

THE TRUTH ABOUT V.D. SAVARKAR

Dr. J. Kuruvachira

In recent years, it has become fashionable among Hindutva ideologues to pay blind obeisance to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) as a ‘freedom fighter’ and a ‘national hero’. Savarkar has been for a long time *Veer* Savarkar in the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (RSS) folklore and in the school textbooks sponsored by them. A few years ago, the RSS attempted to have his statue erected in Marseilles, France, to commemorate his ‘anti-British’ stand in the early 1920s. The plan had to be abandoned after a world-wide protest campaign to the French President and the Mayor of Marseilles.

More recently, the BJP-led government had the audacity to propose his name for the *Bharat Ratna* (‘Jewel of India’) award. In September 2001, a film was produced on Savarkar projecting him as a great freedom fighter. He was also remembered in the context of the Port Blair Airport, in the Andamans being named after him — ‘*Veer Savarkar Airport*’! On 26th February 2003, amid a raging controversy, the president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam unveiled the portrait of Savarkar in the central hall of parliament in New Delhi. As he did so, the BJP and the Shiva Sena MPs and their supporters shouted *swatantryaveer Savarkar amar rahe*.

But does Vinayak Damodar Savarkar really merit the epithet ‘*swatantrya-veer*’ (‘brave worrier of freedom’) Savarkar? Was he such a great, dedicated, brave revolutionary hero and freedom fighter throughout his life? These are questions that require a close examination. Much has already been written in protest against him being considered as a national hero and a freedom fighter. We examine afresh the Savarkar-case in order to remind the people of India, once again, that he *does not deserve the epithet*.

Attempts to create national heroes

The problem with the present Indian fascists is that they lack respectable nationalist heroes. The Hindutva protagonists never possessed at any point of their history a person of national standing and acceptance. But today they are desperately seeking affiliations to recognised leaders of Indian nationalism. Through countrywide grass-root level campaigns, ‘invention of historical evidences’ and re-interpretation of history, and the use of print and electronic media, the Hindutva ideologues are trying to project that their leaders participated in the freedom struggle. And one such figure is V.D. Savarkar, the father of the Hindutva, which provides the ideological foundation for much of the present-day communal tensions in the country.

There are many *Hindutvawadis* who use all possible means at their disposal to claim that the contribution of Savarkar in the freedom struggle has been as great as that of Mahatma Gandhi. They also lament that Savarkar has not been given his due share of recognition as a freedom fighter. In order to remedy this problem, recently, the combined efforts of the *Hindutvawadis*, the BJP, the RSS, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Sangh Parivar have ‘conferred’ on him — much to the dismay of many reasonable Indians — the epithet ‘*Swatantrya-Veer*’. (See for instance, H.V. Seshadri, “The *Swatantrya-Veer*: Epitome of ‘*Swatantrata*’ and ‘*Veerata*’, in V. Grover (ed.), *V.D. Savarkar*, 1993, 367-375). Some even claim that the two terms ‘*swatantrya veer*’ and ‘*Savarkar*’ are inseparable like flower and its fragrance, the lamp and its light (J.Trehan, “*Savarkarism*”, 500).

Reasons for questioning Savarkar’s *veerata* (bravery)

It seems that those who have ‘thrust’ upon Savarkar the epithet ‘*Swatantrya-Veer*’ have conveniently concealed the *inconsistencies* in his involvement in the freedom

struggle, the fact of his *servile surrender* to the British imperialists, and his *non-cooperation* with Gandhi and the Indian National Congress in their struggle for freedom.

Savarkar underwent a serious metamorphosis during his years in jail in the Andamans between 1911 and 1921. He subjected himself to the British and pleaded clemency on *their* conditions and agreed to give full co-operation to them. Many documents to this effect are available in the national archives. He also worked against Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, which were the symbols of Indian national movement. Further, he actively promoted the Hindutva ideology, communalism, re-conversion, Hindu *Raj* (State) and 'xenophobia' towards such minorities as the Muslims, Christians, Communists, Secularists, Liberals, and the like. Thus Savarkar broke away from the mainstream freedom movement and adopted a public position expressing this break. He died in 1966, at the age of eighty-three, practically forgotten by the people of India because they knew that there was no real *veerata* (bravery) in the so-called *veer* Savarkar.

