

Original Article

Veer Savarkar: Revolutionary Nationalism, Leadership, and Contributions to India's Freedom Movement

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Abstract

This paper examines the life, leadership, revolutionary ideology, and enduring legacy of Veer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, one of the most influential and debated figures in India's freedom movement. It traces his journey from his early years in Bhagur to his role as a revolutionary nationalist, political thinker, writer, and organizer. The study explores Savarkar's contributions to the struggle against British colonial rule through his advocacy of armed resistance, organizational leadership, and influential literary works, including The First War of Indian Independence 1857. It further analyzes the evolution of his political philosophy, particularly the concept of Hindutva, and its impact on Indian political and social discourse. The paper also discusses the controversies surrounding his ideological positions and public legacy, highlighting the contrasting interpretations of his contributions by historians and political thinkers. By presenting a balanced overview of his revolutionary activities, leadership strategies, and intellectual influence, the study emphasizes Savarkar's significant role in shaping India's nationalist movement while acknowledging the continuing debates regarding his ideas in contemporary India.

Keywords: Veer Savarkar, Revolutionary Nationalism, Indian Freedom Movement, Hindutva, Leadership, Political Thought, Revolutionary Movement, Nationalism, Freedom Struggle, V.D. Savarkar.

Introduction

Prologue: A Storm in the Native Land

A storm is raging across the native land; clouds, heavy with rain, pass swiftly through the sky, bright flashes of lightning light up the heavens, the tumultuous roar of thunder is heard, and the wild wind is forcing open the windows and doors of houses. Sitting on the terrace of a small house in a tiny corner of a secluded village, a youth is watching the storm with a thrilling wonder. He, like the winds, is discontented; and he, too, is longing to be free. But where can he go? The day dreaming is suddenly interrupted by his father, who comes to tell him that he is wanted. His brother has just returned from prison; an offer of bail has been made, and while some of the leaders are deciding to accept it, others strongly oppose it. The youth's brother, on the other hand, asks a similar group of young men if they would like to help make a diversion away from the city—away from the windows and doors and the keen eyes of the police.

Perhaps it is the storm, perhaps it is just the natural course of youth, but all are of the opinion that the city is too tame. Where can they go? Old books as yet unopened promise escape, and vague talk of a reenactment of older days arches their brows with that lost look which is so alluring. The explanation of the armies of the lion and the tiger are exciting on the longest, enacting the daring, feverish of a pair of wee ones is playing in a corner. The elder lad has grown weary of his dramatic fancies and has hastened off to more manly pursuits.

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No wonder; a fearsome voice has just bellowed across the room, demanding a re-enactment of the hunt, but huge, horrible pirates have also come to life on the border of the painting. Visions of heaving sails, bent oars, and a bolt-just-to-be-released also suggest more distant scenes, but they too have paled behind those other hints—the swimming across the stormy waters to join the enemy and the warning of their arrival in native; and it is these that have been clamored for again and again.

All this the youth knows only too well, and his night-time thoughts too end with the mighty new land. The native land is fertile no longer; disturbed, shocked by violence, it flings back again and again the tired footfalls of a reckless people. That stormy wind of the heavens is racing desperately to the sea; the black clouds are gathering and thickening at even; the springing, voicing stream brings news of crimes and hurry across its opens and passes, and wants to reach the sea, the bathing place—at present, the centre of all light. Like that mighty wind, he too wants at any cost to join the fleeing clouds—to gather refreshing water and make known, by its steady lapping on the shores of the distant land, the first greenness of spring, the watchful hospitality of old. But dark clouds of more than natural dangers, Crime, Sorrow, Death snake across the way; visible wings, encaged sense, waver and are frightened from adventure...

