



Brief

RSS and Spirit of Volunteerism

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Sangh volunteers' service projects have stumped the global communities & offer a unique template to serve humanity



Introduction

Millions of selfless volunteers or Swayamsevak working round the clock in Bharat and outside form flesh and blood of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the largest Hindu centric organization.

Swayamsevak or volunteers driven movement run by RSS is easily bracketed as the biggest for social up-lift of vulnerable individuals, socially and economically deprived families and ensure 'inclusive' development and progress of Bharat.

From the perspective of its disciplined volunteers, RSS stands out as the most unique societal movement not seen anywhere else in the world. Commitment, conviction and discipline coupled with selfless service of fellow human beings serve as the fulcrum of this huge organization.

This huge number of unpaid volunteers motivated by sense of belonging, wider societal cohesion, prosperity and progress of Bharat is what makes RSS an unprecedented preposition that's hitherto unheard of.

This huge clutch of volunteers that set aside their own issues and prioritize providing selfless service transcend caste, creed, gender, socio-economic backgrounds, region, religion and professions that they belong to.

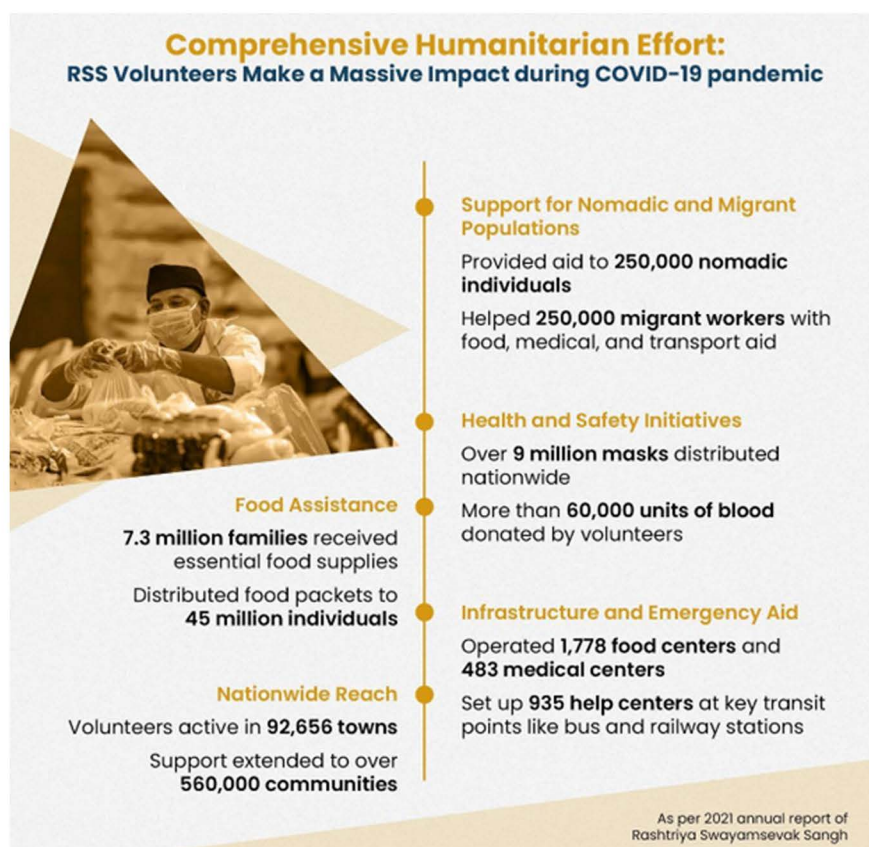
From providing relief to communities, families and individuals in times of crisis like the Covid 19 pandemic to floods, cyclones to humanitarian crises, RSS has been at forefront of 'selfless service'.

Unique spirit of volunteerism that Swayamsevaks display is result of rigor with which RSS undertakes personality development campaigns across Bharat through its Shakhas, basic units or branches held in each city, village, town, community or neighbourhood each day without fail.