Because of these reasons, many right thinking people in India and outside, have protested against Savarkar being given the epithet 'Swatantrya-Veer' Savarkar. Documents that were available but were kept under cover for nearly eight decades show his true personality, not as *veer* Savarkar but as a *coward*. Scholars have taken pain to research into the original documents and the writings of Savarkar himself in order to arrive at this conclusion. Today he stands exposed as a 'hero' with a clay-feet — much to the embarrassment of the Hindutva ideologues who have assiduously attempted to promote him as a national hero.

Savarkar's flirt with Indian Nationalism

Savarkar's initial anti-British struggle was no doubt impressive and it commands respect. His *Abhinav Bahrat* (Young India) drew its inspiration from Giuseppe Mazzini's *Giovani Italia* (Young Italy). Savarkar had gone to London to study law. While in England he formed the 'Free Indian Society' with a commitment to overthrowing British rule in India. His group learned the art of bomb-making from a Russian revolutionary in Paris. Because of his anti-British stance he was denied his barristership. He also secretly sent to India firearms and literature on bomb-making. One member of his group killed a top-ranking official in India Office in London and was sentenced to death. For involvement in this, and for another charges in the Indian courts, Savarkar was arrested, sentenced and was to undergo life-imprisonment. He was deported from England. The ship carrying him stopped at Marseilles, where he jumped into the sea and swam to the shore to claim asylum on French soil. But he was captured and was transported to the Andamans. In 1921 Savarkar was transferred to a prison in Rantnagiri in Bombay province.

The patriotism of 'early' Savarkar is epitomised in his *The War of Independence 1857* in which he named the revolt of Indian soldiers against the British — the so-called 'Sepoy Mutiny' — 'the War of Indian independence'. It is this 'early' phase of Savarkar's life alone that the contemporary Hindutva protagonists highlight when they present him as a 'hero' of India's struggle for independence. They conveniently hide his subsequent life which was marked by pro-British attitudes and total non-involvement in any major activity aimed at Indian nationalism.

Savarkar's surrender to the British

The conditions in the prisons of the Andamans were no doubt harsh but not a few patriots faced it courageously. But Savarkar was not one among them. He appealed for

clemency, first in 1911 and then again in 1913, the latter during the visit of Sir Reginald Craddock. In a letter dated November 14, 1913 Savarkar (convict no. 32778) wrote to the Home Minister of the Government of India:

“I hereby acknowledge that I had a fair trial and just sentence. I heartily abhor methods of violence resorted to in days gone by and I feel myself duty bound to *uphold law and constitution* [British] to the best of my powers and am willing to *make the reform* [i.e., the Montague-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 which did not satisfy the demands of the nationalist movement] *a success* in so far as I may be allowed to do so in future” (From facsimile of Savarkar’s letter, *Frontline*, April 7, 1995. Italics added).

We read again:

“If the government in their manifold beneficence and mercy release me, I for one cannot but be the *staunchest advocate* of constitutional progress and *loyalty to the English government* which is the foremost condition of that progress [...] Moreover, my *conversion* to the constitutional line would bring back all those mislead young men in India and abroad who were once looking up to me as their guide [...] The Mighty alone can afford to be merciful and therefore where else can the *prodigal son* return but to the parental doors of the government” (From facsimile of Savarkar’s letter, *Frontline*, April 7, 1995. Italics added).

In response to the petition, the British Government released him under the condition that he will stay in Ratnagiri district and will seek the permission of the government to leave the district and also that he will not engage in any public or private political activities without the consent of the government. The period of conditions lasted till 1937.

It is important to note here that Savarkar in his letter acknowledged that he had a *fair trial*. He also accepted the conditions set by the British *without any compunction*. He stated that if released he would be a *staunch advocate of the British policies*. The language of his letter is clearly *servile* and it brings out the *coward* in him.

