

# RGICS

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## RGICS BRIEF

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### **RSS and India's Independence Movement**

### PART: I

### Introduction

The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) was founded in 1925 in Nagpur (Maharashtra) to mobilize Hindus along religious lines. It was the time when the united progressive freedom movement of India was directly challenging British rule. Various charismatic leaders of the freedom movement in various parts country were involved in mobilizing poor, peasants, labourers across caste, community, religion and gender against the brutality of British rule. During this crucial period of Indian history, Dr. K.B. Hedgewar founded the RSS to divide people along communal lines. The mission statement of RSS reads, "Our one supreme goal is to bring to life the all-round glory and greatness of our Hindu Rashtra."<sup>1</sup> RSS borrowed the communal idea of Hindu Rashtra from V.D. Sawarkar, a leader of Hindu Mahasabha. It is to be noted that the Hindu Mahasabha was established 1907 and took on an all India presence in 1915. The Hindu Mahasabha too speaks of Akhand Hindustan and Hindu rashtra- National home for the Hindus. (<http://abhm.org.in/about.aspx#>) Hindu Mahasabha and RSS have similar vision and mission as organizations.

Prominent Historian Shamsul Islam argues that RSS took to the communal path in 1925, which Mohamad Ali Jinnah was to take later through the Muslim League. Meanwhile the British as a part of their strategy to fight back the independence movement actively used the divide and rule method and in this used both RSS and Muslim League in the last two-three decades of their rule in the country. There are historical evidences, which show that both these organizations sided with the British government in India and opposed the ongoing freedom movement. Even after independence, RSS took part in various anti-national activities and communal riots due to which the government of India banned the organization in 1948. It objected to several progressive provisions of the constitution, and laws meant for bringing egalitarian changes in the Indian society. For example, the RSS aggressively opposed promulgation of the progressive Hindu code Bill in early 1950s. Furthermore, it had refused to accept the national flag and denied hoisting it until recently.

The unsuccessful attempts of the RSS in its initial years to discredit the freedom struggle and the process of nation building after independence has now forced the Sangh to change its strategy. It has started associating its leaders with the freedom movement. Various leaders of the Sangh in last 10-15 years have been re-casted as freedom fighters by BJP ruled governments and the RSS. Historian Prof. Shamsul Islam in his booklet 'Freedom Movement and the RSS'<sup>2</sup> used historical documentation of the RSS to show that the RSS not only stayed aloof from the freedom movement of India, but it also betrayed our freedom struggle. This paper summarizes the booklet by the Prof Shamsul Islam to explain RSS' role during independence struggle. It has heavily borrowed from the booklet mentioned above.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://rss.org/Encyc/2015/4/7/1254694.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Shamsul Islam, 'The Freedom Movement & The RSS: A Story of Betrayal', Joshi—Adhikari Institute of Social Studies, August 1999 ISBN : 81-87638-02-8, retrieved from: [https://www.academia.edu/676532/The\\_Freedom\\_Movement\\_and\\_the\\_RSS\\_A\\_Story\\_of\\_Betrayal](https://www.academia.edu/676532/The_Freedom_Movement_and_the_RSS_A_Story_of_Betrayal)

### PART: II

## Ideological Differences between the Freedom Movement and the RSS

The freedom movement of India under the leadership of number of charismatic leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad, Subhashchandra Bosh and B.R. Ambedkar is known for progressive and united mass mobilization against cruel colonial rule. It had a vision of a nation based on equality, freedom and dignity for all. People of India cutting across class, caste, gender and community came together in this struggle for independence.. On the other hand, the RSS was opposed to this concept of freedom struggle. It firmly believed in the idea of the creation of a Hindu theocratic nation with a total disregard for the social, cultural, regional, ethnic and linguistic diversity of Indian people. The booklet 'Freedom Movement and the RSS' explains the intention of Sangh during freedom movement as follows:

- **Hedgewar's Mission in the Congress led United Freedom Movement:** Dr. B. K. Hedgewar (founder of RSS) was briefly associated with the Congress and as he was imprisoned during the Non-Cooperation Movement as congress worker. In the Congress, Dr. Hedgewar was close to the extreme rightwing Hindu Mahasabha leader Dr. B.S. Moonje. Dr. Moonje was at that time in the Congress, though he was opposed to Gandhiji's programme for building Hindu - Muslim unity and was also willing to go in for limited cooperation with the British. After coming out of prison Dr. Hedgewar criticized Gandhiji for his views on Hindu-Muslim unity and equated nationalism with Hindu Rashtra. A major theme of the RSS since its inception was the 'disloyalty' of the Muslims and other minorities to the nation. According to Dr. Hedgewar, *"As a result of the noncooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi the enthusiasm in the country was cooling down and the evils in social life which that movement generated were menacingly raising their head. As the tide of national struggle came to ebb mutual ill-will and jealousies came on the surface. Personal quarrels raged all round. Conflicts between various communities had started. Brahmin-non-Brahmin conflict was nakedly on view. No organization was integrated or united. The yavana-snakes [i.e. Muslims] reared on the milk of non-cooperation were provoking riots in the nation with their poisonous hissing<sup>3</sup>".*
- **Nationalism-RSS was not against British Rule:** The second chief of the RSS M.S. Golwalkar made it clear that the kind of nationalism that the RSS espoused had no anti-British or anti-imperialist content. In his book 'Bunch of Thoughts' Golwalkar writes, *"The theories of territorial nationalism and of common danger, which formed the basis for our concept of nation, had deprived us of the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu Nationhood and made many of the 'freedom movements' virtually anti-British movements. Anti-Britishism was equated with patriotism and nationalism. This reactionary view has had disastrous effects upon the entire course of the freedom movement, its leaders and the common people<sup>4</sup>".*
- **RSS: Pro-British and Anti Muslims:** It is revealing that there is not a single line challenging, exposing, criticizing or confronting the inhuman rule of the British masters in the entire literature of the RSS from 1925 to 1947. It seems it had only one task to accomplish and that was minority-bashing or to be more specific, Muslim-bashing.
- **Adolf Hitler a Role Model for RSS:** Guru Golwalkar's book, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, which Golwalkar published in the year 1938, gives an insight into the thinking of the RSS leadership. In this book, he idealized the Nazi

<sup>3</sup> C.P. Bhishikar, Keshav Sangh Nirrnata, Pune, 1979, p. 7

<sup>4</sup> M.S. Golwalkar, Bunch of Thoughts, Bangalore, 1996, p. 138.

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cultural nationalism of Hitler in the following words: "*German Race pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic Races - the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by*".<sup>5</sup>

- **Fascist Characteristics of the Hindu Rashtra:** Golwalkar unhesitatingly wanted to model his Hindu Rashtra on Hitler's totalitarian and fascist pattern as is clear from the following passage from his book:

*It is worth bearing well in mind how these old Nations solve their minorities' problem. They do not undertake to recognize any separate element in their polity. Emigrants have to get themselves naturally assimilated in the principal mass of the population, the National Race, by adopting its culture and language and sharing in its aspirations, by losing all consciousness of their separate existence, forgetting their foreign origin. If they do not do so, they live merely as outsiders, bound by all the codes and conventions of the Nation, at the sufferance of the Nation and deserving no special protection, far less any privilege or rights. **There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do so and to quit the country at the sweet will of the national race.** That is the only sound view on the minorities' problem. That is the only logical and correct solution. That alone keeps the national life healthy and undisturbed. That alone keeps the nation safe from the danger of a cancer developing into its body politic of the creation of a state within a state.*

*"From this stand point, sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation: let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races who have chosen to live in our country<sup>6</sup>".*

<sup>5</sup> M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 1938, p.35.

<sup>6</sup> M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 1938, p.35.

### PART: III

### Absence of RSS in India's Independence Struggle

- **RSS asked its workers not to Participate in the Dandi March (1930):** RSS founder and first chief of Dr. Hedgewar publically declared that the RSS will not participate in Dandi March organized by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930. RSS ideologue C.P. Bhishikar in his book 'Sanghavriksh Ke Beej' writes, "[In 1930] Mahatma Gandhi had called upon the people to break different laws of the government. Gandhiji himself launched Salt Satyagraha undertaking Dandi Yatra. Dr. Saheb [Hedgewar] sent information everywhere that the Sangh will not participate in the Satyagraha. However, those wishing to participate individually in it were not prohibited. This meant that any responsible worker of the Sangh could not participate in the Satyagraha<sup>7</sup>". However, rather surprisingly, Dr. Hedgewar decided to participate in Gandhi's Dandi Salt Satyagraha as an individual.
- **Hedgewar's Mission to indoctrinate Freedom Fighters while in prison:** Dr. Hedgewar had ulterior motive behind his participation in historical Dandi March followed by imprisonment. The biography of Hedgewar published by the RSS explains his ulterior motive. The book reads,

