

A Century of Discipline, Service, and Nation-Building.

RSS AT 100 – BHARAT'S JOURNEY OF SERVICE, DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP



By

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Preface

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has completed one hundred years of continuous service, discipline, and nation-building. Few institutions in modern Indian history have left as deep a mark on the cultural and political life of Bharat. Founded in 1925 by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the RSS began as a modest attempt to instil self-confidence and unity among Hindus. Over the century, it has transformed into a vast network of organisations dedicated to education, relief work, and cultural renewal.

This book, *RSS at 100 – Bharat’s Journey of Service, Development and Leadership*, is both a chronicle and an examination. It narrates how the Sangh has evolved through phases of colonial subjugation, independence, nation-building, ideological conflict, and globalisation. It also explores the interplay between the Sangh’s philosophy and the governance of the Honourable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi — himself a lifelong swayamsevak.

The centenary of the RSS is not merely an institutional milestone; it is a moment of reflection on the enduring questions of identity, unity, and progress that have shaped India’s modern journey. The book seeks to provide balance — neither hagiography nor polemic — by acknowledging both the achievements and the controversies that define the Sangh’s legacy.

About the Author

Dr. R. G. Anand, MBBS, MD, MHA, FHM, PDCR, LLB, LLM, is a physician, legal scholar, and researcher with a multidisciplinary interest in public health, governance, and socio-political institutions. Over three decades of professional experience in medicine and administration have given him a unique vantage point to study the intersections between social organisations and state policy.

Dr. Anand's earlier works include monographs on *Ethics in Public Health Administration*, *Nationhood and Civilisational Continuity*, and *Health Reforms in Emerging Economies*. His engagement with medical education and community health has brought him in close contact with grassroots realities — from rural welfare to urban reform movements.

A lifelong student of Indian history, Dr. Anand brings to this work a commitment to rigorous documentation and fair interpretation. His study of the RSS combines archival research, interviews, field observations, and policy analysis, culminating in an accessible yet comprehensive account of the Sangh's century-long journey.

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- **Swayamsevaks and pracharaks** who shared their experiences from the field — their accounts, often personal and poignant, illuminated the spirit of dedication that underlies the organisation.
- **Family and well-wishers**, whose patience, affection, and encouragement sustained the author through the years of research and writing.

This book is also indebted to the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's public speeches and policy documents, which provided primary insights into the intersection of leadership, governance, and cultural ideology. Above all, gratitude is owed to the citizens of Bharat — whose diversity, resilience, and collective aspiration continue to define the nation's destiny.

RSS at 100 – Bharat’s Journey of Service, Development and Leadership

Introduction

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded on Vijayadashami day in 1925 by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in Nagpur, enters its second century as one of the most influential and controversial mass organisations in modern India. Over the past hundred years the Sangh has grown from a handful of volunteers into a sprawling network of cultural, educational, labour, religious and political bodies that touch almost every sphere of Indian society. Volunteers have organised relief during earthquakes and floods, run schools and clinics, and promoted social reform. The organisation’s discipline and sense of service have produced leaders who have

shaped contemporary India, including the current Prime Minister who began his public life as an RSS pracharak.

Yet the RSS's legacy is deeply contested. Critics argue that it has reproduced caste hierarchies, excluded women from leadership, opposed the secular Constitution and inspired communal violence. Its early leaders drew inspiration from European fascist movements and described India's minorities as "threats" to national unity. The organisation stood aloof from the mass freedom struggle and was banned multiple times, including after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in 1948. Even today, questions about pluralism, equality and democratic accountability surround its centenary celebrations.

This book aims to provide a detailed and balanced examination of the RSS's century-long journey. It situates the Sangh's growth within its ideological roots, highlights its social service and organisational

innovations, scrutinises its controversies and bans, and explores the evolving relationship between the Sangh and India's elected leadership. The goal is neither hagiography nor denunciation, but an evidence-based reflection on how an organisation rooted in Hindutva has shaped – and been shaped by – the world's largest democracy.

Chapter 1 – Origins and Early Years (1925 – 1940)

Chapter 2 – RSS during the Freedom Struggle and Partition (1940 – 1950)

2.1 Golwalkar’s Leadership and Ideological Consolidation

After Hedgewar’s death, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (known as Guruji) became the second Sarsanghchalak in 1940. Under his stewardship the RSS expanded across India and hardened its ideological positions. Golwalkar’s texts – *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939) and *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966) – emphasised Hindu cultural supremacy and rejected pluralist nationhood. In *Bunch of Thoughts* he lamented that India’s Constitution had “absolutely nothing which can be called our own” and argued that minorities should merely coexist, not be assimilated. He considered caste hierarchy

“natural” and dismissed the idea of a casteless society as utopian. Golwalkar praised Nazi Germany’s “race pride” and its purging of minorities, drawing explicit inspiration from European fascism. Such writings deeply shaped the Sangh’s worldview and continue to inform its ideology.