1. Birth and Awakening: The Early Flame

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was born on May 28, 1883, in a small coastal Maharashtrian village called Bhagur, near Nashik. Destined to become one of India's foremost leaders, Savarkar shone brilliantly since childhood, overflowing with curiosity, compassion, and intelligence. He was the youngest of the five children of Damodar and Ganga Savarkar. The father was an independent school teacher, known for his non-conformist approach to education, while the mother was of a traditional family, restraining her children from learning the English language, for her belief that it would corrupt them. This upbringing helped Savarkar imbibe Western Enlightenment ideas in a Country still infused with a pusillanimous mind-set.

At the early age of six, Savarkar's mind was electrified with revolutionary nationalism when his school-friend narrated the story of Raja Shivaji to him. He wanted to be like Shivaji and chased the British soldiers, who marched past his school, as they carried with them both the idea and the Britain flag of foreign rule. Another friend introduced him to Professor J. T. Lobo, an idealist who incentivised him to dream, believe, and work for an ideal world, devoid of distinctions and full of love. However,

the dream was rudely shattered when his friend died of cholera. Nature's oneness was an idea that now came alive in Savarkar's mind. Even his environment inspired his first act of revolt. The Savarkar family were goat-farmers who were ordered to halt the trade with the fear that they may spread the infection towards the end of a cholera epidemic. Vinayak participated in his first protest along with his brothers.

The Seeds of Revolutionary Thought

The ideas of many revolutionaries were imbued with the spirit of their times. Savarkar was no exception. Yet, the concept of all-round revolt that emerged from his thought and later became the foundation of his action was inspired far more by his intimate connection with the people than his immersion in prevailing intellectual trends. While the Arya Samaj, the influence of European philosophers and revolutionaries such as Karl Marx, Mazzini and Bakunin undoubtedly inspired Savarkar's revolutionary thought, viewed in the context of his achievements, they were but seeds sown in an already receptive mind, nurtured to fruition by experience and action.

It was, of course, Bal Gangadhar Tilak who, by throwing open the doors of the national movement to the masses, both ideologically and organizationally, provided Savarkar with the opportunity to liberate his revolutionary energies. The very same circumstances, however, that compelled peers like Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh to become leaders of the masses and helped several of them avoid the annoying constraints placed upon the declared revolutionary movement also compelled Savarkar to seek refuge in a radical underground, as his aspirations exceeded the latitude that the non-violence led by Tilak offered. His radical nationalism found its logical culmination in the Galilee Chapel statement and the publication in 1908 of a fundamental, comprehensive and systematic discourse detailing the full implications of riot and revolt as a political doctrine: *The First War of Indian Independence 1857*.

The Path of Revolution: Imprisoned Resolve and Exile

Savarkar's commitment to revolutionary action became irrevocable after being sentenced to two life imprisonments—over two decades of painstaking hunger strikes and finally being sent into exile. The rigours of solitary confinement sharpened his will and inner discipline, even as the inability to engage in physical action left a damaging void, which he could only partially fill by spearheading the Hindustan Republican Association. While imprisoned in 1909 Savarkar

contemplated one of his greatest philosophical triumphs, described as the “deepest consciousness” of his life, and penned the famous Vande Mataram. Thereafter, his revolutionary thought evolved in two distinctive and interrelated ways: the private exploration of what he considered the main Indian philosophical Darshana and a gradual evolution towards the concept of hateful active resistance against a cruel and tyrannical enemy.

Exile from India proved the most gratifying transformation of his life. Scapegrace, witty, irresponsibly daring, self-indulgent, freewheeling—all the most dangerous characteristics of a revolutionist in the gaiety of his white heat turned into gravitas of the Heptapod. In exile, Savarkar’s mind progressively turned towards Hindutva, aided by a series of stimulating encounters with Western intellectuals. He developed a complex philosophical system centred on his own Darshana—a “biological theory of Hindudom” postulating that the Hindus constituted a distinct entity living in a culture area bounded by the Himalayas, the sea, and the Indo-Gangetic alluvium. Theirs was a collective soul designed for a lacy net of non-militaristic and non-imperialist life, but over the ages corrupted by harms of conquest, exile, and conversion into hostile colony. Their real satisfaction and supreme ideal lay in exterminating or denying the right of existence to those communities which denied the right of existence to the Hindus.

