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The Freedom Movement & The RSS: A Story of Betrayal

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PREFACE

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) claims to be the greatest embodiment of nationalism in the country today. There has been a concerted attempt to market it as being synonymous with patriotism in India. It is also a fact, though, that the claims of the RSS in this regard have always been challenged by individuals and organizations who were in the thick of the freedom movement. There is no dearth of writings exposing the negative role of the RSS during the freedom struggle. However, this booklet is an attempt to collect facts of the freedom movement era from the documents of the RSS itself. It has been the intention of the author that the documents of the RSS should speak for themselves. This booklet is surely going to disillusion those who believe that the RSS played any role in securing freedom. They will hear from the horse's mouth that not only was a silence maintained about the evils of foreign rule but all attempts were made to sabotage the fight against British imperialism.

This booklet contains a thematic index of references in speeches and writings of RSS leaders to participation in the freedom struggle. This is published as an appendix.

Translations from original Hindi texts quoted in the booklet are by the author.

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THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND THE RSS

With the dream of unfurling the saffron flag of Hindu Rashtra, the Prime Minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee issued a commemorative postage stamp to mark the 110th birth anniversary of 'freedom fighter' and founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), Dr. K.B. Hedgewar, on March 18, 1999 in New Delhi. It was the first instance since India's independence that a postage stamp was issued commemorating the birthday of the founder of the RSS or any other leader of this organization. On this occasion, the Prime Minister while addressing mainly a gathering of RSS cadre, took credit for the fact that by issuing the postage stamp his government had corrected an injustice whereby the great freedom fighter and patriot Dr. Hedgewar was denied his due place in the history of independent India. Rajendar Singh, chief of RSS, and Union Home Minister L.K. Advani too spoke on the occasion and described Dr. Hedgewar as a great revolutionary.¹

This is not the place to go into the issue whether revolutionaries and freedom fighters who challenged the might of the British rulers need the honours of this government or for that matter any other government. However, the fact of the matter is that the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and the RSS chief were talking dishonestly. They were trying to pass off a pre-independence political trend represented by the RSS as a legacy of the anti-colonial struggle whereas in reality RSS was never part of the anti-imperialist struggle. On the contrary, since its inception in 1925, the RSS only tried to disrupt the great anti-imperialist struggle of the Indian people against the British colonial rulers.

Interestingly, the 'contribution' to the freedom struggle for which the BJP Government honoured Dr. Hedgewar was made by him as a Congressman. It may

not be known to many that he went to jail for the first time for giving an inflammatory speech in support of the Khilafat Movement (1920-21). He was subsequently sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. According to his biography published by the RSS, "the experiences gained by his in the freedom movement till now, gave rise to a number of questions in his mind. He felt that some other way should be found".² In the same book, it is further mentioned that Dr. Hedgewar was attracted towards Hindutva by 1925 and "through his talent he found a new method of Shakha, different from the ways then prevalent, of doing public work and the type of efforts then being made for gaining freedom".³ The truth is that Dr. Hedgewar by then had openly taken the path, which Mohammed Ali Jinnah was to later take, of breaking the united movement of the Indian people against the British rulers and splitting it along religious lines.

Dr. Hedgewar was sent to jail a second time by the British government. This was the last time that he went to jail. The reason for his second imprisonment has been described in the same biography in the following words: "[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".⁴ However, rather surprisingly, Dr. Saheb decided to participate in Gandhi's Dandi Salt Satyagraha as an individual. Of course, he had an ulterior motive. We learn about this from the same biography published by the RSS: "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".⁵ 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. He 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".⁶ 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. In fact, the Congress leadership soon realized that communal and sectarian organizations were bent upon using the cadre of Congress for their vicious designs. In 1934, the All India Congress Committee passed a resolution forbidding Congress members from becoming members of the RSS, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Muslim League.

It needs to be underlined that on the two occasions that Dr. Hedgewar went to jail, it was at the call of the Congress. If it is true that the Vajpayee government has honoured him for his participation in Congress-led movements this should be clearly stated. On the other hand if he is being honoured as the founder of the RSS then the only 'contribution' for which he can claim credit is that of propagating the communal and disruptive ideology of Hindu Rashtra - an ideology which divided and undermined the freedom movement.

