second Sarsanghchalak of RSS, Shri Guruji had nursed the nascent RSS for 33 years with his strong spiritual and intellectual personality. No doubt, he dominated the thinking of two generations comprehensively.

In the first year after his appointment, a well-known scholar asked Guruji during his Bombay tour in 1941, "Are you opposed to be publishing literature about Sangh? Why don't you create various kinds of literature to spread Sangh ideology?" Guruji's response was, "I hope that a great scholar like you would be well aware of the tradition of this country. We give more importance to spoken word – *shruti*. As long as one can manage with the

spoken word, one should work through this system only. Sangh swayamsevak make contacts by visiting homes and meeting people face to face; and move forward on the basis of '*shruti*', that is, sharing what they have experienced in their own lives. While doing this, based on our experience about the growth of organisation, if we feel that it is no more possible to work without '*smriti*' i.e. written word, we shall not hesitate to create '*smriti*' or channel our thoughts and philosophy in writing. Is it not correct to say that in our own country, code of conduct – '*aachaar samhitaa*' – was written only after '*shruti*' had been established?" Bouddhik (intellectual training) in Sangh falls under this classification of *shruti*. This is not an exhibition of one's intellect, but a radiation of emotions of the heart."

There is another example in Gururji's life which indicates his abhorrence to any kind of publicity for service done to the society by Sangh volunteers. A book about RSS volunteers' role during the partition had been published in Punjab. When Gururji was asked to release it he refused, saying when a son serves his mother he does it as his *dharma* and doesn't go to newspapers broadcasting his services. What swayamsevak did was their duty to motherland and there is no need to publicise it.

This culture was nurtured assiduously by Dr K B Hedgewar, the founder of RSS who had worked in political field for many years, including in Congress. before he decided to dedicate his life to organizing Hindu society. He understood the pitfalls of propaganda and public projection that can create schism within an organisation that diverts attention from work on the field. Even after he founded RSS, he took part in various agitations with his RSS workers but as citizen, not as RSS.

During my innings as RSS media-in-charge for Mumbai, I found that very few journalists turned up for briefings and discussions with RSS leaders. They were interested only in the RSS Chief as they never understood the collective nature of its leadership. It hardly took invitations to visit camps or special programmes seriously. Reports would not be found in media even when a journalist had visited a programme. I am not sure if it

was due to editorial policies or reluctance to publish ‘non-interesting’ positive news.

Since my young days, it has saddened my heart that none of the massive RSS gatherings, marches, camps were reported in so called national press, though regional press would generally cover them. It never seemed to amaze a press person that an organisation could organise a camp of 10,000 or 20,000 volunteers for three days immaculately without any chaos with the help of amateur volunteers working part time. I recall seeing photographs of a group of nine to ten hapless RSS volunteers taking bath under common taps in a well organised camp in UP which boasted 20,000 attendees; but not a single image of such a grand and disciplined gathering!

It never mattered to media that the biggest student organisation like ABVP or the biggest labour organisation, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh could organise massive highly disciplined agitations that went well without any violence. It did not matter to them that a student organisation could hold a disciplined convention with delegates paying out of their pockets, even for travel without a single instance of misbehaviour of any kind with people or persons of opposite sex. Probably, they found it too boring!

I have mentioned earlier in the book about the envy RSS aroused in the Congress which led to some the leftist party leaders to push their agenda forward, namely cornering RSS even before Gandhi was assassinated. One can still see this Nehruvian-Leftist nexus alive and at work. On one such instance, the RSS finally decided to haul Arjun Singh to the courts on Gandhi murder charges. This case was reported in the media, but media did not follow the case well enough to show how Arjun Singh has shied away from courts with one excuse or the other and wriggled out of a difficult situation until he passed away. Last year Mr. Rahul Gandhi has got embroiled in a similar defamation case in Bhiwandi near Mumbai for accusing RSS of murdering Gandhi ji.

Recently media went to town about Union Carbide story talking of escape of the then head of Union Carbide India operations under the watchful eyes of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and Arjun Singh. It spoke out when Arjun Singh was down and out, but was totally asleep when the Bhopal gas

tragedy happened in 1984. The fact that a person like Anderson could not have escaped without complicity of the Centre is handled very 'sensitively' by media so that 'fair name' of Rajiv Gandhi is not besmirched. The Union Carbide tragedy has been reduced to Anderson's escape and the worst aspects of government's apathy, negotiating most pitiable and embarrassing settlement in financial terms, misuse of funds etc., have all been forgotten in this most shameful episode in post-independent history.

The media kept silent on the anti-Hindu persecution and riots in Bengal under 'secular' Mamata Banerjee. It is a blot on so called independent media. The riots in Deganga on 6 September 2010 was first reported by the print media on 8th September after the Army had been called in to restore peace. Two hundred army personnel had to be posted there, as the West Bengal police was a mute spectator to the carnage, even as a fellow-officer received serious injuries. The leader of rioters was allegedly, a Trinamool Congress MP from the area. Only *Pioneer* and Kolkata edition of the *Times of India* covered the news, while television media was totally blind and deaf to it. Significantly this small town is only 35 kilometers from Kolkata and near the Bangladesh-India border. Similarly, Bareilly riots in 2012 were also hidden from public view for more than a week. Imagine even fraction of something like this happening in Gujarat! Thus, an allergic reaction towards RSS is borne more out of inveterate dislike fundamentalist secularist for anything to do with Hindus or Hindutva. Meaning of 'secularism' has been reduced to bias for minorities (read Muslims) and against Hindus.

The memories of Jhabua nuns' rape case of 1998 may have faded but damage has been done, as the entire media went berserk indulging in accusations against RSS and VHP for this horrible deed. But, when police enquiry and court cases proved this to be a case of rape by their own religious brethren, press forgot to highlight it prominently, or did any editor or senior journalists thought it fit to apologise for causing harm to RSS's image. Same scenario unfolded, as if a repeat episode when an elderly nurse in Bengal was raped in 2015 and RSS name was dragged in without any proof. Ultimately a Bangladeshi was convicted in 2017. Again no sense of

remorse by media could be seen. In the same vein, we know about different parameters adopted for covering the murder of Graham Steins and Swami Laxmananand Saraswati. While murder of Graham Steins was a “heinous crime against humanity by the Hindu extremists”, murder of Swami Laxmananand Saraswati was a “routine inside page news” until there was violence. Violence and ‘horrible communal killings by RSS and VHP goons’ became the main news immediately. Not only that, almost entire debate on this issue was covered by media without a capable VHP person on panels in nearly all discussions on the topic.

Narendra Modi and his government have been pilloried for Gujarat riots with worst kind of adjectives, even though one third of the dead are Hindus. Time and again it has been labelled a ‘pogrom’. After it was proved that Teesta Setalvad had used immoral stratagems like tutored witnesses, false evidence, false stories, she was not put on the mat on television and print media. Even after Modi has been acquitted by Supreme Court of India supervised SIT probe, abuse and accusation of Modi from secular media has not stopped.

The hotly debated issue of Triple Talaq also shows bias of the so-called liberal media. Suddenly, the secular liberal media feels it is a matter of faith and not of gender justice. Even as Supreme Court pronounced Triple Talaq illegal in 2017, there were apologists for Wahhabi elements supporting it.

Ram Madhav, then in RSS, was in Mumbai for one of our programmes as a keynote speaker a few years back. We persuaded Ram Madhav to give some time for interview with a senior journalist from the *Times of India*. He had a long serious sitting with Ram Madhav. It was an exclusive interview which had covered many subjects. And what do we get the next day as an anchor story on the front page of the newspaper? “RSS considering replacing its khaki half pants in uniform with full length trousers!” There was no mention of any other subject covered in that Q&A. I am sure, Ram Madhav is not a person who would put in one hour discussing a raging ‘ideological’ issue of half pants vs. full pants!

We note that though RSS volunteers are generally the first to reach a disaster site, media never highlights its work. I have actually seen camera

stall and move away as soon as an ‘RSS half pant’ comes into view. Since, now I am deeply into media as a regular TV panelist, I have it straight from a TV reporter how his sequence showing RSS relief work was chopped off. How many newspapers give coverage to RSS disaster relief work or any of its social service work, forget lauding its selfless service?

After his appointment as RSS Chief, Dr Mohan Bhagwat took a countrywide tour of 50 cities over one year (one public programme every Sunday). All the programmes were in uniform for RSS volunteers apart from general public. Total attendance may have gone into million plus. The last leg of the programme, Kerala saw an unprecedented congregation of nearly one hundred thousand volunteers in uniform from across Kerala in grounds near Kochi. It was a spectacle worth watching when these people did physical drills and collectively sang an RSS song. The whole lecture was given in English by the RSS Sarsanghchaalak Dr Mohan Bhagwat and translated in Malayalam by a senior RSS functionary. I am sure, hardly any reader of this book would have read this news at all, let alone in the next day’s newspapers, apart from local dailies of Kerala. However, when RSS supporters use YouTube or other Social Media for disseminating such news, a senior journalist, Sagarika Ghosh calls for censorship on net!

The most laughably sad spectacle of media bias was exposed yet again when it was found that new Rajya Sabha members Tarun Vijay and Arun Dave, one former and one current pracharak, had no assets. Media has not celebrated the story of value-based and moral life of these anti-thesis of modern politicians, on the contrary it has tried to find loopholes in this story. There was a debate on CNBC where Karan Thapar, Vinod Mehta and their ilk refused to believe that it is possible. I can understand media kings disbelieving that a much appreciated journalist like Tarun Vijay can lead his life committed to his mission without amassing any wealth inspite of being in media for decades. It is probably embarrassing for them! A simple Anil Dave in the thick of Madhya Pradesh politics without assets is an anachronism hard to digest! Same media czars harangue people on lack of morality and values in politics and tar all the politicians with black brush of corruption.

I have come to the conclusion that the veil of secrecy is not drawn by RSS, but it is a veil pulled over it by media itself. By doing so it is doing a disservice to people. In its own judgmental wisdom it probably decided to be the prosecutor and the jury; and ordained that RSS work must be kept a secret from the society so the harm can be kept to the minimum. When you couple this attitude with excessive media exposure that works as oxygen for terrorists and separatists in Kashmir or 'Breaking India forces' you wonder about clarity of thought of the Indian media.

Having highlighted the problematic relationship between media and RSS, I may say that RSS too has been lax or a little slow in changing with the times. The abiding thought and mental makeup of the RSS workers based on the founder's directive to keep away from publicity and work silently, had been stretched too far, for too long.

Till a few years back, media used to be an unnecessary waste of time, or at the best, a necessary evil for RSS. To put it on record, RSS created a 'Prachar Vibhag' or 'media cell' in 1994, 70 years after RSS was established. However, only recently has it begun to look at various arms of media as crucial tools to disseminate its views and ideology; something that is a must, keeping with the current communication trends in today's battle for the minds.

Objective of the 'media cell' is to share positive information and news about RSS, Hindu society, various organisations, even social upliftment work of those not related to RSS. It is not to be a vehicle for organisational or personal publicity or marketing.

It is still work in progress. While it is true that a major section of media is dominated by secular-Marxist parivaar, there is also a sizable section in media which simply does not know enough about RSS and is susceptible to impressions created by this dominant section. The sheer inertia and disinterest in doing some leg work and research to understand the spirit of RSS work, and its positive social impact leads to absence of information or distorted information about RSS and its affiliates. This year's 'controversy' raised about absence of women in shorts in RSS, implying women are not allowed in the RSS by Congress VP Rahul Gandhi showed us poor

information even about an 85 year old women's' organization called Rashtra Sevika Samiti that has 100s of branches across India and over one lac members. It holds public programmes, including parades in its uniform. A senior 'political' editor admitted to me during a TV debate that even he didn't know about this work! Whom to blame? Lack of media interest or failure of Samiti to get itself published or advertised?

With this clarity that it should only project good work, not project individuals or run propaganda, it has begun projecting itself in Social Media, mainly Facebook and YouTube. Its presence on Twitter is limited, as yet. However, most of what you see or read in social media, even now, is not an organised effort of RSS related groups but mostly individual exertions. On its part RSS is sharing more and more news and information with main stream media and opened up for more interactions with the media. It has become active in supporting seminars and workshops that promote alternative views. It is also taking interest in other outreach options to broadcast alternative views on issues affecting India. Readers can find RSS related people on social platforms and mainstream media, including TV channels in nearly all languages. This has created a positive image of RSS and helped people understand it better. It is very amusing to meet people on television panels who are surprised to know that RSS members are also normal reasonable human beings like others!