2.2 The RSS and the Freedom Movement

During the decisive phase of India’s freedom struggle – the Quit India Movement of 1942 and subsequent mass protests – the RSS largely refrained from direct participation. Instead of mobilising masses against colonial rule, it focused on building internal discipline and cultural unity. Scholars note that the Sangh maintained silence while Gandhi, Nehru, Bose and Azad were imprisoned, and many swayamsevak continued drills rather than joining agitations. Ambedkar remarked that the RSS “stood aloof,” while Patel criticised it for its limited contribution. The Communist Party of India contrasted its own

involvement in labour and peasant struggles with the RSS's preoccupation with drills and caste hierarchies[10].

RSS supporters argue that individual volunteers participated in the freedom movement outside the organisation and that Hedgewar and other karyakartas were imprisoned. Yet the absence of collective mobilisation differentiates the RSS from other nationalist groups and fuels ongoing debates about its patriotism.

2.3 Partition, Communal Violence and the First Ban

The partition of India in 1947 triggered horrific communal riots. RSS volunteers provided relief camps for Hindu refugees, but the organisation was also accused of inflaming communal tensions. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January 1948 by Nathuram Godse – a former RSS member – cast a dark shadow. The government

banned the RSS and arrested Golwalkar. Sardar Patel wrote to him that RSS speeches were “full of communal poison” and created an atmosphere in which Gandhi’s murder became possible. Under pressure, the Sangh adopted a written constitution in 1949, swore loyalty to the Constitution and the national flag and pledged to eschew politics. The ban was lifted after almost two years, but the association of RSS with Gandhi’s assassination remains etched in public memory.

2.4 Formation of the Jana Sangh

In 1951 Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, a former Congress minister, founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) as the political arm of the RSS. Although the RSS maintained its non-political façade, the BJS allowed swayamsevaks to contest elections while maintaining organisational ties with the Sangh. The BJS espoused cultural nationalism and opposed the Congress’s secular policies. In 1980 it was

reorganised as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which would later become India's dominant political force.

Chapter 3 – Expansion and Turbulence (1950 – 1990)

3.1 Post-Ban Consolidation and Bhoodan Participation

After the 1948–49 ban was lifted, the RSS focused on regaining public trust and widening its social outreach. Volunteers participated in Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan (land donation) movement, encouraging landlords to donate land to the landless. Nanaji Deshmukh and other swayamsevaks played active roles, though Golwalkar criticised the movement as reactive and argued that it should instil faith in the masses to rise above communism. This engagement signalled the Sangh's willingness to

support social reform while retaining its ideological distinctiveness.

3.2 Caste Reforms and Social Outreach

The Sangh sought to address caste divisions by advocating training Dalits and other marginalised communities as temple priests and condemning upper-caste discrimination. Leaders emphasised that the divisive caste system weakened Hindu society. However, contradictions persisted. Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay points out that representation from Dalit and Adivasi communities in leadership remained negligible, and testimonies of discrimination within shakhas continued. Bhanwar Meghwanshi, a former Dalit swayamsevak, recalls being ostracised when his food was thrown on the street. The Sangh's journal *Organiser* opposed affirmative action, warning that reservations would reignite caste conflict. Thus, the RSS's commitment

to caste reform has often been tempered by its ideological adherence to hierarchical order.

3.3 Relief Work and Disaster Response

One area where the RSS gained public appreciation was relief and rehabilitation during disasters. Volunteers assisted victims of cyclones, floods and the Bhopal gas tragedy, and tens of thousands of swayamsevaks participated in rescue operations during the 2001 Gujarat earthquake and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. RSS-affiliated Seva Bharati built shelters, distributed food and provided medical care. During the 1984 anti-Sikh riots some volunteers reportedly protected Sikh neighbours [620151305713660†L1026-L1030] .

These interventions bolstered the organisation's reputation for selfless service, even as critics viewed them as part of a strategy to expand influence.

