



Relevance of Savarkar's thought in the 21st Century: An Indian Perspective

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Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was a eminent representative of Indian political thought for his view on cultural nationalism during the nationalist freedom struggle. Since the his younger age he started to think on India's independence. In fact, Savarkar gave a systematic articulation to the opinions held various quarters of the country that the true resurgence of India as a distinguished part of the comity of nations could be facilitated only be rooting Indian nationalism in the cultural ethos of the Hindu religion. He was of the opinion that the real personality of India could be reflected to her only by reviving her glorious past and re-exploring , what he called 'Hindu Rastra'. So, the political philosophy of Savarkar appeared as a distinct ideological formulation having its reflection on the homogeneity of the Hindu population living in a particular land and having a shared cultural ethos of the majority of the people(Joglekar 2006:27).

Since time immemorial, the tradition of intellectual explorations by Hindu revivalists found its articulation in two distinct streams that may be called as Hinduism and Hindutva. Despite having the same long term perspective of reestablishing practically of the Hindu way of life in India in the face of apparent loosening of faith amongst the people due to long years of subjugation by British rulers , the two faiths differed on the idea of conceptualizing the Hindu view of life. Therefore, Hinduism tried to conceptualize the idea of Hindu view of life as it is essential for religious practices. It may be interpreted as visiting the domain of personal life of the ethical principles which would guide conduct of people even in other spheres of life as well. Thus, political agenda and parochial view may dismantle Hindu followers , reflecting in individual's public and private spheres. The philosophy of Hinduism reflected in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan.

As against the individualistic of the idea of Hinduism , the notion of Hindutva was shaped by radical elements of the Hindu revivalists

movements. It is noteworthy that Hindutva tried to envisage comprehensive blueprint for the reconstruction of the political-cultural system of the country in such a way that Hindus would get an absolute preponderance in the affairs of the country. The ideology of Hindutva, therefore, moves beyond confines of religious and personal life of individuals and seeks to reconstruct a whole new world for Hindus by way of establishing the "Hindu rastra" in the country. Over the years, the secular perspective has been imbibed by the political-cultural life of Indian people. The ideology of Hindutva was introduced by Savarkar in his various writings and speeches. Later on, Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha was adopted the ideology of Hindutva in the pursuits of "Hindu Rastra" in India. Indeed, the entire Hindu rightist political and cultural formations in the country takes their ideological sustenance from the ideology of Hindutva propounded by V. D. Savarkar (Munshi 1967).

However, Savarkar's nationalist orientations started with the consideration of revolt of 1857 as India's First war of Independence. It is said that he was one of India's foremost freedom fighters. His intellectual explorations throws some lights on the political ideas and proposes some valuable suggestions to reform Hindu society as well. At this outset, an attempt has been made in this paper to present a contextual and analytical study of socio-political thought of Savarkar with special to Hindutva.

V. D. Savarkar was born on 27th May 1883, into a Brahmin family in Maharashtra. The plague years (1896-9) were tough years for the Deccan and they were made worse by intensive colonial actions. Savarkar ('Patriots' Society) in 1899 which turned into the 'Mitra Mela' ('Society of Friends) a year later (1901). It was as the Mitra Mela that the society came to the attention of the police (Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya 2000).



Mitra mela was a consciousness-raising society, holding more lectures than anything else. In Savarkar's memoirs, these early days of political activism are considered in a manner that makes clear that he believed he could single-handedly change the direction of Indian history.

In the 19th century in Maharashtra was time in which there were active debates about history, the role it played in the life of a nation and its use as a corrective to colonial denigrations of India's past.

It is noteworthy that, Savarkar completed his own monumental history of the 1857 rebellion. It was the first systematic analysis of the rebellion as a failed war of national independence. Savarkar proceeded to discount all the usual colonial arguments about the causes of 1857: the greased cartridge, the economic motives of the elite, the annexation of Oudh Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya 2000. Vol 3).

Savarkar was certainly not only Indian nationalist to advocate violent resistance to the colonial state by means of political assassinations and fiery rhetoric. Savarkar's surveillance emphasized on the colonial police placed on his long history of writings rather than his short history of gun-running.

It is noteworthy that Savarkar's nationalist interpretation in his tract, Hindu Pad Padshahi, published in 1925 and focused on the rise of Marhata power in Maharashtra, even emphasized on Muslim predominance in other parts of the country (Savarkar 1945). He commended the superb military leadership of Shivaji and victory against policy of barbaric aggression, violent usurpation of power, fanatical hatred and intolerance of the Muslim rulers. His appreciation for the Maratha polity emanated from his perception that it was based on the infallible principles of Swadharma and Swaraj. He appreciated the democratic aspects of the ruling system of Shivaji and argued that such governance would be the one suited to the needs of Hindus.