In 1920 Gandhi wrote in *Young India* about Savarkar’s attitude towards the British: “They [the Savarkar brothers] both state unequivocally that they do not desire independence from the British connection. On the contrary, they feel that India’s destiny can be worked out in association with the British” (*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 17, 462. Henceforth CWMG). Thus Savarkar ‘forfeited’ his claim to be a revolutionary freedom fighter and bartered the country’s independence to obtain his own personal freedom. This act of surrender to the British alone is sufficient to obliterate all the revolutionary feats attributed to him by his contemporary followers.

Savarkar as an advocate of Hindu Nationalism

During his detention in the Andamans, Savarkar’s views underwent a great change. He renounced the struggle against British imperialism and transformed himself from being a revolutionary nationalist to a staunch proponent of Hindu fascism. In the ideological front Savarkar came to be greatly influenced by German racism. He studied with care Bluntschli’s *The Theory of the State*, a book which he had not only read but also used when teaching his fellow prisoners. Bluntschli was an exponent of German ethnic nationalism and his writings influenced many other Hindu nationalists, including M.S. Golwalkar. (C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and the Indian Politics*, 32). Savarkar also took inspiration from other Western architects of ethnic nationalism.

Savarkar was a changed person after his jail term in the Andamans. Then on he never associated with anything even remotely sounding as anti-British. In 1923 he published his controversial *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* which won him the title 'Father of Hindutva'. Again, soon after his release from the Andamans, K.B. Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS met him in Ratnagiri prison and Hedgewar is said to have obtained Savarkar's support for the founding of the RSS, inaugurated in 1925.

Savarkar joins the Hindu Mahasabha

In 1937 the conditions of Savarkar's release were removed completely. On release he was invited to join the Congress. But he refused and joined the Hindu Mahasabha (The Great Hindu Conference). J.D. Joglekar comments: "The man who wrote 'Hindutva' and also many newspaper articles about the 'Hindu Nation' was surely not likely to join the Congress" (J. D. Joglekar, "Veer Savarkar: Profile of a Prophet", 324).

In 1937 Savarkar was elected president of the Hindu Mahasabha, the political wing of the Hindutva ideologists. R.C. Majumdar states that Savarkar was re-elected year after year and the organisation developed into a *political and communal body* (R.C. Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People. Struggle for Freedom*, 611-612). About the communal nature of the Hindu Mahasabha Nehru said: "I confess that [...] the activities of Hindu communal organisations including the Mahasabha, have been communal, anti-national and reactionary" (J. Nehru, *Recent Essays and Writings*, 46).

Savarkar then began openly heaping abuses on Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress leaders. He branded Gandhi as an appeaser of Muslims. He also stated that *the struggle for supremacy would begin after the British have left* and that the Christians and Muslims were the *real enemies* who could be defeated only by Hindutva. He also had close contacts with the RSS — today's apex organisation of Hindu fascists. Nathuram Godse who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi was an ardent follower of Savarkar. Savarkar himself was a co-accused in the murder of Gandhiji but was acquitted only due to lack of sufficient evidence.

Withdrawal from mainstream Nationalism

A clemency letter in itself does not make Savarkar any less of a hero. But we must see what he did *in the prison* and what was his major concern *after the release*. His interest was in winning the friendship of the Hindus and the British. The old antagonism against the British imperialists did not exist any more. The Hindu Mahasabha actively campaigned to recruit Hindu young men into the British army and the Congress activists used to call Savarkar a 'recruiting officer'. When Gandhi launched the 'Quit India Movement' asking people to renounce government jobs, Savarkar gave a counter order saying: "I issue this definite instruction to all Hindu Sanghatanists in general holding any post or position of vantage in the government service, should stick to them and continue to perform their regular duties" (Quoted by A.G. Noorani "The Collaborators", *Frontline*, December 1, 1995).