The people of this country would like to know which movements were launched by the RSS before 1947, to free India from British imperialism. Who amongst its leaders and cadres suffered repression under colonial rule? Who amongst them went to jail or became martyrs for the cause of the freedom of the country?

The truth is that the foundation of anti-imperialist people's unity, especially unity of the Hindu and Muslim masses, was firmly laid by the great struggle of the Indian people for independence in 1857. This unity formed the basis of the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), in the course of which India's struggle for freedom underwent a qualitative change. The single most important feature of the immediate post-war period was the politics of mass mobilization which Gandhiji initiated. The period following the Non-Cooperation Movement witnessed the growth of workers' and peasants' movements which strengthened the united anti-imperialist struggle.

At the same time an unfortunate feature of the national movement during the mid-1920s was the growing tendency of some of the prominent leaders to take positions along communal lines. This was a development which suited the British and the imperialist rulers left no stone unturned to encourage this trend. Hindu and Muslim chauvinists undermined the unity which had been built up during the Non-Cooperation Movement led by Gandhiji. The communal stance of the Hindu Mahasabha, which had the support of the Congress right-wing, made things difficult for communal amity. As for the Muslim chauvinists, particularly the more obscurantist and reactionary sections among them, they tried to project the Khilafat issue as one concerning the Muslim community alone. By stressing on the religious aspects of the issue they diluted the political and anti-imperialist content of the movement. After the Non-Cooperation Movement some of them took to communal politics, while several others like Maulana Azad and Saifuddin Kitchlew, who were dedicated to the cause of Hindu - Muslim unity, became part of the Congress leadership. The Hindu and Muslim communalists thus complemented each other's politics, and British imperialism nurtured both of them.

It is against this background that Dr. Hedgewar formed the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh in 1925. Dr. Hedgewar was born in 1889 in Nagpur. After completing his school education he went to Calcutta (1910-1915) to study medicine. Although RSS publications claim that he was in touch with revolutionary terrorist groups there, no independent confirmation of this is available. Almost nothing is known of his political activities for nearly five years after he returned to Nagpur in 1915. It seems that Dr. Hedgewar did not set up a medical practice. The details of the 'formative' period of his political career are vague. He was briefly associated with the Congress and as we have seen he was imprisoned during the Non-Cooperation Movement.

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 non-cooperation 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".⁷

With the aim of propagating these views among youngsters, mainly teenage boys, he formed the RSS in 1925. The RSS concentrated on disseminating Dr. Hedgewar's views of Hindu Rashtra among youth. The organization was not engaged in undertaking any movement or launching any struggle against the British. Whereas on the one hand the revolutionary activities of Bhagat Singh and his comrades were shaking the foundations of British rule, on the other hand official documents of the late twenties contain no reference to any anti-British activities of the RSS. The main task of the Sangh was to carry on a hate campaign against the minorities. It sought urban middle-class Maharashtrian Brahmin boys for their audience, and in the early years this remained the main social base of the organization. It is pertinent that a spurt in the membership of the organization came soon after a riot in Nagpur in 1927.

While the RSS embarked on its hate campaign the freedom struggle was, by 1927-28, ready to enter a new phase. The twenties had witnessed the rise of a left movement in India with the formation of socialist groups and the founding of the Communist Party. A strong trade union movement had also come into existence. Towards the end of the twenties a number of working-class strikes swept the country. 1927 saw another development. This was the announcement by the British of another commission to go into the question of constitutional reforms for India—the Simon Commission. The nationalists opposed the Simon Commission and the Congress gave a call to boycott it. The boycott of the Simon Commission developed into a major mass agitation. The British relied upon the growing aggressiveness of Hindu and Muslim communalists to disrupt the unity of the anti-

imperialist mass upsurge of the late 1920s and hoped that this would enable them to impose a constitutional arrangement which would safeguard British interests.

There is a vast amount of archival source material and other documentation which provides detailed information about the activities of the Congress, the revolutionary terrorists and various other groups which were engaged in the anti-imperialist struggle. The Communists, who throughout this period had to work secretly and remained underground due to severe imperialist repression, have already published a large part of the voluminous source material pertaining to their activities in this period. The source material is corroborated by the official and semi-official records, and can be easily verified and cross-checked. The revolutionary terrorists too, even though they worked in utmost secrecy, have left behind extensive evidence of their activities. This also holds true for those among the terrorists who, like V.D. Savarkar, were part of the political right-wing and whose views on Hindutva were not fundamentally different from those of the RSS.

