Savarkar's Hindutva and Indian Nationalism

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Abstract

Veer Savarkar, named Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was an Indian independence activist, lawyer, politician, poet, writer and play wright. Born in 1883 in Maharashtra, his early introduction to revolutionary ideas and participation in the Swadeshi movement influenced his conception of the continued struggle to free India from British imperialis By saying this, Savarkar arrived at The India House, a secretive sub-center in London, and in this way, his ascription "The First War of Indian Independence," Yeah, these realignments first observed 1857 revolt as a collective war of freedom. But even in the jail (Cellular Jail of Andaman and Nicobar Islands), his commitment was always unshaken. At the heart of Savarkar's philosophy was Hindutva as further elucidated in his book "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?". It was a kind of identity politics — a cultural nationalism of blood, soil, and culture, that transcended merely a religious identity. While Hindutva under Savarkar conceived of a Hindu Rashtra, completely separate from the inclusive nationalism of figures like Gandhi and Nehru. The paper also explores how Hindutva steers into the territory of Indian nationalism, makes an attempt to check whether it has any relevance with highly inclusive concept of Indian nationalism, what all differs from such inclusive nationalism and for whom this nationalism was primarily targeted? An exposition of the Hindutva of Savarkar will reveal the ideological plurality that characterized the Indian independence movement, the residue it has left on modern politics, and the incalculable ramifications it has had for the nation's socio-cultural grades.

Keywords: Savarkar, Hindutva, Indian nationalism, Cultural nationalism, Inclusive nationalism, Colonialism

Vīra Vināyaka Dāmodara Svarakara, commonly known as Swatantryaveer Savarkar, or simply 'Veer Savarkar' in Marathi language, was an Indian independence activist and politician as well as a poet, writer and playwright. Vasant Rao, commonly known as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in the public sphere was born on 28th May 1883 in Bhagur, a village nearby Nashik in Maharashtra, was profoundly governed by the contemporary socio-political scenario of the colonized India (M.G. Keer 12). His contact with revolutionary ideas early in life and his association with the Swadeshi movement in his formative years make him one of the ardent lifelong advocates of freedom of India from British colonial rule. A major turnaround came in the life of Savarkar when he went to London for studying law. He took part in the revolutionary activities during his stay calling for perfect removal of British rule from

India. He was instrumental in founding the India House in London, a hub for Indian nationalist activities, and authored "The First War of Indian Independence," a seminal work that reinterpreted the 1857 uprising as a unified struggle for freedom rather than a series of mutinies (Savarkar, The First War 45). In 1909, Savarkar's revolutionary zeal led to his arrest in London for his alleged involvement in the assassination of a British official. He was subsequently extradited to India and sentenced to life imprisonment in the Cellular Jail of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, known for its harsh conditions (Keer 58). The relentless misery notwithstanding, Savarkar never lost faith in his own creed, and the galling words of visionary fervour spread among his fellow-jailbirds and freedom fighters. Intense Pressure led to the release of Vinayak in 1924, after he changed his political ideology to support Hindu nationalism. He was president of the Hindu Mahasabha and hypothesised the Organic concept of Hindutva (Hinduness), summed up in the terms Brand-new historicism and the Loyalty, of a Nation. His writings, particularly "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" laid the ideological foundation for the Hindu nationalist movement in India (Savarkar, Hindutva 3).

Introduction to the Concept of Hindutva as Articulated by Savarkar

Savarkar was a Hindu nationalist and Hindutvavādī that sought to define Indian culture and polity in terms of Hindutva. During his magnum opus—'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?', Savarkar expounded that Hindutva is not just a religious concept but a larger cultural identity, nationalistic identity that incorporate the whole cultural heritage of the Indian subcontinent (Savarkar, Hindutva, 5). He even defined term 'Hindu' all who regard India, from Indus to the Seas, as their fatherland i.e. Pitribhumi and their holy land i.e. Punyabhumi (Savarkar, Hindutva 113). Savarkar expressed his ideology in his book Hindutva which came as a reaction to the above observation of cultural and religious melting pot in India with foreign influences and even internal divisive forces at play. He put the onus on unity, symbolised as Bharat, as the strongest national identity refurbished on Hindu culture and Hindu history. Largely cultural and nationalistic as opposed to traditional Hindiusm, which is mainly a religious and spiritual entity. (Bhatt 45).

