

# The RSS is at war with India’s past

All it wants to do is to demolish secular India and the Gandhi-Nehru state to erect a Hindutva state



“Beyond a doubt, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is the most powerful organisation in India today... Its pracharak (active preacher) Narendra Modi is now Prime Minister of India. Its stamp is evident in very many fields of national life,” writes the leading constitutional expert and political analyst in his new book, The RSS: A Menace to India. The RSS is at war with India’s past, he says, and is belittling three of the greatest builders of the Indian state, Ashoka, Akbar and Jawaharlal Nehru. “The poison” of Hindu right-wing communalism “has spread alarmingly,” he says in the introduction, but points out that the “forces that spread it are not invincible. They can be defeated provided that those who oppose it are ready and equipped to meet the challenge at all levels... what is at stake is not only the Indian Dream. What is at stake is the soul of India.” An excerpt:

In March 2015, the Indian Council of Historical Research became the first of the learned institutions to be ‘reconstituted’ to suit the tastes of the saffron rulers.

**A Hindu Rashtra**  
The RSS believed that its hour had arrived. Mohan Bhagwat [sarsanghchalak, or chief] said on February 9, 2015, that this was a “favourable time”. He asserted that “the idea of Hinduism is the only idea in the world which brings all together... Hindustan is a Hindu Rashtra, which is a fact. We are going ahead with this (idea). All Hindus have to be organised to make this nation great. When our country will become great that will benefit the entire world.” He was being modest; for the usual refrain was that a ‘Hindu India’ would be a Vishwaguru or a Jagadguru (world teacher). The world expected the RSS to lead. “The job of the organisation is to unite Hindus and this cannot be done through speeches alone. The time has come when the whole society wants the RSS, and has expectations from us. The organisation

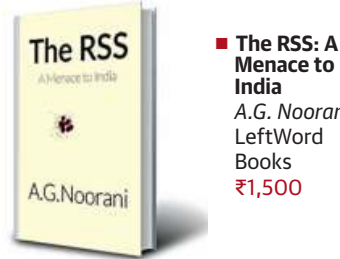


RSS workers in Mangaluru in 2016. ■ H.S. MANJUNATH

must grow in order to fulfil these expectations. We have to unite Hindu society, make it fearless, self-reliant and selfless.”

**The icon of the secular state**  
The RSS had every reason to be pleased with Modi’s ventures, which were based on three fundamentals. First, wipe out the secular national consensus evolved since the 19th century by the leaders of the freedom movement such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Badruddin Tyabji and Surendranath Banerjea. It was also enunciated by Vallabhbhai Patel in his presidential address to the Congress in 1931 and by Maulana Azad in his presidential address in 1940 as a retort to the Muslim League’s clamour for the Partition of India. Nehru faced the reaction thereafter. The tragic situation brought out the best in him and he emerged as the most articulate exponent of and the icon of the secular State.

Secondly, next only to Ashoka and Akbar, Nehru became a great builder of the Indian state. He won the nation’s love and confidence and the world’s admiration. But his concept of that state was that of a secular, democratic state based on a tolerant, pluralist society. This was in direct contradiction to the ideology of the RSS and its political progeny. He fought them tooth and nail. He is the one Congressman the RSS has always hated the most. On the Partition of



■ The RSS: A Menace to India  
A.G. Noorani  
LeftWord Books  
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India, it wanted to establish a Hindu State. Gandhi, Nehru and Patel opposed it. It fell to Nehru to expound the ideal by word and deed. He did so by a relentless campaign of educating the people and by building institutions cast in the secular mode. He espoused the concept of a composite culture of India. The former Jana Sangh leaders accepted this very concept in 1979, only to resile from it a few years later.

**The ‘Gujarat model’**  
The RSS and its creature the BJP want to wipe out and demolish the secular state and erect a Hindutva state based on the fascist ‘Leader’ principle. It would be sustained by a society from which religious tolerance is banished as was done, one hopes momentarily, in Gujarat before and after the 2002 pogrom. This is ‘The Gujarat Model’ which the RSS and its pracharak Modi seek to replicate at the Centre. Not only will India’s democracy and secularism suffer, the India which the nation loves and the world admires will perish. The RSS is

a menace to India; and not only to its minorities.