However no similar documentation has been forthcoming from the RSS. Nor is it possible to locate material in contemporary records which would shed light on the anti-British role of the organization. We have to rely exclusively on what we are told by RSS propagandists in their publications. Is the RSS not in a position to produce a volume containing documents that have a bearing on the role of the organization in the freedom struggle?

The contemporary writings and speeches of RSS leaders have a very different story to tell. These leaders showed little enthusiasm for the anti-British struggle. In the words of Guru Golwalkar, "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. 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 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'.⁸ This incident clearly shows that the RSS leadership was bent upon demoralising the honest patriotic persons to run away from the cause of Freedom Movement.

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".⁹ 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".¹⁰ However, there is not a single publication or document of the Sangh which could throw some light on the great work the RSS did indirectly for the Quit India Movement.

As we have seen, Dr. Hedgewar individually participated in the Salt Satyagraha. But after this the RSS leaders even in their individual capacity kept away from the anti-British struggle. The RSS scrupulously avoided any political activity which

might be construed as being against the British authorities: "After establishing Sangh, Doctor Saheb in his speeches used to talk only of Hindu organization. Direct comment on Government used to be almost nil".¹¹

Though it is possible, given the mass upsurge of that period, that some members of the RSS might have individually participated in some anti-British movement, these would have been isolated instances. The RSS as an organization never launched any struggle or campaign against British colonial rule or for the rights of the oppressed people. Nor was the top leadership of the RSS part of the freedom struggle. The political antecedents of Guru Golwalkar, who headed the organization after the death of Dr. Hedgewar in 1940, reveal that he too was not associated with the national movement.

Guru Golwalkar was born in 1906 near Nagpur. After his initial education he went to Banaras Hindu University (BHU) where he studied zoology and taught at the University till 1933. He worked briefly for the RSS, but subsequently turned towards spiritualism. In 1937 he again became active in the RSS and eventually was named by Dr. Hedgewar as his successor (despite his being relatively junior in the organization). He took over the leadership of the RSS in 1940, at a time when the Muslim League's Pakistan resolution had provided fertile ground for heightened communal propaganda.

During the forties also the RSS aggressively campaigned for Hindu Rashtra, but stayed aloof from the anti-British struggle. Guru Golwalkar in fact made it clear that the variety of nationalism which the RSS espoused had no anti-British or anti-imperialist content whatsoever: "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".¹²

Virulent opposition to Hindu-Muslim unity and to a united people's struggle against British rule was the programme pursued by the RSS throughout the forties. Gandhiji was projected as the villain who was a hurdle to the establishment of Hindu Rashtra. Significantly the British, who encouraged Jinnah's communal politics and used the Muslim League as a convenient tool for imposing partition on the Indian subcontinent, were never condemned by the RSS, whereas Gandhiji who worked ceaselessly to prevent partition was demonized. This demonization of Gandhiji culminated in his assassination in 1948. The RSS has never been able to shake-off the allegation that it was involved in the conspiracy to kill the Mahatma.

Apart from its hate campaign directed against the Muslims and other minorities, the RSS also assumed another role under Guru Golwalkar. Communists and socialists too became objects of the RSS hate campaign in the forties - precisely at a time when communist and socialist influence was growing in the national movement. This role was duly recognized and commended in the early 1950s by a key player in promoting the Cold War - the CIA. It must be remembered that after the Second World War the CIA masterminded the anti-communist campaign worldwide. A CIA - sponsored study of 1950 noted: " If leftist forces in India should acquire increasing importance or if Communist imperialism should present a greater threat to India's sovereignty than the Congress Government could

withstand, the RSS might stand to gain. Its extreme Hindu nationalism might easily become the rallying point for anti-Marxists".¹³

When, after 1948, the RSS was on the defensive due to a ban imposed on it for its involvement in the assassination of Gandhiji, the role of the organization in the anti-communist campaign facilitated its resurrection.

The RSS thus can be seen as having played an extremely dubious role throughout the freedom struggle. All evidence points towards its disruptiveness and the fact that the organization and its leadership was not a part of the freedom struggle. The single most important 'contribution' of the RSS was to consistently disrupt the unified struggle of the Indian people against British imperialism through its extreme exclusivist slogan of Hindu Rashtra.

