

# Rule by RSS

RSS-BJP equation is indeed unique. And an anathema for a modern liberal democracy



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INDIA RECENTLY saw the three-day spectacle (September 2-4) of a "performance review" and "course correction" of a constitutionally elected Union government by an unelected organisation, the RSS. In these columns, BJP general secretary Ram Madhav called it "a family get-together" and asked us to avoid looking at RSS-BJP relationship through the prism of existing models elsewhere ('A family gets together', September 15). I agree. This is a unique relationship, anathema to any modern liberal democracy, and it deserves an original description. Perhaps the prime minister can help Madhav in this endeavour with an acronym, but I don't wish to overburden him.

The RSS proudly claims to be a nationalist organisation. To understand its sense of nationalism, we have to only look at the stellar role, or lack thereof, it played during the freedom struggle. In the RSS mythology, it was much loved by Congress stalwart Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. But Sardar Patel, as home minister, banned the RSS in 1948 following Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. Later, in a reply to S.P. Mukherjee in July 1948, he described the RSS thus: "As regards the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha... our reports do confirm that, as a result of the activities of these two bodies, particularly the former (RSS) an atmosphere was created in the country in which such a ghastly tragedy became possible."

Lest we forget, when the ban on the RSS was lifted in 1949, it was reportedly on the basis of a written promise from the RSS supremo that the organisation would stay out of politics. But we've seen from the events of the past few months how well the RSS has kept its promise. The Sangh has also appropriated the right to speak for an entire country, even those who can't be its members. Instead of criticising this, perhaps we should applaud the RSS for having the courage to create an organisation for the only people it believes are true "Indians": Hindu men. Let us not even venture into the caste composition of the RSS top leadership. The RSS is also proud to stand up for what it believes in — that women ought to stay at home and take care of the household while producing babies. As for non-Hindus, they can do ghar-wapasi.

If these are the nationalist, progressive, feminist and non-sectarian credentials of the Sangh, it shouldn't matter that the RSS doesn't contest elections. Unelected apparatchiks, with no constitutional or legal sanctity, overseeing the affairs of a government is after all the norm for democracies. Doesn't the Pakistan army have a similar hold over the affairs of the Pakistani state?

Madhav also does us a favour by listing the issues close to the RSS's heart. National security, for instance, ranked ahead of the others. Perhaps the RSS bosses will be able to advise Rajnath Singh on how to resolve the tense situations in Manipur and Kashmir, or the increasing number of communal riots across India, instead of focusing on how officials should sign only in Hindi. It is hard to blame the home minister for frivolous pursuits when he is kept in dark about an "agreement" signed by the government with the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah. But the home minister is not alone. The defence minister was apparently in the dark when the prime minister announced the Rafale deal in Paris, and had the one rank-one pension files taken over by the PMO. These "empowered" ministers perhaps needed a shoulder from the RSS to cry upon.

Reviving India's economy might be the nation's agenda but the RSS is ensuring that its government sticks to the social and cultural agenda. Our education minister has had the guidance of Dinanath Batra and his ilk, and the culture minister is trying to inculcate "values" by decimating institutions, like the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. While farmers commit suicide, the agriculture minister talks about "vibrations of peace, love and energy for the seeds" to improve agriculture.

The culture minister has echoed the sentiments of the RSS when he said that girls going for night outs is against Indian culture. Who could possibly complain about such sentiments in modern, 18th century India? Mahesh Sharma is right to point out that in Indian culture there is no need to have old-age homes. The BJP has a different arrangement for such eventualities. It calls it the margdarshak mandal.

When Narendra Modi took oath as PM, he used a phrase, "sangh ke pradhan mantri ke roop main...". Madhav appears to have assumed that the "sangh" in the oath meant the RSS. But it didn't. It refers to the Union of India: the sovereign, democratic, secular, socialist republic of India, which has little in common with the RSS.

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