



BRIEF

Civilisational Dialogue and Global Oneness

A century of service, and the centenary visit of Dr Mohan Bhagwat
to the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom

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I. Summary

On 25 August 2026, Dr Mohan Bhagwat, Sarsanghchalak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, began a visit to the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. He travels at the invitation of local associations and community organisations in each country, and the visit falls within the centenary year of the movement he leads.

The RSS is widely described as the largest voluntary organisation in the world. It sustains more than one hundred thousand local gatherings across India, has inspired some forty autonomous institutions working in every field of national life, and has been built without compulsory membership, without salaries and without external funding. The head of a movement on that scale rarely addresses public audiences abroad, which is what makes this visit unusual in the organisation's own terms.

The centrepiece of the American leg is the Universal Oneness Celebrations in Manhattan on Saturday 29 August, convened by the AHEAD Forum together with more than two hundred partner organisations, with doors from 1:00 pm and the programme running from 2:00 pm to 5:30 pm Eastern Time. The date is Raksha Bandhan, the festival of the protective bond, which Hindu Americans have observed in their own cities for two decades as a day about responsibility extending outward from family to community to humanity. Community leadership events follow in Toronto and London.

The framing of the visit is civilisational rather than political. Its stated purposes are to deepen the people to people connection between Bharat and the societies of the Indian diaspora, to communicate the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the world is one family, and to place the lessons of a hundred years of service before a world asking many of the same questions.

II. Context and Backdrop

The RSS entered its hundredth year on Vijayadashami in 2025. For a movement that has always spoken principally to itself and to Indian society, the centenary has prompted something new, which is a sustained conversation with the wider world.

For much of the past several decades, the international life of the Sangh ecosystem was carried by the diaspora itself. It took shape in temples built in unfamiliar cities, in weekend classes where children learned a grandmother's language, in food banks and blood drives and disaster collections run out of community halls. The work was quiet and local, and it was rarely explained to anyone outside the community. As one of the messages prepared for the New York event puts it, Hindu Americans have been practising oneness quietly for decades.

In April 2026, Dattatreya Hosabale, the Sarkaryavah or general secretary of the RSS, travelled to the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany at the invitation of host institutions in each country. He took part in the THRIVE 2026 summit at the Stanford Faculty Club, convened by the Global Science Innovation Forum, and spoke at a reception on India's global vision organised by the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies in association with the Hudson Institute, where he shared a panel with Walter Russell Mead and with Walter Andersen, the long standing scholar of the movement. Over six days in London and Rugby he met figures from academia, policy, the legislature, business and community organisations.

That tour indicated the constituencies the movement now wishes to reach. Dr Bhagwat's visit follows at a higher level of visibility, and it arrives at a moment when the Indian origin communities of North America and Britain have reached a new stage of settlement. The first generation arrived and worked. The second built the institutions, the temples and the associations. The third has grown up wholly inside these societies, is professionally established within them, and is now asking what of its inheritance it wishes to carry forward and how to explain it to neighbours who have never encountered it. The visit speaks directly to that question.



III. About RSS: A Century of Service

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was founded in Nagpur on the festival of Vijayadashami in 1925 by Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a physician by training and a patriot by conviction. The name states the purpose. Rashtriya means national, swayamsevak means a self motivated volunteer, and sangh means a coming together.

Dr Hedgewar's involvement in public life long preceded the founding. As a medical student in Calcutta he took part in the work of the Anushilan Samiti. At the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress in 1920 he moved a resolution demanding Purna Swaraj, complete independence, nine years before the Congress adopted that goal at Lahore. By his own recollection he was laughed out of the chamber. The episode convinced him that political action without a civilisational foundation would not hold, and that the deeper task was the organisation of a society that colonial administration had worked to divide.

His method was the shakha, a daily neighbourhood gathering of about an hour held in an open ground, combining physical exercise and yoga with games, discussion, song and prayer. It remains the cellular unit of the movement. Two early decisions still shape the organisation. The saffron flag, the Bhagwa Dhwaj, was designated as the guru of the movement rather than any living person, so that ideals would stand above personalities. And the movement was funded through Guru Dakshina, voluntary offerings made by volunteers themselves, which has kept it independent of government and of any external patron for a hundred years.