Moreover 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, Chandrashekhar Azad and their associates. Not only that, they hated even the reformist and moderate movements conducted 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".¹⁴ Could there be a statement more insulting and denigrating to the martyrs than this?

The study of Prarthana (prayer) and Pratigya (oath) as practised in the shakhas of the RSS during the British rule, is an example of how nationalism was equated with Hinduism, in the same way as the Muslim League which had combined Islam with nationality. Significantly, both the Prarthana and Pratigya are silent on the issue of the subjugation of the motherland to the British rulers. A perusal of the relevant portions of the English versions of both will make this very clear:

Prarthana

Affectionate Motherland, I eternally bow to you/O Land of Hindus, you have reared me in comfort/O Sacred Land, the Great Creator of Good, may this body of mine be dedicated to you/I again and again bow before you/O God almighty, we the integral part of the Hindu Rashtra salute you in reverence/For Your cause have we girded up our loins/Give us Your Blessings for its accomplishment.¹⁵
(Translated from Sanskrit)

Pratigya

Before the all-powerful God and my ancestors, I most solemnly take this oath, that I become a member of the RSS in order to achieve all round greatness of Bharatvarsha by fostering the growth of my sacred Hindu religion, Hindu society, and Hindu culture. I shall perform the work of the Sangh honestly, disinterestedly, with my heart and soul, and I shall adhere to this goal all my life. Bharat Mata Ki Jai.¹⁶

Prior to 1939 the RSS had a different prayer, a combination of Marathi and Hindi. It revolved round Ram and the Aryan race. In the new prayer all references to Ram and Aryan race were withdrawn. Also the last slogan Jai Bajrang Bali-Bal Bhim Ki Jai were deleted.

This equation of Indian nationalism with Hindu religion often drew flak from many Hindus as is evident from an incident narrated in a publication of the RSS. The incident occurred at a meeting at Banaras Hindu University, in 1929-30, where both Dr. Hedgewar and Golwalkar were present:

"Doctorji explained to the gathering the meaning of the oath and asked those who were in agreement with its aims to take the oath. Doctorji used to keep always a small iron idol of Hanuman and a saffron flag. After the meeting, in the presence of Hanuman idol and saffron flag he used to go through the process of oath taking for the willing persons. The same day he used to appoint Sanghchalak and Karyavah also.

When the time for the oath taking ceremony approached, some people got impatient. In the meeting some college professors and scholars were present. They said Sangh is undoubtedly good but they cannot agree to the mention of Hindu Rashtra. Doctorji refused to make any change in the oath. When people present in the meeting stressed on changing the text of the oath and offered to take the oath only after the changes were affected [Golwalkar intervened and said]. "Doctorji has put before us a definite work and programme. Those who feel good about it should accept it, otherwise they should refuse. But there is no need to teach lessons to Doctorji. If he starts implementing all those suggestions which he receives while touring the country, then the coming into existence of the organization will be impossible".¹⁷

After the meeting Golwalkar was appointed the Sanghchalak of the shakha of Banaras Hindu University.

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.

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 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".¹⁸

Golwalkar unhesitatingly wanted to model his Hindu Rashtra on Hitler's totalitarian and fascist pattern as is clear from the following words of his in the same 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".¹⁹

There is not a single word about the British rulers who were then plundering the Indian people and nation. The book outlines only one programme, namely, to subjugate the minorities who neither controlled the state nor shared any political or economic power. More than 95 percent of them were artisans, poor peasants, landless agricultural labour or wage-earners. Golwalkar's Super Hindu Race seemed to have no antagonism towards the British rulers who in fact were

foreigners in the real sense of the term and who had given only misery, hunger, poverty, and death to multitudes of Indians, the vast majority of whom were Hindus.

In the post-independence era it has not been possible for pro-RSS elements to defend such shameless fascist attitudes towards minorities and neutrality towards the British masters. The book *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, which was openly circulated by the RSS during British rule and had gone into four editions, was now suddenly presented as if its authorship was disputed. 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'.