Gandhi tried in vain to woo Savarkar into the mainstream nationalism. He says: "I have tried to woo him [V.D.Savarkar] and his friends. I have walked to Savarkar's house. I have gone out of my way to win him over. But I have failed" (CWMG, vol. 70, 348). Thus Savarkar and his followers deliberately dissociated themselves from the gigantic struggle for national liberation from the colonial rule.

The strategic plan of the Hindu Mahasabha was to *take on the reign of India after the independence*. Savarkar's intention was to establish a Hindu *Raj* (State) out of India, and those who opposed it were branded as pseudo-nationalists. He said: "The demand

for a Hindu Raj, these pseudo-nationalists say, is communal, stupid, mediaeval, theocratical, a menace to the progress of mankind itself” (V.D. Savarkar, “Nehru’s Nightmare — Hindu Raj? Carpet Knights”, 171). He publicly asked the Hindus to oppose the efforts of Gandhi and the Congress. He stated: “I warn the Hindu Electorate categorically for the thousandth time that unless they remove these Pseudo-nationalist leaders from the helm of our state: the Gandhistic Indianism will allow Moslems inside India to capture keyposts in the army, the police, the state” (V.D. Savarkar, “Nehru’s Nightmare — Hindu Raj? Carpet Knights”, 173). Such an attitude led Gandhi to say: “I find that the Hindu Mahasabha has made it their dharma to oppose Congress candidates everywhere” (CWMG, 82, 26)

Father of Hindutva ideology or Savarkarism

Savarkar wrote *Hindutva* in 1922 while still in prison in Ratnagiri and published it in Nagpur in 1923, and it became and remains the basic text that defines this politico-religious concept. Since then his ‘enemy’ was not the British imperialists but the minority religious groups and the secularists of India.

The Hindutva according to him rests on three pillars: geographical unity, racial unity and common culture. Those who regard India as their ‘fatherland’ and ‘holyland’ are the people to whom India belongs. This automatically excludes the Christians and the Muslims because, according to him, their holy places are in Jerusalem and Mecca and not in India.

The primary aim of his *Hindutva* was to reconstruct and mobilise the Indian Hindus through a process of Hindu identity-building based on exclusivism, xenophobia, violence, aggression and the philosophy of ‘end justifies the means’. He built the foundation for this on the rudimentary evidences of prejudice and conflict and by concocting false propaganda against the minorities.

The method he suggested for the spread of Hindutva was borrowed from the Nazis. In August 1938 he spoke to a crowd of 20,000 in Pune saying that Germany has every right to resort to Nazism and Italy to Fascism and events have justified that those ‘isms’ and forms of government were imperative and beneficial to them under the conditions that existed there. Savarkar’s love of the Nazis was born out of his obsession with the idea of the ‘dictatorship of the majority’ and xenophobia. About Savarkar and his collaborators Gandhi commented: “Very few, if any, member of the Hindu Mahasabha are believers in non-violence. Neither Shri Savarkar nor Dr. Moonje nor Bhai Paramanand are” (CWMG, vol.73,311); “Those Hindus [...] like Dr. Moonje and Shri Savarkar, believe in the doctrine of the sword” (CWMG, vol.76,389)

Campaign for Hindu Raj

Savarkar aimed at establishing a Hindu *Raj* in India and he made passionate appeals to communal instinct of the Hindus. He defined India as one “who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Father-Land and as well as his Holy-Land that is the cradle land of his religion” (V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 116). He advocated that India is to be a Hindu State. His cry was: “Dravidians or Aryans [...] Hindus first and everything else next” (V.D. Savarkar, “Then Who is Who, Pray”, 169). He said: “The Hindu Sanghatanist ideology alone can therefore, save our nation and re-establish an Akhand Hindusthan from Indus to the Seas” (V.D. Savarkar, “Nehru’s Nightmare — Hindu Raj? Carpet Knights”, 173).

On the nature of the Hindu State he said: “the Hindus, they being the people, whose past, present and future are most closely bound with the soil of Hindusthan as Pitribhu

(fatherland), as Punyabhū (holyland), they constitute the foundation, the bedrock, the reserved forces of the Indian state” (V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 140).