3.4 The Emergency and Second Ban

India's democratic fabric was stretched during the Emergency declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. Civil liberties were suspended, political opponents jailed and press censorship imposed. The RSS, which had opposed authoritarianism and supported democratic institutions, was banned again. Thousands of swayamsevaks were imprisoned; many joined Jayaprakash Narayan's mass movement for the restoration of democracy. The ban was lifted in 1977 after the Janata Party, which included Jana Sangh leaders, came to power.

3.5 Rise of the BJP and Ayodhya Movement

In the 1980s the Bharatiya Janata Party emerged from the Jana Sangh and gradually gained strength with ideological guidance and organisational support from the RSS. During the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, swayamsevaks joined other Hindu nationalist groups in demanding a temple at Ayodhya. The demolition of

the 16th-century Babri Masjid by kar sevaks in December 1992 sparked nationwide riots. The government banned the RSS for the third time, though the ban was lifted the following year. Critics argue that the Sangh's mobilisation undermined secularism; supporters contend that it channelled popular sentiment and addressed historical grievances.

3.6 Growing Affiliated Organisations

During this period the RSS fostered a wide network of affiliated bodies known as the Sangh Parivar. These included the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) in universities, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) in labour, Seva Bharati for social service, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram for tribal welfare and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) for religious activism. This network allowed the RSS to extend its ideological influence into education, labour and civil society while maintaining the claim that it remained a

cultural organisation. Critics describe this network as a parallel state that blurs the line between civil society and politics.

Chapter 4 – The RSS in the 21st Century (2000 – 2025)

4.1 Modern Leadership and Expansion

Kuppahalli Sitaramayya Sudarshan led the RSS from 2000 to 2009, emphasising economic self-sufficiency and criticising the policies of both BJP-led and Congress-led governments. In 2009 Mohan Bhagwat became the sixth Sarsanghchalak. Under his leadership the number of shakhas expanded dramatically; by the centenary year the Sangh claimed more than 80,000 daily and weekly shakhas across India. The organisation celebrated its centenary on Vijayadashami (Dussehra) in October 2025 with rallies, patha sanchalans (marches) and cultural programmes in Nagpur and other cities. Former President Ram Nath Kovind and Bhagwat spoke of harmony, inclusion and unity at the centenary events, but observers noted that this new language of reform sat uneasily alongside the

Sangh's enduring emphasis on Hindu cultural supremacy[11].

4.2 Global Outreach and Diaspora Engagement

The RSS has extended its influence beyond India's borders through the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh and other diaspora organisations. These groups organise cultural festivals, language classes and social service projects in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. According to reports, the RSS has implemented developmental projects in Jammu & Kashmir and reached out to diaspora communities to promote cultural identity and build networks of solidarity. By highlighting India's ancient heritage and contributions to science, technology and literature, the Sangh seeks to enhance India's soft power. Critics, however, worry that such outreach exports majoritarian politics and undermines secular values in host countries.

4.3 Service During Crises

RSS volunteers have continued to respond to humanitarian crises in the 21st century. During the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, tens of thousands of swayamsevaks assisted rescue operations and rebuilding. After the 2004 tsunami, Seva Bharati built shelters and provided food and medical aid. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sangh organised distribution of masks, soap, food and medicines across India. A Muslim woman from Jammu & Kashmir even donated her Hajj savings to Seva Bharati after witnessing its welfare work [620151305713660†L1044-L1047] . Such stories suggest that the Sangh's relief work can transcend communal divides, though sceptics argue that it simultaneously aims to draw beneficiaries into the Hindu cultural fold.

4.4 Criticism and Internal Debates

Despite its expansion, the RSS continues to face criticism for reproducing caste hierarchies and gender exclusion. Women remain organised through the separate Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, rather than being integrated into the core. Scholars such as Shamsul Islam argue that this segregation reflects a patriarchal imagination in which women are custodians of tradition rather than leaders. The Sangh's ideological texts continue to revere Golwalkar, who derided the Constitution and considered caste hierarchy natural[12]. International media have reported on paramilitary-style training and the organisation's influence over government policy. In *The AIDEM*, Hasnain Naqvi notes that the RSS functions as a disciplined militia designed to safeguard a community under siege and that it remains an upper-caste preserve.

Additionally, critics observe that the Sangh's outreach to Dalits and minorities often demands assimilation into a Hindu Rashtra identity rather than dismantling hierarchical structures. An Outlook article summarising centenary events argues that the RSS has reframed its caste narrative from "purity" to "harmony" but continues to pursue cultural homogenisation and graded equality. Drones, Dalit outreach yatras and inclusivity campaigns project modernity and unity while concealing enduring inequalities. Debates also persist over the Sangh's approach to reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes; RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has called for a review of these policies, triggering backlash[13].