Be it tackling environmental disasters, health emergencies to providing opportunities for education, socio-economic

development projects, RSS has been at forefront and continues to lead the Bharatiya society thereby showing the 'other way' to the world.

From enlisting, training, skills to personality development, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has evolved its own process to provide service to the Bharatiya community with a 'smile'.



Contributing to Bharat's society over personal gains or fulfilling one's interests is what RSS volunteers have perfected over last 100 years of the organization's existence that came into being in 1925.

Spirit of volunteerism or selfless service has become way of life for swayamsevaks from the very beginning when RSS founder Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar led a group of youngsters to Ramtek, a town around 50 kilometers away from Nagpur in 1926. These young swayamsevaks helped thousands of devotees descending to Ramtek for worship during the festival. From then on, this spirit of volunteerism only deepened and widened.



In today's materialistic world across Europe and US, it may seem impossible to even imagine individuals giving up family, siblings and personal needs to serve as a community or societal volunteer. Thousands of such volunteers have consciously chose to even stay away from families, lead a celibate life and consider the entire society as his or her own family and dedicate the entire life for its upliftment. Ideas and ideals of RSS made this impossible concept of volunteerism a possibility.

This document will explore several factors that drive individuals to sacrifice individual aspirations for benefit of a larger community. The study will examine organizational framework and functions of RSS including full-time Pracharaks and volunteers. It will emphasize activities that inspire individuals from various backgrounds to make selfless offerings.

Spirit of Volunteerism

Spirit of volunteerism in RSS is not just confined to time or skills but it is lifelong commitment and mission to societal and national progress. This assurance is characterized by a profound sense of responsibility and selflessness, inspired by morals of service and sacrifice. RSS volunteers, or 'Swayamsevaks', are encouraged to view welfare of the nation and society as integral to their own life's purpose, rather than as a detached endeavour.



Selfless service is not a new or afterthought phenomenon in Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. RSS Sarkaryavah (General Secretary) presented the annual report to the Pratinidhi Sabha (annual general body meeting) of 2024 provides ample data that encapsulates wide-ranging activities that the organization undertakes on the strength of its volunteers fanned across length and breadth of Bharat. As per the report, a humongous 122,890 services projects, both long term and short term ventures have been undertaken by RSS either directly or through organizations inspired by the Sangh.

When violence struck Bharat's north-eastern state Manipur on May 2023, RSS and Seva Bharati volunteers were the only ones that travelled to Bishnupur and beyond with financial aid, essential commodities for families who lost their members due to terrorists actions. RSS in Manipur also undertook projects to rehabilitate and educate children who lost parents with outbreak of violence. Rajarshi Bhagyachandra Skills Development Centre was set up as a model relief facility for displaced people from Imphal East. This centre not only served as a shelter but provided opportunities to violence impacted people to get trained, undertake self-employment projects and reconstruct their lives. Several such centres were set up to help beleaguered people of Manipur.

Impact of these projects and institutions run by RSS or fellow organizations in areas like socio-economic self-reliance is so huge that many elected governments with vast resources could not have attempted. A whopping 2.145 million individuals and families in Bharat have benefitted and continue to be supported by projects across healthcare, education, socio-economic empowerment that contributed to improving living standards. Beneficiaries in healthcare sector separately have crossed 8.716 million and food support programmes beneficiaries touched 2.735 million. Community well-being and development is the under-lying objective of the RSS volunteers drive that's comprehensive and unique in their organization.



RSS volunteerism is less about technology and more about strengthening human connections and has linkages to civilizational values. RSS emphasizes on volunteers continuous growth and character development, fostering individuals who prioritize collective well-being over personal gains. This approach is reflective of a broader Bharatiya cultural context where community and familial ties play a significant role and where personal identities are often not important vis-à-vis the community and national identity.



Western and European volunteerism may be effective in mobilizing resources for specific causes and enlisting paid volunteers. RSS volunteerism seeks to cultivate a pervasive and enduring change in personal attitudes towards society and nation, promoting a lifestyle of service rather than distinct volunteering, non-governmental or corporate activities as a profession.

