



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice
India

India – IND36053 – *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS)* – Political Conflict
28 January 2010

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- 6 **Please provide information related to RSS and “Shakka” (Shakha).**

A 2007 UK House of Commons Library research paper states that the *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* (National Volunteers’ Union or RSS) “was formed in 1925 as a mass movement for the promotion and propagation of Hindu culture and values”. It has been banned twice in its history.¹

An earlier 2002 Human Rights Watch report, on communal violence in Gujarat, noted that since its inception the RSS “has propagated a militant form of Hindu nationalism which it promotes as the sole basis for national identity in India”.²

According to the UK House of Commons Library paper many see the RSS as the head of the *Sangh Parivar*, a group of Hindu nationalist organisations. *Sangh Parivar* organisations “espouse a Hindu nationalist agenda based upon the concept of ‘Hindutva’, which views India as a Hindu nation that should be run according to Hindu precepts”. The political wing of the *Sangh Parivar* is the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP). However, the RSS does not unconditionally support the BJP.³

¹ Harrison, T., Jones, S., Lunn, J., Smith, B., Taylor, C., & Youngs, T. 2007, *A political introduction to India*, UK Parliament website, International Affairs and Defence Section – House of Commons Library, 2 May, p.17 <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2007/rp07-041.pdf> – Accessed 11 October 2007 – Attachment 20.

² Human Rights Watch 2002, “*We Have No Orders to Save You*”: *State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*, Vol.14, No.3, April, p.39 – Attachment 21.

³ Harrison, T., Jones, S., Lunn, J., Smith, B., Taylor, C., & Youngs, T. 2007, *A political introduction to India*, UK Parliament website, International Affairs and Defence Section – House of Commons Library, 2 May, p.49 <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2007/rp07-041.pdf> – Accessed 11 October 2007 – Attachment 20.

“*Shakha*” in Hindi means “branch”.⁴ RSS *shakhas* are branches of the RSS.⁵ A December 2003 report published by the International Initiative for Justice, in the context of a feminist analysis of the 2002 Gujarat riots, describes the RSS and *shakha* in the following terms:

...The RSS organization sees itself as a hierarchical family.

Its basic unit is the local *shakha* (branch). The *shakha* meets daily and consists of 50-100 members (*swayamsevaks*--volunteers). Although the typical *shakha* includes all age groups from young boys to men over forty, the majority of participants are usually between 15-25 years of age. A *shakha* meeting lasts for one hour, during which RSS ideology and values are inculcated by means of Sanskrit (language rooted in Brahmin culture), prayers of devotion to the Motherland (*Bharat Mata*), traditional Indian group games, traditional Hindu physical and martial arts drills, and group discussions of ideal moral qualities as well as ways to serve the Motherland. Participation in the highly structured *shakha* meeting and its rituals has the character of an act of religious devotional service (*bhakti*) to the holy, all nurturing *Bharat Mata* and the great Hindu family. *Shakha* participation also develops close personal bonds between *swayamsevaks* as well as ties of loyalty to RSS ideals and leaders...

... The central RSS headquarters are in Nagpur, Maharashtra, with regional, state, and local divisions reaching down to the *shakha* base...

...The young men and women in RSS *shakhas* are given physical training in calisthenics and drills. Across North India, the RSS *shakhas* are also linked to wrestling gymnasiums, the *akhadas*...⁶

The number of RSS *shakhas* have reportedly declined over the last few years to 43,905 *shakhas* in 30,015 places in 2008-2009 (January).⁷ Sources also indicate that the RSS now has online *shakha* sessions.⁸

7 Are there any reports of conflict between members of rival political parties at a local level and ongoing pursuit of members?

There are reports of conflict between rival political parties at a local level and violent retaliatory action is taken by party members, and sources suggest that retaliatory attacks normally occur within a relatively short space of time.

⁴ International Initiative for Justice 2003, *Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat*, December, p.163, Online Volunteers website <http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/ijg/2003/annexures.pdf> – Accessed 13 February 2009 – Attachment 22.

⁵ International Initiative for Justice 2003, *Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat*, December, p.152 Online Volunteers website <http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/ijg/2003/annexures.pdf> – Accessed 13 February 2009 – Attachment 22.

⁶ International Initiative for Justice 2003, *Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat*, December, pp.162-164, Online Volunteers website <http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/ijg/2003/annexures.pdf> – Accessed 13 February 2009 – Attachment 22.

⁷ Ramaseshan, Radhika 2009, ‘Khaki goes chic’, *The Telegraph*, 18 October http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091018/jsp/7days/story_11628344.jsp – Accessed 20 January 2010 – Attachment 23.

⁸ Ramaseshan, Radhika 2009, ‘Khaki goes chic’, *The Telegraph*, 18 October http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091018/jsp/7days/story_11628344.jsp – Accessed 20 January 2010 – Attachment 23; ‘Cyber-savvy Sangh plans to set up e-shakhas’ 2010, *Hindustan Times*, 11 January – Attachment 24.

Reports of party political conflict and retaliation are set out below.

The most recent news article, in January 2010 in *The Hindu*, stated that five CPI-M workers were stabbed by suspected BJP workers in Mahe, Kerala. The attack “raised apprehensions about retaliatory attacks in the area known for political violence”. The police had registered a case of attempted murder against six BJP activists and were investigating the matter.⁹

In November 2009 *The Economic Times* reported clashes between the Trinamool Congress and the CPM (Communist Party of India – Marxist) in three villages in West Bengal. The article did not report any arrests by police.¹⁰

In December 2008 suspected CPI-M activists set alight a defunct office of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) in Koyilandy taluk. Violent incidents were also said to have occurred elsewhere. The violence was reportedly in retaliation to an attack the day before on a CPI-M office by IUML workers. A vehicle transporting IUML workers was also said to have been attacked by Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) activists near Koyilandy. The news article noted that the police registered cases against 200 people.¹¹

In July 2008 two BJP workers were stabbed by suspected CPI-M workers at Chembra in Kannur district. The stabbing was said to be in retaliation to an attack by BJP men on a CPI-M worker two days earlier. The article did not report any arrests by police.¹²

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⁹ ‘Tension at Palloor area in Mahe’ 2010, *The Hindu*, 4 January
<http://beta.thehindu.com/news/states/kerala/article75362.ece> – Accessed 21 January 2010 – Attachment 25.

¹⁰ ‘Trinamool, CPM clash in LS over Maoist violence’ 2009, *The Economic Times*, 27 November – Attachment 26.

¹¹ ‘Political violence spreads to Koyilandy taluk’ 2008, *The Hindu*, 3 December – Attachment 27.

¹² ‘2 BJP workers stabbed in Kerala’ 2008, *UNI (United News of India)*, 8 July – Attachment 28.

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21. Human Rights Watch 2002, “*We Have No Orders to Save You*”: *State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*, Vol.14, No.3, April.
22. International Initiative for Justice 2003, *Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat*, December, Online Volunteers website
<http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/iiig/2003/annexures.pdf> – Accessed 13 February 2009.
23. Ramaseshan, Radhika 2009, ‘Khaki goes chic’, *The Telegraph*, 18 October
http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091018/jsp/7days/story_11628344.jsp – Accessed 20 January 2010.
24. ‘Cyber-savvy Sangh plans to set up e-shakhas’ 2010, *Hindustan Times*, 11 January.
25. ‘Tension at Palloor area in Mahe’ 2010, *The Hindu*, 4 January
<http://beta.thehindu.com/news/states/kerala/article75362.ece> – Accessed 21 January 2010.
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27. ‘Political violence spreads to Koyilandy taluk’ 2008, *The Hindu*, 3 December.
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