

Bharatiyata in Practice: A Century of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Revival of Indian Traditional Knowledge and Education System

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Abstract

The current paper offers a critical analysis of the RSS, Bharatiyata, and Indian Traditional Knowledge, highlighting current views and assumptions and encourages further scholarly debate. Bharat, the motherland of numerous saints and scholars, has been the cradle of the human race, which the West now recognises. The Punya Bhoomi Bharat enlightened the lives of millions of people through its progeny. In ancient times, the universities of Takshashila, Vikramshila, Nalanda, etc. were examples of Bharatiya might and traditional knowledge. The sacred lines, 'Let the noble thoughts come from every side' from the Rigveda, guided Bharatiya in knowledge sharing and adapting. This golden wisdom attracted the curious minds of the West. Some came to learn, some came to plunder, loot and corrupt this sacred knowledge. Bharatiya who raised their voice in favour of Bharatiya shiksha and traditional knowledge were dealt severely by the invaders ruling Bharat Bhoomi in the recent past. The study utilised the help of secondary sources to find out the ideological leanings and works of RSS related to the concepts of Bharatiyata and Indian Traditional Knowledge. The paper highlights the role of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in spreading the notion of Bharatiyata and Indian Traditional Knowledge among the masses through its various initiatives and sub-organisations.

Keywords: *Bharatiyata, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Indian Traditional Knowledge, Bharatiya Educational Thought, Ideology of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*

Introduction

Education has been used as a potent weapon to upgrade or degrade the masses. "A people without the knowledge of their history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots"(Black History Month, 2020). This quote emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage and history for a people's identity and stability. The British, to subdue the people of Bharat, started a covert warfare of belittling the Bharatiya Sanskar and literature (Macaulay, 1835). This Bharatiya system, which made the masses the creators of their present and future, was a major hurdle in colonial rule. Higher education flourished at Nalanda, Takshashila University, Ujjain, and Vikramshila Universities during the first millennium and the few centuries before (Sharma, 2023). Ancient Bharatiya centres of learning like Takshashila, Vikramshila, Nalanda, etc., had faced numerous attempts at destruction by the invaders. Still, the system of Bharatiya knowledge continued through the Gurukul system, oral traditions, etc. In the Vedic system of education, women enjoyed equal status with men in all educational activities (Choudhary, 2008). The British knew that the Gurukul system was a force in Bharat that made the masses conscious and aware of their past and present. 70% of our people were educated and literate prior to the British taking over Bharat, and everyone used to find ways to make a living based on that education. The unemployment was essentially non-existent. According to the English educational system at the time, their literacy rate was approximately 17%. The British abandoned our educational approach after they arrived (Pti, 2023). The 'white man's burden' of civilising the natives (the phrase they used to refer to all Bharatiya) and stealing the wealth of this Bharatiya upmahadwip appear to have been the two main goals of the rulers under the East India Company and subsequently British administration (Kumar & Nivedita, n.d.). Gandhi even compared the traditional educational system to a lovely tree that was felled under British control (Sharma, 2023). It is commonly accepted that the kindness and greatness of a nation's citizens are the foundation of its progress. As a result, social and personal development are prioritised for the integrity of the country.

Thus, RSS, which Dr. Hedgewar formed, is dedicated to a person's social and personal growth through education (Kapri & Rani, 2017). The Bharatiya system of knowledge and learning was geared towards building a person with strong moral character, ethics, and empathy (Patil, 2024). The goal of the modern educational system that Lord Macauley introduced to India in 1835 is to outdo everyone else. Personality development, the formation of a moral conscience, and ethical training are absent. One of the biggest flaws about this education is that it is more commercial than an institutional concept that should impart holistic learning to the students. The British wanted to create a bulk of Bharatiya people who would be Indian in colour and English in taste (Macaulay, 1835). Their model of education aimed to condition Bharatiya in the westernised model of education and change the belief system, traditions, ethos, social life and cognitive abilities of the masses to further their agenda by every means possible. To understand what Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, commonly known as RSS, is, firstly, we have to understand the various factors that led to the birth of this organisation. The RSS has the distinction of being the world's biggest voluntary organisation (The Economist, 2024). The RSS and its members have contributed significantly beyond their acknowledged efforts (Sharda, 2018).