The 'Operation Authorship Cover-up' still continues. Former Prime Minister Chandrashekhar while participating in the confidence motion debate in Lok Sabha on 28.3.93 raised the issue of this book once again. He was perturbed by the fact that the BJP Government was following the diktat of the RSS whose ideological guru had authored the above book, which contained fascist ideas and preached hatred for the minorities which was extremely detrimental for the democratic polity of the country. Home Minister L.K. Advani intervened to say that the author of the book, Guruji had distanced himself from the book and declared to have no relation with the book. This is Mask One. Subsequently the mouthpiece of the RSS, *Organiser*, carried a story titled 'The Fascist Identified' by David Frawley. The story gave another interpretation to the issue of authorship. It said, "Those who call

the RSS Fascist emphasize one book to prove it. We or Our Nationhood Defined, by B.S. Savarkar, the elder brother of the great Indian revolutionary Veer Savarkar. The book in places expresses some sympathy with Germany of the times, the nineteen thirties, which appeared to be making great strides as a nation. Guruji Golwalkar, who later became the leader of the RSS in 1940 translated the book in 1938. Leftists like to pretend the book was written by Golwalkar and expresses long term Sangh policy, though it was only part of the general literature of the times that he was examining".²⁰ This explanation is all the more intriguing since the title of the original book has the following words about the author: M.S. Golwalkar, M.Sc., LL.B. (Sometime Professor Banaras Hindu University). Would this mean that Golwalkar was simply a translator and dishonestly got his name printed as author? However, this is Mask Two. This is for the consumption of the liberals and the democrats. Such explanations may help the RSS to show a humane face the world over, where Hitler is still regarded as the anti-thesis of all that is good in civilization and held responsible for the annihilation of Jews and millions of toiling people in Germany and elsewhere. It is also worth mentioning that B.S. Savarkar, the elder brother of V.D. Savarkar, was a very close associate of Dr. Hedgewar. B.S. Savarkar had formed an organisation called Tarun Hindu Sabha which he merged with the RSS in 1931. Therefore whoever is the real author of We or Our Nationhood Defined, the views contained in it represent the ideology of the RSS leadership.

For the die-hard believer in the cause of Hindu Rashtra and cadre of the RSS, they have another mask, Mask Three: This appears in an affidavit which two important officials of the RSS, Bhausahab Deoras (brother of the former chief of the RSS) and Rajender Singh (the present chief) submitted before the Charity Commissioner, Nagpur. The affidavit read: "With a view to give scientific base to

propagate the idea - India being historically from time immemorial a Hindu Nation - late Shri M.S. Golwalkar had written a book entitled We or Our Nationhood Defined, which was published in 1938".

Whatever may be the controversy over the authorship of We or Our Nationhood Defined, the crucial thing is that the RSS has never modified its views about the cleansing of the minorities in India, especially Muslims. Left untouched by the British rulers they developed the organizational capability to attempt blood-bath of Muslims in many parts of the country. 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.

"Greatly alarmed by those revelations, I immediately took the police party to the Premier's [chief minister's] house. There, in a closed room, Jaitley gave a full report of his discovery, backed by all the evidence contained in the steel trunks. Timely raids conducted on the premises of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) had brought the massive conspiracy to light. The whole plot had been concerted under the direction and supervision of the Supremo of the organization himself. Both Jaitley and I pressed for the immediate arrest of the prime accused, Shri Golwalkar, who was still in the area.

"Pantji [G.B. Pant] could not but accept the evidence of his eyes and ears and expressed deep concern. But instead of agreeing to the immediate arrest of the ringleader as we had hoped, and as Kidwai would have done, he asked for the matter to be placed for consideration by the Cabinet at its next meeting. It was no doubt a matter of political delicacy as the roots of the RSS had gone deep into the body politic. There were also other political compulsions as RSS sympathizers, both covert and overt, were to be found in the Congress Party itself and even in the Cabinet. It was no secret that the presiding officer of the Upper House. Atma Govind Kher, was himself an adherent and his sons were openly members of the RSS.

"At the Cabinet meeting there was the usual procrastination and much irrelevant talk. The fact that the police had unearthed a conspiracy which would have set the whole province in flames and that the officers concerned deserved warm commendation hardly seemed to figure in the discussion. What ultimately emerged was that a letter should be issued to Shri Golwalkar pointing out the contents and nature of the evidence which had been gathered and demanding an explanation thereof. At my insistence, such a letter if it were to be sent, should be issued by the

Premier himself to carry greater weight. Panditji asked me to prepare a draft, which I did in imitation of his own characteristic style. The letter was to be delivered forthwith and two police officers were assigned for the purpose.

"Golwalkar, however, had been tipped off and he was nowhere to be found in the area. He was tracked down southwards but he managed to elude the couriers in pursuit. This infructuous chase continue from place to place and weeks passed.