Battle has been joined with the Left dominated media. and it is clear that they are feeling the heat. Since last year, senior RSS leaders are being invited to Literature Festivals that resulted in 'celebrated' Left Liberal intellectuals boycotting those festivals. Worse still, those writers and intellectuals who attend an event organised seemingly by RSS related organizations, or RSS itself, are being virtually boycotted by today's mainstream organisers as 'Sanghis'. Invitations are sent but not confirmed. Film industry people who express opinions contrary to leading film personalities with left leanings find themselves being offered less work. Talk of 'Freedom of Expression'! But, I am confident this cultural and ideological apartheid will go too, due to changing narrative.

Lack of credibility of its narrative, divorced from reality, has increasingly led to the substitution of the mainstream media with a social media as the alternative source of news, even if there are pitfalls of fake news too getting circulated sometimes. But, veteran media people point out that manufacturing news has crept into mainstream media too. Infact several news stories that would have been buried come alive but for social media. I note with satisfaction that television channels that are thriving and topping the TRP charts are those supporting nationalist cause and not those with divisive agenda of pseudo-secular casteist politics. We are witnessing democratisation of the news dissemination systems. It has come as a blessing to RSS as an organisation and its workers and sympathisers are now pushing it into limelight with positive results.

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ANNEXURE

When I set out to write this book, I had meant it to be a kind of primer about the RSS for laymen who wished to know about RSS, its philosophy, its method of working and manifestation of its philosophy, but did not know where to look for it. I also found that there was no book, especially in English that gave a comprehensive 360° view of RSS. It went through some revisions with inputs from friends. People giving their critical inputs, both within and outside the RSS, felt that the RSS has been targeted for decades by media and vested political interests on some unfounded information. The untruths and partial truths have been circulated and repeated so many times that people have stopped questioning them. I felt that it was necessary to set record straight especially about RSS and Gandhi's murder, the RSS and its participation or non-participation in freedom movement and the back ground to the antagonism that RSS faces from Congress and its leftist friends since 1947-48. Since, RSS side of story is not easily available on book-shelves for various reasons, I decided to add an annexure covering these aspects from authentic sources.

I chose latest well referenced and researched biography of Shri M. S. Golwalkar, better known as Guruji, the second and longest serving Sarsanghchalak as the basis of this annexure. It has been written by a very senior R.S.S. pracharak Shri Ranga Hari in Hindi and was released a few months back. It is available in Hindi currently. I had the fortune of translating it into English and it is under print now. Considering the importance of references in this section, I have listed the original references used by Shri Ranga Hari in this part of the book.

Annexure I is a small essay about all the Sarsanghchalaaks or Chiefs of RSS since its inception. Sarsanghchalak of RSS is supposed to give

direction to RSS movement, but is hardly seen or heard by common people, I felt that a little information about them and their impact on RSS growth would be a good idea. Annexures II to V cover the historic period of 1942 to 1948. Annexure II is my note on RSS and Politics, since there are routine debates about it. Annexures III to VI cover the historic period of 1942 to 1948.

Though this section is a little longer than an annexure should be, I think, it will be highly appreciated by serious students who sincerely wish to know the other side of the story.

I take this opportunity to thank Shri Ranga Hari from bottom of my heart for allowing me to quote freely from his book.

Annexure I

Sarsanghchaalaks of RSS

I was a young boy when I saw and heard Guruji, the second Sarsanghchaalak. I was too young to understand or analyse him as a leader of the movement. I could sense a feeling of hushed awe when he entered any meeting place. However, I have worked in various capacities in the RSS from third Sarsanghchaalak onward. As a common worker of the RSS, I have looked upto them, attended their meetings, their discussions and Q&A sessions. I thought it would be a good idea to look at their work briefly as a witness to their times.

Sarsanghchaalak is a guide and philosopher of the RSS and is not supposed to be hands on policy implementer. The decision making and policy making in the RSS is a collective responsibility,, thus, to give full credit of work during his tenure to Sarsanghchaalak would not be correct. But, it is equally true that each Sarsanghchaalak, by virtue of his primacy and respect he commands, creates an impact on the Sangh work which is reflected in organisation's working and growth due to his leadership; even as he takes along his team that may have people even senior to him. This is typical of Sangh that the importance of a person is not defined by his age or the place he comes from.

It is not a scholarly analysis, as I am ill equipped to do it. Nor are these views based on serious study of their biographies and available literature. These are based purely on my personal experiences during their times.

1. Founder Dr. K.B. Hedgewar alias Doctorji (1925-1940)

I have mentioned about Dr. Hedgwar extensively in the book. He did his study in medicine from Kolkata where he was consumed more with an urge to do something to free the motherland than with becoming a doctor. He was an active member of Anusheelan Samiti, underground movement of revolutionaries. His code name in CID files there was 'koken'. He was also senior office bearer at state level in pre-independence Congress before he launched the RSS. It is but natural that his name crops up routinely in any discussion about RSS.

Dr. Hedgewar's contribution to the theory of Indian social organisations' creation, management and growth is incomparable. This contribution in creation of a unique model of organisation building is more important than the fact that he was founder of RSS. It is was and remains an entirely new model never tried out anywhere in the world.

Some of the firsts to his credit are – the idea of daily get together for a minimum period of one hour to instill a sense of moral values and patriotism, discipline, inculcating non-monetised value system and spirit of sacrifice and working as a team not as individual right from young age. This seemingly simple idea of devoting atleast one hour daily for the society and nation finally motivates simple ordinary individuals to devote not just an hour but even their lives. He established the idea of paying out of pocket for all your activities, not expecting anything from the society but giving it back. The importance of anonymity while contributing to the cause of society and organisation as per one's capacity, thus no chance of money influencing decision making at any level. His novel thought of choosing a symbol and not an individual as the 'Guru' or 'master', thus giving a clear signal of avoiding personality worship or personality oriented activities. He underlined the importance of shedding personal ego, setting example by highest possible sacrifices himself thus leading by example. He devised a truly indigenous training methodology for workers, transforming a common citizen swayamsevak into a committed social worker. All this led to creation of an organisation rose on the foundational structure of 'shakhas'

that has grown and consolidated since 92 years with no splits or bitter power struggles – the bane of Indian social organisations.

Apart from these signal contributions, he set ground rules of keeping Sangh and its work separate from political activism and electoral politics by creating as much insulation between the two as possible. If a person were to take up any political activities, he was to do that as an individual and not as Sangh representative or Sangh. He stuck throughout to his basic philosophy that “Sangh will do nothing, swayamsevakas will do everything”. To set an example, he resigned from the post of Sarsanghchalak and handed over reins of organisation to another leader when he participated in satyagrah during struggle for independence.

Without any show or publicity, he strengthened movement against untouchability, women’s empowerment and took Hinduism out of ritualism and re-ignited its cultural spirit.

2. Shri M.S. Golwalkar alias Guruji (1940-1973)

Shri M.S. Golwalkar alias Guruji was recruited by one of the students in BHU, Bhaiyyaji Dani, into Sangh quite late in life when he was teaching at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). He was a post graduate in Zoology and Bachelor of Law. He was lovingly called ‘Guruji’ by his students in BHU with whom he was very popular due to his huge treasure of knowledge and ever willing nature to help them, whether they belonged to his class, subjects or not. Thus, this popular way of addressing him as Guruji has nothing to do with his being head of RSS. Saffron flag is the only guru in Sangh.

He would have become a ‘Sadhu’ in the Ramakrishna Mission order of Swami Akhandaananda but for this interlude in Banaras and subsequent incidents in his life. He had taken ‘diksha’ from Swamiji i.e. he was an ordained ‘sanyasin’. He was simply bowled over by Dr. Hedgewar’s fierce patriotism and selfless hard work. His elevation to the highest post at a young age of 34 years was a big surprise for everybody outside Sangh. But, it reinforced the philosophy of promoting talent rather than work on the

principle of seniority in the organisation. Subsequent history attested to the wisdom of Doctor Hedgewar's choice.

Guruji held the reins of the RSS for the longest period of 33 years in its history. A period that saw tumultuous events of independence movement, climaxing in a blood soaked partition, first and toughest ban on RSS and its withdrawal, restoring the young organisation back to health and putting it on path of phenomenal growth. He was instrumental in seeing the growth of the small plant that had blossomed under Doctor Hedgewar's guidance into massive banyan tree of RSS that stuck roots all cross India in every nook and corner. Like a Banyan tree many sub-root systems and branches of allied organisations sprouted in nearly all the social segments both horizontally and vertically. He systematised the organisational methodology designed by Doctorji into a mature science of organisation and human building.

He was probably one of the most well-read person of India at that time with wide ranging interests from Arts to Science and from Technology to Spiritualism. He could talk with any person from a child to an intellectual with ease with enough interesting knowledge sharing. This, coupled with his divine spirituality created an impact on the organisation far beyond just physical growth and consolidation. His spirituality and asceticism seeped through Sangh in nearly all its aspects. The institution of pracharak system – the backbone of organisational growth – has a spiritual halo with ascetic and celibate lifestyle probably due to lifestyle and personality of Guruji. The resulting near spiritual way of working in Sangh carries an indelible stamp of Guruji's spiritual practices. In one of his speeches he was resoundingly critical people who thought that following rituals makes one religious and spiritual. In another place he says, "Worship is not business. This is pure surrender, a one sided affair. We only give. Only people, who surrender their all, can pull a nation out of the ruins of destruction and take it to the pinnacle of glory."

To me, the most long lasting contribution of Guruji to consolidation and unification of Hindu society, apart from expansion of Sangh work, was bringing together of heads of various Hindu sects, religions and traditions

on one common platform of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, attempted never before in Hinduism's thousands of years' of history. To make these leaders to declare untouchability as 'un-Hindu' was something only he could achieve due to his humility and charming equation with nearly all spiritual leaders of the time at spiritual level.

His role as the rock solid and aggressive supporter for Hindu refugees abandoned by the then Congress leaders and later Indian government led by them is unforgettable. The price that swayamsevaks paid for their valour is recorded in Sangh history, though neglected by Indian historians for the fear of glorifying 'communal' patriots. He and his band of thousands of dedicated workers not only saw to their safe passage to India as far as possible but also their rehabilitation.

Ofcourse, it was under his sagacious and patient leadership that the young RSS survived the highly pernicious and oppressive first ban. No other organisation could have probably survived the ruthless state force under the motivated urge of Nehru to 'crush' RSS who was enjoying unparalleled power. It is to his credit that inspite of this ruinous ban, subsequent satyagrah resulting in nearly 77000 supporters spending 5-6 months behind bars, losing their jobs, businesses, Sangh revived and grew in following years. One of the reason may have been that he carried no rancour against anybody and was ready to extend his hand and go an extra mile for harmony in society. He never spoke ill of Pandit Nehru though he personally and RSS suffered immensely due to his malicious bias. He was an admirer of Sardar Patel for his sterling role in unifying India and became his good friend though he had succumbed to Nehru's partisan politics and supported and continued ban on RSS till circumstances forced him to rescind it. Pandit Nehru probably realised his folly later in life after shameful 1962 debacle and rock solid support given by RSS cadre to the government in this war and invited RSS to join the Republic day parade in 1963. Guruji agreed readily to the proposal.

3. Shri Madhukar alias Balasaheb Deoras (1973-1994)

Balasaheb Deoras was a quintessential product of the organisational process set up by Dr. Hedgewar. He was an ordinary dedicated swayamsevak who grew up into a social worker and leader. He was one of the first recruits in the first shakha started by Dr. Hedgewar. He trained as a lawyer but dedicated his life to RSS work after graduation. .

He was an organiser par excellence, a down to earth person. He was one of the top 3-4 key leaders of struggle to lift ban on RSS in 1948. Guruji was behind bars during most of the time and his young band of colleagues had to carry on with this struggle with periodic guidance from him. Guruji used to say that if you wish to know about Doctorji, look at Balasaheb. He was a totally hands-on person with great rapport with swayamsevaks. He was approachable and open to any question; and patient with his answers, how so ever trivial they may seem to others. He was highly compassionate about swayamsevaks' problems and very sensitive to social discrimination.

He had a clear and scientific perspective of Indian society and its ills. Though the fight against untouchability and support for reforms in Hindu society had been a silent work of the Sangh for long time, he spoke resoundingly "If untouchability is not bad then nothing is bad in this world. Untouchability must go – lock, stock and barrel."

The doomsayers in newspapers had raised the bogey of 'After Guruji who?' and began writing virtual obituary of Sangh. But, his own silent and strong working, coupled with a personality neutral system developed by Sangh, organisation saw sustained growth of the organisation. Though he himself stayed away from media like his predecessors, he made RSS more media friendly and open to interaction with media.

