

What Do We Make Of R.S.S.?

■ Dr. M.N.Buch

In 1925 Dr. K.B. Hedgewar founded the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (R.S.S.) in Nagpur. In 1920 he had participated in a movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi and upto that time he had Congress leanings. It is reported that in Wardha when Gandhiji asked Dr. Hedgewar why he has started a separate organisation, R.S.S, instead of creating a group of nationalist minded volunteers within the Congress, Dr. Hedgewar replied that his intention was that he wanted to create a cadre of selfless people who will work for the nation and this was not possible within the hold of a political party. It is from this that R.S.S claims that it is a service organisation and not a political party. Incidentally, within the Congress Party also there is the Rashtriya Seva Dal, which consists of volunteers who, like R.S.S, wear uniforms and perform various duties at Congress functions. However, the Seva Dal is an organic part of the Congress and is a political organisation.

The first question which arises, therefore, is whether R.S.S. is a political organisation or not. Till the birth of Jan Sangh, the predecessor party to BJP, the R.S.S. claim to be non political might have had some credence, but by the admission of some R.S.S. functionaries themselves the Jan Sangh itself was created because R.S.S. felt politically isolated because it was banned twice and it felt that in order to defend itself in Parliament R.S.S had to have a political organisation which could speak on its behalf. That is one way of looking at things, but the fact is that once R.S.S. helped to create a political party it could no longer claim to be apolitical. Over time, especially after Jan Sangh grew into the larger BJP, R.S.S.'s interaction with the party and its overall control has increased. Today the situation is that R.S.S. decides who will be the BJP leader at national level and in every State unit of BJP the organising secretary is always a nominee of R.S.S. Though many explanations are given by R.S.S. for such a situation the fact remains that R.S.S. does have a controlling voice in BJP, its role being akin to that of the Ayatollah, the supreme leader in Iran, vis-à-vis the government of that country.

R.S.S. explains that in every organisation sponsored by it, ABVP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bhartiya Kisan Sangh, etc., numbering thirty-nine in all, R.S.S. gives moral guidance, but it is difficult to believe that this moral stance is not tantamount to supreme control. I personally tested the R.S.S. contention that its not a political party by writing first to Shri Sudarshan and then to Shri Mohan Bhagwat, successive Sar Sanghchalaks, giving some suggestions. I advised that because R.S.S. claims to be a non political organisation it should set up teams of experts in various fields such as Education, Scientific and Technical Research, Agriculture, Industry, Urban Development, Infrastructure Creation, Employment, Social Infrastructure, etc., which could give blueprints in each sector, each of which should be achievable within our resources. These papers could then act as a guide for planning and could help government, regardless of its political ideology, to prepare specific development programmes. In both cases I received postcards from the R.S.S. headquarters, the gist of which was that my letters would be placed before the Sar Sanghchalak at the appropriate time. Not only did this belie the claim that R.S.S. is apolitical and interested in nation building, it also proved that the office of the R.S.S. had fine-tuned red tapism to an extent which no government can dream of. My only regret is that because R.S.S. is in fact deeply involved in politics, instead of fighting shy of revealing its political face the Sangh in fact should come out openly and state that it is a political organisation and it has political goals.

R.S.S. has always been accused of being a communally biased group with a definite Hindutva programme. R.S. S. claims that it is not in the least communal but that in protecting the Hindu dharma

and culture it has always promoted nationhood rather than communalism. Therefore, while not opposing any religion as such R.S.S. has opposed religious conversion on the grounds that conversion to Christianity or Islam has given rise to separatism, for example, in the North East and the creation of Pakistan. Unless the Constitution of India is repudiated by R.S.S. the fact is that the Preamble secures for all citizens liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. Article 25 grants as a fundamental right freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion. This right is not restricted to Hindus only. Forcible conversion is illegal but propagation of faith and welcoming into the faith those who voluntarily come to it is a fundamental right. Anyone who opposes this is ipso facto communal. I am not for a minute suggesting that a Hindu organisation which supports the faith is more communal than a Muslim organization, a Sikh organisation or a Christian organisation which is religion based. None of these organisations are secular in terms of the definition given in the Constitution of India I am prepared to live with the proposition that R.S.S. does not believe in violence against followers of other religions, though experience suggests otherwise, but certainly it does practice a form of religious exclusivity which is more suited for Semitic religions rather than an inclusive one such as Sanatan Dharma.

Undoubtedly in time of natural calamity and manmade disasters R.S.S. volunteers have done excellent work, whether it be the Bhopal gas tragedy or the tsunami which hit India a few years ago. This work was selfless and covered every community. That is the positive side of R.S.S. But unless R.S.S. becomes more open and more outgoing the negative image it has at present will continue to prevail. It is for the R.S.S. leaders to think about this and ask themselves a question which must be answered honestly. It is, "Is R.S.S. a truly nationalist service organisation or has it wandered from the path?"