*"Dr. Saheb had the confidence that with a freedom loving, self-sacrificing and reputed group of people inside with him there, he would discuss the Sangh with them and win them over for its work"<sup>8</sup>. In this context it is further stated in the biography, "Doctor Saheb did not let the work of the Sangh get away from his mind (aankhon se aujhal nahin hone diya) even for a moment during his imprisonment. RSS ideologue C.B. Bhishikar in his book writes, "He (Hedgewar) established close links with all the leaders and activists [of the Congress] who were in prison, made them understand the work of the Sangh and obtained from them promise of cooperation in work for the future. He came out of the prison only after making plans for a big leap for work expansion"<sup>9</sup>.*

It is clear that Dr. Hedgewar chose to go to jail his time not because he was convinced of the cause but in order to break the ranks of the Congress cadre. These cadres were participating in the Non-Cooperation Movement and going to jails upholding the banner of united struggle of the people of all religions of the country.

- **Negative Role of RSS in the Quit India Movement (1942):** The RSS' publication 'Shri Guruji Samagra Darshan' describes how it boycotted the historical Quit India Movement of 1942 and discouraged people from being part of this movement. The book (Shri Guruji Samagra Darshan) quotes second chief of RSS Shri M. S. Golwalkar, it reads,

*"There is another reason for the need of always remaining involved in routine work. There is some unrest in the mind due to the situation developing in the country from time to time. There was such unrest in 1942. Before that there was the movement in 1930-31. At that time many other people had gone to Doctorji (Hedgewar). This 'delegation' requested Doctorji that this movement will give independence and Sangh should not lag behind.*

*At that time, when a gentleman told Doctorji that he was ready to go to jail, Doctorji said, 'Definitely go. But who will take care of your family then? That gentlemen told-'he has sufficiently arranged*

<sup>7</sup> C.P. Bhishikar, Sanghavriksh Ke Beej: Dr. Keshav Rao Hedgewar, New Delhi, 1994,

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Hedgewar The Epoch Maker, Biography of K.B. Hedgewar, published by RSS

<sup>9</sup> C.P. Bhishikar, Sanghavriksh Ke Beej: Dr. Keshav Rao Hedgewar, New Delhi, 1994

*resources not only to run the family expenses for two years but also to pay fines according to the requirements'. Then Doctorji said to him-'if you have fully arranged for the resources then come out to work for the Sangh for two years'. After returning home that gentleman neither went to jail nor came out to work for the Sangh"<sup>10</sup>. This incident clearly shows that the RSS leadership was intent on discouraging people in participating in protests being organized by leaders of the Freedom Movement.*

- **RSS Supported British Rule during Quit India Movement:** The RSS' publication 'Shri Guruji Samagra Darshan' further explains how the RSS was against freedom movement and supported authority of British rule. According to the book at the time of the Quit India Movement Guru Golwalkar stated: *"There are bad results of struggle. The boys became militant after the 1920-21 movement. It is not an attempt to throw mud at the leaders. But these are inevitable products after the struggle. The matter is that we could not properly control these results. After 1942, people often started thinking that there was no need to think of the law"<sup>11</sup>. After the 1942 Movement Guruji further commented, "In 1942 also there was a strong sentiment in the hearts of many. At that time too the routine work of Sangh continued. Sangh decided not to do anything directly"<sup>12</sup>.*
- **RSS Denounce Martyrs of Freedom Struggle:** There is ample proof in the documents of the RSS which conclusively establishes the fact that RSS denounced movements led by revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekar Azad and their associates. Not only that, they hated even the reformist and moderate movements led by leaders like Gandhiji against the British rulers. Here is a passage from Bunch of Thoughts decrying the whole tradition of martyrs:

*"There is no doubt that such men who embrace martyrdom are great heroes and their philosophy too is pre-eminently manly. They are far above the average men who meekly submit to fate and remain in fear and inaction. All the same, such persons are not held up as ideals in our society. We have not looked upon their martyrdom as the highest point of greatness to which men should aspire. For, after all, they failed in achieving their ideal, and failure implies some fatal flaw in them"<sup>13</sup>.*

- **Secret Deal between RSS and British Government:** The book, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, which was openly circulated by the RSS during British rule and had gone into four editions, ran into a controversy of its own making with issues of authorship. The RSS machinery started spreading different theories about the authorship according to their own requirements. Interestingly, even though this book glorified the German dictator Adolf Hitler at a time when the British were engaged in a life and death struggle against him during World War II, the British authorities did not ban it. The obvious reason for allowing the book to be freely circulated was that such literature was essential for the imperialist policy of 'divide and rule'.

