

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION**

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% American Embassy  
New Delhi, India  
(written at Poona, November 19, 1947).

Dear Mr. Rogers:

In the last few weeks, I have come in contact with the Poona branch of an increasingly important Hindu organization, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. ( A rough translation of "Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh" would be, "Body of Volunteers for the Service of Our Nation"; more concisely, "Organization of National Volunteers". Generally it is known simply as "the R.S.S." ). This body, which might be described as the martial arm of staunch Hindu nationalism, keeps many of its activities and most of its organizational structure careful secrets from the general public. It is therefore difficult to know well. I am impressed, however, with the need of understanding its general nature and role, if the subcontinent's continued political-communal impasse is to be understood, for it is a steadily growing body, active and efficient, with apparently shrewd and determined leaders. As my own contacts with the R.S.S. have been few and mostly casual, this letter will describe only my introduction to the organization. Perhaps in coming months I will come closer to an understanding of its ultimate purposes, determination and strength.

The piecemeal fashion in which I've come to know of the R.S.S. illustrates its ability to be unostentatious. At the Hindu University in Benares, last February, I occasionally saw groups of 30 to 50 students quietly gathering in the evening to play games, to take physical exercise - including drill with the lathi, a man-tall heavy stick used as a weapon by police and others - or to sing Hindi hymns, listen to a lecturer, or hold discussions. The apparent mild nature - except for the lathi drill - of the participating youths and their joint activities, in contrast to the stormy, busy meetings of the Student Congress and Student Union, kept my attention away from these small groups. From a friend I learned that they were basic units of the R.S.S., a Hindu organization started as long ago as 1925 chiefly to reform and strengthen the character of Hindus as individuals and as a society. Beyond this vague statement, I inquired no further at the time.

At the Muslim University in Aligarh, two months later, I learned of the R.S.S. from the other side. To a number of Muslim faculty members, the R.S.S. was an object of terror. They charged it with organizing the bloody outbreaks in Bihar and at Garmukhteswar, in the United Provinces, where defenseless Muslims were slaughtered by Hindus in retaliation for Muslim violence in Bengal. Because the Congress Party Government of the United Provinces had never found or punished those responsible for the Garmukhteswar raid, Muslims feared that the Government either silently acquiesced in the deed, or else was powerless to control or punish the organizers of the raid. In either case, Muslims could not feel secure. Strong rumors were afoot that R.S.S. strength was 20,000 in Aligarh District alone. Its nominal local leaders were known, but Muslims were sure that control behind the scenes rested with stronger, hidden men and forces. To Muslims, it was a mysterious, threatening body.

As one instance of how force has built up as a reaction to force right at the local level, I should add in passing that leaders of the Muslim League National Guard who came to Aligarh early in May were earnestly talking plans for self-defense. "In each mohalla (ward) of cities like Cawnpore and Lucknow, and in every district", they exhorted students, "we must work hard and soon to develop an organized defense for Muslims." Hindus, in turn, feared such Muslim preparations were not for defense only, but for eventual aggression, for they remembered Mr. Jinnah's repeated demand for a 'corridor' passing through key United Provinces cities to connect Eastern and Western Pakistan. So, in a familiar tragic pattern of conflict bungled into, force and its menace have contributed to India's widening rift: a frankly aggressive and hostile minority on each side has stimulated deep mistrust and even hate in much larger numbers on the opposite side; these in turn speaking or planning for defense have increased the mutual suspicion.

By early September, when I next heard of the R.S.S., festering fear, pride and hate had burst into violence in the Punjab and Delhi, after the freeing and partition of India. The massacres there, and the mass migration of peoples which started then, have been vividly reported, I judge, in the American press. The English-language press in Bombay, where I was at that time, conveyed a strong and depressing overall picture of the great upheaval eight hundred miles to the north, but did not elaborate on details. Among news reports from Delhi were brief statements that armed R.S.S. bands, as well as the Sikhs, had been active and ruthless in attacking Muslims. Most papers did not further describe these R.S.S. bands. Only in the smaller, left-wing press of Bombay, particularly People's Age, weekly organ of the Communist Party of India, did I read more detailed statements on the R.S.S. Asserting that the organization had played a major part in attacks on Muslims, left-wing papers reported that the R.S.S. was part of an alignment of interests - including a number of Hindu and Sikh princes, large landlords, industrial and commercial leaders - who continued to instigate communal conflict in order to divert attention from economic issues. Referring to this alleged alignment as a "Fascist conspiracy", Peoples Age charged that its private armies, including the R.S.S., had actually sought, by disrupting civil life and weakening police and military authority, to overthrow the Congress Party Government led by Nehru.