"Came January 30, 1948 when the Mahatma, that supreme apostle of peace, fell to a bullet fired by an RSS fanatic. The tragic episode left me sick at heart".²¹

The RSS during the freedom struggle hated anything which symbolized the united struggle of the Indian people against British rule. The case of the tricolour is the most pertinent one. In December 1929 Congress at its Lahore session adopted Purna Swaraj as the national goal and called upon the people to observe January 26, 1930 as Independence Day by displaying and honouring the Tricolour (the Tricolour was by consensus considered the flag of the national movement by this time). In response to this Dr. Hedgewar as Sarsanghchalak issued a circular to all the RSS Shakhas to worship the Bhagwan Jhande (Saffron flag). The important point is that nowhere in the functioning of the RSS is the tricolour or national flag used even today. The RSS leaders like Marla Manohar Joshi may go to unfurl the tricolour at Lal Chow of Srinagar, Kashmir, in order to hypocritically demonstrate their 'patriotism', but the fact is that the RSS openly dishonours and denigrates the national flag. Golwalkar while addressing a Gurupurnima gathering in Nagpur on July 14, 1946, stated that it was the saffron flag which in totality represented their great culture. It was the embodiment of God: "We firmly believe that in the end the whole nation will bow before this saffron flag".²² Even 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?".²³

These were the anti-national activities of the RSS due to which the organization was banned on February 4, 1948. The government communiqué, banning the RSS was self-explanatory:

"In their resolution of February 2, 1948 the Government of India declared their determination to root out the forces of hate and violence that are at work in our country and imperil the freedom of the Nation and darken her fair name. In pursuance of this policy the Government of India have decided to declare unlawful the RSS". The communiqué went on to disclose that the ban on the RSS was imposed because, "undesirable and even dangerous activities have been carried on by members of the Sangh. It has been found that in several parts of the country individual members of the RSS have indulged in acts of violence arson, robbery, dacoity, and murder and have collected illicit arms and ammunition. They have been found circulating leaflets exhorting people to resort to terrorist methods, to collect firearms, to create disaffection against the government and suborn the police and the military".

Within a few months of the ban a move was initiated by sympathizers of the RSS within the Congress to lift the ban. However, the Union Home Ministry through a

communiqué, dated November 14, 1948, once again emphasized, that "the information received by the Government of India shows that the activities carried on in various forms and ways by the people associated with the RSS tend to be anti-national and often subversive and violent and that persistent attempts are being made by the RSS to receive an atmosphere in the country which was productive of such disastrous consequences in the past". While rejecting all pleas of Golwalkar the communiqué continued: "He has written letters both to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister explaining inter alia that the RSS agrees entirely in the conception of a secular state for India and that it accepts the National Flag of the country and requesting that the ban imposed on the organization in February should now be lifted. These professions of the RSS leader are, however, quite inconsistent with the practice of his followers and for the reasons already explained above, the Government of India find themselves unable to advise provincial governments to lift the ban. The Prime Minister has, therefore, declined the interview which Mr. Golwalkar had sought". Government of India decided to lift the ban on RSS on July 11, 1949, only after Golwalkar gave an undertaking to be loyal to the Constitution of India and respect the National Flag.

It is well-known that the then Home Minister, Sardar Patel, had a soft-corner for the RSS. Sardar Patel continues to be a favourite with the RSS and references to him are invariably for the purpose of denigrating Gandhi and Nehru. However even Patel found it difficult to defend the RSS in the aftermath of Gandhiji's assassination. In a letter written to Golwalkar, dated 11 September 1948, Sardar Patel stated:

"Organizing the Hindus and helping them is one thing but going in for revenge for its sufferings on innocent and helpless men, women and children is quite another thing.

"Apart from this, their opposition to the Congress, that too of such virulence, disregarding all considerations of personality, decency or decorum, created a kind of unrest among the people. All their speeches were full of communal poison. It was not necessary to spread poison in order to enthuse the Hindus and organize for their protection. As a final result of the poison, the country had to suffer the sacrifice of the invaluable life of Gandhiji. Even an iota of the sympathy of the Government, or of the people, no more remained for the RSS. In fact opposition grew. Opposition turned more severe, when the RSS men expressed joy and distributed sweets after Gandhiji's death. Under these conditions it became inevitable for the Government to take action against the RSS.