He was clear that RSS was not in day to day politics, but if situation demanded it would be ready to jump into politics for good of the nation. His decision to align with democratic anti-corruption movement symbolised by 'Navnirman Andolan', persuading Jai Prakash Narain to lead the agitation through his colleagues like Nanaji Deshmukh was a courageous move that his opponents had not imagined. His subsequent leadership in the fight for democracy during emergency showed Sangh's and its cadres' commitment to democratic ideals. His support for dissolution of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh

to merge with the Janata Party must have been one of the toughest decisions of his life. But, it altered the political geography and history of India forever.

Balasaheb Deoras's lasting contribution was the structured approach he helped create in social service arena where the RSS was present for a long time but no formal structure had been created. What started as a plan to set up 1000 social service projects during Dr. Hedgewar's birth centenary in 1989 has grown to over 170,000 social service projects now.

His solid backing for equitable harmonious society (samaajik samarasataa) led to a movement that has seen coming together of people with differing views on the problem of discriminative caste system but a common goal of resolving it with social harmony, with a sense of equality, not political haranguing.

He was at the helm of affairs during historic 'Ekaatmataa Yatra' and 'Ram Janmabhoomi Andolan', movements that changed the perspective of Hindus about their national identity and unity as also dynamics of Indian polity, bringing Hindutva into the political centre stage from peripheries to which Nehruvians and Marxists had been able to push it for decades.

4. Prof. Rajendra Singh alias Rajju Bhaiyya (1994-2000)

A man of very high intellect, Rajju Bhaiyya joined RSS during his post-graduation days in BHU and rose fast in the RSS hierarchy due to his brilliant organisational acumen. He would walk into his classes as a professor directly with his 'jhola' of the pracharak, in his trade mark 'dhoti kurta' to give lectures.

His brilliance in science had led Shri C. V. Raman to invite him to join him in research, and later in life by Homi Bhabha. However, he had already chosen his path, to work for the society through RSS.

He was very soft spoken and had a very pleasant, radiant personality. There was something spiritual about his inner core that reflected in his personality. He had a calming effect on anybody who went to meet him. He was addressed as 'Rajju bhaiyya' by everybody from his teaching days due

to his benign and very helpful personality. He was a very good poet and singer and had helped set music to many RSS songs.

One of the most important beliefs of Rajju Bhaiyya was: “All people are basically nice. One should deal with every person by believing in his goodness. Anger, jealousy, etc., are offshoots of his past experiences, which affect his behavior. Primarily every person is nice and everyone is reliable.”

He had a very sharp memory and would call people and his ex-students by name even after meeting them after years and decades. He had intellectual and physical courage and a steely resolve. He didn't shy away from expressing his opinion clearly.

His passion for education encouraged RSS associate organisations to reach out to the nook and corners of India and run thousands of schools during his tenure as Sarsanghchaalak. Interestingly, he was in the team of pracharakas that included Nanaji Deshmukh and Bhaurao Deoras who initiated this education movement of Sangh way back in 1948-1950s with encouraging support of Guruji.

Like other Sarsanghchaalaks he was a firm believer in the concept of Swadeshi and empowering rural economy. Initiating the rural developmental activities, he had declared in 1995 that the utmost priority should be of making the villages hunger-free, disease-free and literate (*kshudha mukta, roga mukta, tatha shikshayukta*). Today, there are hundreds of villages where the rural development work done by swayamsevakas and inspired the people of surrounding villages, their experiments are being emulated by those people.

He had a knack of nurturing relations with students, compatriots, academicians, spiritual and social/political leaders across political spectrum. Rajju bhaiyya was mentor to many political leaders of BJP. He had a sharp political mind but kept away scrupulously from active politics. His critical role in RSS can be gauged from the fact that he was the key person during emergency to contact senior bureaucrats, political leaders and activists across India during underground struggle. He was one of the senior RSS functionaries guiding Ram Janmabhoomi movement. It was during his tenure as RSS chief that BJP ascended from being a bit player to become

the leading player in national politics, resulting in a BJP led central government finally.

5. Shri K. S. Sudarshan (2000 - 2009)

Sudarshan ji had a sharp intellect, great clarity of thought and was outspoken. A Gold medalist post graduate telecom engineer by training, he was thoroughly read and marshaled his thoughts crisply. He was a Kannadiga who studied and lived his earlier life in Madhya Pradesh and grew as a senior RSS pracharak in that state. He was a polyglot with knowledge of six languages from Southern and Northern India. He was impatient and blunt in his observations but nobody could challenge his analysis easily.

He was passionate about Swadeshi and travelled to remotest corners of Bharat whenever he hears about a successful or path breaking experiment about innovative indigenous technologies even after retiring from the top post. He was always there to encourage such people. His lectures used to be peppered with anecdotes about such experiments and successful models, illustrating forcefully that Swadeshi was not a dreamy philosophy but something that could make India self-sufficient and society more equitable. His stress on self-sustaining rural economy, sustainable consumption – not just sustainable development, espousal about scientific Hindu way of personal, social and national life for national and global harmony was his theme for many years.

He had studied Islam and Christianity deeply. He could talk to Muslim scholars and Church clergy with aplomb with deep knowledge and present his view point honestly without ruffling their feathers. He was instrumental in helping the foundation of Rashtriya Muslim Manch. It was his major contribution to national integration.

Many analysts consider his inability to take along leaders of other allied movements of Hindutva a weakness in his leadership. However, I think, he was there in the historic period when the whole society and various Hindutva related organisations were in a big churn. Thus, it would not have

been an easy task for anybody. His critics, especially in media, could not easily find anything objectionable in his analysis of a situation or his solutions, but are unable to come to terms with his forthright style and tried to present him in a negative light, rather than highlighting his scientific approach to Hindutva.

To my mind, his signal contribution was to bring back unapologetic, well-reasoned aggression to Hindutva philosophy. He presented Hindutva in a scientific manner and explained how it alone could respond to challenges of environmental degradation, civilizational clashes and related issues plaguing India and the world.

6. Dr. Mohan Bhagwat (2009)

Dr. Mohan Bhagwat is a veterinary doctor by training and second generation swayamsevak from Nagpur. His father was one of the first bands of pracharaks and initiated Sangh work in Gujarat. He has radiance on his face and a twinkle in the eyes and a ready smile; a person with whom you can feel cheerful in any kind of situation. His meetings are generally lively with some light hearted banter too.

He is always open to new ideas and ready to listen. This openness is what attracts workers to him for any discussion. Behind this easy exterior is a firm mind that is focused on the heart of RSS work i.e. the RSS shakhas. He is again, clearly an organisation man giving top priority to organisation above anything else. His lectures are precise, to the point, which show his clarity of thought.

The way he has carried out his responsibilities so far, it seems that he will bring in more vigour to the organisation. He should be able to give new dimension to Sangh work that needs to move in tune with rapid societal changes.

The recent victory of BJP and Modi and his strong backing for generational change in BJP has shown his decisive and forward looking personality. It is an indication that he is going to leave behind a strong stamp of his personality in modern India's history.

Annexure II

1942, Quit India Agitation and RSS

Year 1942 was literally a year of comprehensive transformation in the history of Sangh. Large number of swayamsevaks volunteered to become pracharaks. Most of them were highly educated. From Lahore alone there were new 48 pracharaks, 52 pracharaks came from Amritsar while Nagpur saw 22 new pracharaks that year.¹ Other centres had similar experience.

But, there were already some of evil omens for the RSS. Central government came out with a gazette on August 5, 1940. As per its sections 56-58, private organisations were prohibited from giving army training or wearing army uniforms. There was no mention of the Sangh in it. But, the language of this gazette indicated for whom it was framed. The crafty British knew very well about the political background of Dr. Hedgewar, so they were keeping a close watch on Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh founded by him. This is the reason Central Province government had issued a gazette 8 years back on December 15, 1932 that termed participation of government servants in Sangh illegal. Sangh had come out of such trials successfully. Dr. Hedgewar, who was well versed in public life, was gone and his successor Golwalkar seemed to be raw, relatively inexperienced. So, this seemed to be the right time to strangle it. This was the intention behind this government order.²

Guruji took steps that would help swayamsevaks work undisturbed for their goal without being bothered with this order. The report sent by the

central police intelligence department on December 13, 1943 speaks about the impact of his communications. “It is not possible to build a case for banning Sangh. But, it is equally clear that Golwalkar is creating a strong organisation at a rapid pace that would obey orders, maintaining confidentiality and jump into any activity of sabotage or of any other type whenever required as per their leader’s orders. The structure of this organisation looks superficially like that of ‘khaaksaars’. But, the fundamental difference between the two is that the leader of Khaaksaar, Inaayatullah, is a big mouthed imbalanced lunatic, while Golwalkar is a very cautious, crafty and much more capable leader.”³

When Sangh was growing at such a pace, August Kranti (Quit India movement) of 1942 exploded onto the scene. This was the second freedom struggle in the life time of Sangh. First one was the Salt satyagrah of 1930. Dr. Hedgewar had taken part in that movement in his personal capacity after handing over the responsibilities of Sarsanghchaalak to Dr. L. V. Paranjape. Appaji Joshi of Vardha and Dadarao Paramarth had also gone to prison with him. A circular was sent to all the shakhas that ‘ordinary swayamsevak can take part in the satyagrah in his personal capacity after taking permission from the local Sanghchaalak’. After twelve years now, Guruji faced the question of taking part in 1942 movement.

During these intervening twelve years, strong hunger for independence had awakened the entire society across all section of the populace. On the other hand condition of British was deteriorating rapidly in the fierce war. Feeling that their poor position implies our strong position, ordinary people of the country believed that independence was round the corner. Situation for Sangh had also changed a lot for the better. Number of experienced workers had risen. Though, the growth was not very balanced, the Sangh had expanded geographically in large areas. But, it was also true that this expansion was limited to Mumbai Presidency and Central Province. In other places, its presence was more like a seedling. Still the tone of organisation was that of growth. Guruji had to decide about the role of the Sangh in this background.

Guruji convened a meeting of state level workers. It was decided to evaluate the state of the movement dispassionately. Famous revolutionary Dr. Pandurangrao Khaankhoje (who had earned his fame in Mexico) and Sangh strategist Balasaheb Deoras were sent to meet underground leader Jayprakash Narayan with this objective in mind. Guruji was keen to get satisfactory answers to seven questions. The questions were –

1. Part of ‘Dying’ is clear in the slogan ‘Do or Die’. But what is to be ‘Done’? Has Congress working committee given any directions about it?
2. What is the immediate and long term goal of the movement? That is, what do we want to achieve without fail?
3. What is the working methodology of the movement and how is it going to work?
4. How long will the movement run?
5. You must have estimated your strength, how big is this strength?
6. What is the next move after the movement is successful? And
7. If it is unsuccessful, then what is to be done next?⁴

Dr. Khaankhoje and Deoras came back after meeting Jayprakash ji. Dr. Khaankhoje’s opinion was that “none of the answers by Jayprakash ji was satisfactory. Not only this, there was no clear direction about what was to be done or not done by the people, next in line, after the front line leaders were arrested.” In light of this information, Guruji held discussions with his colleagues. He was aware of Sangh’s strengths and limitations as an organisation. He had also discovered the actual state of movement. In spite of all this, he had no two opinions about the lofty goals of this movement. Under the circumstances, Guruji decided that, “The agitation is being conducted for the freedom of the country. Therefore, swayamsevaks, as citizens, can take part in this agitation in whichever part of the country they are. But, as an organisation, Sangh will keep working for national cause, that is, organising the society; without getting involved in the agitation directly.”

There is another direct source of information of this subject. That is a personal interaction of Dattopant Thengdi at that time. Here is his account: “Guruji had to go to Chennai after his programme in the port city of Mangalore in September 1942. Swayamsevaks and pracharakas were deeply upset and they were in a state of dilemma due to impact of the movement that was shaking up the whole nation. Questions like, why is Sangh inactive in these times? What is the use of its strength? etc. hurt their souls hard. I was pracharak in Calicut in Kerala those days. Brethren there insisted that we should meet Shri Guruji and inform him of these ground realities. With this objective, I met Shri Guruji in Mangalore. Summary of his detailed response is as follows:

1. Sangh has its own code of conduct in such matters. According to these, when the Sangh founder, Doctorji took part in satyagrah, he kept Sangh out of the agitation and urged swayamsevaks to keep their Sangh work going without any disruption.
2. However, if we were to reach near the goal of independence by leaving aside this tradition, then we are not bound by it. Because our work and traditions have the same goal and independence is definitely our immediate goal.
3. It would have been desirable if the Congress had taken other parties and Sangh into confidence before initiating the agitation. But, it did not do so. Still, there is no reason to be upset. Independence gained through this movement will be for all, not just for Congress. So, it would not be right to show any ego in this matter.
4. It is a worrying prospect that Congress leaders have not made any preparations before launch of this agitation. People had to face and fight British rulers directly. There was no planned arrangement for this. Thought it is true that in a period of revolution, things won't go as per plans; it is equally true that there should be some element of planning and leaders should be alert to take advantage of any situation that might arise. It is also true that policies and directions depend only on fervour of the people and leaders cannot do much about it. But, we must

remember that it is fatal not to have any plans during a movement or revolution.