The RSS's ideology is based on the Hindu Renaissance Movement of the middle of the nineteenth century—Veer Savarkar's idea of "Hindutva" formed in the early 1900s. As a rationalist and atheist, Veer Savarkar disapproved of the idea of religion. Consequently, he created the term "Hindutva" to avoid any religious associations with the movement. He considered "Hindutva" to be a culture. With its dedication to the holistic advancement of Bharat and Bharatiya society, the RSS is always "Ready for Selfless Service" and upholds the same Hindutva ideology. Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, tribal people, untouchables, members of the Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, and others are all included in the movement's definition of Hindus (Srivastava, 2017). Nonetheless, some people have criticised the RSS for advocating Hindu supremacist doctrine (Srivastava, 2017). The RSS aims to redefine India by its predominantly Hindu faith (Frayer & Khan, 2019). The RSS has been labelled as jingoistic, and its Nationalism is termed as non-Indian (Tnn, 2019). The Hindu religion and philosophy of the eternal way of life associated with Indian civilizational values are known as Sanatan Dharma (Tiway, 2023). "Dharmic" people, according to RSS's Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat, wish for the world to be united and uplift everyone (ANI, 2023).

Furthermore, To create all-around Anushasana in all spheres of life and to unite all of our people into a single, harmonious national whole that stretches from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari, RSS has been working tirelessly to instil in our people a burning devotion to Bharat and its national ethos; kindle in them the spirit of dedication and sterling qualities and character; rouse social consciousness, mutual good-will, love, and cooperation among them all; to make them realize that service to the nation is the ultimate goal and that caste, creed, and language are secondary; to mold their behavior accordingly; to instill in them a sense of true humility and discipline; and to train their bodies to be strong and robust to shoulder any social responsibility (Srivastava, 2017). After the emergency in 1977, Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan, while addressing a huge gathering, said that RSS can transform the society for the better, and no other organisation in the country comes anywhere near it (Hindu Vivek Kendra. (n.d.). The credit for freeing the nation from the clutches of the emergency goes to the RSS (Philip, 2018). The RSS inculcates the qualities of discipline and dedication in the swayamsevak (volunteers) for the "protection of the country" (Philip, 2018).

Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach, critically analysing the secondary data sources like journal papers, research articles, books, news records, etc. The aim is to evaluate the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's engagement with education and the Indian Traditional Knowledge system by examining the existing literature and discourses on the works of the RSS and its affiliated education-oriented organisations.

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the role of RSS in imparting Bharatiya knowledge in the educational system
2. To study the 'Sangh Parivar' associations working on the education and the Bharatiya value system
3. To assess the criticism and debates around the works of the RSS

Limitations

The present study relied on the published material in Hindi and English only till mid-2025. It didn't include fieldwork, interviews, questionnaires, etc., which could make the study more in-depth and comprehensive. Future scholars may explore various dimensions through empirical studies and ethnographic studies, such as regional variations in the RSS's work culture, the interpretation of 'sangh pariwar' and its works, or the RSS's specific focus on a unique aspect of the Indian Traditional Knowledge system.

Educational Ideology of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Views of Dr. Hedgewar on Education:

Founded by the great visionary and freedom fighter Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in Nagpur on 28th September, 1925, RSS has focused on people's character building and nation building since its inception. Dr. Hedgewar believed in the notion that Hindus are more able than the British and anti-Hindus, but Hindus lacked a sense of cohesion and togetherness. Hence, Hindus need to be organised into a sangathan to cultivate the Maxwell Bolton Review Michigan Consumer feeling of Hindu Rashtra or Nation with a Hindu culture and way of life (Nair, 2009). Dr. Hedgewar's interpretation of education was unique and in alignment with the Bharatiya Sanskriti and Sanskar. He viewed education as something more significant than merely acquiring knowledge. He believed that character development, life-giving, and man-making should be the goals of education. Young brains should be instilled with moral notions to boost their self-esteem and develop a sense of national identity. Education helps to transform rich cultural heritage from one generation to the next, in addition to influencing an individual's behaviour and overall personality (Kapri & Rani, 2017).

The educational philosophies of Dr. Hedgewar—"the learning to do," "the learning to be," and "the learning to live together"—are widely accepted throughout the world. This proves the foresight of a great visionary who changed the way we perceived our surroundings and world (Kapri & Rani, 2017). Education is a never-ending phenomenon (Starr, 1943). We, as human beings, learn consciously and unconsciously from the world around us. Everything has a direct or indirect impact on our being. Dr. Hedgewar understood this and started the concept of 'Shakha' where patriotic individuals can meet once in a day, week or month in the morning or evening and do some physical exercises, sing patriotic songs, play mind games and do some brain storming regarding the past, present and future of our great nation 'Bharat' (Kapri & Rani, 2017). The motive of the RSS has always been to implement the Bharatiya Sanskar and Shiksha into the day-to-day lives of the people. The 'Swayamsevak', i.e. volunteers of RSS, believe that each one can teach us something, no matter his or her social or economic stature. We must not miss any chance to learn from them to make our life meaningful and oriented towards a bigger goal of nation-building. RSS has played a very crucial role in the development of Bharat. The nationalism based on culture, promoting the idea of "Hindutva" as a unifying cultural identity, rooted in Indian (Bharatiya) traditions and values, has been a driving force in the organisations supported by the RSS.