"Since then, over six months have elapsed. We had hoped that after this lapse of time, with full and proper consideration the RSS persons would come to the right path. But from the reports that come to me, it is evident that attempts to put fresh life into their same old activities are afoot". (Justice on Trial: Historic Documents of Guruji-Government Correspondence, Delhi).

In all fairness to Guru Golwalkar, he did not claim that the RSS had been opposed to the British. During the course of a speech at Indore in 1960 he said, "Many people worked with the inspiration to free the country by throwing the British out. After formal departure of the British this inspiration slackened. In fact there was no need to have this much inspiration. We should remember that in our pledge we have talked of the freedom of the country through defending religion and culture. These is no mention of departure of the British in that".²⁴

Guruji, the Sarsanghchalak of the RSS, was never able to hide his opposition to any movement against foreign rule. As late as March 1947 when the British had

decided to go away from India, Guruji while addressing the annual day function of the RSS at Delhi, declared that leaders with narrow vision were trying to oppose the state power of the British. While elaborating the point he said that it was wrong to hold the powerful foreigners responsible for all our ills. He decried the tendency of "initiating the political movements on the basis of our hatred towards our victors".²⁵ While narrating an incident in the course of his speech he got more original on the issue: "Once a respectable senior gentleman came to our shakha (the drill). He had brought a new message for the volunteers of the RSS. When given an opportunity to address the volunteers of the shakha, he spoke in a very impressive tone, 'Now do only one work. Catch hold of the British, bash them and throw them out. Whatever happens we will see late on'. He said this much and sat down. Behind this ideology is a feeling of anger and sorrow towards state power and reactionary tendency based on hatred. The evil with today's political sentimentalism is that its basis is reaction, sorrow and anger, and opposition to the victors forgetting friendliness. Somebody went to the extent of saying that, 'it is through opposition that national life builds up and only through its power of organization appears'. And if a question is put before them that what is the basis of the opposition? Then the reason is told that we are being exploited economically. We get fewer jobs in armed forces, government offices. Freedom is required so that a lot of wealth is gotten, there is no shortage of employment and food and water. In other words 'freedom is freedom from poverty' in other words if get rich we will be free. If a dog procures lots of fresh bread then it is sufficient. Their ideal is that India should become dog of a rich person, and face no shortage of food water and shelter".²⁶

The RSS was not even willing to regard colonial domination as an injustice. In a speech of June 8, 1942, Golwalkar had declared: "Sangh does not want to blame

anybody else for the present degraded state of the society. When the people start blaming others, then there is weakness in them. It is futile to blame the strong for the injustice done to the weak... Sangh does not want to waste its invaluable time in abusing or criticizing other. If we know that large fish eat the smaller ones, it is outright madness to blame the big fish. Law of nature whether good or bad is true all the time. This rule does not change by terming it unjust".²⁷

The RSS leadership has always tried to defend its inactivity against British rule by taking the plea that theirs was a cultural organisation and could not have possibly taken up political issues. Pro-RSS people in the media work overtime to strengthen this impression. The RSS keeps on changing its face as per their political convenience. On the issue of minorities, secularism and Hindu nationalism, they are extremely political. But the moment the issue of the inhuman British Raj crops up, they are transformed into a cultural organization. Irrespective of the public postures of the RSS leadership it may be worthwhile to know the ideas of Gururji on the subject of participation in political activities. While addressing senior activists of the RSS in a training camp, he said, "We know this also that some of our volunteers work in politics. There according to the needs of the work they have to organize public meetings, processions etc., have to raise slogans. All these things have no place in our work. However, the actor should portray the character given to him to the best of his capability. But sometimes volunteers go beyond the role assigned to an actor as they develop over-zealousness in their hearts, to the extent that they become useless for this work. This is not good".²⁸

It will be shocking for any Indian who loves the martyrs of the freedom movement to know what Dr. Hedgewar and the RSS felt about the revolutionaries fighting against the British. According to his biography published by the RSS, "Patriotism

is not only going to prison. It is not correct to be carried away by such superficial patriotism. He used to urge that while remaining prepared to die of the country when the time came, it is very necessary to have a desire to live while organizing for the freedom of the country".²⁹ It is indeed a pity that 'fools' like Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev, Ashfaqullah, Chandrashekhar Azad did not come into contact with this 'great patriotic thinker'. If they had the great opportunity to meet him, these martyrs could have been saved from giving their lives for "superficial patriotism". This also must be the reason that RSS produced no martyrs during the freedom movement.