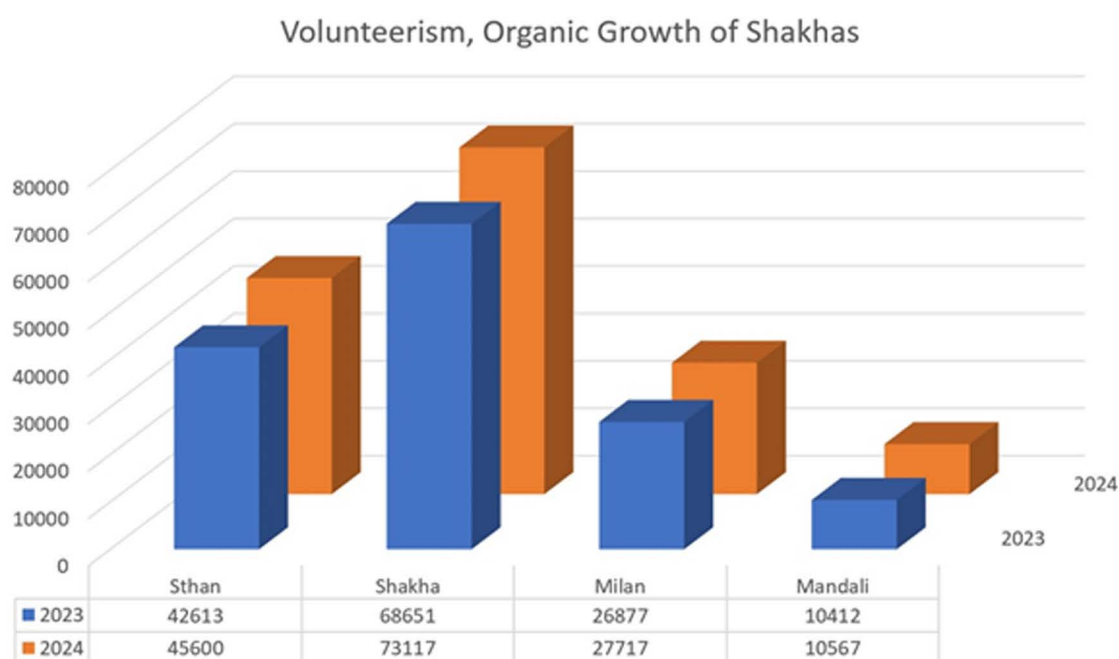
RSS's approach to volunteerism is also deeply rooted in spirituality rather than materialism, focusing on selfless service over financial rewards. Oriented towards welfare of society and nation rather than mere systemic efficiency or technological advancement, this philosophy reflects the timeless values of Hindu and Bharatiya culture. By prioritizing ethical integrity and social responsibility, RSS underscores commitment to enduring cultural principles that foster a profound connection to one's roots and a dedication to the collective good.

A prime example of RSS volunteers or Rashtriya Seva Bharti, a sangh inspired organization, is holding community weddings periodically in several states of Bharat. For young ladies and men with minimal economic means or those without living family members were supported by conducting their marriages beginning 2011 in Rajasthan. In last 13-odd years, several hundreds of couples were married off with all arrangements and expenses covered by the RSS volunteers. In 2024 alone, 45 couples' weddings were held. Since the project began, at least 2420 couples were settled as families in sync with all Hindu rituals and traditions across 33 locations in 22 districts of the North-western state, Rajasthan.

Volunteerism, life & blood of RSS

Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a trained doctor, activist and independence movement patriot has had meticulously crafted foundational approaches of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),

flagging way for formation of a huge and committed groups of volunteers across Bharat. Daily Shakha, every day get-togethers, is a key component of these endeavours that reinforces RSS process, vision and action.