Through its various initiatives, sub-organisations, it seeks to create a sense of national unity through shared cultural heritage, festivals, and historical narratives (Srivastava, 2017). The work related to social service and disaster relief is also given due attention in the RSS (Bhattacharjee, 2019). It has been offering seva projects including healthcare, disaster assistance, and rural development. The RSS's ideology, as stated earlier, is social awakening and character building of the Bharatiya people (Vaidya, 2024). In the field of Bharatiyata-based education and Indian Traditional Knowledge, RSS has been running, managing, supervising and supporting its sub-organisations that work specifically in the education and allied sectors.

Views of Dr. Mohan Bhagwat on Indian Traditional Knowledge:

While the Western concept of progress is predicated on conquering nature, the Bharatiya concept is comprehensive and works in harmony with nature. As a result, nature and the environment have suffered greatly as a result of Western growth methods. We must create our own development models that the rest of the world can adopt (Thakur, 2024). According to the RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat, our nation, Bharat, was formed because of the penance of our forefathers who wanted the welfare of the world. Bharatiya people have a responsibility to share their expertise because of this. Using the Indian traditional knowledge, we should first examine what was known in the past, then re-learn it and provide to the world a comprehensive form of knowledge that is pertinent to the nation, the period, and the circumstances (Ians, 2023). The information included in our shastras, or sacred texts, is extremely valuable in a global context in addition to being essential to the Indian knowledge system. For a long time, the world has looked to Bharat for solutions, and now that they are running out of other options, the demand is greater than ever. Bharat needs to consider the knowledge that has been created over the past 2,000 years if it wants to be a global leader. This viewpoint is still ineffective and lacking, nevertheless. This incompleteness must be addressed by re-examining our sacred values (PTI, 2025).

Vidya Bharati:

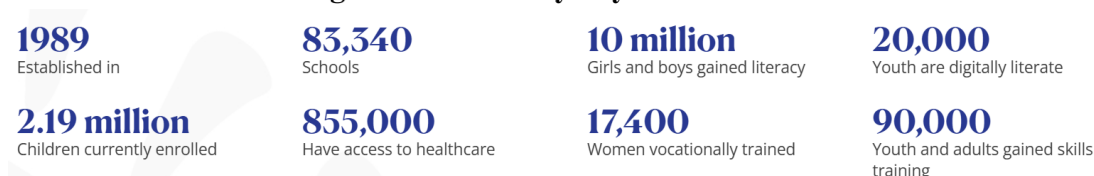
With the motto: - "*Siksha ka Mool Mantra: Sanskar, Sewa aur Samarpan*" (The core of education: Values, Service, and Dedication), Vidya Bharati has been imparting culturally-rooted and Bharatiya value-based education to the children (Vidya Bharti Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan, n.d.). Dedicated to educating the next generation in the values and culture of Bharatiya, Vidya Bharati has been offering high-quality education since 1952. The first school in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, was established in 1952 by a group of devoted and patriotic individuals who saw education as a means of teaching the next generation Indian values and culture. This school was given the name Saraswati Shishu Mandir-Temple of the Goddess Saraswati in honour of the children. Because of their enthusiasm, commitment, and diligence, similar schools started to be founded elsewhere as well. The number of these schools in Uttar Pradesh grew quickly. In 1958, a Shishu Shiksha Prabandh Samiti was established at the state level to ensure its proper direction and planned growth. The foundation of a national body came in 1977 and Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan was created with its Registered office at Lucknow & functional headquarters in Delhi.

All state-level committees were linked to this Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan (Vidya Bharti Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Sansthan, n.d.). Vidya Bharati is running more than 10,000 formal schools and teaching almost 3 million students in Bharat. The success of Vidya Bharati is due to its pragmatic approach and being inexpensive as compared to other privately run schools in Bharat (Iwanek, 2022). In addition to running schools in the tribal areas and border areas, Vidya Bharati is running seven sainik schools in Bharat to prepare patriotic soldiers for the safety and security of Bharat (Vidya Bharti Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Sansthan, n.d.).