Scale of the present

The RSS today conducts about 88,949 daily shakhas, alongside some 32,606 weekly milans and 13,211 monthly mandlis, and is present in roughly 55,683 localities across India. It records more than 152,000 service projects spanning education, healthcare, self reliance and social welfare, and the wider ecosystem includes over 20,000 schools.

There is no membership form and no subscription fee. A person becomes a swayamsevak by attending a shakha and continuing to attend. Responsibility is carried by householders in ordinary professions working alongside pracharaks, full time lifelong volunteers who draw no salary and who often remain unmarried in order to stay mobile. Women participate through the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, founded in 1936 by Vandaniya Lakshmibai Kelkar. Decisions are taken by consensus rather than by command, and across a hundred years and six Sarsanghchalaks the movement has seen no split, no faction and no schism.



Seva in times of trial

The record of seva (selfless service) is the plainest measure of the century. When Partition tore the subcontinent apart in 1947 and the new government's machinery buckled under the weight of millions of refugees, swayamsevaks organised and ran three thousand relief camps across northern India. In Calcutta alone the Vastuhara Sahayata Samiti fed eighty thousand people and clothed a hundred and fifty thousand.

That reflex has not faltered since. Swayamsevaks served through the wars of 1962, 1965 and 1971, taking on traffic duty, blood donation and logistics so that the police and the forces could be freed for their own work. They served through the Bihar drought of 1966, the Andhra cyclone of 1977, the Morbi dam burst of 1979, Bhopal in 1984, the Odisha super cyclone of 1999, Bhuj in 2001, the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the Kosi floods of 2008 and Kedarnath in 2013. In 2020, when the world met a pandemic it had not seen in a century, more than 342,000 swayamsevaks served at 67,000 locations across India, distributing ration kits to over five million families, organising more than thirty million meal packets and 4.4 million face masks, and running service centres in forty three cities. Much of that work reached no headlines at all.



Social harmony

A separate thread runs through every decade, which is the patient dissolving of inherited division through habit and lived practice rather than by decree. From the beginning, volunteers of every caste gathered on one ground, in one uniform, exercising, praying and eating together, at a time when many institutions remained caste exclusive. When Dr B. R. Ambedkar visited an RSS camp in 1939, he found an equality among volunteers of every background in which no one appeared conscious of the difference.

The work deepened across successive leaderships. In 1969, Guruji helped bring about the Udupi Sants Sammelan, at which Hindu religious leaders from every tradition jointly declared that untouchability has no sanction in Hindutva.

In 1974 at Pune, Balasaheb Deoras declared that if untouchability is not wrong then nothing in the world is wrong, and followed it with concrete direction on shared meals across caste, on temple entry and on inter caste marriage.

Dr Bhagwat has carried this forward across his addresses of 2015, 2018 and 2023, holding that discrimination by varna and jaati should be discarded altogether. It shows today in the annual Social Harmony Fortnight, in the principle of ek mandir, ek kuan, ek smashaan, one temple, one well and one cremation ground shared by all, and in senior pracharaks from Dalit and tribal communities leading the work in states across the country.



RSS inspired organizations

Roughly forty institutions have grown from the work of individual swayamsevak, reaching into student affairs, labour, farming, education, tribal welfare, science, sport, the classical arts, the Sanskrit language and the welfare of veterans.

RSS neither owns, governs nor funds them. They were founded by swayamsevakas who, formed in the shakha, took up whatever work of nation building drew them, and each operates with full autonomy, coordinated lightly through the Samanvay committee. What they hold in common is a set of values rather than a line of instruction.



IV. Dr. Bhagwat's Visit

Dr Bhagwat's three nation tour begins on 25 August 2026 and forms part of the wider centenary outreach of the RSS. The itinerary has been released progressively, and is shaped in each country by the local host organisations rather than directed centrally.