As per 2024 annual report of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

- *Sthan: A place where regular activities take place.*
- *Shakha: An assembly held in an open ground for about an hour.*
- *Milan: Same as Shakha, but held weekly or fortnightly.*
- *Mandali: A regular intellectual gathering held weekly, fortnightly, or monthly.*

RSS volunteers tie down themselves to fundamental pillars of selflessness, consciousness and discipline that underpinned all aspects of its day-to-day activities. In his speech of 1935, Dr Hedgewar stressed the importance of consistent engagement and individual attention to swayamsevaks (volunteers), stating that "a swayamsevak works well today and sits at home tomorrow. If a Swayamsevak is absent from the Shakha on any given day, go to his residence and find out why. Otherwise, he will not attend the Shakha, even on the second day. On the third day, he will be hesitant to visit the Shakha. On fourth day, he will feel anxious, and on fifth day, he will begin postponing. As a result, no Swayamsevak should be allowed to miss the Shakha meeting."

This approach emphasizes significance of cultivating a sense of duty and brotherhood through consistent engagement and cooperation.

RSS has never used financial allurements as a means to engage with its volunteers. Instead, the emphasis has always been on cultivating a solid sense of duty towards uplift of society and nation, pressing individuals to recognize that their primary purpose is to contribute to welfare of the community and motherland, going beyond their own personal and financial benefits.



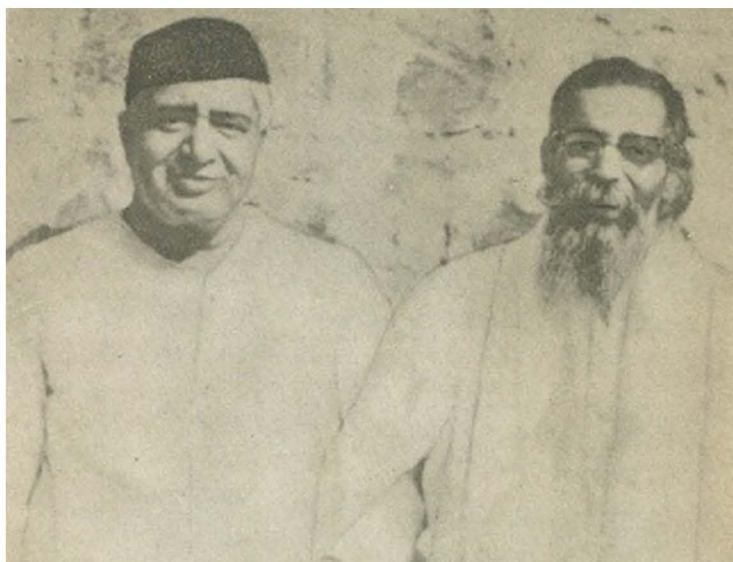
RSS has effectively fostered a shared understanding that improvement of society and the nation is more important than personal interests. The legacy of Dr. Hedgewar's vision and the core values of the RSS are evident in the world's biggest force of self-sacrificing volunteers today.

Pracharaks breathe life into volunteerism

The institution of Pracharaks (dedicated and spirited campaigners) is unique and key to RSS's volunteerism. Thousands of such dedicated volunteers lead monastic life to further the spirit of selfless service. Pracharaks do not receive any monetary compensation and usually live in RSS karyalays (office).

It began with students, researchers, farmers and the civilians that were full time volunteers from anywhere between three to ten years. Some dedicated their entire lives to carry on the voluntary work through both time bound and institutionalized service projects in sectors like healthcare, schools, training and skills development, economic empowerment programmes, environmental campaigns etc.

An exemplary instance is that of senior pracharak, Bhaiyya ji Dani, a student who played pivotal role in recruiting Shri Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar—popularly known as Guruji—into the Shakha at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). While Guruji ascended to become second Sarsanghchalak (Chief), Dani Ji assumed charge Sarkaryavah (General Secretary) of the RSS.



As a Pracharak, there is no obligation to serve, either temporarily or for life. Nevertheless, this lifestyle of selflessness profoundly attracts numerous individuals who discover that gratification of serving society and nation surpasses any other pursuit. As a result, several individuals have committed their lives to this honourable cause.

For instance, pracharaks posted in remote, unfamiliar areas among communities that he or she has never worked do not complain or grumble. Instead, RSS volunteers and pracharaks adopt and transform themselves to be natives. Languages, attire, living style, food habits or culture may not be a hindrance for RSS volunteers and pracharaks to provide selfless service.

