

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh 03-Jun-2017

What does RSS stand for? Who was its founder and when and where was it founded?

RSS stands for Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. It was founded by Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar on the auspicious occasion of Vijayadashami in the year 1925 at Nagpur in Central Bharat. Dr Hedgewar, a born patriot and freedom fighter, was a medical doctor but dedicated himself to the service of the nation. He was pained at the disorganized state of Hindu society and to organize them, he started the RSS.

Who can be a member of RSS?

In the RSS system, there is no formal membership. Those who attend the RSS Shakhas are called Swayamsevaks and any Hindu male can become a Swayamsevak.

What is the procedure for membership of RSS?

As said earlier, there is no formal membership enrolment in the RSS. Anyone can approach the nearest 'Shakha' which is the fundamental unit of activity of RSS and become a swayamsevak. There are no fees, no registration form, and no formal application. Once you start attending the daily shakha either in the morning or in the evening as per your convenience, you become the swayamsevak of RSS. It is that simple.

If someone does not know any Shakha or Swayamsevak nearby, one can join the RSS online too. BY filling out the form on this website, we provide the nearest suitable contact for joining RSS.

What is the Shakha?

Simply put, a shakha is a daily gathering of swayamsevaks of different age groups at a predefined meeting place or ground for one hour. The daily routine programs include physical exercises, singing the patriotic chorus, group discussions on a varied range of subjects, and a prayer for our motherland. But that is not the end. As the third Sarsangchalak of RSS the late Sri Balasaheb Devras said:

The RSS Shakha is not just a place to play games or parade, but an unsaid promise of the protection of the good citizenry, an acculturation forum to keep the young away from undesirable addictions; it is a center of hope, for rapid action and undemanding help in case of emergencies and crisis that affect the people. It is a guarantee of the unafraid movement of women and a powerful deterrent to indecent behavior towards them, also a powerful threat to the brutal and anti-national forces. But the most

important aspect is it is a university for training the appropriate workers to be made available for the requirements of the various fields of life of the nation. And the medium to achieve all this is the games we play on the grounds of RSS Shakha.

Why is there a uniform for RSS functions? How does one get it?

Physical exercises and parades are an integral part of the RSS training. They are introduced to inculcate physical and psychological discipline. As such, a definite uniform becomes an inseparable part of this discipline. The physical exercises also help in developing a sense of unity and fraternity among the swayamsevkas coming from different social, economic, and educational backgrounds. One uniform for all helps foster the feeling of oneness.

Moreover, the particular uniform is used only for certain ceremonial parades and functions and not daily. One can attend a daily shakha in any suitable and respectable dress. The particular uniform is available at the local RSS offices and the swayamsevakas have to buy the uniform. It is not provided them free of cost.

Can the women become RSS members?

No. The RSS was founded to organize the Hindu society and considering the practical limitations, allowed entry to Hindu males only. However, when the need for a similar organization for Hindu women was also felt, one social worker from Wardha in Maharashtra Lakshmibai Kelkar approached the RSS founder Dr Hedgewar and after holding extensive consultations with him decided to launch Rashtra Sevika Samiti in the year 1936. The objectives of RSS and Samiti were the same. Hence, women can join the Rashtra Sevika Samiti.

The RSS always talks about the Hindus, Hindu Rashtra, Hindu culture, etc. Why? Is it a religious organization?

The RSS talks of Hindu, Hindu Rashtra, and Hindu Culture because the RSS believed from day one that this country belonged to the Hindus. The RSS perceives Hinduism as a term that defines the national identity of the people living in this country. It is not a religious or sectarian identity. It is as the Supreme Court of India observed, a way of life. Hindus have their own 'View of Life' and a 'Way of Life'. Within the Hindu fold some innumerable sects and subsects have perfect freedom to follow their ways of worship etc. But the national identity of the people of this country is essentially Hindu, the RSS believes.