One pattern holds across all three legs. Alongside the public programmes, meetings are planned with Hindu organisations, diaspora associations, temples and cultural networks, and with notable figures from science, technology, business, academia and public life. The tour works at two levels at once, in large gatherings of the community and in smaller rooms where the conversation can go further.

United States, from 25 August. The opening days are given to direct diaspora interactions and public engagements in New York City.

New York, Saturday 29 August. The Universal Oneness Celebrations at Madison Square Garden, convened by the AHEAD Forum, American Hindus for Engagement and Dialogue, together with more than two hundred partner organisations. Doors open at 1:00 pm and the programme runs from 2:00 pm to 5:30 pm Eastern Time. Dr Bhagwat delivers the keynote, alongside voices from a range of faith traditions and a cultural programme of Bharatanatyam, music and movement.

What distinguishes the coalition is its breadth. The partner organisations carry roots in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Caribbean and East Africa, and bring together Gujarati, Tamil, Bengali, Nepali, Telugu and Malayali communities alongside families whose journeys ran through Trinidad, Fiji and Kenya. Different routes, one river.

No single organisation sits at the head table, and each partner stands as an equal. Participants include physicians, teachers, engineers, students, veterans, artists and volunteers, with delegations from temples, yoga organisations, educational institutions, service bodies, regional associations and interfaith communities across the country.

The choice of date carries the meaning of the event. Raksha Bandhan honours the thread tied between siblings and the promise of protection that accompanies it. The programme extends that promise outward, from family to community to nation, and from humanity to the natural world. It is a Hindu festival carrying a universal claim, which is characteristic of how the movement communicates.

Canada, 31 August to 1 September. Meetings in Toronto with members of the Canadian Indian diaspora, together with community leadership programmes. This is the first official visit to Canada by a serving Sarsanghchalak.

United Kingdom, early September. Community leadership programmes in London, dialogue sessions with mainstream institutions, and local diaspora outreach, following the pattern set during the April engagements in London and Rugby.

Across the three countries the tour rests on three stated pillars;

The first is diaspora engagement, meaning close interaction with Indian origin communities, faith based networks and cultural associations.

The second is the projection of core values, namely global harmony, civic responsibility and the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

The third is dialogue with mainstream institutions in each host society on the history and worldview of the RSS, and on Hindu society and Bharat (India) more broadly.

V. Deepening People to People Connect

Relations between India and the West have been conducted for decades in the language of states. Trade agreements, defence cooperation, technology partnerships and visa regimes are the substance of that conversation, and it is a necessary one. It is also incomplete. There has been far less dialogue with India as a civilisation, with the ideas that sit underneath the state and the people who carry them across generations and oceans. The visit is an attempt at that second conversation.

Four things give it weight.

The first is rarity. The office of Sarsanghchalak is defined by a deliberate avoidance of personal prominence, and its holder is not a travelling figure. A public address abroad is therefore an unusual event by the movement's own standards, and choosing to make one in the centenary year is a considered decision.

The second is that the diaspora has come of age. Indian origin communities in all three countries have grown in size, professional standing and civic participation, and they are no longer only recipients of cultural transmission from India. They are participants in the public life of their own societies. The proposition offered by the movement is that a community can be wholly committed to the country it lives in while remaining rooted in the civilisation it comes from, and that such a community becomes a bridge rather than a boundary.

The third is that the exchange runs in both directions. The coalition receiving Dr Bhagwat is the other half of it. Two hundred organisations that have spent decades running food banks, tutoring programmes, blood drives and relief efforts in American cities are not an audience assembled to listen passively. They have their own century of practice to describe.

The fourth is that the questions are shared. Social harmony across communities, families that hold together under strain, ecological responsibility, cultural rootedness among children raised far from where their grandparents were born, and citizens who understand duty as the counterpart of rights are open questions in the United States, Canada and Britain as much as in India. That is what makes the encounter a dialogue rather than a lecture.



VI. Offerings to the World

The centenary framing gathers the movement's work into Panch Parivartan, the Five Transformations. Each begins with the individual, passes through the family, and extends outward to the nation and to humanity. That sequence is the method as much as the order, being change that starts in a household and spreads by example rather than change announced from above.