As a news reader in Bombay, it was difficult to measure the degree of truth in these charges. Verbal reports from the north seemed to corroborate my impression that the People's Age analysis was of aid to an understanding of the situation. An American friend who met Nehru in those days told me that the Prime Minister himself used the word 'Fascist' to describe the type of forces that were threatening to gain control.

To return to my own experiences. The Bombay area in those weeks escaped Hindu-Muslim outbreaks, though there was tension in the city itself. Late in September, when I reached Poona, the summer seat of the Bombay Province Government, I met Muslim wedding processions and Hindu religious parades passing through mixed street crowds with equal freedom. I have found Hindus bitter and concerned, not at their Muslim neighbors, but at Mr. Jinnah's continued success in the creation of Pakistan. It was a disappointment to them that the Congress Party was forced to concede partition. But now with migration of millions of Muslims into West Punjab and millions of Hindus and Sikhs away, the western segment of Pakistan has become almost completely Muslim territory. Hindus in Maharashtra, the extensive Marathi-language area of which Poona has long been cultural and political center, are proud heirs

of the great Maratha Empire of the 18th century, Hinduism's strongest political-military counterblow to the Muslims in pre-British centuries. To educated Hindus of the Maratha tradition, a consciousness of Indian geopolitics and statecraft seems to come instinctively. As a consolidated Muslim area, even though distant, Western Pakistan seems to them a potential threat to India. Eastern Pakistan and the Muslim-ruled state of Hyderabad, plus some forty million Muslims remaining within the Indian Dominion, add to their feeling of insecurity. "We must be strong enough for all eventualities", is their attitude.

In such an atmosphere, during the two months I have been in Poona, the R.S.S. has taken no violent action against the small local Muslim minority, but has spared no efforts to increase its influence among Hindus. Early in October, members of the Gokhale Institute staff mentioned the R.S.S. to me as "the strongest organization in Maharashtra", and told me it was planning a huge province-wide rally near Poona, at which 100,000 members were expected to gather. The second day's program, I was told, would be open to the public. Some days after I decided to attend, I learned that the Congress Party Government in Bombay Province had banned the meeting, on the ground that it might increase communal discord. None of the newspapers which I read carried news of the proposed meeting or of the ban, though I was told that one local Marathi language daily did report the ban.

Not blocked completely by the Government action, the R.S.S. substituted for the planned meeting a flexible series of smaller regional rallies, called at short notice to avoid possible further bans, at cities like Poona, Ahmednagar, Sholapur, Bangalore. At a Poona rally which I attended late in October, ten thousand R.S.S. volunteers were in uniform, and about six thousand non-R.S.S. Hindus in the audience. Later, the national R.S.S. leader Golwalkar swung through western India on a major speaking tour. A reported 50,000 to 70,000 citizens attended his Poona rally. I saw no news of this or any of his other meetings (with one exception) in the English press, but learned of them from Hindu friends. Apparently the R.S.S. seeks no publicity through established media. I became aware of the first Poona rally one morning in the home of a student friend, Patil, who is not an R.S.S. member, when two of his college acquaintances entered and handed him a printed invitation to attend R.S.S. rallies that evening and the next morning. Such personal contacts and printed matter circulated by itself, I later learned, are regular R.S.S. methods of exposing its program to likely supporters.

