RSS AT 100

# A HUNDRED YEARS OF SEWA: WHAT I LEARNT WRITING ABOUT THE RSS

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In 1925, on the day of Vijayadashami, Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar gathered a handful of young men in Nagpur. There was no building, no funding and no big announcement. There was a ground, a saffron flag and an idea: that a nation is only as strong as the character of its ordinary people.

A hundred years later, that idea has become the largest voluntary organisation in the world. I grew up in Nagpur, a short distance from where it started, and for most of my life I took it for granted. When I sat down to write *RSS: 100 Years of Selfless Service*, I wanted to understand one thing: how did an organisation with no salaries and no glamour keep going for a century?

The answer I found was one word. Sewa.

## Service without a receipt

Most of the work the Sangh's volunteers do never makes the news. When floods come, swayamsevaks are often among the first to reach villages, carrying food and rebuilding homes. When an earthquake strikes, they dig through rubble alongside the army. During the pandemic, while most of us stayed home, volunteers ran kitchens, carried patients and performed last rites for people whose own families could not come.

None of them asked for credit. That surprised me more than anything else while I was researching the book. In an age where every good deed is photographed and posted, here were thousands of people who simply did the work and went home.

## The shakha is the secret

People outside the Sangh often ask what happens at a shakha. The honest answer is: very little that looks impressive. An hour of games, exercise, a song and a short talk. But repeated every day, for years, it builds something rare. It builds people who show up.

That is the real engine. Schools in tribal areas, hostels for children from the Northeast, blood banks, relief camps: all of these grew from people who first learnt discipline and duty on a dusty ground at six in the morning.

## Why I wrote it for young readers

I wrote the book for readers between ten and eighteen years old. Many people asked me why. My reason is simple. Our children know a great deal about cricket stars and film actors. Very few of them know the names of the volunteers who built the institutions around them.

I wanted a young reader to finish the book and think: I can also serve. Not in a grand way. In my street, my school, my city. That is how the Sangh itself began: with a few boys in Nagpur who decided to do something for their country.

## What a century teaches us

The RSS has been praised and criticised in equal measure over the last hundred years. Any organisation of its size will be. But the one thing even its critics rarely question is the dedication of its volunteers.

For me, that is the lesson of the centenary. Nations are not built only by governments or by a few great leaders. They are built by lakhs of ordinary people who give an hour a day, without asking what they get back.

If my book encourages even a few young readers to become one of those people, it will have done its job.



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