5. In spite of all this, if a country was to gain independence with Sangh jumping into the agitation, we would have not been averse to it. But, when I took a comprehensive view, it was my firm belief that we would not be able to reach anywhere near the goal.
6. Many people have overestimated Sangh's present strength. It is a situation where people who are in a place where Sangh is strong, believe that Sangh is equally strong in other places too. But, this is not the reality. To be victorious in a struggle, many other things need to be favourable apart from your strength. Of these, first is support from common people and their co-operation. Second is dissatisfaction among police, armed forces etc. Attitude of these sections of government is crucial before one takes the path of struggle. Even if these factors were favourable, still chances of success of our struggle would be bleak, this is my assessment. I believe that our strength will be limited from Belgaum to Gondia. Will we be able to achieve our objective with these limitations?

The truth is that our influence is limited to the central region of our country. Even if the struggle was to be successful in this limited area, it would be possible for our enemy to post its army from all the directions. People will get frustrated with such a development. But, if the zone of struggle were to be near the borders, it would be easy to put up a fight and would be more useful from strategy point of view.

In such circumstances, I believe that it would be fruitless for Sangh as an organisation to get involved in this movement. It doesn't mean that we wish to save our skin. But the truth is that people will end up disappointed with this agitation.”⁵

In short, Sangh leadership comprehended the inherent weakness of this battle, practical view of the Sangh's organisational status across India, society's mental state and permitted swayamsevakas as patriotic citizens to take part in this national struggle and extend whole hearted co-operation to

it. As a result many swayamsevaks jumped into this battle and took part to the best of their abilities along with common people, as a part of the society. In Vidarbha, swayamsevaks of Chimur launched agitation under the leadership of Ramakant Deshpande. Breaking the bounds of non-violence, it turned violent. A few British were also killed in an encounter. This encounter became famous in the history of this movement as ‘Chimur Ashti episode’. Deshpande was sentenced to death, but later commuted to imprisonment with some legal luminary’s intervention

Similar was the heroic story of Hemu Kalani of Sakkar town in Sindh. He was busy removing fishplates from the railway tracks with his brave colleagues. Their objective was to frustrate the plans to move forces to suppress the struggle in various areas. Unfortunately, Hemu was arrested. His friends escaped. Hemu was awarded death sentence by the Army Court in 1943. Sindhi brethren in Mumbai celebrate the memory of martyr Hemu Kalani in Mumbai to this day.⁶ Unfortunately, his name is not celebrated as a freedom fighter in official records, probably because he was an RSS volunteer. He was disowned in Pakistan as he was a Hindu - from a community that was thrown out of Pakistan. And, he is not remembered in India because he belongs to an uprooted community that lost its entire land to Pakistan formation.

Apart from such activities, many swayamsevaks also helped the underground leaders of the movement. House of Sanghchaalak of North East Lala Hansraj was the secret place of stay for Aruna Asaf Ali. She herself speaks about it in an interview published in Hindi daily ‘Hindustan’ in August 1967. She says, “I was underground in 1942 agitation, Delhi Sanghchaalak Lala Hansraj provided me refuge in his house for 10-15 days and arranged for my complete safety. He saw to it that nobody got information about my stay at his house. Since, underground workers should not stay at for long at the same place, I moved out of his house dancing ‘Bhangra’ in an embroidered ghagra and chunari in a baraat (marriage procession). This dress was given to me by Lalaji’s wife. When I went to return it in due course, she refused to take it back, saying, keep it with you as our gift with our best wishes.”⁷

“When the famous Vedic scholar Pandit Shripad Damodar Satavalekar was Sanghchaalak of Aundh, he had given asylum for many days to the revolutionary underground leader Nana Patil who had experimented with the novel idea ‘Patri Sarkaar’. Nana Patil’s colleague Kisanveer had stayed at the house of Satara Sanghchaalak in Wai while working underground there. Famous Socialist leader Achyutrao Patwardhan had stayed at many Sangh swayamsevaks’ homes when he used to work underground and change places according to circumstances. Not only these people, but even the life-long bitter opponent of Sangh, follower of Gandhiji like Sane Guruji used to stay at Pune Sanghchaalak Bhausahab Deshmukh’s house secretly.”⁸

The Congress committee member of Solapur, Ganesh Bapuji Shinkar had taken part in the satyagrah to press for the removal of ban on Sangh in 1948. He had resigned from Congress on grounds of democratic ethics before joining the satyagrah. He issued a statement clarifying his stand and it was published on 12th December, 1948. He says, “I had participated in Bharat Chhodo (Quit India) movement in 1942. Capitalist and agrarian community was scared of the government at that time, therefore we were not offered safe haven in their homes. We had to stay in Sangh workers’ homes to work underground. People from Sangh used to help us happily with our underground work. They also took care of all our needs. Not only this, if someone from amongst us fell sick, Sangh swayamsevak doctors used to treat us. Sangh swayamsevaks who were advocates, used to fight our cases fearlessly. Their patriotism and value based living was undisputable.”⁹

When anti-national Communists were acting like fifth columnists and getting agitating patriots arrested, the Sangh was doing its bit for the struggle. Eventually, the agitation cooled down after 75 days by the end of October. Scattered and weak leadership and disorganised agitation on one side and highly well entrenched ruling set up of British on the other, led to death of a well-intentioned movement in its infancy.

That British rulers were alert was well known. CID kept sending reports about the RSS Chief regularly. The report on 30th December 1943 says,

“Rashtriya Swayamsevak is moving ahead rapidly towards building a highly significant all India organisation. Spokesmen of Sangh keep saying that the basic goal of Sangh is to achieve Hindu unity. In a programme in November 1943 in Lahore, M. S. Golwalkar declared that Sangh’s objective is to remove the feeling of untouchability and weaving together all sections of Hindu society in a single unifying thread. It is clear that Sangh is bent upon expanding its area of influence and this year it has been able to bring on board, the famous religious saint Sant Tukadoji Maharaj from Central Province for spreading its message.”

“Membership of Sangh is swelling continuously. In Central Province, membership has increased from thirty two thousand to thirty three thousand three hundred forty four. It has reached twenty thousand four hundred seventy six from eighteen thousand twenty nine in Mumbai and fourteen thousand from ten thousand in Punjab. A new dimension to their growth is their efforts to gain entry in the villages. M. S. Golwalkar laid a lot of stress on this aspect in the winter camp of Vardha - that Sangh should expand into villages.”

“Sangh office bearers from its head office are touring the shakhas in remote areas continuously, so that they can heighten interest of swayamsevaks in Sangh work, give them secret directions and strengthen the local organisation. We can see the recent well spread out tour of the present Chief of Sangh, M. S. Golwalkar as an example of such efforts. In last month of April he was in Ahmedabad, in May he was in Amravati and Pune. In June he was in Nasik and Banaras. He toured Chaandaa in August, Pune in September, Madras and Central Province in October, and Rawalpindi in November.”¹⁰

Thus, it is clear that Sangh was involved in Independence movement and particularly 1942 movement, a movement show cased as the cathartic period in independence struggle.

***(Excerpts from Chapter 18 of Shri Guruji Golwalkar, Biography
by Ranga Hari)***

1. Shri Guruji Punjab Mein	- 29-30
2. Shri Guruji Samagra	- 9
3. Sangh Beej se Vriksha	- 60-61
4. Raashtraay Namah	- 83-84
5. Pioneer of New Era	- 54-55
6. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh – Sindh kaa Pravaas	- 71
7. Rashtraay Namah	- 85-86
8. Ibid	- 86
9. Pahli Agnipareekshaa	- 140-141
10. Sangh Beej se Vriksha	- 63-66

Annexure III

Background of Ban on RSS in 1948

In his book ‘Golwalkar and R.S.S.’ author Jagat S. Bright writes, “R.S.S. had worked like Red Cross Society during period of independence and partition. Sangh’s contribution in saving innocent people from the explosion of Islamist blind faith before and after the independence was outstanding. Service that R.S.S. did for the society in those hours of grave danger was highly appreciated by the Deputy Prime Minister, Sardar Patel. Tireless efforts put in by Sangh to resettle the refugees properly could not be overlooked by anyone even if one wished to. This very fact generated jealousy and dread in political circles. Responding to it pointedly, Guruji had noted in the Vijayaadashami festival of that year on 24th October, 1947, “Reacting to the acknowledgement that Sangh has received for easing the pain of affected Hindu people of Punjab, an English daily has commented that it is ‘Unfortunate, but true.’ Various political parties also wish to confront Sangh in a similar manner. They are worried that in case Sangh enters the arena of electoral politics, what will be their fate. I wish to assure these parties trying to save their respective reputations with means fair or foul, that their fear is meaningless.”¹

He sought people’s attention about their national duty, “First step upon attaining nation’s independence is to take pride in our forefathers, and not in philosophies of other nations like Russia, America, England etc. When every individual owns up the goal of national welfare, forgetting about self,

only then the nation can arise. Independence will be founded only on selfless sacrifice.”²

As the day of independence drew near, he explained the meaning of this word to RSS activists. To his mind, independence did not simply mean transfer of power. Getting rid of slavery and being independent – he looked at both conditions differently. For him, Bharat’s ‘independence’ - not being dependent, and Bharat’s freedom – being free - were not the same. Former word symbolises lack of dependence while the latter symbolises the power of ‘self’. Addressing senior citizens in capital, Delhi, he said, “Liberating our intellect from the values (samskars) of other countries and evolving a system (tantra) of growth with our own feelings and will is ‘swa-tantra’ (system by self). But, a system that is born through ignoring our history, being slaves of intellect of others, inspired by other societies will not be ‘swa-tantra’ but ‘para-tantra’ (system of others, or slavery of others).’ Philosophy of nationalism is not a philosophy about political rights. We do not wish to borrow talent from outsiders to build our lives. We have our own talent. We will create our own way of life from it. A system that will symbolise our sense of pride, that would be built around comprehensive ‘Bharatiyata’, that through which flows perennial Bharatiya tradition, that is the system of national way of life.”³

Mahatma Gandhi was staying in a Harijan basti during this period. Our Harijan brethren had built a small but beautiful and clean temple for their forefather, effulgent soul, Sage Valmiki in one corner of the colony. On the other side there was a large settlement of Muslims. Therefore, the government had acknowledged internally that Mahatma’s life was not safe in that Harijan settlement. Gandhiji, on the other hand, was against posting of military or police for his security there. In this state of dilemma, top Congress leader Krishnan Nair met state pracharak Vasantrao Oke and requested him to arrange for security of revered Bapuji. Vasantrao implemented a proper plan for this.⁴

Not even thirty days had passed since proclamation of independence when Muslim League hatched a conspiracy to blow up the top leaders of Bharat with a massive explosion. Alert swayamsevaks were doing their own

investigation working day and night had done and passed on precise information to Sardar Patel. Based on this information, armed forces raided many places in Paharganj and surrounding areas and captured large cache of arms and explosives, and took action against the rebels. Dr. Bhagwandas, recipient of Bharat Ratna, lifted the lid off this conspiracy on page 19 in his book 'Crises', published from Allahabad. He notes, "I have confirmed information that some Sangh swayamsevak of Delhi had gone to the extent of making a show of accepting Islam to gain trust of Muslim League members in order to get details of the conspiracy hatched by them. It is only because of this, that they could find and provide advance information to Sardar Patel about the conspiracy of 10th September to kill all the ministers and civil officers and thousands of Hindu citizens, unfurl Pakistan's flag on Red fort and grab control of Indian government. If these young men, fired by ardour and patriotic feelings, had not provided information about this conspiracy in time, there would have no Indian government today."⁵

Just as Guruji was getting ready to leave for Kolkata on September 9, he received a message from Mahatma Gandhi, "Please meet me before leaving." "As you wish," saying so, he went with Lala Hansraj ji to meet Mahatma ji in Birla Bhavan at 10.30 a.m. Situation was grave. Delhi was burning that week. Mahatma ji had reached Delhi only on September 9 after moving around in Kolkata. The situation in the capital had already turned for the worse before his arrival. Displaced commoner refugees moving into Ajmeri and Kashmiri gate of Delhi were livid with searing anger. Mahtama Gandhi and Guruji's were meeting in the background of such an atmosphere. Probably, influenced by rumour mongers, truth seeker Bapuji asked him, "Even your hands are dirtied by blood, aren't they?" Guruji's answer was, "Not at all. They are not dirty, they are pure and clean." Grasping the meaning of what Mahtama ji was indicating, Guruji clarified, "I cannot claim to be aware about the conduct of each and every swayamsevak of Sangh. However, Sangh's objective is to serve Hindu society and Hindutva piously and Sangh wishes to achieve this objective without inflicting injustice on anybody else. Though, Sangh doesn't wish to attack anybody, still it doesn't believe in excessive non-violence. It teaches

self defence. It has never taught about policy of revenge even by mistake. During the discussions, Gandhiji asked Guruji to give a written statement that would appeal people to be peaceful. Responding the suggestion, Guruji said, “Who will listen to me? Your words are respected everywhere, you are senior. So, it is ideal that you release the statement. If you wish so, you can mention my acceptance of your views.” Finally, this is how the statement was released. In the evening prayer meeting, Gandhiji declared that ‘Golwalkar had assured his full co-operation in establishing peace.’ Newspapers also published this statement on the next day.⁶

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Guruji were gaining popularity very rapidly in that atmosphere. Unfortunately, the opposition to Sangh was rising slowly in Congress circles. Guruji had expressed his views on the reason behind this opposition in his Vijayaadashami lecture in Nagpur already.