"Please bring a friend", Patil's invitation card ended. In celebration of Vijaya Dasmi, a national Hindu holiday traditionally denoting the season for martial campaigns as well as the harvest festival, the R.S.S. held rallies to which I went as Patil's friend. They were impressive events. On the parade ground of a Poona college, stretching out at the foot of a steep hill dominated by a large Hindu temple, ten thousand smartly uniformed R.S.S. volunteers drilled, sang, and listened to leaders' speeches. Black felt topee, clean white shirt, khaki shorts, white socks and tennis shoes: a simple uniform, but 10,000 of them represent fair-scale investment in a land laboring under cloth scarcity. Despite the western style uniform, however, the program accented Hinduness. Large red swastikas, ancient Hindu and Aryan insignia, covered the sides of four trucks which brought a 100-piece band to the rally. Near the speakers' platform flew a toothed saffron banner, the Bhagwa Zenda of Shivaji, 17th century Maratha hero, long the flag of princely Hindu states and of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, exclusively Hindu political

opponent of the Indian National Congress. The Congress tricolor, now the basis of India's national flag, which flies over shops and homes of Poona, was conspicuously absent in the R.S.S. scene. As the Bhagwa Zenda was raised and lowered, a leader spoke three quiet, clipped words through the loudspeaker, signals for the assembly to bow heads and raise hands to their hearts in a solemn salute. Then they joined responsively in a Sanskrit hymn. Large numbers of the audience also took part in salute and hymn. Though not R.S.S. members, they found its rituals good.

For a city of nearly 600,000 people, 10,000 volunteers may not seem a large number. But as they spread out in open formation over the extensive field and swung into a unique slow motion physical exercise drill, perfectly in time to the band music, they were a spectacular sight. Illumined by flood lights and a full moon, backs and arms swayed in unison and in straight lines far across the field. They had learned the drill in small groups meeting each evening in their home localities: now as they did it together, their precision was dramatic.

And the efficiency of the meeting was striking in a land notoriously unconcerned over time and order. Volunteers stacked and numbered spectators' bicycles in orderly array, and uniformed guides conducted us along ropes lining the field to a vantage point where tarpaulins were provided to sit on. Capable local planning marked the whole program. But more instructive to me was the careful design of its content. Symbols and ritual, uniforms, strength and efficiency combined with speeches to foster Hindu pride and loyalty. I became sure that keen and purposeful minds operate at top planning levels of the R.S.S.. Even as an outsider I felt definite respect for the ability of men working privately, often handicapped in past years, as now, by government opposition, who have created such a high degree of order in their organization. So much of India still seems bowed with the weight of life that a vigorous, able body at least commands attention for stirring to action. I was impressed, and judged that Hindu onlookers beside me were equally or more so.

At least half of the volunteers, I guessed, were college students. But many older men were also in uniform: school teachers, library aides, professional men, and clerks in government offices, banks, railways, posts and telegraphs. At the next morning's exercises, seven or eight middle-aged men, fatigued perhaps as much by emotional stress as by physical strain under the warm sun, had to be carried off the field into a shaded tent. But my eyes rested longest and most soberly on the company of several hundred uniformed children. How would they be shaped? Patil had already told me that ten-year olds could join the R.S.S., and remain members "until death". Reminding me that the organization is of long standing, he said that among his friends are college men who have been in the R.S.S. since boyhood. Some of them say that they now rebel intellectually at the R.S.S. program and principles, but are by habit and emotional attachment too much part of the fellowship to break away. The R.S.S. seems to be a powerful mould.

What are the purposes and principles for which these volunteers are being mentally, physically, and emotionally prepared?

Whatever may be the personal goals of the men who control its destinies, the vehicle which they are constructing to take them toward their goal is a familiar one: militant nationalism. Of the Hindu variety. This much seems obvious from the rally I attended, from the

gist of speeches translated for me by friends, and from a long discussion with a local R.S.S. organizer. "We know our own program", I was told when I inquired about details. Similar concealment had operated at the rally, where I was one white face among thousands, where Patil was told by two R.S.S. guides that the invitation had meant, "Bring a Hindu friend", and where several onlookers suspiciously noticed me and told Patil not to translate anything for me. Nevertheless, without telling me details, they did reveal the spirit and tone of the movement.