Pracharaks are not average people; many a time they are highly educated with excellent career opportunities. Despite the possibility of highly profitable careers, their commitment to welfare of communities and the nation remains paramount. Distinguished individuals such as Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of RSS and a medical doctor with an MBBS degree; Shri Guruji, a highly regarded professor at BHU; Professor Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhaiya), a renowned physicist and expert in nuclear physics; and the current Sarsanghchalak, Dr. Mohan Bhagwat, highly educated in veterinary science and animal husbandry, all made conscious decision to prioritize serving motherland rather than pursuing personal interests.

RSS ideals and selflessness of its swayamsevaks have not only nurtured the organization's expansion, but have positioned it as having a significant impact in social and national domains, like a banyan tree that extends extensively from its roots. The Sangh's legacy of setting a precedent via personal conduct continues to motivate and draw a wide range of individuals, strengthening its core purpose and effectiveness.

Unique Bharatiya template for Volunteerism

Yes, to some extent. It is crucial to understand that social responsibility and social contract are distinct concepts. The main difference lies in the spirit of volunteerism as perceived in Western or European contexts versus the Bharatiya perspective. Many parts of the world treat volunteerism like a formal agreement, complete with terms, conditions, an honorarium, and specific key result areas (KRAs). This framework approaches volunteerism as a transaction or a formal commitment, closely aligning with a business-like model that clearly outlines and expects inputs and outputs.

Contrastingly, from the RSS standpoint, volunteers serve the community and motherland without any expectation of remuneration or honorarium, driven by a deep-seated belief in their duty to society. Instead of being transactional, the RSS approach instills moral and cultural values that prioritize selfless service. The ethos of contributing to societal progress motivates volunteers, who view volunteering as a personal and spiritual practice, rather than just fulfilling formal obligations.

This dedication to volunteerism by the RSS reflects a broader, holistic view of contributing to society, where an act of volunteering integrates into one's lifestyle as a continuous commitment. This perspective fosters a sense of unity and collective responsibility, distinguishing the Indian approach to volunteerism from more individualistic and compartmentalized practices elsewhere. In doing so, the RSS has cultivated a vast network of volunteers who not only serve but also foster a sense of community and national pride, making their efforts not just acts of service but a vital part of their identity and way of life.

Way Forward

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) represents an exceptional model of volunteerism that goes beyond the traditional frameworks seen in Western and European states. It encompasses a comprehensive and community-oriented approach. This model revolves around inherent distinctions as it does not revolve around mere fulfillment of



a contract but rather centers on adopting a way of life that places betterment of communities, society and the nation as a whole above individual benefits. RSS method emphasizes that selfless service extends beyond simply providing assistance to others; it is a route to individual and spiritual advancement, cultivating a profound sense of satisfaction and purpose.

Amidst a society that is gradually absorbing material possessions and personal success, philosophy of RSS presents a persuasive alternative that prioritizes the upliftment of the society, spiritual growth, and the larger good of everyone. The unwavering commitment of RSS volunteers, who seamlessly incorporate selfless acts into their everyday routines without seeking any form of compensation, offers a profound insight into the concept of altruism. This strategy not only improves communities but also enhances the volunteers' personal lives, promoting a culture of care and responsibility that is desperately required in today's society. It demonstrates that volunteers, motivated by actual concern for society rather than money incentives, can result in significant societal transformation and personal satisfaction.

Moving forward, global communities can gain valuable insights from the RSS model of volunteers. By embracing a comparable philosophy of selflessness and incorporating volunteer work into the very essence of everyday existence, global communities may foster more empathetic and accountable citizens. Highlighting the spiritual and social advantages of volunteering could encourage individuals to dedicate

themselves for the betterment of society as a mission. The lasting influence of RSS on volunteerism illustrates that when people come together to serve a greater purpose, they may not only bring about positive changes in their communities but also experience substantial personal development and spiritual enrichment. This is a message to the global community to reassess the underlying reasons for engaging in volunteer work and adopt a more comprehensive and community-focused approach to servicing the needs of mankind.



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