The RSS also believes, respects, and follows the principle of Unity in Diversity as a quintessence of the Hindu worldview. For example, an average Hindu believes that the Truth is one and can be expressed, told, described attained, and realized in different ways all leading to the One Supreme Reality. Anyone who subscribes to this worldview, accept and respect Bharat's history, nurtures the country through their

social values, and make sacrifices to protect these value system are Hindu in the eyes of RSS notwithstanding their religious moorings and affiliations.

So, can a Christian or a Muslim become a Swayamsevak of RSS?

Yes, if they agree with the above viewpoint. The RSS believes that the Christians and Muslims in Bharat have not come from some alien lands. They are all children of Mother Bharat. At some point of time in history their ancestors might have changed their religion and ways of worship. But that does not separate them from the Hindu society in the larger context.

Right from the RSS founder to the present Sarsanghchalak, all have reiterated this view of the RSS towards the non-Hindus and it was the late Balasaheb Devras who said that change of religion does not mean a change of culture or discarding one ancestor. So, Christians and Muslims share their ancestors, motherland, culture, and language with the majority of Hindus. Those who have realized this are in fact, already taking an active part in RSS activities of nation-building with full responsibility. They are neither discriminated against nor do they receive any special treatment.

What is the current strength of Shakhas and members of RSS in Bharat?

According to the figures in March 2017, 57185 daily shakhas are being held at 36729 places (including rural and urban), in addition to weekly gatherings at 14896 places and monthly meetings at 7594 places in Bharat. However, the RSS does not maintain a record of sorts for the swayamsevaks making it a difficult task to count the exact number of swayamsevaks.

What are the activities of RSS other than regular shakhas? Why it is that in media and public discourse, some organizations are said to have links with RSS?

The RSS per se does not get involved in any other activities other than holding daily shakha and arranging various training camps for the Swayamsevaks. As Dr Hedgewar used to say, the RSS is like a powerhouse that generates electric power and transmits it to various establishments. In the same way, the trained RSS Swayamsevaks, according to their inclinations and choices, have been active in various sectors of our social and national life and launched their initiatives with their feet firmly grounded in their moorings. As of today, there are 40 plus such organizations at the national level and numerous such organizations and institutions at the state, regional, and local levels.

RSS terminology:

The RSS has coined its terms mostly based on Sanskrit words to be used in conducting its activities. To the common outsider, these terms are difficult to apprehend and decipher. Here they are simplified:

Sarsanghchalak: He is the topmost leader of the RSS revered and venerated as 'Friend, Philosopher and Guide' by all. In its journey of 92 years, the RSS has seen the tenure of Six Sarsanghchalaks from its Founder Dr. Hedgewar to its incumbent **Dr. Mohanrao Bhagwat**.

Sarkaryawah: Though there is no equivalent term in English the nearest word could be General Secretary. He is the Executive Head of the organization and conducts the affairs of the Sangh.

Sah-Sarkaryawah: The Joint General Secretary. There can be more than one. At present, there are four Sah-Sarkaryawah to assist the Sarkaryawah in conducting the affairs of the Sangh.

Pracharak: An individual who is inspired by the mission and objective of the Sangh and dedicates his full time to carrying forward this mission is known as Pracharak in the RSS parlance. He is not a canvasser, not even a propagandist. Pracharak is no less than a 'sannyasin' save for the orange robe.

Mukhya-Shikshak: Incharge head of a Shakha.

Karyawah: Executive head of a shakha.

Gatanayak: A group leader.

Prarthana: A prayer is sung daily at the end of the one-hour shakha in honour of the Motherland.

Bhagwa Dhawj: Saffron Flag. The RSS has accepted the Saffron Flag as its "GURU". The flag reminds the swayamsevak of the glorious history of the nation and the heroic deeds of the countless worthy sons and daughters of Mother Bharat inspiring them to devote their time and energy to serve the society.

Gurudakshina: The monetary offering offered at the Bhagwa Dhawj once in a year by each swayamsevak. This money is used for sustaining the overall activity of Sangh.