"Our purpose is to organize the Hindus", the R.S.S. stalwart told me, as we talked in the small, cramped apartment of a Poona barrister, head of the local branch. (This local leader, to whom I have gone several times with an introduction, has on each occasion been away from Poona attending rallies and organizational meetings elsewhere in Maharashtra). "For a thousand years", the leader's aide continued, "we Hindus have been weak, disunited. We have only lived in this land; we have not ruled it. Because we have been split among ourselves, it has been easy for conquerors to succeed. Mohammedans for many hundred years ruled our land, converted Hindus by force. Then the English came and ruled. But now that they are going, Mohammedans again hope to rule us. They want to sweep over Hindusthan - killing or converting us - to make it the center of their pan-Islam. You might have heard of pan-Islam? It is a danger for the world. Mohammedans have attacked us in Noakhali, in the Punjab. We are not united or organized for defense. We need Hindu leaders, decisive strong men who will defend Hindus. Now we can not even defend ourselves."

I asked, "Are not the present leaders of India Hindus?"

His reply: "They have not the Hindu mentality. Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru do not protect Hindus. They say this is a state for all. They wish to protect and help all people, not only Hindus. In Bihar, Pandit Nehru shot Hindus to protect Muslims. Now they use the Indian Army to protect Muslim evacuees, instead of sending it into Pakistan to defend Hindus there. Nehru talks of a non-Hindu state. He refuses to take decisive action with the Army. He does not have the Hindu mentality."

Becoming moral for a moment I asked him, "Do you think the Bihar massacre was right for Hindus to do?"

He answered, "It was perfectly natural retaliation for Noakhali. Might makes right. We must be strong. You can not manage a nation with ahimsa (non-violence), or with the instinct of ahimsa. You must be ready to use force."

The emphasis thus far had been on defense. It is this stress on the need for defensive strength that strikes many Hindus as sound, now that Muslims have established a firm state for themselves. But the R.S.S. spirit does not seem limited to defense alone. "Our aspiration is a Hindu Raj over Hindusthan", the R.S.S. organizer continued. "We in the R.S.S. call this dominion 'Hindusthan', not 'India'. But the Hindusthan of history includes Burma, Ceylon, Pakistan, even Afghanistan. Our aspiration - it will take time, maybe fifty years - is Hindu Raj over all this ancient Hindusthan. Hindus will rule under the Bhagwa Zenda of Maharaja Shivaji, not this tricolor of the Congress. Only Hindus will be nationals; others will live here if they behave, but the nation is a Hindu nation."

In these ambitious, proud words, he was but echoing claims that an R.S.S. leader had made to the ten thousand at the rally I attended: "We can regain Pakistan, even Kabul, if we prepare and act together." It is difficult to say whether top R.S.S. planners really think such goals attainable, or whether they put them before the Hindu public merely to dramatize the case, to kindle enthusiastic imagination for Hindu achievements and possibilities.

I turned to means. "How do you propose to replace the present 'non-Hindu' leaders", I asked. "We in the Rāshtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh do not take any part in politics", he replied; "though we may vote in a certain unified way." (Presumably for candidates of a party like the Hindu Mahasabha, which he mentioned with admiration). "Our only purpose now is to organize the Hindus, to strengthen ourselves internally. We are progressing rapidly. The R.S.S. exists in every town throughout the land; in five years we will be in every village. We will not stand for election. But when the time comes, we will be in power." Details were not added to his last sentence, but the even force of his words made his meaning seem quite clear and determined.

And the material means? This aspect of national development has not been publicly stressed by the R.S.S., as far as I know. In all the speeches at the Poona rally there was no mention of the pressing economic problems of India, or of conflict on economic lines. The local organizer was not equipped to discuss development of India's natural resources. "Let us first join together to fight the enemy", he said. "We can fight among ourselves later on."

When I inquired as to the R.S.S. program to attract Hindus, I was given a frank statement on Hindu social history. "It is a hard job to unify Hindus", the leader's aide admitted. He then named two sects of Brahmins in Maharashtra alone, and within each sect a further three- or fourfold division. "These have all felt separate", he added. "And all other castes suspect Brahmins, who for thousands of years have claimed that they are superior. It is hard to overcome such suspicion and to make people feel they are Hindus first, Brahmins or Marathas second. In our lectures and discussions, we glorify Hinduism and our ancient Hindu heroes and books. We don't have exactly religious teachings: it's not like a temple. But we make the feeling of Hindu a strong one."