The Vulture of Vengeance: The Veer Within

Fear is not an incomprehensible creature, the grotesque monster of folkloric terror; nor is it an intangible shadow dwelling among us. It can take on human form, yet it is distinct from humankind. Within every person exists a collective conscious more malevolent than any fictional adversary. At every moment, this inner beast watches, analyzing and incessantly attempting to overpower the individual by nurturing the intelligence of the senses. It already leads millions astray, enshrouding them in the fallacy of comfort and security. Such was the inner battle confronted by the magnificent white king vulture perched on the mountain’s cliff; yet, the battle of the ungainly moth remained lost long before it even began. Fear, Self-Surrender, and Bravery infatuated the moth with their outer shells; the hunger for real, internal fruit, intoxicated it. Starved of overindulgence, the moth was now no longer confined to the inner battle.

Even the pregnant vulture, after five days of vigil-waiting, tasted the deliciously holy flesh of its own living-fledged chick. Which aspect of the inner struggle can the untroubled individual conveniently explain? Savarkar—a voracious

reader, an oft-astrified and crucified author and playwright—termed the sense of fear the Vulture of Vengeance: it needs to be as intensely cultivated, sharpened, and sublimely fed with natural instinct as need the instincts of Self-Surrender and Bravery within the moth. For the last-named senses have yet to adapted to nature, and without external support, must forever remain wing-burrs—roasted, never flying—if one cannot shift within the ease of nature!

Intensively agonizing over the optimum state for oneself, it confirms what was a forgotten, once-rich sensation during childhood—the true form of Inner Peace that incited so many daring to venture beyond their limits. Savarkar’s own explanation of it is still ideal—the initial peacefully complicated yet, if accomplished, guidance of Fear’s denuded imitation and blind lighting. Every real surpassing of this term opens intuitively and gradually to pleasant adventure, causing the stillborn man to wake up! Hence Savarkar muses, ‘If the Devil is but the mirror image of God, it must likewise be but matter-energy, the finer avenues of the real thought-conflict that creates the real balance—what can any piece of Art be more valuable than that?’

Leadership in a Fledgling Movement: Theory and Practice

Leadership entails more than inspiring rhetoric, conceptual clarity, the ability to mobilize masses, and the courage to endure suffering for a cause. Savarkar exercised command over bodies and minds through careful choice of words and analysis of the target audience. His directions to networks of small secret cells were specific: every revolutionary was asked to action in a place where he was born or educated, where he had the most influence, and where the revolutionary was emotionally or mentally attached. Such a liaison produced a profound effect among the local people. This aspect of Savarkar’s leadership and organization was indispensable at the initial stage when any mass action would receive a severe blow from the British, and the bulk of the revolutionaries were abroad. Both his motives and methods were clearly set out in Hunkar. Savarkar felt that there was a tendency to adopt a liberal attitude in every aspect, particularly in the immediate political needs of India. Hence, he used the word “Hunkar” to question people and force them to think.

The Congress and the Muslim League had given support to the British War. Its internal policy was coined with the welfare of the people; expectations from the British government were growing among the masses and other political parties. The best thing a person could do was to support the British effort in the foreign field in

political terms while gearing up for both its importance and secret preparations for its conclusion on Indian soil. All verbal preparations for the ending need not be public, but the preparations for the discontent, for achieving an end other than what was being planned, had to be the life and breath of all these groups and parties.