Even the word 'shameful' is not appropriate to describe the attitude of the RSS leadership towards those who had sacrificed everything in the struggle against the British rulers. The last Mughal ruler of India, Bahadur Zafar, had emerged as the rallying point and symbol of the Great War of Independence of 1857. Golwalkar wrote thus while making fun of him: "In 1857, the so-called last emperor of India had given the clarion call - Gazio mein bu rahegi jub talak eeman ki/takhte London tak chalegi tegh Hindustan ki (Till the warriors remain faithful to their task/Indian swords will reach London.) But ultimately what happened? Everybody knows that".³⁰ What Golwalkar thought of the people sacrificing their lot for the country is obvious from the following words also. He had the temerity to ask the great revolutionaries who wished to lay down their lives for the freedom of the motherland the following question as if he was representing the British: "But one should think whether complete national interest is accomplished by that? Sacrifice does not lead to increase in the thinking of the society of giving all for the interest of the nation. It is borne by the experience upto now that this fire in the heart is unbearable to the common people".³¹

What did the British rule mean to an average patriotic Indian? It symbolized repression, plunder, and pauperization of the people of this country. It meant the divide and rule policy of the foreign rulers through which they encouraged communal and sectarian divisions in Indian society. And what could be the moving spirit behind any struggle against such a British rule? What could have been the essence of the freedom movement against British rule? It could not have been anything other than a call to throw the British out.

The BJP leadership is very keen to project the RSS as a component of the freedom struggle. This is an attempt to gain greater respectability and wider acceptance. For a party which claims to be the touchstone of patriotism this is an important consideration. The BJP finds it embarrassing that the RSS - to which the top leadership as well as the overwhelming majority of the cadre of the BJP belong - was not a part of the freedom movement. It is politically inconvenient for an organization which constantly refers to its glorious past, that it has no legacy of an anti-colonial struggle - the mightiest struggle of the Indian people in this century. The RSS lacks the courage to categorically state that it did not participate in the freedom struggle because its ideology prevented it from doing so. The political stream of the Hindu rightwing has, of course, accumulated enormous experience in falsifying history. It is hardly surprising then that all manner of falsehoods are resorted to with the aim of distorting the history of the freedom struggle. Will a great nation which has a glorious tradition of anti-imperialist struggles fall prey to this attempt?

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APPENDIX

In order to examine the role of the RSS in the freedom struggle a method of thematic indexing of its available literature, pertaining generally to that period, was adopted. For the purpose of thematic indexing the literature was scrutinized keeping in view certain themes relevant for this study. For instance we looked for references where the RSS might have given a call to the British rulers to leave India or supported the fight of the revolutionaries against the British imperialists or written something on events which proved to be milestones in the history of the freedom struggle like Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev and other revolutionaries. The final picture which emerges from this exercise is presented below with astonishing results which are self-explanatory.

References Critical of British Rule	- Nil
References Glorifying British Rule	- 16
References to singing Vande Mataram to symbolize opposition to British Rule	- Nil
References Decrying/Attacking Minorities	- 74
References Decrying the Freedom Movement	- 16

References Appreciating the Freedom Movement	- Nil
References to any call of the RSS to the British to Leave India	- Nil
References to any Milestone of the Freedom Movement [Like Kakori Bomb Case, Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy, Ghadar Movement etc.]	- Nil
References Appreciating Any Martyr for Laying Down Life Against British Rule	- Nil
References Decrying the Martyrs/Martyrdom	- 10
References Upholding the Constitution of India and the National Flag	- Nil
References Decrying the Constitution of India and the National Flag	- 10
References Appreciating Swadeshi	- Nil

FROM BACK-COVER

"There is another reason for the need of always remaining involved in routine works. 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 gentleman told he has sufficiently arranged 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".

"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... 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".

(Guru Golwalkar on RSS attitude towards Freedom Movement in 1930s and 1940s)

It has been the intention of the author that the documents of the RSS should speak for themselves. This booklet is surely going to disillusion those who believe that the RSS played any role in securing freedom. They will hear from the horse's mouth that not only was a silence maintained about the evils of foreign rule but all attempts were made to sabotage the fight against British imperialism.

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