Guruji had met Sardar Patel and Gandhiji in September. He had not been able to meet Prime Minister due to Prime Minister’s busy schedule. When Guruji visited Delhi again during his tour in October, this meeting was possible. Talks lasted for nearly one hour. Guruji could gauge that Nehruji’s attitude about Sangh was different and not favourable. Clarifying the objectives of Sangh, Guruji began by saying, “Lack of a fundamentally strong and capable organised power has resulted in our nation’s inability to influence the world today.” Diverting his target towards Sangh in an accusing tone, Nehruji said, “But such a power should not be evil.” Guruji grasped the import of these words. Responding that his understanding of Sangh power as evil was against the ground realities, he went on to present his analysis of disturbances in Northern states and added, “This sense of bitterness prevailing across the country is not because of Sangh, it is because of tragic partition.” After discussing about other related subjects, he took leave and requested him that atmosphere by the government should be created in such a way that feeling of co-operation would be encouraged.”⁷

It was decided to hold a full-fledged camp of young swayamsevak of Western Maharashtra in Pune on November 1-2, 1947. One lac

swayamsevaks were expected to attend this camp. Activists had taken leave from their jobs and businesses to make arrangements for the camp in sufficient numbers. Guruji's was to be present throughout the camp. Sardar Patel had agreed to come as the Chief Guest. Aakashwani (All India Radio) had also arranged for broadcasting the news about the camp. Support from all quarters for the camp was available as expected. There was an atmosphere of enthusiasm all around. But, there were evil souls in the Congress camp feeling uncomfortable and seething with jealousy. Ultimately, the state home minister gave an excuse of a grave situation and rescinded the permission for the camp. It was clear that Sangh had become victim of internal pulls and pressures within Congress.

The programme was converted to get-together rallies across Maharashtra at district level on instructions from Guruji. Anger of swayamsevaks was transformed into zeal. Guruji toured all the thirteen districts from October 24 to November 5. It turned out that more than 4 lac swayamsevaks from 1300 villages and towns had attended these programmes.

This pre-emptive, meaningless abortion of the state level camp indicated the direction in which thinking of the Congress government's machinery was moving. Next month, in November, a meeting of Chief Ministers was called in Delhi. The topic of discussion was increasing popularity of Sangh and challenge arising out of it. The problem facing them was how to bridle Sangh.⁸

Around this time accusing swayamsevaks of fomenting riots in Kandaale in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress government there put up cases against them. (These accusations were proven incorrect later on). Such evil designs were witnessed in other places also.

According to daily 'Dainik Kaal' dated October 13, 1947, Satara Congress committee in Maharashtra passed a resolution and asked Chief Minister B. G. Kher to 'Uproot Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh'. In a threatening tone, the committee claimed that 'otherwise we would destroy Sangh ourselves using 1942 type of terrorist methods.' Giving sagely

advice to them, Chief Minister told them, “Don’t take up an action in a mood of pessimism, or else you would be totally destroyed.”⁹

Later on there was a meeting of All India Congress Committee on 17th January 1948 in Delhi that passed a strongly worded resolution against Sangh. It demanded state governments also to take anti-Sangh steps. Lowest units of Congress were also asked to follow this policy. During this time, Central government also released a circular that said, “It was illegal for a government servant to be a member of R.S.S.” Leader of this anti-Sangh front was Uttar Pradesh Home Minister Rafi Ahmed Kidwai.

Tensions between Nehru-Patel came into open during this turbulent period. Even Sangh had to suffer because of this. Speaking in a public meeting on 6th January 1948, Sardar Patel said, “Congress people in power should behave in a different way with Sangh rather than laying stress on their own rights and powers. It is not possible to suppress an organisation with the power of penal action. Sangh people are not the type how will fight for selfish interests. They are patriots who love their motherland.” Within a few days, Pandit Nehru, as if in response to this speech, spoke in Amritsar, “Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha people have insulted our national flag. They are traitors. I will crush them.”

One could talk of countless leaders who came to Sangh offices begging for help in very difficult helpless situations when they were fleeing Pakistan or fighting Muslim League goondas. But, today all this had been forgotten. Why this sense of ingratitude? Historian of Kashmir, Kalhan, has already given answer to this ‘yaksha prashna’- seemingly unsolvable riddle - in his book ‘Raajtarangini’ written in eighth century. His conclusion is that just as a new born baby completely forgets about the pain of living in the womb, similarly a ruler forgets about all that happened previously once he gets power.

On one side, there was a defeatist feeling about kneeling before the decision of partition, guilt complex that we are the cause of unexpected miseries and pains of countless people, the sense of failure that we couldn’t lift a small finger to stop these excesses. On the other hand, there was this sense of brotherhood of swayamsevaks who jumped into defence of

helpless displaced brethren and their rehabilitation without worrying about risks; pious emotions with which they brought leaders of various political parties to safety, without thinking about narrow party politics, to well-appointed centres, live example of Guruji who jumped fearlessly into the terrible whirlpool of calamities and delivered life giving support for a hope filled future to the sufferers; and as a result, affectionate feelings of the populace towards Sangh. This was a factual, comparative scenario.

At the fag end of year 1947 on December 27, Guruji wrote to Rajabhau Deshpande of Pune, "I am aware of the entire situation. This is a period of trial, not of loss. We shall come out of it stronger and in a bigger form. Do not fall into the evil trap of opposing or confronting and avoid bitterness in speech or action. Keep focused on duty, it will lead to success and a favourable environment."¹⁰

Madhya Pradesh's home minister Pandit Dwarika Prasad Mishra's statement seemed like a statement given in favour of Sangh. Countering the allegations of the opposing camp, to Nagpur Navbhaarat (19th December, 1947) he said in a statement, "The very idea that Sangh can overthrow government on the strength of lathis is laughable. It is surprising that this allegation was not made against the local D.S.P. I cannot believe at all that Sangh is a political organisation and that there is a possibility of it overthrowing Pandit Nehru's government."¹¹

Vaartaa Vihaar of North Karnataka and South Maharashtra published the public speech of 'Karnataka Kesari' Gangadhar Rao Deshpande after another six days on 25th December 1947. In this speech he had said, "Congress has passed a resolution recently very cleverly against Sangh....strange are the games of fate that as soon as they got hold of power, they are parroting the idea of 'do not organise' whenever they think of Sangh. But, looking back at my experience of past 50 years, I can state not once but again and again, that organising Hindu is very crucial for maintaining peace in our country. I pray to the people in power not to shirk away from this organisation. This organisation will ultimately come to their rescue at a crucial time."¹²

Most strident editorial appeared in Tribune that was being published from Delhi itself. He wrote on November 26, "Pandit Nehru has instructed East Punjab government to ban R.S.S. and Akali Dal and destroy them. This news is so dreadful that it should not be true at all. And if it is true, then it can only be termed as a misfortune of this country... Because it is necessary for us to remind Pandit Nehru that if these nationalist organisations had not faced the cruel and inhuman Pakistanis with their bravery then thousands of Hindu and Sikh sisters would have been raped, thousands of Sikh and Hindu children would have been butchered.... we wish to say this with full force at our command that Sangh and Akali Dal have made a place for themselves deep in the hearts of the people of this bordering state. Populace there looks at them as the sentinels of their state. It is nothing but ingratitude to brand these organisations communal or private armies. In fact, they are nationalist powers out to help us who have discipline like army, but have no arms. Indian government should be proud of them."¹³

Congress leadership never expected reactions of this order. They kept quiet for some time, but they were looking for the right opportunity. The real reason for this was pointed out by Shri Banahatti, the moving spirit of Sarvodaya movement, in his weekly 'Savdhaan'. He wrote openly that, "In this period, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is the only organisation that can challenge Congress. Talented, dedicated young class of high character is getting attracted to Sangh due to its organised strength. This is the reason Sangh has become an eye sore for Congress leaders. Congress is taking the nationwide work of Sangh, its impact on educated, intelligent youth and rare qualities like readiness of its swayamsevaks to work patiently in times of any disaster as a challenge to itself. The spiritual qualities due to which Congress used to think of itself as a superior power; growth of same qualities in Sangh is making Congress uncomfortable."

Congress government was bent upon not letting any competition nor any noble soul to grow. It was waiting with an evil intention for the right opportunity 'sooner or later' to disrupt the sustained hard work of Sangh. For them the incident that gave them this opportunity was unfortunate

murder of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, began the cycle of persecution of RSS and its followers. This began with arrest of Guruji and ban on RSS.

***(Excerpts from Chapter 20 from Shri Guruji Golwalkar,
Biography by Ranga Hari)***

1.	Shri Guruji Samagra	5 - 170-171
2.	Shri Guruji Samagra	3 - 176
3.	Ibid	- 169-170
4.	Pehli Agnipariksha	- 25-26
5.	Maa. Sa. Golwalkar	- 108
6.	Ibid	- 109
7.	Ibid	- 109-110
8.	Ibid	- 119
9.	Pehli Agnipariksha	- 41
10.	Shri Guruji Samagra	8 - 44
11.	Pehli Agnipariksha	- 43
12.	Ibid	- 43-44
13.	Ibid	- 32

Annexure IV

Exchanges Between RSS, Patel and Nehru

Pre-Satyagrah efforts by RSS

M. S. Golwalkar, aka Guruji, was released on August 6 after nearly 6 months, but release was linked to many conditions. These conditions were – to stay within municipal limits of Nagpur, not to leave Nagpur municipal limits without written permission from District Magistrate, not making any public speech, not writing for newspapers, writing letters in them without District Magistrate's permission, not acting or writing in a way that would create disaffection directly or indirectly against state governments, not keeping in touch with people who acted in such a way.

Conditions did not prohibit writing letters to people. Without delay, he wrote to Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Patel on August 11, requesting him to rescind the ban on Sangh and give back its democratic rights to function. Case of Gandhiji's murder was being conducted in Red Fort in Delhi for two and half months. All the accused except two fugitives of Gwalior had been arrested. Even the charge sheet of the case did not even have a mention of either Sangh or Sangh swayamsevak. Therefore, people and rulers knew clearly that Sangh had no involvement in this incident. But, there was another truth beyond this that was not known at that time but is well known today. It was the report submitted by a high ranking police official Sanjeevi about Gandhi assassination within one month of the incident. He had completed his job in 17 days and handed over the

complete report in writing to Home Minister. With same alacrity and sense of responsibility Home Minister had written a long letter to the Prime Minister on 27th February 1948, that is, on twenty ninth day of Gandhiji's death. Today this letter is available in the sixth volume Collection of Nehru Patel correspondence on page numbers 56 and 57. But, this was an unpublished government document at the time. Letter also exposes another truth of history. Parts of that document are as follows:

- All the materials received through known-unknown, true-untrue, named and unnamed sources have been sifted thoroughly. 90% of these are baseless speculative reports. Most of the allegations are about activities of R.S.S. – that they distributed sweets, held celebrations. All this was found to be false upon investigation.
- Strong opponents of Bapuji's policies and thoughts, many of whom were members of Hindu Mahasabha and R.S.S. did welcome this murder. But, beyond this, there is no way one can drag R.S.S. and Hindu Mahasabha members into this conspiracy on the basis of available evidence. R.S.S. may be responsible for some other disturbances but not for this one. (Page 57)
- Confessions of the conspirators prove that the RSS was not a party, in any way, to this conspiracy. (Page 56)

Thus, it is doubtlessly being clear that the Prime Minister and Home Minister, they already knew the truth about Sangh for more than 5 months when Sarsanghchaalak was writing letters to them. Now, this entire correspondence between the two sides has been published in English and all other major Indian languages.