Samajik Samrasta

Social harmony and cohesion
Inter-community gatherings,
the celebration of festivals
together, sabhhoj, temple entry
Universal: every society.

01

Kutumb Prabodhan

Family awakening

Affection, respect, the discipline of lifelong learning, the
transmission of cultural memory across generations.

Universal: families everywhere.



02

Paryavaran

Environmental stewardship

Saving water, planting trees, organic
farming, conserving local water bodies,
recovery of kinship with the living world.

Universal: the planetary home.



03

“
INDIVIDUAL
TO FAMILY
TO NATION
TO HUMANITY
”

Swa

Selfhood and self-reliance, Atmanirbharta

Culture, languages and products of one's
own; self-respect and capacity as the
foundation for generous engagement
with the world.

Universal: every confident nation.



04

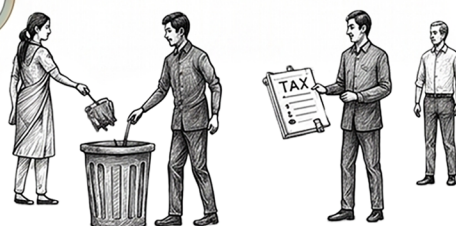
05

Nagrik Kartavya

Civic duty

Following traffic laws, paying taxes, keeping public
places clean; civic character as the indispensable
counterpart of democratic institutions.

Universal: every working democracy.



Samajik Samrasta, social harmony. In any large and diverse society, difference can harden into distance. This work asks the individual to regard every other member of society as kin, and works through common gatherings, shared festivals and the ordinary business of daily life until inherited barriers thin and friendships form across them. Harmony understood this way is not the suppression of diversity but the flowering of unity within it.

Kutumb Prabodhan, awakening the family. Families rest on affection and trust, and everywhere under modern conditions they are under strain. The work begins inside the household, in respect among parents, children and elders, in the habit of lifelong learning, and in the passing on of cultural memory. Nations are made of families, and families that come apart leave a nation weaker than any adversary can.

Paryavaran, environment. Outcomes depend finally on how individuals, families and communities behave towards the natural world, and not only on protocols framed at distant conferences. The emphasis is on what ordinary people can actually do, which is to use less energy, save water, plant trees, take up organic farming and restore the pond in their own locality. Adopted by one household these are small things. Adopted by millions they are a considerable force. The sensibility they draw on is old in Indic civilisation and has counterparts in traditional cultures the world over, being a kinship with the living world rather than a licence over it.

Swa, selfhood and self reliance. Swa begins with an individual's relationship to his own cultural inheritance and a family's transmission of its language and traditions. It is not the closing of doors. It is the maintenance of self respect and capacity. A society with its own languages, its own products and its own cultural memory meets other societies from a position of dignity, and cooperation, trade and intellectual exchange proceed on a stronger footing because of it.

Nagrik Kartavya, civic duty. Democratic institutions, wherever they exist, require citizens of character in order to work. This asks the individual to take the ordinary practices of citizenship seriously, treating them as duties owed rather than impositions borne. Without civic character, formal institutions turn brittle. With it, they hold.

Beneath these five sits the philosophical contribution the movement regards as its most distinctive. In 1965 Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya propounded Ekatma Manav Darshan, Integral Humanism, holding that body, mind, intellect and soul must advance together as inseparable dimensions of a single human enterprise. From it flowed Antyodaya, the rise of the last person, which has shaped Indian thinking on inclusive development for sixty years.

Upadhyaya was asking whether the systems then contending for the world's future gave a full enough account of the human person. In an age when material progress has reached unprecedented levels and the search for meaning has grown correspondingly urgent, the question speaks with renewed force.

Two features of the method deserve stating plainly. The movement has worked by habit, lived practice and example across generations rather than by reform imposed from above, which is slow and durable and avoids the resistance that imposed reform provokes. And it has been done without compulsory membership, without outside funding and without anyone being paid for the work.

The framing of Panch Parivartan is recent. The work is a hundred years old. The principles are not particular to Bharat, and they are offered freely to every society asking the same questions.



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