4.5 Centenary Celebrations and Government Recognition

On 1 October 2025 Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a commemorative postage stamp and a

₹100 coin featuring Bharat Mata to mark the RSS's centenary. In his speech he praised the Sangh's century-long journey as an incarnation of "eternal national consciousness," likening it to a river that nourishes the nation through multiple streams of service. He traced the RSS's contributions from relief work and social reform to its role in fostering discipline and patriotism. Modi's tribute emphasised "Nation First" as the guiding motto of all affiliated organisations.

Many political leaders and celebrities joined the centenary festivities. Bollywood actors, retired judges and former police chiefs praised the RSS's service and discipline. Critics, however, decried the government's overt endorsement of a controversial organisation. The Indian Express argued that Modi's speech whitewashed history by crediting the RSS with humanitarian efforts during Partition and by claiming that it was invited to march in the 1963 Republic Day parade – a claim historians dispute.

The release of commemorative currency featuring Bharat Mata also sparked debate over the blending of cultural symbolism with official state insignia.

Chapter 5 – Ideology and Organisation

5.1 Hindutva: The Core Philosophy

Hindutva lies at the heart of the RSS's worldview. Propounded by Savarkar, it emphasises cultural nationalism based on common ancestry, culture and language rather than civic rights or territorial boundaries. The RSS interprets Hindutva as cultural rather than purely religious, arguing that India's ancient civilisation provides a unifying glue across castes and regions. It contends that organising Hindus is essential to resist external threats and internal decay.

Critics argue that Hindutva conflates cultural identity with majoritarian dominance and undermines the secular Constitution. Golwalkar openly disparaged the Constitution as alien and dismissed minorities' rights. Dharendra Jha highlights that the Sangh was founded as a disciplined Hindu militia, not simply a cultural society. These ideologues viewed caste

hierarchy and patriarchal norms as natural, perpetuating exclusion. Even in recent years, some RSS leaders have called for reviewing affirmative action policies, raising fears that Hindutva's promise of unity masks an agenda of graded inequality[13].

5.2 Organisational Structure

The RSS is a volunteer-driven organisation with a hierarchical structure. At the top is the Sarsanghchalak (chief), appointed for life. He is supported by the Sarkaryavah (general secretary) and several Sah Sarkaryavahs (joint secretaries) who oversee regional and local units. Unlike conventional democratic organisations, positions are filled by consensus among senior leaders rather than through elections. The absence of internal democracy allows for disciplined decision-making but also raises concerns about accountability.

Affiliated organisations extend the Sangh's reach into every sector of society:

- **Political** – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which grew out of the Jana Sangh and is now India’s ruling party.
- **Student Affairs** – the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), one of the world’s largest student organisations.
- **Labour** – the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), among India’s largest trade unions.
- **Relief and Social Service** – Seva Bharati, which organises disaster relief, healthcare and education.
- **Tribal Welfare** – Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, working among Adivasi communities.
- **Religious and Cultural** – the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), promoting Hindu pilgrimages and activism.
- **Education** – Vidya Bharati, running thousands of schools emphasising cultural values.
- **Women’s Wing** – the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, reflecting the Sangh’s gender segregation.

These affiliates allow the RSS to influence politics, education, labour, media and social service while maintaining a veneer of cultural work. Hasnain Naqvi observes that this network functions as a “parallel state,” shaping policy and ideology behind the scenes[16].

5.3 Shakhas and Daily Discipline

Shakhas remain the primary method of training and socialisation. Volunteers assemble daily or weekly to perform exercises, practise martial arts, recite Sanskrit verses and hear inspirational stories. The routine cultivates camaraderie, discipline and a shared worldview. For many swayamsevaks, the shakha becomes a second home and a source of lifelong friendships. Critics, however, warn that regular drills and paramilitary training create an atmosphere of militarisation and inculcate unquestioning obedience.

5.4 Social Service Philosophy

RSS leaders describe their ethos as *sewa* (service). They argue that true nation-building begins with individual character development and extends to compassionate service toward society. This philosophy underpins the Sangh's relief work during disasters, educational initiatives and community outreach. Prime Minister Modi likened the RSS to a river branching into various streams that nurture different facets of national life; in his centenary speech he said the shakha transforms volunteers from "me" to "we," instilling sacrifice and teamwork.