Bitter truth is that the political leaders of that time covered up the truth deliberately and did grave injustice to the Sangh. There was no acknowledgement from Prime Minister's office. Home Minister's reply was sent after one month on September 11. Leaving aside the letter he had written to Prime Minister in the light of investigation of the police officer or pushing it under the carpet, he wrote, "Happiness that Sangh people expressed and sweets they distributed Gandhiji's death has resulted in more

opposition from people.”¹ There is another sentence in that letter with a tone of pious lecturing, “I have firm belief that Sangh people can do justice to their patriotism only by working together with Congress and not by opposing it or being separate from it”² As an honest, reputed and a person pledged to the Congress, Patel had all the right to sermonise anybody about party politics. But, here the letter was addressed to the Home Minister demanding undoing the injustice done to his organisation, based on irrefutable facts. Home Minister’s duty was to prove the allegations true or take them back in view of lack of proofs. But, one will have to say with all due respect for the Home Minister that party politics overrode his duty for rule of law.

Guruji did not express any reaction to Patel’s sermon. He wrote to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru again on September 24, “Eight months have passed since Sangh was banned and every possible investigation in this regard has been conducted by now. I believe that you would have fully understood that the allegations leveled against Sangh are baseless and false. Therefore, it is only a question of administering justice in this matter now. We have a right to expect justice from our own government.”³ Much against the earlier bitter experience, a reply from Prime Minister’s office was received on the fourth day. It was a repetition of the earlier government notification. Only one point was different – “Prime Minister had been informed about a note that United Province government had sent to you containing some evidence collected by the state government about Sangh’s abovementioned activities before the ban was imposed on Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh,. Other states also have such proofs.”⁴

Sangh leadership decided that Sarsanghchaalak should go to Delhi to put forth his demand for justice and he should make Delhi his battlefield for these efforts. Guruji left for Delhi on 16th October. However, newspapers suppressed the news of ‘departure of the head of an outlawed organisation’ under government’s pressure. In spite of this, when the train arrived at 5.15 a.m. after a delay of 45 minutes, nearly ten thousand people had collected in the station campus. Delhi government had already banned raising of slogans at the station. As a counter to this policy, all the guests had arrived with rose

and jasmine flowers. Arrival of Guruji was greeted with grand sweet fragrance of flowers. Writing about it, Home Minister informed Prime Minister, “Their discipline is still strong. I had made it clear that when he (Golwalkar) arrives in Delhi, there should be no display etc. There were three to four thousand people to welcome him at the station. They greeted him in full silence. Not a word came out of their lips. There was no display of any kind. Everybody listened to the orders of Guru Golwalkar.”⁵ This welcome in the capital was a proof of the reality that Sangh work had survived well despite a ban of nearly 8 months. Guruji went to the house of Lala Hansraj Gupta from the station and stayed there till he was put under arrest again on November 12.

Topic of ban always used to come up during informal discussions. The RSS Chief took care that volunteers should not get agitated. “Ban on Sangh is totally unjustified. But, it is our government therefore efforts to get the ban lifted should be peaceful and within rule of law... We should strengthen the social-life, taking recourse to just path. As far as the Sangh is concerned, victory is assured, because its foundation is based on truth.”

The day Guruji reached Delhi he met the Home Minister the same evening. He met him again on October 23. But, discussions didn’t move in the desired direction. Guruji’s stand was, “Because the allegations against Sangh have proven to be so patently untrue and baseless, government must lift the ban immediately. If the government still believes that these accusations have any basis then it is its bounden democratic duty to prove them in the courts.” But, Sardar’s pet theme was the sermon he had delivered in his earlier letter. “Only practical solution is to become part of Congress.”⁶ Sarsanghchaalak Guruji was totally against this suggestion. He was not ready to let die the freedom to organise. Thus, the dialogue failed.

Guruji had understood the mentality of government in the very first meeting. The administration decided to take a more rigid stance about Sangh. Thus, Guruji received a message from Patel ji that, “The job for which you had come to Delhi is over. Therefore, leave Delhi now.” This order passed on October 28 was handed over by the government representative on November 2 at his place of residence. Guruji read it and

expressed his disagreement with it, and wrote on the same page in English, “I believe that this order is unnecessary and it takes away the civil rights of a law abiding citizen. I also believe that I would be a party to this unjustified act and injustice if I accept it. By accepting this order, I would be failing to do my duty as a citizen of an independent state. Thus, I have to submit that I cannot accept this extraordinary order.”⁷

Realising that this government was following the footsteps of foreign rulers blindly and would use similar tactics, the Sangh team awaited the arrest of Guruji that same night. Guruji prepared two statements to present Sangh’s side to the common people before this could happen, and got it distributed to newspaper world one after the other. First statement was refutation of government’s action and second was clarification about Sangh’s position on various issues.

The main points of the first statement were –

- a. We were aware even at the time when allegations were hurled against Sangh that they were false and baseless. Still we had disbanded Sangh, while not accepting those allegations.
- b. During this period all the charges have proven to be untrue.
- c. Nine months has have passed, still this injustice waged against us has not been set right.
- d. Orders were received that Sangh should merge with a political party. This will mean that there is no freedom or right to anybody to organise non-political activity in this country.

Guruji appealed to the society further, “It is my appeal to the Hindu society not to fall prey to misleading false propaganda. We have already suffered a lot during last 1000 years due to our disunity. Atleast, now we should have unity and we should build a more healthy, strong and enlightened life based on mutual affection, dedication and trust; that would result in we, the ancient Hindu society making our sacred motherland, Bharatvarsh happy and prosperous in our own home.”⁸

Second statement was about Sangh’s stand about symbols of national honour. Poisonous arrows of false propaganda were also being unleashed by various leaders about these issues. Clarifying about them, Guruji stated:

1. Flag – Confusion is being created deliberately about Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's views about the flag. the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has its own flag that symbolises its urge to create cultural unity among the Hindu race. Being a part of the nation, Rashtriya Swayamsevak has complete faith and respect for the national flag. And I can say without hesitation that each member of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh will readily sacrifice his life to defend our national flag against any aggressor.
2. Faith in democratic system of governance – Time has proved that democratic state is the best and longest lasting and successful in comparison to all other systems of governance.
3. State is a secular institution – For a Hindu, state has always been a secular institution and so is it even now. Truly, it is unnecessary to give an adjective of 'secular' (asaampradaayik – non-communal) for a state that is already 'secular'.
4. Hindu state – Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh does not propagate a Hindu state which has zero non-Hindu citizens.
5. We believe that no progressive organisation can stay alive long and grow if it works in a secretive manner. Question of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh working in a secret manner also cannot arise as its work is cultural and it has no political ambitions.
6. It is state's duty to raise an army, not that of any non-government organisation. Therefore, it is not right to compare Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's discipline with Army's discipline and its rules of work.
7. The idea of overthrowing the current government and capturing power taking recourse to violence is purely a figment of imagination. Keeping in view Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's cultural form of work and its efforts to keep itself aloof from political ambitions, this question too doesn't arise.
8. I feel that after this, my brethren of this nation will completely believe that allegations against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh are

unjustified and propaganda against it is misleading, they will appreciate my efforts made to revive this organisation with lawful means.

Most of the newspapers published only a summary of these statements. But, Organiser published it in full. The false and misleading propaganda against Sangh and limited dissemination about it by the mainstream newspapers that was seen as a curse turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Swayamsevaks took it up as a challenge. Both of Guruji's statements were translated in different languages and distributed in large numbers in different places all over Bharat. Many persistent college students made hundreds of hand written copies and distributed them.

The government did not arrest Guruji on November 2nd as expected by Sangh team. Instead of this, Guruji received an intimation from the Delhi's magistrate that if he wished to meet Prime Minister then he can stay back in Delhi only for that work. But, this stay will be allowed only on the conditions that were imposed earlier on him by the Madhya Pradesh government. He also realised that government had not shut its doors completely. Therefore, he restarted his correspondence with the central leaders. He wrote a letter the same day to the Prime Minister on November 3.

He stated four major points in this letter. 1) "I request to you that as our Prime Minister you should give us an opportunity in an impartial, justified and positive manner to negate the allegations and prove our innocence." 2) "Finding that the allegations are baseless, ban on Rashtriya Swayamsevak should be lifted immediately." 3) "Adding new points to this issue should be avoided." 4) "I will be highly obliged if I am given an opportunity to meet you."¹⁰ But, Prime Minister's response was not to the issues raised in the letter. Exposing his pre-conceived bias he wrote, "There is no relation between the declared objectives of Sangh and the real objectives, and activities of its members. These real objectives are completely contrary to the resolutions of the Indian parliament and the rules and regulations of the proposed constitution. As per our information these activities are anti-

national and generally destructive and violent. Therefore, you will agree that just an adamant stand will not be of much use.”¹⁰

Guruji's suspicion proved correct. Now a new accusation had come up which was not there in the government notification. Maintaining his expression of respect Guruji wrote back with clarity, “It seems that on the basis of said information you have concluded that our activities are anti-national. This is a grave accusation and it is not proper to raise it against anybody lightly. One needs solid and factual evidence for such an allegation. It is meaningless to keep saying repeatedly that government has information without giving permission to the people against whom they have been raised to examine such allegations. Both of us should agree that *‘just an adamant stand will not be of much use’*. As far as the talk about being contrary to the regulations of the proposed constitution is concerned, it would have been better if our Prime Minister had not written it. It is like punishing somebody for attempting to kill a person who is going to be born after a year or more than that.”

Another point is that we do not know what actions of ours make you say that our declared objectives and activities are different from our real objectives and activities. We are just simple servants of the society involved in creating character and unifying in the cultural field, keeping away from politics. There is no place in our work for the art that conceals real objectives from the declared objectives.”¹¹

Guruji had also written to Home Minister in the same period. Situation at that end was also not different. At the end, the Delhi mission proved to be a failure. He received the final directive from Secretary of Home Ministry, H. B. R. Iyengar, to leave Delhi within 24 hours and return to Nagpur. Guruji and his colleagues realised where the future was heading. They decided to utilise every minute of these 24 hours well. First of all, he wrote to Prime Minister about this last directive in a forthright manner, “We claim to be a cultured state. Such unconstitutional uncivilised qualities can suit only a dictatorial government or to some extent a one party foreign rule. But in my opinion it does not behove a modern cultured democratic

government that claims to protect civil rights impartially. Therefore I have decided to stay in the capital till this injustice to us is set right.”¹²

For 11 days, from November 3 to 13, handcuffs of the state were hanging in front of Guruji who was appealing for justice. He had worked on two fronts during these days. One – Meeting top people in power and demanding justice through letters. Two – Clarifying his stand in press through dialogue with journalists and statements.

Now only one action was left – present his analysis of the situation and views in front of the swayamsevaks, for whom he had come to Delhi as their representative. He prepared a letter in Hindi and English containing 10 paragraphs. In this he described in complete details what had been done from his side so far and stated at the end, “thus, I am taking back the directive that I had given on 6th February 1948 to dissolve Sangh after giving it full thought and I request you to begin your activities regularly. Along with this, we should try our best that peace is maintained and feeling of enmity is kept under check. I have asked our Sarkaryavaah Shri Bhaiyya ji Dani to inform all swayamsevaks about this decision and decide on the day and date to restart our work as it was running earlier.”¹³

Police officers arrested RSS Chief on midnight of November 12, 1948 under the Bengal State criminal procedure act of 1818. This 130 year old act gave unbridled power to arrest anybody anywhere without any proof or reason. In the words of Nehru spoken just three days prior to this, was it not “against the rules and regulations of proposed constitution of Bharat?” Guruji was brought secretly to Nagpur on November 15. The tag put on his luggage by the police officers accompanying him in the flight was ‘accompanying person.’ He was taken to Nagpur Central Jail from the airport. From there he was shifted to Sivani sub-jail after two-three days. Second imprisonment of Guruji commenced thus.