Organizing Ideologies: From Secret Cells to Public Voice

Organizational principles centered on a trio of targets—those who ruled India, the foreign government orchestrating minority and majority vulture play, and those wishing to establish Hindu-Hindu unity to claim India for its rightful Hindu owners through mutual Hindu sacrifices—backed the practical methods chosen by Savarkar. Secret cells employing these methods had begun to take shape by 1906, eventuating in a series of different secret revolutionary organizations that used separate names to save the nation from arrest if and when discovered. Later, when the heat of war had cooled, these groups morphed into the stronger Hindu Mahasabha with a large mass following but short-sighted, intolerant and self-destructive leadership. The original revolutionary approach was out, replaced by Hindutva ideology focusing primarily on Muslim appeasement as the source of all the nation's downfall and danger.

Hindutva and the Hindu Mahasabha had thus long occupied the centre stage. The ubiquitous presence of capitals or branches, activity, news and exhortation of Shaurya Sampraday continued now with even greater growth, happiness and fulfilment. Hindutva-Hindu Mahasabha, however, made their own captains and close comrades blind to these other energies and influences and witnesses. All the same, the vulture-peace- vultured land of Hindus, the fact of the bullets falling always on the Hindu Raj in greater peril to Hengland, hidden by Hengland-hirons—all hidden. In actual practice, when the danger-line passes beyond a point, all-sided energy, popularity, unity, provides breathing-space, and helps save India for Hindus or Hindustan for Hitler.

The Ideologue and the Field Leader: Savarkar in Action

The preceding analysis elucidated Savarkar's ideological contributions and the guiding principles for his movement. Yet every thinker's ideas require instrumental support, and Savarkar was no exception. An eager doer, he endeavored to implement his political philosophy from the outset. His vision came alive through V. D. Savarkar's organization of God and Nation and the activities of his peers, both formal and informal. His enthusiasms, boldness, and clear-eyed

understanding of man and society drew others into action—in religion, education, politics, and social life.

These deeds are often obscured by the lure of Savarkar's written word and the extraordinary turn of events surrounding him. Nevertheless, whether articulating ideas or concretizing them, Savarkar received help, making a crucial difference. An army ensures principled conduct in the field, and the Hindutva ideology offered guiding principles. As in any theater, organization and precise direction matter enormously; yet success ultimately hinges on the quality of the performers. For Savarkar, the best actor remained unnamed, and no directing hand pushed or pulled. Individual interest, creativity, and vigor broke every boundary.

The evolution of the free India Society, too, elucidated the interplay between Savarkar's ideas and the progress of the early revolutionary movement. The organization sought to awaken a feeling of independence through youthful energy, proposing the reestablishment of the nation under God and the lively creation of a new, powerful, and free nation of Aryans. In a memorial to the first president and S. G. Wagh's internal propaganda, Savarkar confided: "Our badge should depict the vulture, and we should throw ourselves into the fight like the vulture of vengeance, soar high above the storms, and yet dash down upon all external and internal enemies without mercy or fear."

Battles, Dissent, and Discourse: The Public Arena

A storm uprooted familiar equations, shaking a political landscape deemed stable. The demand for a radical departure from the past confused many, including Savarkar. Defensive and offensive trends often existed side by side, yet bold action nevertheless left an inevitable mark. Dissenting voices among the rising generation confirmed the growing schism, giving rise to private polemic and bitter public battle. Different aims and methods—particularly in the sensitive area of Hindu-Muslim relations—generated a wide range of opinion among younger and older patriots alike.

Savarkar's published work was not a casual aside to active politics. These books and pamphlets were not only an expression but also amply served to popularize his viewpoint and make it understood by all sections of the people—that they should join in the approaching revolt for liberty, as well as hatred for the Englishmen. Wherever and whenever he could do so, he entered the lists as a champion of the Hindus, attacked the Muslim League and the Pan-Islamic movement, and opposed any movement which was, in effect, a

device for the betrayal of Hindu interests to secure Muslim help, whether in the form of partition or joint cabinet schemes, or any other. He and his supporters felt strongly on the subject of Maryada Purushottama Committee reached a compromise regarding the Rameshwar incident, and his criticism in the Bharat Mata carried a raj for both Congressmen and Government, yet he was one of the few who showed independence and adhered to an uncompromising attitude.

