

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)

'We don't call it Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS] overseas. It's not on Indian soil so we can't use the word 'Rashtriya'. We call it Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh as it unites Hindus worldwide'

-Ramesh Subramaniam, Mumbai coordinator of RSS's overseas work
about the HSS.

A report by



Collective Against the Violation and Abuse of Civil and Human Rights

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Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh (HSS)

Introduction

The RSS (Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh) is an extreme Hindu-nationalist group in India whose founders were admirers of Hitler and have compared the Muslims in India to the Jews of Germany. For the RSS Indian identity is identical to Hindu identity. One of the proponent of Hindutva, V.D. Savarkar has said 'Germany had every right to resort to Nazism, and Italy to Fascism.' They have 50,000 local branches also known as 'shakhas'. The Sangh Parivar (translation: "Family of the Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh" or the "RSS family") refers, as an umbrella term, to the collection of Hindu nationalist organizations spawned by the RSS and remain affiliated to it.

The Sangh Parivar represents the Hindu nationalist movement of India. Its religious wing, the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) has been classified by the CIA as a militant religious outfit. Its student wing ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad) has been associated with several violent attacks on students in University campuses. The other organizations affiliated to RSS include the political party BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), Bajrang Dal (also classified by the CIA as a militant organization) and the worker's union Bharatiya Kishan Sangh. The RSS established itself as the HSS (Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh) in the United Kingdom under the name of HSS which was officially born on 2nd July, 1966. It is currently active and receiving funds from 45 countries and boasts 750 branches.

Each national HSS is autonomous, though there are global coordinators. HSS is very active in the English-speaking world and problems have been flagged in UK, USA and Canada as will be summarized below. In Europe, in addition to UK, branches can be found in Germany, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and so on.

Part-I: Flagged Problems

1. Hate speech

Hate speech has been flagged on multiple occasions, the most striking being those revealed by a sting operation by ITV in UK.

- i. UK (2015): A sting operation footage showed a teacher on camera making anti-Muslim and Christian remarks to students at a camp organized by HSS.
- ii. Canada (2020): HSS member removed from school board for hate speech.

In the sting operation done in UK, the flagged teacher is recorded having said this: "To destroy the Hindu history is the secret conspiracy of the Christians." and "You see, when it comes to Islam, they are the world's worst religion and they don't have common sense to find out what is humanity." In the aftermath of the same incidence, the UK Charity Commission issued a warning "RSS must have no influence or control over the Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh (HSS)". In the Canadian case, an uptick of general hate speech in the social media discourse was reported. No specific report of flagged hate-speech in the USA could be located on the internet, but general reports on how far-right extreme Hindu groups generate hate in the USA is documented. An important document comes from academic

and historian of ancient Indian history, Prof. Audrey Truschke, who reports how she has been subject to anti-Semitic insults from the Hindu far right; however, this was not explicitly tied to HSS.

2. Interference in elections:

Right-wing and far-right Hindu groups have reportedly tried to influence elections in all three countries, with varying success.

- i. UK (2019): HSS, through a sister organization called Overseas Friends of BJP UK, tried to influence the Indian diaspora by supporting the Conservatives over the Labour party in the last UK general elections. Grounds for not supporting the labour party as described by the President of the Overseas Friends of the BJP are, 'Firstly, some Labour MPs joined the violent protests outside India House on August 15 and September 3. Secondly, no Labour MPs spoke in favor of India in the House of Commons on Kashmir, and thirdly because of the Labour motion on Kashmir passed at their party conference. Kashmir is an internal matter of India. Why is the Labour party discussing the Indian state? We will only support MPs who support us'.
- ii. Canada (2019): In July 2019 Canadian intelligence officials sounded the same alarm: India's ruling Hindu nationalist BJP was influencing the Canadian election through the diaspora. The National Post reported that some of the top bureaucrats in the country have been warned about India's attempt to influence the Canadian election through its ethnic diaspora for its own agenda.
- iii. USA (2019-20): Narendra Modi at an event in the USA even appealed to the Indian diaspora to vote for Donald Trump. Tulsi Gabbard, the ex-aspiring democratic candidate and one-time potential running mate for democratic nominee Joe Biden, was openly supported by the right-wing Hindu diaspora.

For western democracies it should be a grave concern that BJP or its branches are interfering with their elections. Not only could this possibly mean interference by the ruling party of India but also a rise of right-wing politics in the west. A British journalist had tweeted the following 'Why is the BJP trying to influence the British election?'

3. Infiltration of institutions in the host country:

- i. Canada (2018): Peel regional police department invited a HSS functionary to participate in a Hindu festival organized by them.
- ii. USA (2020): Carmen police department came under scrutiny after hosting HSS.