The Relevance of Studying the Intersection of Hindutva and Indian Nationalism

For a lot of reasons, the intersection of Hindutva with Indian nationalism is something that ought to be realized. Rare and important, among a few other reasons it throws some light on the ideological diversity within Indian independence movement. Savarkar´s vision of Hindutva thus represented a more exclusive sense of nationalism, oriented around identity, whereas figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru promoted an inclusive secular nationalism, aiming at integrating Indians on the principle of inclusion and diversity (Jaffrelot 89). The second reason, of course, which is perfectly valid, is the need to study Hindutva to grasp the fundamentals of Indian politics today. Vast age has forever affected contemporary political progressions and parties (For example, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

that looks right to Savarkar's ideas. The revival of Hindu nationalism in the last few decades has its roots in the theoretical readings of his tomes; hence, it is an important field of study (Andersen and Damle 67). Finally, the exploration of Hindutva also permits a more nuanced look into the India's socio-cultural scene. It is far too wide-ranging to get into here, but it touches on important issues of religious pluralism, secularism, and the role cultural identity plays in framing national policies and discourse. India is still a country battling the paradox of diversity and national identity and with this struggle, Savarkar continues to be an important consideration with respect to Hindutva in academia as well as policymaking (Basu 102).

Savarkar's Definition of Hindutva versus Hinduism

Prominent in the Indian independence movement, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar provided a distinct formulation of Hindutva diverging from the traditional religious interpretation of Hinduism. To Savarkar, Hindutva is more about a broader socio-political identity related to cultural nationalism than a religion per se. His important treatise Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?, gives a definition of Hindutva as a unifying force from common ancestry (rashtra), culture (sanskriti) and land (bhoomi), rather than only a religious tenet. (Savarkar 3-5). Savarkar's Hindutva was conceived as the unifying force — the unity that does not divide between Hindu and Jain, Buddhist and Sikh, included all who shared the sacred land (Punyabhumi) and fatherland (Pitribhumi) of India. This definition belongs to that group whose sacred sites may fall outside the geographical boundaries of India, which means it leaves Muslims or Christians separately from within the scope of Hindutva (Savarkar 113-114). Hinduism, by contrast, encompasses thousands of beliefs, practices, philosophies and everything in between, essentially functioning as a religious framework, with subsequent schools of thought and traditions emerging from it. If we take the broadest understanding of what traditional Hinduism has been, it is essentially pantheistic and inclusive of theologies and philosophies from theism on one hand to atheism on the other, which does not really square with the exclusivist rhetoric of Hindutva.

The core components of Savarkar's Hindutva ideology can be distilled into several key characteristics:

1. **Janma Bhumi**: A Common Ancestry–according to Savarkar, a common ancestry, historical experience is a prerequisite for national unity. Being of common ancestry gives Hindus a broader sense of kinship with the result that all Hindus become one nation (Savarkar 15-17).

2. **Common Culture (Sanskriti):** Culture, according to Savarkar, includes the customs, traditions, language, and historical consciousness that give a community its identity. Sanskrit and vernacular languages that derive from ancient Indian civilization serve as the cultural glue that binds Hindus according to Savarkar (Savarkar 25–26).

3. **Common Land (Rashtra Bhumi)** : The geographical unity of India as a sacred land is the key idea in Savarkar`s conception of Hindutva. He regards the entire region from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean as a sacred, significant ground for Hindus (Savarkar 34-36).

4. **Religious Unity :** It is a universal application of Hindutva not a provision like religion (however put the importance of Hindus religious symbols and practices). Savarkar evokes these symbols to inspire Hindu unity and encourages the worship of Hindu deities, goddesses, rites as elements of common cultural, if not religious, belief (Savarkar 42-43).

5. **Exclusivism:** A common criticism is that Hindutva seeks to exclude those who do not possess the same roots in the culture and ancestry (example: Muslims and Christians). Savarkar justifies this exclusivism on the claim that outside India, they have their holy land, their loyalty to the Indian nation is so affected (Savarkar 113-114).

The Intended Audience and Followers of the Hindutva Ideology

The articulation of Hindutva by Savarkar sought to bring together a united Hindu identity in the face of the two primary existential threats of colonialism and the emergence of the Islamic and Christian communities in the region. His intended audience included:

- **Hindu youth**, Savarkar believed, we need the strength and inspiration of Hindu youth for the resuscitation and the preservation of Hindu culture and heritage. He dreamed for strong, educated and cultural rooted young Hindu generative (Jaffrelot 50).

- **Educated Middle Class**: The educated middle class was and remained the hip cup for Savarkar's message. Educated Hindus whose public opinion and policy influencing capacities He believed were crucial in spreading and implementing the ideals of Hindutva (Andersen and Damle 112).

- **Hindu Organisations**: Within Hindu nationalist organisations, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) being its most prominent, largely followed the thoughts of Savarkar. These groups accepted many of his ideas and sought to revitalize Hindu culture and politics in India (Graham 145).