(Excerpts of Chapter 23 of Shri Guruji Golwalkar, Biography by Ranga Hari)

1.	Shri Guruji Samagra 10	- 14
2.	Shri Guruji Samagra 10	- 14
3.	Ibid	- 15
4.	Ibid	- 20-21
5.	Sardar Patel patraachaar 7	- 261
6.	Shri Guruji Samagra 10	- 77-80
7.	Ibid	- 24
8.	Ibid	- 28-29
9.	Ibid	- 30-32
10.	Ibid	- 39-40
11.	Ibid	- 41-42
12.	Ibid	- 43-44
13.	Ibid	- 49

Annexure V

Satyagraha Against 1948 Ban and its Successful Culmination

Plan of Sangh was to fight the ban with a satyagrah by reopening RSS shakhas. It was the beginning of the clash with government. There was no disturbance like ‘rasta roko’ nor did it involve sitting in ‘dharna’ in front of government offices. Common people were not face any disorder in their daily lives. Form of this protest was very simple. An designated swayamsevak would send written information to the office of local administration that “we are starting a daily Sangh shakha at xyz place at abc time.” A pre-decided team of swayamsevaks would reach that place at preplanned time and begin shakha activities shouting slogans like “Bharatmata ki Jai”, “Sangh se pratibandh hatao”. This was the format of satyagrah. Sangh satyagrah was not against anybody – neither government nor the police; but it was definitely against injustice.

To strengthen this plan, all the pracharaks who had been moved to different small and big places, came back to their areas. Satyagrahis were prepared with personal contacts by working over-ground, without going underground, without depending on motivating speeches and without support from newspapers. Whatever the reaction of police against conducting shakhas – whether lawful or unlawful – they bore it peacefully. There was not even a small counter-reaction anywhere. Leadership had taken common swayamsevak into confidence and informed them about the

actual conditions on the field transparently. They were told bluntly that government can act in a devilish way, students' studies can be stopped, member's jobs can be at risk, government servants would, surely, be removed from jobs, farmers' properties may be confiscated, businesses may be shut down, some close brethren may lose lives due to unfortunate accidental attacks, families may force their members to seek pardon, imprisonment may be for longer period than expected etc. etc. Factual picture of the scenario was presented to the swayamsevaks. They were not given assurances like 'ban will be lifted in four weeks' as was done by leaders in earlier times who had assured that 'independence will be achieved in one year'. Members were reminded how they had suffered all the atrocities with bounden hands in the first week of February. After making all these preparations only, did Sarkaaryavaah Bhaiyya ji Dani declare that Sangh shakhas would re-commence from December 9.

Guruji wrote another special letter for swayamsevaks who were to offer satyagraha. It was handed over to each satyagrahi. It was so inspiring that many swayamsevaks in jail learnt this letter by heart. Given below is a small extract of that letter:

"...There is no time for thoughts like 'me and mine' in this terrible time of calamity for Bharatmata. Whatever happens to us as individuals, we have to set Bharatmata free from the impact of un-Bharatiyataa (abhaaratiyata). We have to rescue all the children of Mother from abduction of their natural rights by parties in power that are blinded by selfishness. We have to see that everybody benefits from free, happy and honourable life.

Our work is undoubtedly the finest, it is exalted, it is divine work of God, in its fulfillment is the highest achievement for mankind. It is like envisioning the Supreme Being. Therefore, arise and make up for the loss of ten months of inaction. Truth is with us. It is a sin to sleep at times of injustice, and live as its victim. Let us set right this injustice. This is a confrontation of dharma versus adharma, justice versus injustice, Greatness versus pettiness, love versus evil. Victory is assured, because with Dharma is Supreme god and with him comes victory.

So, arise with victorious roar for Bharatmata's glory that would reverberate from the horizons of the heart to the horizons of the universe and rest not till work is accomplished.”¹

Government side had begun its verbal assault from the beginning of December. Speaking in Gwalior on 5th December, Sardar Patel cautioned in a threatening tone, “Hearts of Sangh members are filled with venom of hatred, therefore they can never run a satyagrah agitation successfully. Government is armed fully to accept their challenge.”² While addressing the annual conference of Congress in Jaipur, Pandit Nehru said, “This is not satyagrah, it is an ill-conceived insistence of Sangh urchins. We shall use all over power to suppress this agitation. We shall never allow these people to raise their heads.”³

On the other side newspapers opposed these dictatorial and unjust steps of the government unhesitatingly. Editorial of 21st October in English daily *Hitavaad*, from Nagpur noted, “Prove the allegations or remove the ban – This demand of Shri Golwalkar is logical and one cannot disregard it. People from Congress should definitely not ignore it because they were in the same situation in 1942 that Sangh is in today. Congress had been declared outlawed and British government in its charge-sheet had claimed that Congress is responsible for the disturbances of year 1942. So, Gandhiji had made a humble demand that allegations against Congress should be presented to a court of law and they should be proven.”⁴

Even in this short period of two weeks, the satyagraha left a strong impression on the people. Government's idea that this kids' game would lose steam in 4-5 days proved to be totally wrong. Satyagraha was running with same vigour even in third week of January. The truth was that all the major prisons of the country had not only been filled up by the second week of satyagraha, infact they were packed to more than twice or thrice their capacity with satyagrahis. Most of the jailers had intimated the rulers of this situation through telegrams. But, how could satyagrah stop? So, government began another experiment. Police began picking up satyagrahis and pushing them into jungles that were 60-70 miles away from their homes. But, those people would come back again to take part in satyagrah

as additional team after moving around from village to villages in small groups like the pilgrims of earlier times, partaking food in different homes and spreading the word about Sangh too.

Within a month the threatening tone of rulers had mellowed down. Government thought of opening the dialogue with Sangh again. For this satyagrah has to be stopped first. For this, Sardar Patel asked for co-operation of Moulichandra Sharma who was well known to both the sides. Moulichandra Sharma contacted the editor of Kesari, G. V. Ketkar in Pune to make Sardar Patel's idea successful.

Discussion went along expected line. Ketkar met Sardar Patel and reached Sivani again on 16th. Writing about it, journalist Ketkar says, "I went to Sivani again, met Guruji. Discussions went on for four hours. Guruji would read each and every word of the directive that I needed from Guruji to suspend the agitation very seriously and kept correcting it time and again. Four drafts were made one after another, but each was rejected due to incorrect construct of words. Fifth draft was made satisfactorily. Guruji would examine each word in depth so that prestige of Sangh would not be compromised in anyway. Of the two copies of the fifth draft, Guruji kept one with him while I got ready to take the second copy to leave the jail."⁵

Co-ordinator of the entire satyagrah movement was Doctor Bhai Mahavir. After getting Guruji's directive through G.V. Ketkar, he gave a statement on January 21 about suspending the satyagrah. The statement said, "The Sangh had not begun the satyagrah to put government in difficulty. Its objective was to raise a strong voice against injustice being perpetrated against the Sangh and seek attention of government and enlightened people. It seems that our voice has attained expected success. Therefore, experiencing a friendly atmosphere and to make next level of action a success, agitation is being suspended."⁶

Thus, the satyagraha of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ran for 45 days from December 9, 1948 to January 22, 1949. As per last count, number of satyagrahis was 77,090.⁷ This figure was bigger than number of

prisoners held during 1942 agitation, that was recognised as the biggest movement for independence.

Statesman of 22nd Jan carried both the editorial and statement about withdrawal of satyagrah together. It said, “For this, not only government, but Sangh leadership also deserves complements and thanks. Credit goes to them for the way they conducted satyagrah.”⁸

Atmosphere of struggle mellowed down and environment for dialogue became positive. But regrettably the Congress government’s stance was not straight forward. Leaving aside the points there were there in the notification about ban, they began throwing up unrelated issues like, “The Sangh doesn’t have a constitution so in its absence it is difficult to lift the ban.” Instead of sitting across and discussing issues in an atmosphere of friendly co-operation, their behaviour smacked of feudalism. T. R. Venkatraman and G.V. Ketkar had taken on the role of mediators between government and Guruji.

As he came out of Sivani jail after meeting Guruji, he told Eknath Ranade, “To make your Guruji agree to anything is like moving a mountain. Still, due to his respect for me, he agreed to my views with open heart. Now, provide me with the necessary material to help me prepare the constitution.” Eknath ji and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay sat together to draw out the working methodology of Sangh. Finally, the constitution of Sangh took form. Shastriji reached Sivani again on March 10 with this draft. Explaining the whole story behind making of this document, he handed it over to Guruji. Guruji flipped each page and signed at the required place.”

On advice from Shastriji, Guruji gave this authority to Shastriji through his signed power of attorney to him. The letter said, “I have read the constitution prepared by Shri T. R. Venkataram Shastri. I accept it. With a view of saving time and as a matter of convenience I am requesting Shri Shastriji to submit it to the Central government and accept him as my authorised representative.” Shastriji came to Nagpur with these documents and met state home minister Dwarika Prasad Mishra and after handing over the entire material to him for the purpose of submission to the Central

Home Minister, he proceeded for Chennai. This ex-advocate general had believed that next steps would take place without any hurdle. However, Home Minister of free India managed to find one fault with the whole exercise. He sent all the documents back to Chennai with a letter stating, "Though you have prepared this constitution, it is the constitution of Sangh. Therefore, following the right procedure, Golwalkar should himself send it to Central home department through Madhya Pradesh home ministry. The permission given to you for meeting Golwalkar was not given to you as a mediator." This behaviour of the Home Minister was found distasteful by the elderly gentleman. But, he was sincere about making the job successful that he had taken up. But, in his age, that too at the height of summers, it was exhausting for him to travel to Nagpur again via Sivani. Therefore, he handed over all this material with another letter through Shivram Shankar Apte to deliver it to Guruji by hand, appraising Guruji about the unexpected hurdle put by the government and his suggestion about how to re-present it. Apte ji went to Sivani in April 1949 to overcome the hurdle.

Accepting various opinions and discussions, Guruji submitted the constitution of Sangh to Central government through Madhya Pradesh government from Sivani jail on April 11. Attached letter had following lines, "I am sending the written constitution of Sangh alongwith. Now onwards, the organisation will work as per its provisions. It contains mainly those provisions on which Sangh was working for years."

"I hope that constitution prepared now will be acceptable and will fulfill a sharply felt weakness. With a hope that the administration will approve the constitution, I also hope that you show the courtesy of releasing a notification to lift the ban on Sangh and let it work as per its constitution (which has been prepared and sent to you). When this possibility is created, I will get this constitution printed. The required notifications that are to be released, may be released fast so that Sangh work can be conducted with ease."

"It pains me a lot that the Bharatiya government looks at my words and general conduct with suspicion. But, time will prove my work, that weaves together a scattered and highly divided people into a cultural tie built with a

common goal and common discipline and generates unity, will prove to be useful for overall good of the nation. Future alone will tell that my nature is of co-operation, maintaining a positive feeling for all, and not tuned to fighting with some group. I expect a positive response very soon.”⁹

Infact, the demand of government had been met fully. Now, all that was left was to lift the ban with a liberal and open heart. Expecting this, generous hearted Venkataram Shastri had written special letters to Madhya Pradesh home minister Mishra ji on April 16 and Home Minister Patel on April 29 from Chennai. But the government was different ideas.

It had a different regrettable objective. There was a meeting of Chief Ministers on April 8-9 in which it was decided to continue the ban. Because of this, government decided to play some complex political games of its own. Instead of Home Minister, home secretary took over the correspondence in this matter. After that, the human contacts established so far, began to melt away. Dry bureaucratic processes took over. Home secretary raised objections over sub-sections of the constitution. Guruji sent his reply to the letter sent by state home ministry in Sivani jail directly to Central Home Minister. This time he wrote in a more terse manner, “Even my demand for producing evidence against the allegations against us is more than six month old, but there no proof has come up during this period. In such a scenario, it doesn’t behove a supposedly cultured government to keep repeating the so called allegations even after such a long lapse of time and showing disrespect to truth, justice and judicial system.” And finally, drawing attention of the Home Minister, he clarified, “Before closing this letter, I would like to bring to your notice another fact that there is no constitution in which you cannot pick holes in some way. All constitutions can be amended suitably over time. Therefore I think that if somebody criticises a constitution right upon its introduction and expects it to be perfectly complete like the final words of God, it is not right to have such a view. I have been told that government wants Sangh’s constitution in writing. I have submitted it. I feel that the right way is to implement the constitution in practice and change and improve it as situation arises. This is, infact, constructive and useful way of doing it.”¹⁰ The response that

Iyengar sent after a week exposed the true intent of the government. He had written in conclusion, “The Government’s approach about Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is completely transparent and without any confusion. It is the custodian of people’s interest and this is how it should be. It is its duty to protect them from undesirable and foul elements. Till it is not fully assured that Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh will not be in a position to repeat such incidents and it will be able to stop negative fallout of such actions that are a result of its activities in the past, it cannot take a lenient view about the organisation.”¹¹

Guruji sent response to this letter, too, to Home Minister. Attacking the intoxication of power, he wrote in his last letter, “In a matter like this, a suggestion of an independent enquiry committee can come only from people who do not understand even the basics of governance” – I am obliged for being told about this. I accept my ignorance on this subject. Not just ordinary human being, but even Mahatma Gandhi, himself, had a right to this ignorance, so I consider this a matter of pride for me. If this is how your government basically thinks then it is dangerous. Letter dated 3rd May 1949 gave me a sense of satisfaction. That is, that my assessment of the mentality about the people who have the right to rule, was not wrong.”¹²

At this stage dialogue between the two sides stopped. In the meanwhile, many newspapers published the Sangh’s constitution that had been submitted to the government. Navbhaarat of Delhi wrote in its editorial dated May 24, “Sangh has submitted a written constitution due to adamant stand of Congress government. Why is government silent now? After studying the constitution of Sangh, we have come to the conclusion that Congress rulers should not object to any part of it.”¹³

Having understood the thinking of government, the Sangh began preparing a new strategy. Jail walls not only have ears but they also have lips. It doesn’t matter whether Guruji is inside or Eknath ji is outside. Leaders and organisers had kept message broadcasting systems very fast based on this truism. Because of this, morale of swayamsevaks was very high inspite of being in prison for four-five months. Infact, the Congress leadership’s estimates about the scenario slipped off the tracks here. They

had assumed that policy of procrastination will weaken the opposition. That is why they had dragged the matter for five months after suspension of satyagrah.