Yet social service initiatives often reinforce Hindu cultural identity. As the Outlook piece notes, outreach programmes emphasise assimilation into a Hindu Rashtra rather than challenging caste hierarchies. Critics also point out that these programmes allow the Sangh to expand its influence

among marginalised communities while maintaining ideological control.

Chapter 6 – Social Service and Reform Activities

6.1 Education

Education has been central to the RSS's social outreach. Through Vidya Bharati, the Sangh runs thousands of schools that combine modern curricula with instruction in Indian culture, Sanskrit prayers and patriotic songs. These schools celebrate Hindu festivals and highlight ancient achievements in science and philosophy. Supporters argue that they instil pride and discipline; critics caution that they marginalise non-Hindu perspectives and promote doctrinaire histories. The RSS has also advocated training Dalits and members of marginalised communities as priests, challenging caste exclusivity in temples. However, testimonies of discrimination, such as Bhanwar Meghwanshi's experience of being ostracised, reveal persistent contradictions.

6.2 Healthcare and Rural Development

Seva Bharati and other Sangh-affiliated groups organise medical camps, blood-donation drives, vaccination programmes and health-education workshops. They adopt villages, build community centres and promote organic farming. Many parliamentarians collaborate with RSS cadres to develop model villages under government schemes. Critics argue that such programmes serve to expand the Sangh's grassroots network; supporters counter that they fill gaps left by the state.

6.3 Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation

RSS volunteers have earned widespread praise for their swift response during natural disasters. They provided rescue and rehabilitation during the Odisha and Andhra Pradesh cyclones of the 1970s, the Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984, the Gujarat earthquake of 2001 and the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. Seva Bharati constructed shelters, distributed food

and medical supplies, and adopted children orphaned by the tsunami [620151305713660†L1016-L1019] .

During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers distributed masks, food and medicine across the country and were lauded even by members of minority communities. These efforts have helped build a perception of the Sangh as a reliable service organisation.

6.4 Tribal and Indigenous Outreach

Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, founded in 1952, works among India's tribal communities. It runs schools, hostels and health centres and encourages tribal youth to pursue education, sports and vocational training. Supporters say the organisation brings development to neglected areas; critics accuse it of cultural assimilation, arguing that its programmes promote absorption into mainstream Hinduism at the

expense of indigenous traditions. The line between uplift and cultural homogenisation remains debated.

6.5 Protection of Minorities and Relief during Riots

During the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, RSS activists reportedly protected Sikh neighbours and provided shelter **【620151305713660†L1026-L1030】** . Such actions complicate the narrative that the Sangh solely fuels communalism. Similar accounts exist of volunteers assisting victims irrespective of religion during local riots. Nonetheless, these examples coexist with accusations that RSS members have instigated or supported communal mobilisations, underscoring the organisation's dual image as both protector and provocateur.

Chapter 7 – Criticism and Controversies

7.1 Caste and Gender Exclusion

Despite rhetoric of unity, scholars have documented that the RSS remains an upper-caste preserve. Leadership positions are dominated by Brahmins and other upper castes, and representation from Dalit and Adivasi communities remains limited. Women are organised through the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti and excluded from core decision-making. Shamsul Islam argues that this segregation reflects a patriarchal vision in which women serve as custodians of tradition rather than equal partners in leadership. Critics warn that such structures perpetuate hierarchical norms and undermine the promise of inclusivity.

7.2 Ideological Rigidity and Constitutional Opposition

Golwalkar's writings remain central to the RSS's ideology. He disparaged India's Constitution as alien, argued that minorities should merely coexist and considered caste hierarchy natural[12]. Dhirendra Jha notes that the Sangh was conceived as a militia rather than a cultural society, designed to safeguard a besieged community. These positions conflict with the Constitution's promise of equality and pluralism. Although later leaders have moderated their rhetoric, the core philosophy of Hindutva continues to emphasise cultural dominance over civic citizenship. Critics argue that this ideological rigidity fosters intolerance and undermines the foundations of a secular, democratic republic.

7.3 Role in the Freedom Struggle

As discussed in Chapter 2, the RSS abstained from mass mobilisation during the Quit India Movement and other anti-colonial campaigns. The Indian Express emphasises that while communists mobilised workers and peasants for independence, the RSS focused on drills and caste discipline[10]. The organisation's founder Hedgewar and his successor Golwalkar dismissed the independence movement as merely political and prioritised building a Hindu nation. This historical aloofness complicates later claims that the RSS played a pivotal role in achieving independence.