- **General Hindu Population**: Ultimately, Savarkar wanted to cater to the general Hindu population, to "instill a feeling of pride in their cultural past and a spirit to work for its protection and preservation, on the one hand, and to infuse in them a sense of larger identity that would direct their political adventure, which was necessary in context of internal and external enemies;" (Kapur 67). Savarkar's Hindutva presents a vision of Indian nationalism rooted in a shared cultural and ancestral identity. While it diverges from the inclusive, religiously diverse concept of Hinduism, it seeks to forge a unified national identity among Hindus based on

common cultural and historical bonds. This vision, while influential, has also sparked considerable debate and controversy, particularly concerning its exclusivist elements.

Hindutva and Nationalism

The ideology of Hindutva laid down in his works "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1923). It is a key text for understanding the cultural nationalism it helped to define. Hindutva as defined by Savarkan is not just a religious identity but a cultural and a civilizational identity of the hindu community which they share by way of common culture, heritage, history and above all values. Savarkar described that Hindutva is not related to the religious aspects of Hinduism, instead he related to the broad identity that binds all who view the Indian subcontinent as their holy land and the territory of their forefathers (Savarkar 17). At the centrepiece of this framework was the notion of a "Hindu Rashtra," or a unified Hindu nation that prized cultural solidarity over communal divisions. According to Savarkar, Indian nationalism is a Hindu nationalism, a dead sure future of the Hindus, and no one else. To his way of thinking, the fact that the "Hindu-race" is the only one who experienced the continuity of their national legacy is perhaps the best strength of India, and culturally, the "Hindus as a family" is the "living race," and the "Hindu nationality now represents the mother-nation," (Savarkar 24-25).

Divergence from Inclusive Nationalism

Savarkar's version of Hindutva is a far cry from the inclusive nationalism that leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru upheld. Gandhi, on his path to leading the nationalist movement and his enthusiasm for nationalistic sentiment, sought to fight for political independence in a non-violent manner (ahimsa) that could unify the socio-political structure and was quite ingeniously underpinned by religious tolerance and co-operation between the different kinds. To the end, Gandhi maintained that India's anti-colonial struggle was primarily a moral and spiritual one in which each and every religion, community and individual within India could live peacefully (Parekh 56-57). In the same vein, Nehru propounded a secular and inclusive idea of India that kept the state above religion, and thereby stood for the equality and justice for all citizens regardless of their religious denomination. The concept of Nehruvian Nationalism was such that it did not seek to exclude other minority religious and cultural groups from entering the national mainstream, but aimed at incorporating these different groups into the cohesive nation-state (Gopal 73-75). In contrast, Hindutva according to Savarkar emphasises the cultural unity of Hindus, and less so religious pluralism. He perceived an essentially Hindu cultural identity of the Indian national ethos and promoted Hindu values in the form of a politically/bureaucratically imposed degree of reverential respect for the Hindu traditions of the majority. Therein is a contradiction of visions that separates Hindutva from the inclusiveness of nationalist aspirations shared by Gandhi and Nehru (Jaffrelot 34-36).

The Impact of Hindutva on the Indian Independence Movement

The influence of Hindutva on the Indian National Movement was multi-faceted and even paradoxical. Compared to country's mainstream nationalist leadership (Gandhi and Nehru) who pursues non-violence and inclusive politics, Savarkar follows more militant and exclusive approach. In his role as head of the Hindu Mahasabha, Savarkar aimed to use the organisation to gather Hindu communities in order to assert their communal identity, under the colonial identity, and in the post-colonial period (Sharma 112-113). While some sections of the nationalist movement were influenced by Savarkar's emphasis on a Hindu identity and led to the formation of organizations resonating his thoughts. Inspired by Savarkar's ideas, the centrist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925, played a significant role in promoting Hindutva ideology. The RSS and similar organizations did not head the independence movement, yet presented a parallel narrative to that of the main nationalist discourse, one focussed on a Hindu- centric vision of India (Andersen and Damle 88-89).

Cultural and Social Dimensions

Hindutva and its sociopolitical dynamics are the very important part of public debate in Indian society, due to its enormous cultural repercussion in the Indian society. Hindutva promotes a mythic genealogy, where Hindu civilization is explained in terms of a narrative of historical continuity and cultural superiority. This story usually celebrates the greatness of ancient Hindu glory and situates current social struggles within sociocultural resurgence (Thapar 42-44). Also, Savarkar's Hindutva allows the practice of observing Hindu festivals, rituals, and symbols so as to unite them along the lines of national cultural practices, thus integrating into public life. This assertion of culture has meant that subaltern regional practices have been ghettoised into an overarching Hindu identity, ignoring many times the cultural articulation done by non-Hindu communities (Nanda 65-67).