The RSS has set before itself this, the second task – the destruction of the Gandhi-Nehru state after brainwashing the nation into acceptance of Hindutva. Soon after the 1989 elections, Jaswant Singh went about campaigning for an ideological “idol-breaking”. Modi is at work on this ignoble venture.

Lastly, the RSS wants to eliminate the minorities, chiefly Muslims and Christians as minorities, and reduce them politically to being nonentities. Mobilise “the Hindu vote bank”, denounce the “appeasement” of a “Muslim vote bank” and either eliminate all opposition parties (“Congress Mukht”, Modi’s ideal) or absorb them; the willing ones are too small and too contemptible to mention. The Sikhs are not overlooked. [K.S.] Sudarshan’s characteristically Quixotic venture to Punjab earned him a loathing.

Sudarshan became RSS chief on March 10, 2000. He advised, “The Prime Minister should bring in economic advisers who believe in the swadeshi concept”. He also demanded that the Constitution of India be scrapped. “This ‘remake’ of the British model in [sic] in 1935” should be replaced with one based on the “aspirations of the people”. In drafting the present Constitution “Indian ethos and aspirations were not taken into account”. He added that “the RSS did not expect the Review Committee appointed by the Government to do this [take a fresh look] as it has been asked not to alter the basic structure of the Constitution”.

On the same day, in his first address to RSS activists in Nagpur, Sudarshan said: “These non-Hindus are not foreigners but ex-Hindus; they are Indians but their faiths will have to be Indianised.”

He attacked Gandhi as well as Nehru. “Even Gandhi blamed the Hindu community for creating an environment congenial to communal conflicts.” He asserted that the “third phase in RSS history was marked by Jawaharlal Nehru’s efforts to curb the organisation”. The demolition of the Babri Masjid, he claimed on March 19, “has made Hindus all over the world proud”.

Excerpted with permission from LeftWord Books

# The battle for Sabarimala

The issues raised in Kerala this election were related not to matters of mortals but those relating to God



T.P. SREENIVASAN

The will of the people of Kerala, more inscrutable than before, is safely sealed in rooms with extra security as demanded by the times. The long wait for the Lok Sabha election results will mark an anti-climax, with temples getting a break from the delirium of devotees. Offerings from candidates will quietly pour in, making it comfortable for temples to regenerate and repair the damage done. As activists leave the temples, devotees can return to their prayers in peace. The rhythms, the bells and the music will be heard again, without being immersed in political cacophony.

## Embracing Hinduism

This is the first time that God and temple rituals came to the forefront as election issues in Kerala. Earlier, it was only entreaties and special prayers that marked the election process. The first signs of the change appeared when some of the communist conclaves featured Christ and Krishna, together with Karl Marx and Fidel Castro. The explanation was that divine teachings may have influenced communism, but that was the beginning of the efforts to end the monopoly of the BJP over Hinduism. Soon enough, every party began to create its own version of Hinduism to prove that the BJP version was extremist. Political parties began to embrace Hinduism of different varieties rather than alienate Hindus, many of whom were inclined towards the BJP.

A Supreme Court judgment on the longstanding issue of whether women between the ages of 10 and 50 should be allowed to enter the Sabarimala shrine caused a tremor in Kerala, though initially there was a general consensus that constitutional rights would eventually let women of all ages enter the temple. There were some issues about women being unable to remain pure in body and soul for the entire 41 day-period of penance because of menstruation. But the surprising insistence of the Kerala government on enforcing the decision without any concern for the safety or the convenience of the women pilgrims led to sharp differences over the Supreme Court verdict. Following the model of the Ram temple, which brought the BJP to power in Delhi, the highly polarised political parties took on the cause of the vast number of devotees, who wanted customs

and traditions to be protected. The strongest position was taken by the BJP, which espoused the view that young women should not enter and a review of the verdict should be sought. The Congress hesitated for a moment, but in keeping with its soft Hindutva agenda, supported the traditionalists. The government stood firm and turned Sabarimala into a battlefield, openly escorting activists to the sanctum sanctorum.

## Gaining political mileage

As political postures developed around the issue, the Left parties pushed for a renaissance movement to reform outdated practices, while the powerful Nair Service Society sought protection of the faith by either reviewing the Supreme Court decision or by legislative action. The BJP supported the faithful and championed their cause, but stopped short of using its majority in the Lok Sabha to issue an ordinance to counter the decision of the Supreme Court. The Congress eventually came to the side of the believers. As a consequence of these developments, the Kerala government was seen as a renaissance group, while the others became champions of faith and rituals. Since the line between the BJP and the devotee groups was thin, the BJP got more political mileage out of the controversy than the others and, therefore, is expecting to open its parliamentary account in Kerala this time. The Congress also believes that it has gained popularity with the devotees. The Left believes that it too has gained on account of its government-sponsored renaissance, demonstrated by protests staged under its auspices by women.