Savarkar argued that the revolt of 1857 was India's first war of independence which was the natural manifestation of the feeling of independence visiting the hearts and minds of the patriotic soldiers right from the western to the eastern parts of the country. He had tremendous admiration for this sense of innate freedom of the sepoys, as it was deep rooted in the indigenous ideals of Swadharma and Swaraj. Savarkar cited one of the leaders of the 1857 revolt was Nana Sahib who had been exterminated at a lonely place in the United Provinces, as harbouring the aspirations of liberating his 'motherland from the internecine skirmishes and setting up the 'United States of

India' as an independent country. He also focused on the interpretations presented by European commentators who argued the revolt of 1857 in boarder perspective as having the characteristics of a mass-raising and nationalistic in nature (Mazumdar 1969:988).

Quoted Charles Ball, Ghosh said Mutiny a 'rebellion of a whole people' and Justin McCarthy who said that the sepoys seized 'one of the great critical moments of history and converted a military mutiny into a national religious war'.

Viewing revolt of 1857 as the first war of independence, Savarkar focused a number of remarkable conclusions having immense value and importance of various aspects of nationalist freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhi with the ideals of satyagraha and non-violence. Savarkar had a tremendous admiration for the participants of nationalist freedom struggle.

All in all Hindutva was hallmark of Savarkar's intellectual formulations, focusing nationalist interpretations of the history of India appears quite refreezing and pioneering. Savarkar's being called as 'Swatantraveer' for portraying of the revolt 1857 as India's first war of independence, reflecting exemplary courage in standing up to the host of colonial as well as native historians and commentators who had been bent upon denigrating the event as Sepoy Mutiny. Savarkar's nationalist on analysis the landmark event of the Indian national movement.

Savarkar's view on Hindutva

During his incarnation in Ratnagiri jail in 1922, he wrote his "Essentials of Hindutva" that formulated his theory of Hindutva. He was a self-proclaimed atheist but a staunch believer of Hindutva and he believed all the religions are the same and can together to form Akhand Bharat (Unified or Great India). Later on, he joined Tilak's Samaj Party, advocating for the use of Hindi as a national language. He raised voice against untouchability and caste-based discrimination.

Hindutva as a political philosophy was not only reflected the firm of Savarkar conviction in the veracity and practicability of the religious-cultural ethos of Hindus to be important basis of conceptualizing India as a Hindu Rashtra responding Hindu nationalist to the then time.

Savarkar tried to ideological construction to provide the consideration of Hindus in India. He began his conceptualization of the idea of Hindutva by seeking answer to the question as to what could be as Hindutva. He considered as Bharatrastra is



the land of Hindus. From the Indus to the Seas considered as his fatherland as well his holyland that would be the cradle land of his religion. He envisaged three fundamental bonds that wouldcojoin the Hindus as a common entity , namely , rastra (territory), jati (race), and Sanskriti (culture). Thus, territorily, a Hindu is one who feels being attached to the geographical tract the one hand, and from Himalayas to the Cape Comorin , on the other(Davis in inside.bard.edu/-rdavis/PDFs/hindutva.pdf).

Savarkar also considered a Hindu as the one 'whose first and discernible source could be traced to the Himalayan altitudes of Vedic 'Saptasindhu'. Culturally, Savarkar maintains that a Hindu must feel the pride and commonality of his cultural roots with the other people Hindustahan.

Savarkar, thus provides for a complex criterion to ordain a distinct and character to the Hindus in the Indian society. Considering Hindus as their fatherland and holyland, 'So to every Hindu from the Santhal to the Sadhu, this Bharat bhumi, this 'Sindhusthan is at once a pitribhu and a punyabhū—fatherland and holy land .Further, Savarkar asserted that the converts to Christianity and Islam could not be considered as Hindus despite sharing common culture and lifestyle due to the fact that though they regard Hindusthan as their fatherland, they do not regard it as their holy land. He also emphasized on Hindi Sangathan and pointed out the identicalness between the notions of Hindutva and Indianess (Sharma 2003).

However, the ideology of Hindutva as propounded by Savarkar rooted in the version of Hindu solidarity . He maintained that despite having numerous external differentiations, internally , Hindus are bound together by certain distinct cultural , historical , religious, social and linguistic commonalities which have been brought about by centuries of assimilation and association with each other.