The Idea of the Hindu Rashtra and Its Socio-Political Implications

The idea of the Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation) — a political state in which Hindu cultural values prevail — lies at the heart of Savarkar's Hindutva. In a Hindu Rashtra, the legal and political systems would be harmonized with Hindu traditions and principles, having the potential to affect policies concerning education, language, and religious practices (Savarkar 119-121). Such an idea has great socio-political connotations. Critics say the creation of a Hindu Rashtra hinders the secular and plural sociocultural foundation of the Indian state and leads to potential discrimination against non-Hindu communities. The stress on Hindu cultural hegemony is bound to discriminate against the religious minority, and thereby lead to the fragmentation of society (Bhargava 90-92).

The Status and Treatment of Minority Communities within the Hindutva Framework

Under the ideology of Hindutva one of the most sensitive and debatable areas is the condition and treatment to be meted out to the minority communities in this nation. It is not that exclusion of religious minorities is an inherent feature of Savarkarite Hindutva but that there are conditions to their being assimilated into the Hindu Rashtra. The Hindus, in turn, only demand respect for their civilization, and that too when they have assumed a majority and all the others become minorities. This has actually caused conflicts in practice over conditional inclusions. Critics say Hindutva promotes cultural homogeneity, and seeks to make India a Hindu state, leading to majoritarianism, discrimination and societal intolerance against minorities. The real question is one of the consequences of Hindutva inspired policies in the form of communal violence, social exclusion and particular form of political marginalization (Engineer 77-79).

Contemporary Relevance

Even today, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's idea of Hindutva remains a powerful force in the political and social affairs of present-day India. This ideology, incorporating a cultural and nationalistic interpretation of "Hinduness", has been variously adopted and adapted by political forces — most notably the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). That Hindutva rallies around cultural purity, religious identity, and national solidarity comes as little surprise, especially in the post-colonial context of India that finds itself emboldened, yet uncertain about its place on a global scale (Jaffrelot 22). The recent political developments in India are a clear evidence of the enduring of Savarkar's Hindutva. This Hindutva is a source of electoral strategies and policy choices by BJP. For example, the revocation of Article 370 bordering on the abrogation of special autonomy to the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir can be viewed as an illustrative expression on the part of Indian majoritarian fascism towards a total integration of Jammu & Kashmir into the Indian nation-state corresponding with the Hindutva understanding of nationhood (Sardesai 125).

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, for instance, offers citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries This legislation has been criticized for partiality towards specific communities thereby destroying one of the fundamental principles on the basis of which the Indian Constitution was built, secularity as per the critics, of the Indian constitution, part of Hindutva project of the definition of Indian identity in religious terms (Chatterji et al. 178). In this context, the growing focus on encouraging public display of Hindu culture — from the celebration of Hindu festivals to the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya — epitomises the extent of Hindutva in official policies today. This is an attempt to re-establish historical and cultural links, central to the Hindutva ideology (Katju 86). Hindutva is an ideology that has had a substantial impact on the formation of contemporary Indian identity and nationalism. It attempts to build a commonly recognized national identity on the basis of shared cultural and religious tradition. This is visible in the field of educational policy, where there have been considerable efforts to change history textbooks so that they reflect the contributions

and narratives in accordance with Hindutva beliefs. The promotion of Hindi language, the support for the position of Sanskrit and traditional Indian forms of knowledge reflected in the educational curriculum meant to enhance national pride as well as cultural integrity and ultimately a greater sense of unity among the majority group. However, it is true that this agenda also exposes the widespread marginalization of various minority communities.

Conclusion

V. D. Savarkar's vision of Hindutva has remained a powerful force in Indian nationalism. The appeal of cultural unity and religiosity and the vision of India as "mother" to the "children" of "one blood," manifest in biological terms, have found adherents beyond what the public discourses acknowledge. Despite the overwhelming dominance of the secular and pluralist narrative about the nation, the political-cultural activities of the current century have highlighted the continuing relevance of Savarkar's Hindutva in defining India and Indian-ness. Future research should explore the long-term effects of Hindutva on Indian democracy, secularism, and social cohesion. Studies could examine the effect of Hindutva on minority rights, enfranchisement and empowerment, and eruption and recurrence of inter-community strife. To draw a balance sheet of successes and failures, studies could also document how Hindutva affects social harmony and interpersonal relationships. Further, researchers should study the commonalities in and the differences between Hindutva and the several nationalisms based on religious identity that have risen or are rising around the world. At the grassroots, research is needed on the spread and effect of Hindutva ideas in the rural and semi-urban areas of the country. Research should combine the methodologies for the study of Hindutva on a national scale using ethnographic techniques including the capturing of individual experiences. The findings could be useful for social policy-making and for devising methods to package "development" for the religious nationalists to while at the same time ensuring inclusive growth and social peace.

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