7.4 Communal Violence and Bans

The RSS has faced repeated bans for its alleged role in communal polarisation. After Gandhi's assassination, the government banned the organisation and accused it of creating an atmosphere of communal poison. During the

Emergency (1975) and after the Babri Masjid demolition (1992) it was banned again. The Indian Express notes that the organisation has often survived not by courage but by compromise: after each ban its leaders negotiated with the government to lift restrictions, sometimes offering cooperation in return[17]. Such episodes reveal an organisation adept at adapting to political circumstances while retaining its core agenda.

7.5 Links to Fascism and Exclusionary Nationalism

Scholars such as Christophe Jaffrelot have drawn parallels between the RSS's ideology and European fascism. Golwalkar praised Nazi Germany's "race pride" and its "purging" of minorities. The Sangh's worldview positions Muslims, Christians and communists as internal enemies; Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts* lists these groups as threats to the nation. Critics argue that this identification of

“enemies within” legitimises communal polarisation and undermines pluralism. The Indian Express notes that the RSS’s propaganda and speeches during Partition fuelled suspicion and vengeance against Muslims, contributing to the communal inferno of 1947[19].

7.6 Militarisation and Intolerance

The RSS’s emphasis on martial drills and rifle training has raised concerns. International media have reported on summer camps where volunteers practise with rifles and on the organisation’s influence over public policy. The AIDEM points out that the Sangh functions as a disciplined militia designed to protect a besieged community. Critics warn that such militarisation fosters intolerance and prepares cadres for confrontation rather than dialogue. The RSS counters that physical training instils courage and discipline and prepares volunteers for service during crises.

7.7 Secrecy, Accountability and Political Influence

Despite its vast influence, the RSS is registered not as a political entity but as a cultural organisation. This status shields it from public scrutiny and legal accountability. Hashain Naqvi notes that over its 100 years the Sangh has expanded its reach into education, media, trade unions and civil society while avoiding transparency[20]. The organisation wields significant influence over the Bharatiya Janata Party, blurring the line between cultural and political spheres. Christophe Jaffrelot observes that the Hindu Rashtra is no longer an abstract dream but is being legislated, normalised and institutionalised through this symbiosis[16]. Critics worry that such entanglement undermines democratic accountability and marginalises minorities and dissenters.

Chapter 8 – Contributions of the Honourable Prime Minister

8.1 Background and Rise to Power

Narendra Damodardas Modi, born on 17 September 1950 in Vadnagar, Gujarat, joined the RSS as a teenager and became a pracharak. During the Emergency he reportedly worked underground to resist authoritarianism. In the early 1980s he was deputed to the BJP's Gujarat unit and rose through its ranks, serving as Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014. His tenure saw rapid economic growth and infrastructural development but also the horrific 2002 communal riots, which remain a subject of controversy. Modi led the BJP to a historic majority in 2014 and secured re-election in 2019 and 2024, making him the longest serving non-Congress Prime Minister.

8.2 Welfare and Social Schemes

Since 2014 the Modi government has launched numerous welfare schemes aimed at poverty alleviation, financial inclusion and basic amenities. Tens of crores of people receive free food grains under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana; millions of toilets have been built under the Swachh Bharat Mission; crores of households have obtained tap-water connections and houses under PM Awas Yojana; and loans have been disbursed under Mudra Yojana and PM SVANidhi to support micro-entrepreneurs. During the COVID-19 pandemic the government transferred cash to crores of women. These initiatives have expanded welfare outreach to historically underserved communities.

8.3 Agricultural Reforms and Farmer Welfare

The government has increased the agricultural budget significantly since 2014. Crores of soil-health cards have been distributed, and large sums have

been transferred to farmers under the PM Kisan scheme. Crop insurance payouts under the PM Fasal Bima Yojana have provided support against crop loss. Procurement at minimum support prices has expanded for pulses and oilseeds. Investments in agricultural infrastructure and digital marketing platforms have aimed to improve farmers' incomes.

8.4 Women's Empowerment and Social Inclusion

The Modi government has prioritised women's empowerment. The Ujjwala scheme has provided crores of households with LPG connections, reducing indoor air pollution. Maternity leave has been extended, and self-help groups have been mobilised to support entrepreneurship among women. Figures indicate that women account for a large share of Mudra loans, and initiatives like "Lakhpati Didi" aim to create women millionaires in

rural areas. Surveys show that India's sex ratio has improved to 1,020 women per 1,000 men.