<sup>10</sup> Shri Guruji Samagra Darshan, Vol. IV, Nagpur, n.d., p. 39-40

<sup>11</sup> Shri Guruji Samagra Darshan, Vol. IV, Nagpur, n.d., p. 39-40

<sup>12</sup> Shri Guruji Samagra Darshan, Vol. IV, Nagpur, n.d., p. 39-40

<sup>13</sup> Golwalkar, Bunch of Thoughts, p.283



### PART: IV

## Anti-National Activities of RSS in Post-Independence Period

- **Involvement in Communal Violence:** There are official documents which show that the RSS was involved actively in communal violence during partition. The following passage from the autobiography of the first Home Secretary of UP, Rajeshwar Dayal, ICS, clearly shows the sinister designs of the RSS to break the unity of the country just on the eve of Independence.

*"I must record an episode of a very grave nature when the procrastination and indecision of the UP Cabinet led to dire consequences. When communal tension was still at fever pitch, the Deputy Inspector General of Police of the Western Range, a very seasoned and capable officer, B.B.L. Jaitley, arrived at my house in great secrecy. He was accompanied by two of his officers who brought with them two large steel trunks securely locked. When the trunks were opened, they revealed incontrovertible evidence of a dastardly conspiracy to create a communal holocaust throughout the Western districts of the province. The trunks were crammed with blueprints of great accuracy and professionalism of every town and village in that vast area, prominently marking out the Muslim localities and habitations. There were also detailed instructions regarding access to the various locations, and other matters which amply revealed the sinister purport."<sup>14</sup>*

- **RSS Refused to Accept Tricolor as National Flag:** After independence when the tricolour became the national flag, it was the RSS which refused to accept it as the national flag. Golwalkar while discussing the issue of the national flag in an essay entitled 'Drifting and Drifting' in Bunch of Thoughts has the following to say: *"Our leaders have set up a new flag for our country. Why did they do so? It just is a case of drifting and imitating. Ours is an ancient and great nation with a glorious past. Then, had we no flag of our own? Had we no national emblem at all these thousands of years? Undoubtedly we had. Then why this utter void, this utter vacuum in our minds?"<sup>15</sup>*
- **Denial to give Equal Rights to Women:** Nehru and Ambedkar were in favour of evolving a common code bill for Hindus. Ramchandra Guha writes, "Basing himself on a draft prepared by Sir B. N. Rau, Ambedkar sought to bring the varying interpretations and traditions of Hindu law into a single unified code. But this act of codification was also an act of radical reform, by which the distinctions of caste were made irrelevant, and the rights of women greatly enhanced. For our purposes, it is enough to summarise the major changes as follows; (1) For the first time, the widow and daughter were awarded the same share of property as the son; (2) for the first time, women were allowed to divorce a cruel or negligent husband; (3) for the first time, the husband was prohibited from taking a second wife; (4) for the first time, a man and woman of different castes could be married under Hindu law; (5) for the first time, a Hindu couple could adopt a child of a different caste. In the vanguard of the opposition was the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In a single year, 1949, the RSS organised as many as 79 meetings in Delhi where effigies of Nehru and Ambedkar were burnt, and where the new Bill was denounced as an attack on Hindu culture and tradition." A major leader of the movement against the new Bill was a certain Swami Karpatri. In speeches in Delhi and elsewhere, he challenged Ambedkar to a public debate on the new Code. (<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2004/07/18/stories/2004071800120300.htm>)

<sup>14</sup> Rajeshwar Dayal, A Life of Our Times, New Delhi, 1999, pp.93-94

<sup>15</sup> Bunch of Thoughts. 1996, pp. 237-238

### Conclusion

There has been an attempt by the RSS and its political affiliate Bhartiya Janta Party to re-cast their historical leaders as freedom fighters. They have been disseminating literature to show that their leaders were part of the historical Indian freedom struggle. However, apart from their one-sided propaganda writings, historically nothing is available to show that RSS fought British rule during freedom struggle. Prof Shamsul Islam (Historian) writes that there is no material in contemporary records which would shed light on the anti-British role of the RSS. He further writes that even the RSS do not have historical evidences to prove their involvement in freedom movement<sup>16</sup>. However, there is ample amount of RSS literature to show that the organization was not only against the united freedom movement of India but also sided with the British government.

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<sup>16</sup> Shamsul Islam, 'The Freedom Movement & The RSS: A Story of Betrayal', Joshi—Adhikari Institute of Social Studies, August 1999 ISBN : 81-87638-02-8