Sangh leadership's decided to get back onto the battle grounds again with support of a favourable society. Noticing the last sentence of Home Secretary's letter, "Government cannot take a lenient view about the organisation", Guruji decided to face the challenge head on. He handed over a letter head carrying his name containing his plan for struggle to the jail warden, to be handed over to Balasaheb Deoras who was to be released after a week. Jailer intercepted it and sent it directly to Dwarika Prasad Mishra, who sent it to Home Minister Patel.¹⁴

It seems that this could be a part of RSS strategy. It gave an idea about the intentions of Sangh leader. Sangh leader had written to his closest colleague, "I had told Shri Venkataram Shastri from beginning that this is what government will do. He assured me "leave it to me". I accepted his offer. But, my view is that it is not possible to resolve this issue without informing members all over and launching a powerful agitation again. Thus, without rushing into it, this agitation will run for many days with faultless preparations. With this understanding, there is no alternative but to re-launch this agitation in June end or at a suitable time. This is my opinion. It would be better to include and add other types of strikes etc. to this. A good resolution should be documented well. Copies of this statement should be distributed all over the country. The statement should also declare that as a result of government putting hurdles against the right of the people to assemble, we are launching this peaceful agitation because we have been left with no other alternative. This statement should be sent from an unmarked place by post to the central and state governments and agitation should be launched in a peaceful manner."

"This is, but, my opinion. However, you people, who are outside should sit together and take the right decision. My effort is only that this sense of indecision must end. This situation of being 'neither here nor being there' with washing away of mediator's efforts must come to an end."¹⁵

As expected, Sarkaaryavaah Bhaiyya ji Dani and Balasaheb Deoras reached Nagpur after being released from jail on June 5. None of them received the abovementioned letter suppressed by the jailer, but they had received complete information from other 'information highways'. Eknath Ranade also joined them later. Opinion of all the three was similar to that of Guruji. Their assessment was that discussions about some agreement with government were like a cry in the wilderness and that government is playing a game of stretching and delaying the issue. They also assessed the situation on the ground. They could notice that atmosphere prevailing at the time of imposition of ban had changed radically. Now, people have understood the truth.

In the meanwhile, the case of Gandhi's murder had also got over. In that, prosecuting lawyers had not even mentioned the name of any swayamsevak. In the judgment that Justice H. Atmacharan gave, the Sangh's name didn't appear anywhere. During the hearing, the accused had kept aloof of Sangh in the long statement that he read out in front of the judge. Thus, the case, the accused and the judge – all three had left out Sangh. In short, the triumvirate came to conclusion that hearts of the swayamsevak in jail were still ready for the struggle and ready to bear with more pain, but there was serious shortage of funds when they looked towards their side. They decided not to bow down. All the underground volunteers were sent out this directive all over the country. A series of contacts, discussions and broadcasting of instructions were used to hone the souls of swayamsevak to be ready for hard work.

The government must have received information about the movement in Sangh camp through its intelligence department. Student organisations had started functioning in different states of country. Experienced and polished workers of Sangh like Balraj Madhok, Dattopant Thengdi, Dattaji Didolkar and Nagaraj Reddy were leading this activity. Large number of students from amongst displaced citizens had joined the organisation in North.

Simultaneously, discussions and workshops began about desirability of new political party to make real democracy more effective in the new post-independence period. Professor Malkani wrote a series of articles in the

weekly, Organiser, about the possible shape of a new political party. Sangh had begun its moves. But, Sangh leadership was aware that government being run by Sardar Patel would not give way so easily. Government was hatching conspiracy to create fissures among Guruji and his followers. After receiving the letter written from Sivani jail by Guruji, Sardar Patel wrote to Dwarika Prasad Mishra, “If this letter reaches the desired destination, it will have the authentic stamp of the Chief of the organisation. In its absence there will be pulls within the organisation about the problem. As a result, we shall face split up groups rather than a well united organisation. Therefore, as a policy and strategy, it would be ideal to not let this letter reach the desired destination.”¹⁶ A manifestation of this move was shifting of Guruji under the orders of Dwarika Prasad on June 7 from Sivani jail to Baitul jail that was 200 km. away. It was clearly a vengeful step of the government. Even the imperialist British used to put political prisoners in jails like Yerwada, Naini etc. with normal facilities. Dangerous prisoners used to be sent to cellular jail of Andaman or Mandalay jail in Burma. Baitul was a younger sibling of these two jails. Guruji was put in this oven in those hot days of summer. His physical condition was not good even in Sivani. It got worse in Baitul. But, there too, he stuck to his policy of ‘no demands, no complaints.’

Dani-Deoras duo took an aggressive stance. When a government appointed anonymous person met Bhaiyya ji Dani to get Sangh’s opinion, Bhaiyya ji showed him the typewritten copy of the document about formation of the proposed political party. Vasantrao Oke also followed the same strategy. When these details reached various ministries, many chief ministers started saying that, “we shall have to reconsider the proposal of April about ban on Sangh.” Many ministers expressed the opinion that if the Sangh entered politics, it would be transformed from a ‘brahmin’ to ‘brahmraakshas’ (from a peaceful person to a demon). It seems Nehruji’s thoughts were moving in the same direction. We can conclude so because the title of the chapter covering this issue in the words of Nehru is “The less of these bans the better”.¹⁷

The government seemed to have made up its mind internally to somehow find a solution to this problem. To achieve this, dialogue that had broken down had to be reopened. There was an intractable hurdle here. Guruji had stopped his correspondence with the government and so had the government. Now, the dilemma was how to move ahead? Sardar Patel found a way out. Thus, Dwarika Prasad ji reached Delhi and stayed with Food minister Babu Rajendra Prasad. He called Moulichandra Sharma who was known and acceptable to both the sides, and apprised him of the problem. And, he also told that this was a “directive from Sardar Patel taking rest in Dehradun”. Moulichandra ji accepted the brief immediately. He reached Nagpur on July 7. Home minister made arrangement of a car for him. He met Dani and Deoras without delay. They informed him of their experience from the beginning to date and told him that their faith in government was finished; it was fruitless to talk with these people, and requested him bluntly to leave them alone on their path. Moulichandra ji returned after meeting Mishra ji and said, “Patel ji really wants to lift the ban. If Golwalkar were to write a letter to Patel on the same issues that he had talked about in his statement last November on 2nd, that is, about national flag, system of governance, secular state etc. then it would be possible.” Dani and Deoras did not soften their stance even this time. Both said very clearly, “Whether they lift ban or not, there is no possibility of anybody from among us including Guruji of writing a word to the centre of power.” Moulichandra ji came back after meeting Mishra ji and offered a new idea for a solution. According to it, Moulichandra Sharma ji would be the person who would ask for clarification, Guruji would give him clarification in writing. Ban would be lifted on the basis of that clarification. Sangh leadership was agreeable to this, but on one condition, only on one condition. They told Moulichandra ji, “You will first give us the list of those questions, after expressing our opinion only will we pass it on to Guruji.” According to this, Moulichandra ji presented the list with 8 issues given to him by Dwarika Prasad. They were about Sangh’s faith in Indian constitution and flag, Sangh’s view about working secretly, process of election in Sangh, meaning of life long oath of Sangh, admission of

young boys in Sangh, process of appointment of Sarsanghchaalak, balanced representation of members and system of income and expense.

Deoras-Dani duo didn't find anything unacceptable in this list. Actually, Guruji had given answer to most of these issues already. So, rather than getting stuck with it, they wrote together a detailed letter to Guruji, sealed it in an envelope and while handing it over to the mediator, they said, "Sharma ji, please do not read this, nor do allow anybody else to read it. Give it directly in Guruji's hands. Show Guruji's clarification directly to us, only then hand it over to Mishra ji." He accepted the condition and while leaving said, "shubham bhavatu" (may good things happen). He kept his word. He did not hand over the sealed envelope to Mishra ji taking refuge under his promise. Activities went ahead smoothly after this.

Moulichandra ji reached Baitul by car on July 10. In words of Moulichandra ji, "I kept the letters in front of him after this. He said, 'give these to me, I will sign them.' Opposing this, I told him, 'First read these letters properly, think over them. It is possible that some words in them may not be of your liking.' He wrote that letter on a letter pad with his name, signed it and gave the letter to me."¹⁸ Moulichandra ji showed it to Dani-Deoras first and then gave them to Dwarika Prasad Mishra. He read it out to Sardar Patel in Dehradun on telephone, where he was taking rest after a heart attack. Sardar gave it his acceptance and directed that the letter be sent directly to Delhi office. Dehradun-Nagpur-Delhi hotline did its work on the midnight of 11th and before sunrise on 12th July, Sangh ban was lifted.

There is an interesting side light. Guruji's authorised letter sent alongwith the Sangh documents sent by Venkataram Shastri was returned to the sender with the reason, "You are not official mediator." And now, Moulichandra Sharma sends a clarification given to him to the government, and that is accepted, though he has not been declared a mediator. Not only this, acceptance is done on telephone and with the brave spirit of a Napoleon and the complex problem is resolved at a lightning speed. This is the mystical way of politics. Finally, ban was lifted on the midnight of July 11, news was broadcast on July 12 from Aakashwani; and published in all

newspapers on July 13. RSS Chief was freed from Baitul prison on the morning of July 13.

(Excerpts of Chapter 24 of Shri Guruji Golwalkar, Biography by Ranga Hari)

1.	Shri Guruji Samagra 10	- 50-51
2.	Pehli Agnipariksha	- 101
3.	Maa. Sa. Golwalkar	- 148
4.	Pahli Agnipariksha	- 97
5.	NA	
6.	Jeevan Prasang -1	- 215-216
7.	Pehli Agnipariksha	- 166
8.	Ibid	- 215
9.	Shri Guruji Samagra 10	- 56-57
10.	Ibid	- 61-64
11.	Ibid	- 66
12.	Ibid	- 67
13.	Ibid	- 222
14.	Living an Era-2	- 78
15.	Ibid	- 78
16.	Ibid	- 80
17.	Ibid	- 56
18.	Jeevan Prasang-1	- 218

About the Author



Ratan Sharda has been a RSS member since his childhood, working across various levels of the organisation over the years. He also worked as an Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) member during the Emergency period of 1975-77 and was an active student leader. Sharda was jailed during the Emergency, when he was the General Secretary of his College Students' Union. During his days as a senior activist, he worked closely with nearly all major RSS-affiliated organisations. He, hence, enjoys a wide exposure to the working style of not only the RSS, but of its affiliated organisations as well. Sharda is a founder member of the Vishwa Adhyayan Kendra (Centre for International Studies), Mumbai, having acted as its General Secretary for eight years. He is a managing committee member / advisor of two schools.

Born in Mumbai in December 1954, he graduated from St. Xavier's College Mumbai, and went on to complete his post-graduation from



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Mumbai University in 1982. Sharda also holds a Diploma in Textile Chemistry, and has had varied business experiences.

Ratan Sharda is a well-known face on TV panels as commentator on national issues. As a political analyst and columnist, he contributes to the Organiser, Newbharati and merinews.com, The Print among other magazines and newzines. His blog is secretsofrss.blogspot.in