Savarkar envisaged a Hindu State that is founded on pseudo-secularism, force, violence, threat of the ‘Other’ and military might. He said: “our State must raise a mighty force exclusively constituted by Hindus alone, must open arms and ammunition factories exclusively manned by the Hindus alone and mobilise everything on a war scale” (V.D. Savarkar, “Problems before Hinduism after Bloodless(!) Vivisection”, 177).

But Savarkar knew that such a state of affairs was not to be contemplated as long as Gandhi, Nehru and other secular leaders lead the National movement. Nehru emphatically said: “if you think in terms of any kind of a communal state, a Hindu Rashtra, etc. you are not going to get it, however much you may try” (*Selected Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, vol. 7, 404). Such a view led Savarkar to assert: “As [...] neither the Gandhistic ideology nor the pseudo-nationalistic ideology of the Congress can ever cope with this Islamic offensive and as the *Hindu Sanghathanist ideology alone* can and will be able to fight out this danger successfully, the Government should consist of such Ministers alone who are pledged to the Hindu Sanghathanist ideology alone” (V.D. Savarkar, “Problems before Hindudom after Bloodless(!) Vivisection”, 177. *Italics added*).

Savarkar accused Nehru saying that he had been indulging in furious denunciations against a demand for a Hindu State as if the mere demand for a Hindu Raj constitutes a danger to his Government (V.D. Savarkar, “Nehru’s Nightmare — Hindu Raj? Carpet Knights”, 170). Savarkar further added: “Pandit Nehru swaggers on that if the Hindu Sanghathanists persist on in their efforts to establish a Hindu Raj, they would meet with the fate of Hitler and Mussolini” (V.D. Savarkar, “Nehru’s Nightmare — Hindu Raj? Carpet Knights”, 171). He questioned those who stood for a secular state: “How is it then that the very mention of the name of Hindustan or the Hindu State alone takes your breath out as if you were smitten by a snake bite?” (V.D. Savarkar, “Nehru’s Nightmare — Hindu Raj? Carpet Knights”, 172).

Advocate of pan-Hinduism

Savarkar advocated the concept of pan-Hinduism. In 1937 as president of the Hindu Mahasabha he stated in his presidential address in Ahmedabad: “the Hindu Mahasabha is not in the main a Hindu Dharma Sabha, but it is pre-eminently a Hindu Rashtra Sabha and is a pan-Hindu Organisation shaping the destiny of the Hindu Nation in all its social, political and cultural aspects” (quoted in C. Gupta, “Life of Barrister Savarkar”, 297).

To Savarkar the calling of the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal as a foreign country was intolerable. He held that the brave and warlike Gurkhas were part and parcel of Hinduism and any move to keep them segregated from India was strongly and relentlessly opposed by him. In fact under his guidance the Ratnagiri Hindu Sabha initiated a movement to bring them back to Pan-Hinduism (C. Gupta, “Life of Barrister Savarkar”, 291).

Against the co-existence of Hindus and Muslims

When ‘early’ Savarkar wrote his *The War of Independence 1857*, he upheld Hindu-Muslim unity. He also remained unflinchingly opposed to the British. But after his conversion to the Hindutva, on several occasions he gave hints concerning the impossibility of a co-existence of Hindus and Muslims. In 1939 he said that nationality did not depend so much on a common geographical area as on unity of thought, religion, language and culture. For this reason the Germans and the Jews could not be regarded as a nation. Later in the same year he made a statement in the 21st session of the Hindu Mahasabha that the Indian Muslims are on the whole more inclined to identify themselves and their

interests with Muslims outside India than Hindus who live next door, like the Jews in Germany.

Savarkar staunchly advocated the two-nation theory and the partition of India. He said: “I have no quarrel with Mr. Jinnah’s two-nation theory. We, Hindus are a nation by ourselves and it is a historical fact that Hindus and Muslims are two nations”(V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 140).

