

Hindutva Nation Abroad

STICHTING THE LONDON STORY

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Stichting the London Story is a diaspora-led non-profit organisation based in the Netherlands. We are committed to defending human rights of minorities and migrants within and outside of India.

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This is a preliminary report curating publicly available sources on some of the flagged issues with HSS. Members of Foundation The London Story has taken utmost care in verifying the quality of the sources, however, **we do not assume any liability towards claims made in the secondary literature that is quoted in the report.** The report is freely available for further research and investigations.

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Introduction

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) describes itself as “a voluntary, non-profit, social and cultural organization [that] aims to organize the Hindu community in order to preserve, practice and promote Hindu ideals and values” [1]. It is currently active and receiving funds from 45 countries and boasts 750 branches [2]. Each national HSS is autonomous, though there are global coordinators [3]. HSS is very active in the English speaking world and problems have been flagged in UK, USA and Canada as summarized below. In Europe, in addition to UK, branches can be found in Germany (<http://hssgermany.org/>), Norway (<https://www.hssnorway.org/>), Denmark (<https://www.facebook.com/hssdenmark>), Finland (<https://www.facebook.com/HSSFinland/>) and so on. It is common knowledge that HSS is closely associated with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an extreme Hindu-nationalist group in India. While in India, RSS claims HSS as its international wing, HSS abroad usually ostentatiously distances itself from RSS.

While the far-right nature of RSS is well documented, HSS is usually careful to publicly maintain a veneer of moderation and to distance itself from RSS. Below, we first list the issues flagged concerning HSS, and then evidence of HSS-RSS equivalence, finishing with a brief note on presence of HSS in Germany

Flagged Problems

1. Hate speech

Hate speech has been flagged in multiple occasions, the most striking being those revealed by a sting operation by ITV in UK. A 2015 sting operation footage in UK showed a teacher on camera making anti-Muslim and Christian remarks to students at a camp

organised HSS [4][5]. Teacher’s words: included statements like: “To destroy the Hindu history is the secret conspiracy of the Christians.” and “You see, when it comes to Islam, they are the world’s worst religion and they don’t have common sense to find out what is humanity.” [6][7]. In the aftermath of the incidence, the UK Charity Commission warned “RSS must have no influence or control over the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)” [8].

No specific report of flagged hate-speech in the USA could be located on the internet, but general reports on how far-right extreme Hindu groups generate hate in the USA is documented [12] [13]. An important document comes from academic and historian of ancient Indian history, Prof. Audrey Truschke, who reports how she has been subject to anti-Semitic insults from the Hindu far-right, however this was not explicitly tied to HSS [14].

In the Canada an uptick of general hate speech in the social media discourse was reported. It is also found that in 2020 a School Board member was removed due to hate speech [10][11].

As a foundation we are now starting to document online-hate speech by Hindutva supporters.

2. Interference in elections

Right-wing and far-right Hindu groups have reportedly tried to influence elections in all three countries, with varying success.

In 2019, HSS, through a sister organization called Overseas Friends of BJP UK, tried to influence the Indian diaspora to vote in a particular way in the last UK general elections[15][16].

In July 2019 Canadian intelligence officials sounded the same alarm: India’s ruling Hindu

nationalist BJP was influencing the Canadian election through the diaspora[16].

In USA, Tulsi Gabbard, the ex-aspiring democratic candidate and one-time potential running mate for democratic nominee Joe Biden, was openly supported by the right-wing Hindu diaspora. RSS/HSS financing Preston Kulkarni's campaign for US Congress in Houston, Texas RSS Funds Padma Kuppa for Michigan State House of Representatives (second term) [27] [28].

The interference of Hindu groups in the recent national elections in Canada and UK were reported. It typically consists of the Indian diaspora trying to persuade their compatriots to switch their traditional allegiance on the basis of perceived proximity of the different political parties to the ruling BJP party in India – the strategy was reportedly not very successful though it did diminish margins in some places [15]. The involvement in the US elections was more overt – with open support – vocal and financial - for a specific candidate [17]. Similar financing is going on for upcoming house elections [27,28]. Ref. [27] explains the quid-pro-quid nature of such funding, giving example of how RSS-funded politicians facilitated the rehabilitation of Modi in the USA after he was banned following the Gujarat riots.