## Rise in number of voters

The vexatious issue on the day after the polling was the phenomenal rise in the number of voters compared to previous elections. Each side believes that more voters came to vote this time because of its own enhanced popularity. Obviously, the issues raised this time were not those of mortals, like unemployment and price rise, but those relating to God. Though the Chief Electoral Officer of the State had decreed that Lord Ayyappa’s name should not be dragged into the campaign, the Sabarimala issue was on the minds of voters as they went to the polling booths. The description of Kerala as ‘God’s Own Country’ was a mere tourist slogan once, but today political parties are banking on divine intervention to determine Kerala’s future.

T.P. Sreenivasan is a former Ambassador of India and currently Director General, Kerala International Centre, Thiruvananthapuram

## SINGLE FILE

# We are all similar

The neuroscience of Indianness and a case for unity

MADHURIKA SANKAR



We are living in an increasingly polarised world. When we draw lines in the sand to demarcate our socio-cultural and religious identities, the consequences are violent. This is visible in the threats to liberal institutions, in mob lynchings, in suicide bombings, and in the building

of walls that would put ancient Chinese engineering to shame.

However, our self-identity has been scientifically proven to have a strong biological basis and that contradicts the notion that, as human beings, we voluntarily choose certain behaviours over others.

In his fascinating book, *The Man Who Wasn’t There*, Anil Ananthaswamy illustrates how when things go awry in the brain, we get a peek into the way certain neurobiological processes work. For instance, it seems so obvious to say, “I exist”. But people who suffer from Cotard’s Syndrome claim, “I don’t exist.” By understanding abnormal neurobiological underpinnings, we have gained an insight into the neuroscience of our notions of self-identity.

Neurologist-philosopher Gerhard Roth’s words are profound: “Irrespective of its genetic endowment, a human baby growing up in Africa, Europe or Japan will become an African, a European or a Japanese... he will never acquire a full understanding of other cultures since the brain has passed through the narrow bottleneck of culturalization.”

Indeed, cultural neuroscience is a cutting-edge area of scientific exploration, using highly sophisticated brain-imaging tools such as fMRIs, which examine the neurobiological underpinnings of self-identity and how the culture we live in affects the neural pathways that dictate behaviour.

For example, when solving simple arithmetic problems, native English speakers engage the left perisylvian cortices – areas that are typically involved in linguistic processing. However, native Chinese speakers show very little activation in this area. Instead, they show marked activation in a pre-motor association area. This demonstrates that the same behavioural outcome is accomplished by different brain pathways, depending on their cultural backgrounds.

Renowned psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar examines the above biological phenomena through the lens of Indian identity in his book, *The Indians*, and posits that Indians, no matter which nook of the country they are from, share certain biologically predicated responses in thought and behaviour to the same stimuli.

The notion that we are more similar than different – whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, forward or backward caste, rich or poor, local or from the diaspora – may elicit ire in some people. But where do socio-cultural assertions by an insular few stand in the face of larger forces – biologically-proven phenomena that, in a beautifully Socratic irony, have partial bases in the very cultures they stem from?

The writer is based in Chennai



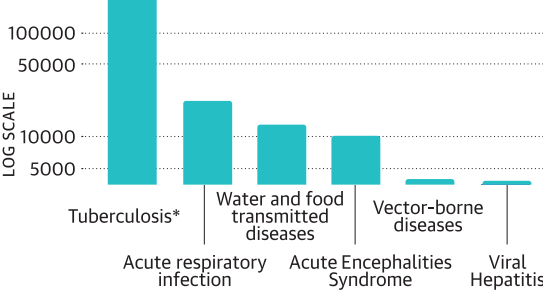
## DATA POINT

# Infectious killers

Tuberculosis claimed close to three lakh lives between 2012 and 2016, making it one of India’s deadliest infectious diseases. Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh registered a high number of deaths per one lakh population. Though deaths due to TB have come down, casualties due to vector-borne diseases have been on the rise in recent years. By Sumant Sen