8.5 Youth, Education and Digital Revolution

The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 introduced reforms to curricula and pedagogy. The PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana has trained millions in vocational skills. Start-up programmes have encouraged entrepreneurship, with over a lakh start-ups officially recognised and millions of jobs created. The government has modernised schools under PM SHRI and expanded the network of IITs, IIMs and AIIMS. India leads the world in real-time digital transactions; the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) processes billions of payments each month. High-speed internet and optical fibre have been extended across villages, enabling digital inclusion.

8.6 Infrastructure and Connectivity

India's infrastructure landscape has undergone rapid expansion. Budgets for roads and highways have increased several-fold, and highway construction has accelerated. The railways' modernisation includes new trains and electrification. Metro rail networks have expanded in major cities, and dozens of new airports have been operationalised. Housing schemes have built millions of urban and rural houses. These projects aim to stimulate economic growth and improve connectivity.

8.7 National Security and Diplomacy

The Modi government has emphasised national security. Defence exports have surged, operations have evacuated Indian citizens from conflict zones, and strategic decisions such as the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A have reconfigured the status of Jammu & Kashmir. Supporters praise these moves as asserting national sovereignty; critics argue that they

undermine federalism and minority rights. The government has also pursued active diplomacy, engaging with global powers and promoting initiatives like the International Solar Alliance.

8.8 Cultural Preservation and Heritage Projects

The government has undertaken projects to restore and promote cultural heritage. Temples such as Kedarnath and Somnath have been redeveloped, and the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya is under construction. Schemes like Swadesh Darshan and HRIDAY develop thematic circuits and heritage cities. Hundreds of stolen artefacts have been repatriated. Critics argue that these initiatives prioritise majoritarian religious symbolism; supporters view them as reclaiming cultural pride.

8.9 Critiques of Modi's Governance

While many laud the Prime Minister's developmental agenda, critiques persist. Some economists note that job creation has not kept pace with growth and that informal workers face precarity. Large farmers and opposition parties criticised agricultural reforms and staged mass protests in 2020–21, arguing that they favoured corporate interests. Human-rights groups point to restrictions on civil liberties, media freedom and dissent. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act and proposals for a National Register of Citizens have been criticised for discriminating against Muslims. International indices have reported declines in democratic freedoms. Balancing growth with inclusivity and rights remains an ongoing challenge.

Chapter 9 – Interplay Between the RSS and the Prime Minister

9.1 Ideological Convergence and Divergence

Narendra Modi's formative years in the RSS have shaped his worldview. The Sangh's emphasis on discipline, cultural pride, service and nationalism resonates in his programmes such as Swachh Bharat (cleanliness), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (save and educate the girl child), Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) and the emphasis on yoga and ancient traditions. His speeches often invoke India's civilisational heritage and valorise Hindu symbols. However, divergences exist. Modi has embraced ambitious infrastructure projects, digital technology and global economic integration, whereas some RSS leaders criticise globalisation and foreign investment. His outreach to Muslim countries and climate diplomacy suggest pragmatism beyond Hindutva orthodoxy. Tensions have surfaced when

RSS leaders questioned government policies such as the Goods and Services Tax or labour reforms.

9.2 Institutional Relationships

The RSS exerts influence through its cadres who occupy positions within the BJP, government and affiliated organisations. The BJP relies on the RSS for ideological training, campaign mobilisation and organisational discipline. The Sangh's network of shakhas provides a ready base for disseminating government schemes. Critics argue that this blurs the line between cultural and political roles and threatens democratic accountability[16]. Others contend that the synergy ensures cohesive policy implementation and moral clarity. The relationship remains symbiotic but occasionally fraught as both sides navigate the balance between ideology and electoral pragmatism.

9.3 Public Perceptions and Future Challenges

Public perceptions of the RSS–Modi relationship vary widely. Supporters view the synergy as an asset that nurtures disciplined leadership and patriotic service. Detractors worry that ideological dominance marginalises minorities and suppresses dissent. As India confronts economic inequality, climate change, unemployment and social harmony, both the RSS and the government must evolve. Scholars urge the Sangh to confront its foundational fault lines – caste hierarchy, gender exclusion and constitutional dissonance – and align with the republic’s egalitarian ideals[21]. Similarly, the government must balance majoritarian impulses with the constitutional promise of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity will shape Bharat’s next century.

Conclusion

In its first century the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has evolved from a small cadre of volunteers into a vast network that influences politics, education, labour, religion and social service. Its disciplined cadre and ethos of selfless service have inspired millions and produced leaders who have transformed India's landscape. The organisation's volunteers have provided relief during disasters, run schools and hospitals, advocated social reform and fostered community organisation. Together with the Prime Minister's policies, this network has contributed to rapid development, expanded welfare and a renewed sense of cultural pride.