3. Improper use of funds

HSS and its sister organizations often collect funds, ostentatiously for charity. But misuse of such funds have been widely reported. The money raised in the wake of earthquake in Gujarat was reported to have been misused for far-right political activities, some reports going as far as to link it directly to the infamous Gujarat riots which took place right afterwards. One report says: “The extremist RSS's front organizations have received millions of pounds raised from the British public. These funds were collected by the Leicester-based registered

charity, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and its fundraising arm Sewa International” [22]. Very similar allegation emerged for funding from USA “... receiving millions of dollars from corporates in the United States to instigate communal violence and propagate the Hindutva ideology in Gujarat and other parts of the country. This was exposed by the Campaign to Stop Funding Hate (SFH) ... have identified the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) as the key fund-raiser for the Sangh Parivar in the U.S. SFH says that the IDRF, which was set up to provide funds for ‘relief and development work’, has been funding RSS-initiated projects all over India.” [23] Indian minorities abroad have expressed concern about HSS (and RSS), specifically the growing links between Indian diplomats abroad and the HSS/RSS, that undermines their neutrality [24]. Similarly, the links between elected representatives of the host country and the local HSS was flagged [25,26].

HSS / RSS link

Though HSS claims that they have no formal ties with RSS, it is an open secret that they are in fact a RSS subsidiary as is clear from the following sources: “A new report titled ‘Hindu Nationalism in the United States’ released by SACW (South Asia Citizens Web) states that US based charitable organizations are pumping billions of dollars to India's Hindu nationalist RSS & Company.”

[<https://www.worldbulletin.net/asia-pacific/report-shows-us-hindu-nationalists-funding-indias-rssh140043.html>]

“This would seem like a promising recruitment pool for the RSS, though the regular attendance for US HSS [Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the overseas counterpart of the RSS in the US] shakhas as of 2017 is only between 5,000 and 7,000 (that number would increase several times if one counted occasional attendance or participation in HSS programmes and parivar-

supported projects).”

[<https://qz.com/india/1350285/rss-and-the-spread-of-hindu-nationalism-in-us/>]

“...may have neglected to mention that the HSS is the international wing of India’s Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. A uniformed paramilitary with an estimated six million members, the RSS has been accused of violence against Indian minorities, an allegation repeatedly raised by hundreds of furious commenters on Facebook and Twitter.”

[<https://www.sikh24.com/2020/02/14/rss-lecture-to-indiana-police-department-sparks-outrage/>] “...support from RSS/ HSS/ BJP Hindutwa Extremists in USA” [<https://world-defense.com/threads/bjp-in-indiarss-in-the-us-the-american-sangh%E2%80%99s-affair-with-tulsi-gabbard.7083/>] “ So RSS disowns HSS? "We don't call it Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) overseas as It is not Indian soil. So we can't use the word Rashtriya. We call it 'Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh' (HSS)" ”

[https://twitter.com/zoo_bear/status/1177913928950534144] (Tweet from Mohammed Zubair , co-founder of respected fact-checkers @AltNews)

HSS in Europe

Germany: Started in 2014. Currently chapters in Hamburg, Frankfurt, Darmstadt-dieburg, Munich, Mannheim, Berlin, Dresden, Düsseldorf. Activities include “Balagokulum” - children’s forum to “enable Hindu children in Germany to appreciate their cultural roots and learn Hindu values”. They raise funds through voluntary contributions [<http://hssgermany.org/faq>]. Ostentatiously a ‘cultural’ organization but admits “HSS is ideologically inspired by the RSS”.

HSS Munich chapter recently invited a member of the Bavarian parliament from the Green Party to give a speech. The concerned politician, who had been unaware of the far-right nature of HSS

when she accepted the invitation, ultimately decided to cancel the appointment

<https://twitter.com/FriedrichPieter/status/1281301229759426560> This incidence underlines the growing confidence of HSS in Germany and its desire to gain legitimacy beyond the far-right circles.

Sweden: The face-book page of HSS-Sweden is unusually open in advertising its ideological leanings. It displays a short cartoon film on expansionist dreams of the RSS

[<https://www.facebook.com/1592731247636319/videos/782574809226082/>]. It also features a video of the RSS chief

[<https://www.facebook.com/HSS-Sweden-1592731247636319/>].

Norway: The Norway branch seems also very active and advertises its charity work and calls for donations

[<https://hssnorway.org/categories/sewa-day-2012>] (See UK and USA examples above for potential for misuse of funds). They regularly organize camps to teach “organizational skills” and “about Hindu religion” (see example from UK above for use of such camps for indoctrination of very young children in anti-Christian and Islamophobic doctrine).

Denmark and Finland: The Danish and Finnish branches organize weekly meetings and cultural events and judging by its Facebook page, is less overtly active in propaganda and indoctrination than its other Scandinavian counterparts.

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