Contributions to the Freedom Cause: Literature, Advocacy, and Mobilization

Surya Sen's declaration on 7 July 1908 condemned Savarkar's public declarations, calling for resistance to foreign rule and the use of terrorism. A year earlier, Sen had commended and explained the Banaras Congress resolution advocating the swaraj of the Indian people by all means, including the most violent. Whether or not the upholder of Hindutva thought this meant, when commenting on the revolutionaries' attack on Warren Hastings, "exhuming the spittle-drenched memory of a court prose-beggared ... hack," is a quibble. In a bigger spirit, in which Sen's crowning literary achievement had to be written, the veneration of revolutionaries abolished scornful distinctions.

Savarkar's revolutionary work encompassed not only self-propelling literature and advocacy at great personal cost. The unorganized federal structure of modern India made swaraj accessible without mass mobilization: the British staged ritualized general elections in a polity bereft of Swadeshi. The homogeneous, organized continent and its still partially united Eastern This desire became a mass desire, first within India and then across the globe. By uniting the Indian diaspora, Blunt's flamen jälkeen käyttöön and Dhanvantari's proclamations of trinities and the Four Kings of Babylon, Mazzini's trident, the Swami's unassimilability, the fathers of missionary conquests across the borders set the world aflame.

The Hindutva Concept: Debates and Dimensions

The Hindutva concept occupies a prominent place in contemporary discussions about Hindutva (Hindu), Hinduness, Hindurashtra (Hindu state), or Hindutwavadi (Hindutva adherent). These core ideas have come to inspire a multitude of heterogeneous discourses both within and outside India, constituting, themselves, the focus of several debates. Within the Hindutva discourse, the primary tenets of Hindutva, namely those articulated by Savarkar between 1905 and 1923, emerge. Contemporary articulations differ on how to approach the Hindutva concept. One group maintains the notion of a "Hindu nation" while

analysing Savarkar's texts as history. A second line of interpretation systematically criticises Savarkar's conception, treating his works as antiquated prescriptions not properly applicable today. Many contemporaries in the third group acknowledge that Savarkar's writings on Hindutva inhabit a crucial role concerning Modern India but furnish various analyses of the fundamental tenets and diverse dimensions of the concept. Inevitably, such exegeses now hinge upon the historical context characterising the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries along with the debates accentuating its essential features (Chandrasekaran, 2012).

Controversies and Legacies: Memory, Myth, and Meaning

Savarkar incites admiration and scorn, ardent devotion and fierce disdain. Revered as an architect of Hindutva and a visionary ahead of his time, he also draws accusations of sectarianism, opportunism, and anti-secularism. Communal rioting just before 1947, the Partition, the subsequent mass killings, and the assassination of Gandhi prompted Historian Stuart Woolf to assert: "If anyone contributed to these events it was Savarkar." Such clashing appraisals create a complicated legacy, nurtured by supporters and detractors alike.

Debates surrounding Savarkar's life, work, and ideas have deepened since his passing, escalating during and after the twentieth century. Private memorialization morphed into public commemoration. His concept of Hindutva and its practical application elicited fervent response. The Hindutva manifesto also revealed perceptions. The Sangh Parivar advocated its historical acceptance but positioned it outside the Congress. Yet the Sangh's view suffered criticism and counter-response. The assassination generated intense scrutiny. Memorials prompted "myth-making." Multiple discourses explored these dimensions. It is also argued that, while Savarkar saw a united India as "Hindu Raj", Gandhiji could express any view within Hinduism; hence Savarkar was not a true Hindu. Although important, these discussions are best synthesized into "myth" and "memory", explored here through the lens of public gesture.