At the same time, the RSS's ideological roots in Hindutva raise profound questions about pluralism, equality and democratic accountability. Its record on caste and gender inclusivity remains contested; its abstention from the mass freedom struggle and its

association with communal violence continue to provoke debate. The organisation has been banned multiple times and remains under scrutiny for militaristic practices, secretive operations and anti-minority rhetoric. For the government, development successes must be weighed against concerns about rights, dissent and social cohesion.

As Bharat enters its second century with the RSS as an influential force, the challenge is to harness the organisation's strengths – discipline, service and cultural pride – while reforming its exclusionary tendencies. Future leaders must pursue growth and innovation without compromising democratic institutions and inclusive values. Only by acknowledging both the achievements and the shortcomings of the Sangh and the government can India chart a path toward a more just and prosperous future.

Appendix

Appendix A: Chronology of Major Events in the RSS (1925–2025)

Year	Event
1925	Foundation of the RSS by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in Nagpur.
1930s	Establishment of shakhas across Central and Northern India.
1940	M. S. Golwalkar becomes Sarsanghchalak; ideological consolidation begins.
1947–48	Partition of India; communal riots; assassination of Mahatma Gandhi; first ban on RSS.
1951	Formation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh as political arm.
1975–77	Second ban during the Emergency; participation in resistance movements.
1980	Formation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
1992	Demolition of Babri Masjid; third ban on

Year	Event
	RSS.
2001– 2004	Relief work during Gujarat earthquake and Indian Ocean tsunami.
2014	Narendra Modi, former RSS pracharak, becomes Prime Minister.
2020	RSS participates in COVID-19 relief operations nationwide.
2025	RSS celebrates its centenary with global events and government recognition.

Appendix B: Glossary of Key Terms

- **Swayamsevak** – A volunteer member of the RSS.
- **Shakha** – Local branch where daily or weekly drills, discussions, and exercises are held.
- **Sarsanghchalak** – The chief leader of the RSS.
- **Pracharak** – Full-time propagator or worker of the organisation.
- **Hindutva** – Ideology of cultural nationalism that forms the philosophical basis of the RSS.

- **Seva Bharati** – RSS-affiliated service organisation for relief and welfare.
- **Sangh Parivar** – The family of organisations ideologically affiliated with the RSS.
- **Bharat Mata** – The personification of India as the Mother Goddess, a unifying national symbol.

Appendix C: List of Affiliated Organisations

- **Political:** Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)
- **Students:** Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)
- **Labour:** Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)
- **Social Service:** Seva Bharati
- **Education:** Vidya Bharati
- **Tribal Welfare:** Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram
- **Religious and Cultural:** Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)
- **Women’s Wing:** Rashtriya Sevika Samiti

Sources

1. Hasnain Naqvi, “RSS at 100: A Century Under Scrutiny,” *The AIDEM* (September 27 2025), which notes that the Sangh was designed as a disciplined Hindu militia and remains an upper-caste preserve.
2. Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, *RSS: Icons of the Indian Right* (2009), quoted in *The AIDEM*, observing that the organisation reproduced upper-caste leadership and excluded women.
3. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966), as cited by *The AIDEM*, criticising India’s Constitution and advocating that minorities merely coexist and viewing caste hierarchy as natural.
4. Dharendra K. Jha, *Shadow Armies: Fringe Organisations & Foot Soldiers of Hindutva* (2019), referenced by *The AIDEM*, describing the RSS as a militia to safeguard a community under siege.

5. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's letter to Golwalkar (1948), cited in *The AIDEM*, accusing the RSS of creating an atmosphere that enabled Gandhi's assassination.

6. The *Indian Express* opinion piece "Why the RSS's past and present can't be whitewashed" (October 11 2025), noting the RSS's absence from the freedom struggle, its role in communal propaganda during Partition and its internal enemies doctrine.

7. The *Indian Express* article discussing Modi's centenary speech, criticising claims about RSS humanitarian work and the 1963 Republic Day parade.

8. The Outlook article "After a 100 Years, Can the RSS Sing a Different Tune?" (October 17 2025), summarising how the Sangh reframed its caste narrative from purity to harmony while maintaining cultural homogenisation.

9. Miscellaneous reports cited in the book covering relief work, educational initiatives, disaster response and government welfare schemes.