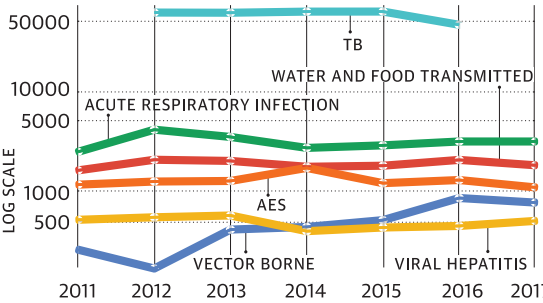
## TB, a grave concern

The chart shows the infectious diseases which caused the most number of deaths in India from 2011 to 2017. Tuberculosis killed the highest number of people



## Alarming trends

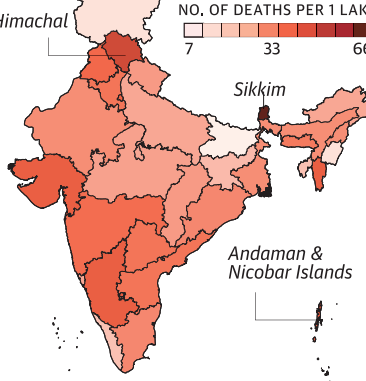
The chart shows the number of deaths due to diseases over the years. Although casualties due to TB reduced in 2016, it still remains the most fatal disease in the country



Source: MOHFW, National Health Profile of India, Central Bureau of Health Intelligence, Rajya Sabha

## State-wise split

Sikkim recorded the highest deaths per lakh of the population (66 per 1 lakh population) due to TB. The least deaths per 1 lakh population were recorded in Lakshadweep, Bihar, and Jammu & Kashmir



## Breathing troubles

While West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh accounted for most deaths due to respiratory ailments in India, Mizoram, Sikkim, and Himachal Pradesh had the maximum rate of such fatalities

State/ UT	Total deaths	Deaths per 1 lakh of the population
W.B.	4,243	4
U.P.	3,842	2
A.P.	2,064	2
M.P.	1,358	2
Delhi	1,315	7
Mizoram	302	24
Sikkim	127	19
Himachal	1,233	16
Tripura	480	12
Puducherry	172	12

\*TB data from 2012 to 2016

## FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 1, 1969

## Desai denies charge of Budget leakage

Mr. Morarji Desai, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, to-day [April 30, New Delhi] vehemently denied there had been any leakage of the budget proposals as alleged by the S.S.P. member, Mr. Madhu Limaye. Mr. Desai who was replying to the general discussion on the Finance Bill in the Lok Sabha did not agree that the levy on fertilizers would either discourage the use of fertilizers or hit the farmer. He also defended the stringent penalties for the failure to file Wealth Tax returns. Mr. Desai who was replying amidst interruptions from the Opposition benches, characterised Mr. Limaye’s demand that the Customs department should appeal against the Appellate Board decision which dealt with the BOAC case as “fantastic”. “My honourable friend still persists even though there is no case in it,” he said.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 1, 1919.

## Behar Planters.

The General Secretary, Behar Planters’ Association, has addressed a lengthy letter to the Government of India [as it is available in Calcutta] urging upon the latter the immediate necessity for taking effective measures to prevent any recurrence of recent outbreaks in the Punjab and other Provinces. After reviewing the action of the Government with regard to Mr. Gandhi’s activities in Champaran, Knaira and other places the letter concludes: My Association wishes to impress upon the Government of India the fact that the responsibility for recent outbreaks and consequent loss of life must be shared alike by the instigators of agitations against the Rowlatt Bills and by the Government of India itself. It is impossible to believe either that the organisers of the Satyagraha movement did not realise the inevitable effect of their propaganda on the mobs and students of the towns in which they worked or that they would have gone to the lengths they did had they not had good reason to believe from previous experience that the Government would be unlikely to take any strong action against them.

## POLL CALL

## Dissolution of Lok Sabha

In India, the Lok Sabha has a five-year term, but can be dissolved earlier. According to Article 83(2) of the Constitution, completion of five years from the first day of its meeting amounts to dissolution of the Lower House. In this case, an election is held to elect the new Members of Parliament. The Lower House can also be dissolved earlier by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. It can also be dissolved if the President feels that no viable government can be formed after the resignation or fall of a regime.

## MORE ON THE WEB

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