The two examples cited here shows how HSS tries to penetrate into institutions in the host country to gain legitimacy and push forward its extremist views and opinions.

4. Improper use of funds

HSS and its sister organizations often collect funds, ostentatiously for charity. However, misuse of such funds has been widely reported on multiple occasions.

- i. **UK (2002):** The Charity commission, UK received [complaints](#) regarding HSS and its source of funding and finances.
- ii. **USA (2002):** Not only individual but also corporate funding was reported to have been **used to [incite hate and violence in India](#)**.

The money raised in the wake of earthquake in Gujarat (2001) was reported to have been misused for far-right political activities, some reports go as far as linking it directly to the infamous Gujarat riots which took place right afterwards (2002). One [report](#) says: *“The extremist RSS’s front organizations have received millions of pounds raised from the British public. These funds were collected by the Leicester-based registered charity, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and its fundraising arm Sewa International”*. Very similar allegation emerged for [funding](#) from USA “... receiving millions of dollars from corporates in the United States to instigate communal violence and propagate the Hindutva ideology in Gujarat and other parts of the country. This was exposed by the Campaign to Stop Funding Hate (SFH) ... have identified the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) as the key fund-raiser for the Sangh Parivar in the U.S. SFH says that the IDRF, which was set up to provide funds for ‘relief and development work’, has been funding RSS-initiated projects all over India.”

Indian minorities abroad have expressed concern about HSS (and RSS), specifically the growing links between Indian diplomats abroad and the HSS/RSS, that undermines their [neutrality](#). Similarly, the [links](#) between elected representatives of the host country and the local HSS were [flagged](#).

Part-II: HSS / RSS link

Though HSS claims that they have no formal ties with RSS, it is an open secret that they are in fact an RSS subsidiary, as is evident from the following sources:

1. According to the official [website](#) of HSS Germany, ‘**HSS is ideologically inspired by the RSS...**’.
2. According to its [Wikipedia](#) page ‘**Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) is a subsidiary of [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh](#) (RSS) for supporting and mobilizing Hindus living outside India.**’
3. Ramesh Subramaniam, Mumbai coordinator of RSS’s overseas work has [said](#) the following about the HSS, ‘**We don’t call it Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh overseas. It’s not on Indian soil so we can’t use the word ‘Rashtriya’. We call it Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh as it unites Hindus worldwide**’
4. “India-based Sangh affiliates receive social and financial support from its U.S.-based wings, the latter of which exist largely as tax-exempt non-profit organizations in the United States: Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS),

Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), Sewa International USA, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation-USA. The Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party – USA (OFBJP) is active as well, though it is not a tax-exempt group.” - ‘[Hindu Nationalism in the United States](#)’ released by SACW (South Asia Citizens Web)

5. Another [report](#) talks about religious American Hindu community and how it is a promising recruitment group for the RSS via the HSS. “This would seem like a promising recruitment pool for the RSS, though the regular attendance for US HSS [**Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the overseas counterpart of the RSS in the US**] shakhas as of 2017 is only between 5,000 and 7,000 (that number would increase several times if one counted occasional attendance or participation in HSS programs and parivar-supported projects).”
6. HSS intellectual unit in Cape Town has said that the role of HSS is designed by the framework [decided by the RSS](#)
7. The [Facebook](#) page of HSS-Sweden is unusually open in advertising its ideological leanings towards RSS. It displays a short cartoon film on expansionist dreams of the RSS. A video of RSS chief also features [here](#).
8. The Norway branch seems also very active and advertises its charity work and calls for [donations](#) (See UK and USA examples above for potential for misuse of funds). They regularly organize camps to teach “organizational skills” and “about Hindu religion” (see example from UK above for use of such camps for indoctrination of very young children in anti-Christian and Islamophobic doctrine).

Part-III: HSS in Germany

Started in 2014. Regional chapters in **Hamburg, Frankfurt, Darmstadt-dieburg, München, Mannheim, Berlin, Dresden, and Düsseldorf**. Activities include “Balagokulum” - children’s forum to “enable Hindu children in [Germany](#) to appreciate their cultural roots and learn Hindu values”. They raise funds through voluntary contributions. Ostentatiously a ‘cultural’ organization but admits “HSS is ideologically [inspired](#) by the RSS...”.

HSS Munich chapter recently invited a member of the Bavarian parliament from the Green Party to give a speech. The concerned politician, who had been unaware of the far-right nature of HSS accepted the invitation, however, ultimately decided to [cancel](#) the appointment after becoming aware of the true nature of HSS. There is evidence on social media of an FDP politician from Frankfurt, Mr. Rahul Kumar, to have attended event(s) organized by the HSS.

This incidence underlines the growing confidence of HSS in Germany and its desire to gain legitimacy beyond the far-right circles.