Muslims and Christians are foreigners

Savarkar’s Hindutva propounded the theory that Muslims and Christians are foreigners and therefore, they have no place in India. He said: “Mohammadens and Christian communities possess all the essential qualifications of Hindutva but one and all that is that they do not look upon India as their holyland” (V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 113). He affirmed again: “Their holyland is far off in Arabia and Palestine. Their mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of foreign origin. Their love is divided” (V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 113). He further noted: “But besides culture the tie of common holyland has at times proved stronger than the claims of a Motherland. Look at the Mohammedans [...] Mecca to them is a stronger reality than Delhi or Agra. Some of them do not make any secret of being bound to sacrifice all India if that be to the glory of Islam [...] The crusades again attest to the wonderful influence that a common holyland exercises over peoples widely separated in race, nationality and langue, to bind and hold them together” (V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 135-136).

Re-conversion (*Suddhi*) activities

One of the most sensitive activities in which the Hindu Mahasabha indulged in was the re-conversion of Hindus. Savarkar fought tooth and nail against any Hindu changing his religious allegiance. He ardently advocated re-conversion with the spirit of a fanatic. When he returned to Ratnagiri one of his principle activities was re-conversion.

In his memories and diaries of the prison days he glorified his years in the prison by claiming that he contributed to the political education of the prisoners. But the writings pertaining to those years are not bereft of communal poison. He engaged himself in re-conversion (*Shuddhi*) activities. For instance, while in the Andamans his fanaticism led him to the extent of performing *Suddhi* thereby reclaiming the Hindus who were converted to Islam (C. Gupta, “Life of Barrister Savarkar”, 277).

On several occasions Savarkar spoke disparagingly of Muslims and Christians: “The scandalous activities of Bengal Moslem gundas and proselytisers, working hand in hand have become so persistent and so notorious that one cannot understand how the Hindus in East Bengal have grown so incredibly emasculated” (V. D. Savarkar, “Facts Without Comment”, 182); “The Moslem shopkeepers, those who visit Hindu ladies for selling glass bangles, Moslem servants in Hindu houses — all try to seduce or kidnap boys and girls and generally force them to accept Mahommedanism” (V. D. Savarkar, “Facts Without Comment”, 180); “The Christians also are making great progress in this State. If things go on like that Sambhar would cease to contain a Hindu home” (V. D. Savarkar, “Facts Without Comment”, 180).

J.D. Joglekar notes that the first re-conversion at Savarkar’s instance took place in 1925, when one Jadhav, who had become a Christian, was brought back to the Hindu fold. The next year a whole Brahmin family converted to Christianity, was reconverted (J.D. Joglekar, “Veer Savarkar: Profile of a Prophet”, 323).

Savarkar believed that conversions from Hinduism are a direct attack on India's nationhood. B.K. Kelkar commenting on the philosophy of Savarkar says that he played a triple role of a *thinker* of Hindutva, a *protector* of it and the *organiser* of Hindus. He also held the view that to change one's religion meant to change one's nationhood and culture. According to him the proselytisation carried on by Christians and Muslims weans the people away from the cultural mainstream of the nation, and ultimately they no longer remain a part of the nation (B.K. Kelkar, "Savarkar: A Three-Dimensional View", 363).

Implementation of Savarkarism today

The militant Hindutva ideology of Savarkar or 'Savarkarism' dominates Indian political and religious scene today. With the political power in New Delhi in the hands of the Hindutva ideologues a re-writing of Indian history along fascist lines is already underway, and persons like Savarkar, Golwalkar, Hedgewar, Moonje and Godse are emerging as 'national heroes'. In the process, the memories of collective struggle for independence and its true symbols and landmarks are being forgotten, and its towering personalities are replaced by dwarfs and cowards.