The vast variety of Hindu civilization, the absence in history of much conscious Hindu spirit or nationalism, make the task of revival, of patriotic propaganda, a difficult one. Indian history, as I learned earlier this year, is glaringly open to partisan mis-teaching, which may be one method of strengthening the "feeling of Hindu". Another method is reiterated denunciation of the non-Hindu. At the Poona rally, speakers attacked Britain, America, and especially Russia, repeatedly admonishing their listeners to have nothing to do with any foreign 'isms'. "We can get no help or guidance from outside. We are Hindus, and must help ourselves." Guruji (Teacher or Guide) Golwalkar, national R.S.S. head, added a semi-mystical tone to this plea. Golwalkar was described to me as a massive worker and excellent speaker in several Indian languages, a former professor of philosophy at Benares University, and a disciple of Aurobindo Ghose, sometime Bengal political extremist who for the last forty years has lived in seclusion in South India writing such monumental mystic volumes as "The Divine Life". The essence of Golwalkar's message, I was told, is: "Under the influence of foreigners, you have forgotten who you are. You have been guilty of self-forgetfulness. No doubt all foreigners are not bad, but you become puzzled when you allow their influence to work on you. Self-realization must be your aim. Know who

you are." Condensed, this may seem a negative message with limited appeal. But Golwalkar's Hindu auditors listen to his oration for two hours, in pindrop silence.

"That meeting you saw was just show, external demonstration", my R.S.S. acquaintance concluded. "Inwardly we are much stronger, the bonds are firm, the feeling among us is a glorious one - an inward glow at strengthening the Hindu nation. This man is a Maratha, of the cultivating class. I am a Brahmin. We may continue to eat differently, live differently - as laid down in caste rules - but now we know we are brothers. We feel as brothers. We are getting stronger."

I believe he is correct here: the R.S.S. is getting stronger. I have not made anything like a thorough canvas of Poona reactions to it, but have touched a number of segments of opinion. Hindu observers tell me, what is fairly obvious, that in the last few months their community has increasingly come to agree with the R.S.S. argument that Muslim Pakistan is potentially a menace which will have to be met with force. (This fear was termed unrealistic by a non-Pakistani Muslim of Congress sympathies: "They certainly flatter Muslims in considering Pakistan dangerous." Realistic or not, it is present). Liberal Hindus, like some of the Gokhale Institute staff, speak of the R.S.S. to a foreigner only with some embarrassment, for its techniques and aims are not precisely democratic. But even they are unable to dismiss its appeal. "We must be strong", they agree.

There are indications that the Congress Party sees the R.S.S. as a serious threat to its continued control of government. Certainly the Congress Government can not afford to take a soft line toward Muslim Pakistan and Muslim-ruled Hyderabad, for this will heavily cut its popular support as more Hindus come to agree with the stronger policy advocated by the R.S.S. and other like bodies. Further, the R.S.S. has a pervasive influence in key government offices like the Secretariat, Posts and Telegraphs, and Railways, and thus may be in position to impede certain government actions. One Congress-minded newspaper editor suspects the R.S.S. of trying to manoeuvre into eventual control of the Army or the Police. Such is the pragmatic tone of Indian political discussions today. In similar mood, a well-placed administrative officer of Congress sympathies recommends that Congressmen 'infiltrate' into the R.S.S., to turn its attitude away from extreme Hindu communalism. Or the Congress might 'absorb' the R.S.S. If the latter should occur, it could not fail to accentuate the strong Hindu communal trend that already dominates important elements of the Congress.

Communist Party of India workers in Bombay and Poona dislike R.S.S. doctrine and recognize it as a formidable opponent. Viewing Hindu nationalism as a combination of intense psychological factors, not the least of which in their minds is middle and upper class yearning for security, they regard it as a classic enemy. Unable to combat it effectively in its own field at present, they continue organizational work among agricultural, industrial and menial workers who, they feel, may be less moved by abstract nationalism than by their daily grievances.

It is not easy to see the future here. Freedom has opened a welter of doors through which cravings and complaints, frustrated for generations, will tumble forth. The task of Gandhi, Nehru, and of the coming generation, is correspondingly difficult.

Yours sincerely,

*Richard Morse*  
Richard Morse