Identifying the characteristics of Hindu rastra, Savarkar emphasized on the minorities some degree of freedom and right to participation in the affairs of the state provided they accept a position of non-aggression to the interests and rights of Hindus.

Therefore, he opposed the demand of Muslims for the grant separate electorate in India. So, it is argued that question of minority rights, the approach of Savarkar was in consonance with his broad conceptualization of the philosophy of Hindutva.

Socio-Political thought of Savarkar

In Savarkar's conceptualization of Hindutva and Hindu Rastra, his social ideas become quite critical as they try to make blueprint for essential transformation in the Indian society. Savarkar was a believer in the idea of social change and argued that dynamic society needed to keep on changing dimensions accordance with the context of the time. However, in perceiving the idea of social change, he was highly impressed by the philosophical traditions of European thinkers, from which he borrowed the three significant characteristics of human life (Chousalkar 2004:91).

Savarkar's established Patit Pavan Mandir in the Ratnagiri district to allow entry to all Hindus including Dalit. According to Savarkar , the rigid caste systems, "deserves to be thrown into the dustbins of history". Criticizing the hold of caste system on the Hindu society, he repudiated the Chaturvarnya system as the root cause of the caste system which had given birth to such inhuman practices like untochability.

Savarkar tried to break away from caste-based vocational rigidity and encourage persons to purses any vocation of their choice based aptitude and ability. Savarkar raised voice for inter-caste marriage, inter-caste dinning. Savarkar wanted to popularize Vedic literature irrespective of caste in the Indian society. He believed that Vedic literature and its civilizational knowledge were important for the entire human race and her culture to every corner of the globe.

V. D. Savarkar underscored was the need to develop a scientific temper. It is through science, modern thought and industrialization that we can ensure that every man and woman in India will have a job to do , food to eat , clothes to wear and happily life tom lead".

Thus, socio-political thoughts of Savarkar reflected contemporary and aimed at infusing a sense of critical comprehension in the minds of the people. All in all, he wanted the Hindu society to get rid of its discriminatory customs and practices.

Critique of Hinduism

He firmly believed that Hindu consolidation was impossible to achieve in light of the practice of untochability and the rigidity of the caste system in India. He raised voice against caste system and untouchability. He found the caste system oppressive and inhuman.

In 1927, he again said that untouchability is the worst inhuman practice of Indian society. He also said that Hindutva was essentially political and cultural in nature. He urged for united Hindutva. Savarkar asserted for political Hindutva would



remain weak and continue to suffer if a great majority of the population was not emancipated from social and cultural humiliation and further integrated into the mainstream. He also challenged some of the practices which were the exclusive rights and privileges of the upper castes Hindus such as wearing sacred threads, chanting of Vedas etc. His social works also had a political objective as he wanted to unite all Hindus under one banner with the aim at 'securing a better life for untouchables'. He believed that untouchability would be fragmented the society which opposed dharma, justice and Hinduism.

The idea of his Hindutva and Hindu Rastra certainly also included, apart from uniting and organizing Hindus, the reinforcing of the cultural and civilizational icon and heritage which were distinctively associated with the Hindu civilization such as language. Despite the fact that Savarkar was a great scholar of Marathi literature and Marathi History, advocating Hindi as the national language and the nagari script as the national script and articulating the popular slogan of 'Hindi Hindu Hindustan' of India.

Post –Independence India and Savarkar

Savarkar was under the constant scrutiny of the public after Gandhiji's assassination. Later, he was also arrested by the government. Later on, he released from the jail. He continued addressing the social and cultural elopements of Hindutva. Savarkar's was died in 1966 for his ill health. Savarkar's idea of Hindutva for uniting India is still relevant in the 21st century.

Conclusions

Savarkar's life thoughts have drawn attention as well as criticism from many quarters of the society. He was branded for providing the intellectual input for the present day right wing extremism in the country.

Though, Savarkar's ideology failed connect the support from the mass of the Indian society. His uni-dimensional approach to politics –protection of Hindu interests against Muslim encroachment--had no relevance for the Hindu masses' (Dixit 1986:135).

Savarkar's socio-political thoughts had been attacked by many quarters of the society. His theorization of on the notion of Hindutva reflected against the spirit of composite or mixed culture of Indian society since time immemorial. Savarkar's creative interpretation of the revolt of 1857 as India's first war of independence whose intellectual and functional contribution to the cause of Indian nationalism can be memorized forever.

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