Cultural and social memory moves myth toward reality without negating the originating stories. Memory connects the public to the personal. Cast in violence, the human narrative conveys shared experience with the universality of suffering. Victory—personal or communal—remains elusive; survival alone becomes heroism. The veer's triumph lies in surviving catastrophe not wholly unscathed but resilient enough to inspire selfless

struggle in others. Savarkar's presence in the minds and hearts of men was priceless. But the myth differs from the man. Transforming the veer into a deity; textual decontextualization; receiver satisfaction; freedom struggle obscured; and alienation of other faiths from Hindutva together shape the myth. Scholars debate meaning and significance. Controversy remains but public recognition is unchallengeable.

Perceptions Across Generations

The waves of popular mobilization that surged during the freedom struggle up to 1947 and have continued since, have diversified their intentions, modes of action, and political supporters. Such shifts entail new readings of the past. People fighting with the slogans of secularism, socialism, or revolution discovered heroes and heroines who had been scorned, and scorned as enemies. Others have detected faults in their youth idols, but any critique of a valiant personality truly be nitpicked be reason for repulsing that ideal, especially when Bhagat Singh raised the tricolor and dreamed of an India free from unfaithful, sycophant, greedy, arrogant rulers.

While some view Savarkar as a top hero of India's freedom movement, others perceive him as possessing all the possible faults. The ever-growing vilification of Hindutva supporters, many of them self-proclaimed Bahujan leaders, milks pure hatred to bring down that ideal for electoral gain. Yet the very hate behind this vaunted rampaging moat, tinted with pessimism and destructiveness, selects one leader, one party with a fundamental belief, and one surviving goal—the very essence visible in all past generations as a constant thread in India's 5,000-year history and remain the spirit of their willing activities. The ever-growing swirl of changeless chakras surrounds both qualities, fusing and fusing.

Epilogue: Reflections on a Revolutionary Arc

A life rich in thought and action unfolds an integrated arc of revolutionary nationalism from birth to lasting impact. Premature anxiety about Savarkar's legacy gave way to discovery of still-relevant ideas and a fresh appreciation of his leadership role within the broader freedom movement. Central questions emerged on youth engagement with his thought and the resilience of principles articulated a century ago. Given the rise of authoritarianism, homogenization, and violence lastingly afflicting humanity, Savarkar's call for universal tolerance and his compassionate political vision remain as powerful and urgent as ever.

Drawing from insights gathered along the journey, a brief account of Savarkar's life illuminates revolutionary aspirations, contributions, and thoughts about hindutva immortalized in his foundational work, Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? The continuing salience of Savarkar's thought in India and beyond, both politically and culturally, attests to the power and relevance of his vision.

Conclusion

Every revolution generates heroes and Villains. Villains for the British, nationalist leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and Others. A man of the stature of Jawaharlal Nehru labeled them as the 'Hindu revolutionary terrorists.' Yet, the history of modern India's birth prescribes a grand place for the entire Forces of Indian Nationalism. The Acts of man against arbitrary Power cannot be judged from the conventional canons of Right and Wrong. The Indian people's struggle for freedom gathered momentum between 1907 and 1918. During this period, the Indian National Congress forged ahead under the guidance of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and other mass leaders. The foundation of the All-India Muslim League, the outbreak of World War I, and the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as a great leader signaled the advent of a new phase in the struggle for freedom.

Veer Savarkar sacrificed the best years of his life for the sake of the nation. His life symbolized the synthesis of hero worship, patriotism, and religion. He donned the mantle of a warrior, accepted the vulture of vengeance, and prayed the prayer of the brave because the birth of the nation demanded it. Savarkar was born in the lap of the sea and grew into a warrior and hero; hence hero-worship was a natural sentiment for him. He was in the realm of organization. He was, indeed, the first Indian political leader who laid down the definite principles of organization and pursued them consistently, even though the leaders of the Indian National Congress were wedded to the policy of mere negotiation. He was the first leader to ally the workers of the Indian National Congress with the secret societies and the terrorist; the first political leader to propagate the quintessence of the religion of a distinct community in India as the basis of Indian politics. Every Indian political leader stressed the necessity of faith and self-sacrifice for the country; Savarkar was the first to make a cult of it.

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