Ekal Vidyalaya

Ekal Vidyalayas are elementary schools with only one teacher that are located in isolated rural and tribal communities (Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation. (n.d.). The vision of Dr. Hedgewar was to reach the backward areas and educate all people (Kapri & Rani, 2017). This is the main initiative of Ekal. With a core curriculum that includes language, math, and science as well as physical education and values education, Ekal's one-teacher model revolutionises education in rural areas. Since 1989, the organization has provided over 10 million students in 80,000 Indian villages and tribal areas with economic opportunities and literacy. Sanskar Kendra is also run by these schools to impart Bharatiya values in the children. Besides that, Ekal Vidyalaya are being run by Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram in Maoist-affected areas like Chhattisgarh. To safeguard Bharat from anti-Bharat ideologies and supporters, these schools have done tremendous work, and during this nation-building process, some volunteers also got killed by the Maoists (Vskteam, 2017).

Figure 1: Ekal Vidyalaya Statistics



Source: www.ekal.org

Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad

It is a self-governing social organization that prioritises education. ABVP aspires to attain its mission by bringing about positive and meaningful changes in education and in the mentality and thoughts of the educational fraternity, like students, teachers and society. It believes that students are not tomorrow's, but today's citizens. As a result, they can effect the necessary change in the nation's social structure (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad). In just 72 years since its founding in 1948, ABVP has achieved the distinction of being the world's largest student organisation. The focal area of its activity is college & university campuses, and its direct concern is students. However, ABVP as a social organisation has been running different social service campaigns across Bharat. In addition to addressing issues with youth participation and development, the ABVP seeks to explore methods for incorporating traditional Indian values into modern educational institutions (Organiser, 2025).

Bhartiya Shikshan Mandal

Bhartiya Shikshan Mandal (BSM), a branch of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, is dedicated to promoting purity in education and culture. BSM aspires to create an educational system rooted in India's long-standing philosophical and cultural traditions since it feels that the current system is "entirely contrary to Bharatiyata" (Narayanan, 2016). To this end, it wants to influence governments and educational institutions to develop frameworks that align with Indian values. In 1969, on the auspicious day of Rama Navami, the Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal was established with the goal of bringing about a national resurgence in the field of education. Its objective is to evolve the National Education Policy, Curriculum, System, and Methodology based on the integral Bharatiya vision, rooted in its eternal ethos, and centred on the overall development of the country. To realise this noble mission of reestablishing the Bharatiya Education System, several educational, intellectual, and experimental activities are being carried out throughout the nation at the school and university levels (Bhartiya Shikshan Mandal. (n.d.).

Figure 2: 'Research for Resurgence, 2016'

Some Topics Identified for Research			
PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION Critical Analysis of training programs for pre-school teachers with reference to Bharatiya culture Study of child tracking method and child development Study of values imbibed in school, home and society	PRIMARY EDUCATION Development of Bharatiya parameters based assessment and accreditation system for management, governing bodies, schools, teachers and students Review of text books with reference to Bharatiya content Review of non-text books (supplementary to text book) with reference to validity of contents	POLITICAL SCIENCE AND SOCIOLOGY Warfare techniques in ancient India Defining empowerment of women in Bharatiya way Conceptualization of Ram Rajya: Good governance Mahabharat - political system Chanakya - Global leader of political science Study of political thought process of Deendayal Upadhyaya KB Hedgewar's contribution in nation building	MEDIA AND JOURNALISM Media ethics: Bharatiya approach Media policy in Narad's devotional voice Media policy of Ramayana Media flow process in the Vedas and Puranas
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION Evaluation and quantification of achieved objectives at pre-university level (subject understanding/value education/patriotism/ethics/Bharatiyata/determination skill/clarity of thoughts/clarity of goals/vision for life/decision making capability) Development of comprehensive and unbiased mentoring system			

Source: Economic Times

Conclusion

It's not easy to summarise the work of RSS in a few words. With consistent efforts of the Swayamsevaks(volunteers) engaged in various activities of nation building, the RSS is truly a nationalist organisation that is shaping the present and future of Bharat. The works of Vidya Bharati, Ekal Vidyalaya, ABVP, Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal, etc. are truly instrumental in disseminating the values of Bharatiya education and Indian Traditional Knowledge to the masses and raising Bharatiya consciousness among the masses. To uplift a nation, we need to keep its people engaged in nation-building activities. Hence the work of RSS is more than what can be seen or observed generally. The belief that Bharata was a nation of high technology, along with high moral values and a social code of conduct, is reflected in the initiatives of the RSS. Like other people-centric organizations, RSS has been subjected to criticism and objections.

Nonetheless, observing its social work and community outreach programmes, it can be said that it's working to remove self-doubt from the minds of the masses to make Bharat better, something like the 'Back to Vedas' philosophy of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, where we need to take pride in our rich intangible heritage. To follow its quest of Akhand Bharat and becoming a Vishwa Guru, the RSS is moving step by step, gradually and consistently. As Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is celebrating its 100th year of existence, it has vowed to increase people's participation in nation-building.

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