There are many who hold cabinet posts in the central government in New Delhi and in the State governments who have been schooled in Savarkarism. Savarkar believed in a *strong militarised India*, and in consonance with it the BJP government makes sure that India's nuclear and missile programmes go ahead without any break. Lal Krishna Advani learned Hindutva from Savarkar and many of his policies are *literal implementation* of the ideals of his icon. Atal Behari Vajpayee who heads the *right wing* BJP-led government, Murali Manohar Joshi who directs the *saffronisation* of Indian education and the *re-writing of history* along the Hindutva lines, Sita Ram Goel, Ram Swarup and Arun Shourie who are notorious for *maligning the minorities* through their pen pushing, Narendra Modi who is called the *cave man* of Gujarat and an adept in the use of political language *without refinement or restraint*, the RSS, the VHP and the Sangh Parivar and their affiliates who indulge in violence, crime and show of muscle power so on, are some of those who are schooled in Savarkarism and who consider him as 'national' hero. But Savarkar is *not the hero* of any true patriotic Indian who values secularism and the pluralistic culture of India. Thus Savarkar remains as an icon only for the Hindutva ideologues.

Conclusion: no 'veerata' in the so-called 'Veer Savarkar'

Savarkar started his public career as a large-hearted revolutionary patriot and anti-British. But his flirtation with freedom struggle did not last long. He renounced his principles in the Andaman jails and after his release from prison he stayed away from all anti-British activities. With his aggressive anti-Gandhi, anti-Congress and anti-minority propaganda he ended up helping the British in their policy of divide and rule.

The defence of Savarkar and projecting him as a national hero are result of a reaction to strong criticism from secular and democratic Indians. It is true that some credit should be given to him for his contribution to Indian nationalism in his early years *prior* to his arrival in the Andamans. But on no account does he deserve the honour of being called *swatantriya-veer* Savarkar! Any attempt in popularising this epithet will automatically legitimise the fascist doctrine of the Hindutva. It will strike at the very root of India's secularism and veritably destroy the edifice of Indian religious and cultural pluralism.

Therefore, in order to assess the merit of Savarkar it is not enough to limit oneself to the study of his life and activities *prior* to his deportation to the Andamans — as the contemporary Hindutva ideologues are doing. It tells us only the half-truth about Savarkar. The other half is a story of cowardice, fanaticism, fascism, racism, militancy, terrorism, servitude to the British and Hindu sectarian nationalism. Those who indulge in such activities are not freedom fighters. Again, the truth about Savarkar is that he accepted the humiliating terms from the British, openly opposed Gandhi's policies, the Civil Obedience Movement and the Indian National Congress. He recruited Indians for the British Army. He did not participate in any anti-British agitation. He preached the ideology of Hindutva, Hindu communalism, pseudo-secularism, hatred of the minorities and practice of re-conversion. He advocated the two-nation theory and pan-Hinduism and allegedly participated in the conspiracy to murder Mahatma Gandhi and was one of the accused.

Thus Savarkar showed little *veerata* (bravery) as a freedom fighter and patriot. He was the embodiment of cowardice, selfishness, non-patriotism, narrow nationalism, communalism, and of one working against true national interests. He betrayed the trust of the Indians and their aspirations by arraying himself against his own Motherland and by co-operating with the British. He opposed the great leaders of India's freedom struggle like Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru. Against the policies of the Indian National Congress he cultivated the politico-communal organisation called the Hindu Mahasabha. How could such a person deserve the epithet '*swatantrya-veer*' Savarkar?

The various political stances which Savarkar took after his arrest and deportation to the Andamans and after his release from prison, prove beyond doubt the absurdity of placing him on the pedestal along with the great freedom fighters and patriots of India. Hence the claim that Savarkar was a true patriot and a brave freedom fighter is a myth without any foundation, and consequently he does not deserve the *epithet* '*swatantrya-veer*' Savarkar. **We may conclude with the words of M.S.Golwalkar: "Strange, very strange, that traitors should sit enthroned as national and patriots heaped with ignominy. This is the point. We have learned to call a class of people patriots, saviours of the nation"(M.S.Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*,2).**

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(The author is a senior lecturer in Philosophy of religion, Phenomenology of religion and Indian culture. He can be contacted at kurusdb@rediff.mail.com)