

## HINDUISM - A LEGACY IN DISPUTE : SAVARKAR AND GANDHI

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Gandhi and Savarkar represented two alternative and opposed concepts of nationalism and Hinduism. Gandhi's acquaintance with Savarkar probably started around 1906 when Savarkar went to London on a scholarship from Shyamji Krishna Varma on the recommendation of Lokamanya Tilak. About the same time i.e., October 1906. Gandhi and Haji Ojer Ally were in London on a second deputation from South Africa. Arriving in London on 20 October, Gandhi and Ally were taken by Leius Ritch to stay at India House. The very next morning they met the young Indians staying at India House. It is quite probable that Gandhi met Veer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar for the first time on this occasion though there is no historical evidence of the meeting. He could definitely have met him during this period in London as he met Shyamji Krishna Varma for discussions. The second meeting for which there is historical evidence was in 1909 when Gandhi was again on a deputation from South Africa. This was immediately after the assassination of Sir Gurson Willie on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1909 By Madanlal Dhingra. Both Gandhi and Savarkar were present at a Dussehra dinner in Bayswater at Nazimuddin's Indian restaurant. The meeting marked a clash between them. A Police agent reporting the meeting recorded "24" October M.K. Gandhi of Transval presided in the dinner party and expressed disagreement with Savarkar. So he was criticized by Chatto and Savarkar."1 Gandhi and Savarkar were both in Yeravda Jail in 1922. In 1927, Savarkar was in Ratnagiri on 1<sup>st</sup> March. At a public address Gandhi referred to Veer Savarkar whom he said he had known well in England and whose sacrifices and patriotism were well

known. Savarkar invited Gandhi to his residence and this was their first meeting after nearly 18 years, i.e., after London. They discussed political problems, and the problem of shudhi. Neither was convinced of the other side. This was their last meeting.

Gandhi and Savarkar stood for alternative visions of Indianness, the Indian identity, nationalism and Hinduism. They were both strongly committed to India and Indian nationalism. The relationship was adversarial, for Savarkar stood strongly against the Gandhian programme and Gandhian ahimsa. They were both leaders representing the Hindu community albeit in totally different ways. The relationship contributed to making both of them think out their own ideologies because of the adversarial dialogue that went on between them in the field of political action. Thus Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* on the voyage from London to South Africa between 13 and 22 November 1909 on board the ship Kildonan Castle. Gandhi himself made it clear in the preface to the book that it was intended to address the Indian school of violence that he had encountered in London and in South Africa.

“My countrymen, therefore, believe that they should adopt modern civilization and modern methods of violence to drive out the English, *Hind Swaraj* has been written in order to show that they were following a suicidal policy, and if they would but revert to their once glorious civilization, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation of India gone.”<sup>2</sup> (*Hind Swaraj* p.7) The impact of the encounter with Savarkar and his strong ideas of militant nationalism is also seen in the letter Gandhi wrote just before leaving London to Lord Ampthill (20 October, 1909). He wrote:

“Opposed as I am to violence in any shape or form, I have endeavored specially to come into contact with the so-called extremists who may be better described as the party of violence<sup>3</sup> and :”

“I have practically met no one who believes that India can ever become free without resort to violence.”<sup>4</sup> (p.134 *HS*).

For Savarkar also the relationship made him think out and articulate his own ideology in response to the Gandhian scheme. Thus, his biographer D. Keer says that he wrote “Hindutva” largely as a response to the

Gandhian ideology.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of Indian politics, it is relevant to look at and understand clearly the argument advanced by Savarkar. That argument propounds and legitimizes hindutva and gives it an institutional programme in terms of nation building. In Gandhi we have a clear alternative ideology that encounters a hostile militant hindutva, subjects it to a powerful critique and gives a philosophical and deeply spiritual interpretation of Hinduism. Gandhi then provides a critique that is internal to Hinduism and from within the discourse that the hindutva argument appropriates completely. This encounter is part of a religious and philosophical debate on the politics of Hinduism.

In this paper I shall concentrate on understanding Savarkar and the hindutva ideology. I shall further attempt a critique of the same along Gandhian lines.

To begin with, however, it will be interesting to look at the term 'Hindu'. The word "Hindu" appeared in Gaudiya Vaisnava texts of the 16th century. It was at that point used primarily to distinguish the "natives" from Muslims as foreigners.<sup>6</sup> The term ; 'Hindu dharma' also appeared in several early Bengali texts.<sup>7</sup> Yet it was not then felt necessary to articulate its precise implications. In the indigenous discourse then the Hindu was self evidently different in terms of his religious beliefs and cultural, social and linguistic characteristics. The connection between 'Hindu' and 'Indian' is also important. It is fairly well documented that Hindu as a general label for things Indian goes back to remote antiquity.<sup>8</sup> Savarkar, made a distinction between 'Hinduism' and 'hindutva'. He introduced into the centuries old tradition of discourse around the word 'hindu' the new world 'hindutva'. Savarkar said that hindutva was broader than Hinduism, which related to the religious system of the Hindus, their theology and dogma. Hindutva was far more complex and comprehensive. It referred not only to the religious aspect of the Hindus but also to their cultural, social, political and linguistic aspects. Thus Savrkar declared "Let Hinduism concern itself with the salvation of life after death, the concept of god and the universe. Let individuals be free to form opinions about the trio. The whole universe from one end to the other is the real book of religion. But so far as the materialistic and secular aspect is concerned,

the Hindus are a nation bound by a common culture, a common history, a common language, a common country and a common religion.”<sup>9</sup> For Savarkar then, the secular cultural, linguistic, historical, elements that bind the Hindus constituted hindutva as “hinduhood” or the hindu identity.

It stressed the fact that historical, cultural, linguistic factors that form the custom and belief framework and the cultural linguistic context of a religious identity are definitive of that identity and essential for the survival of that identity. This factor was, it should be noted, equally important to Gandhi.

Of the two, Hinduism was clearly seen to be dependent on the cultural linguistic factors. Yet the relationship of the latter to Hinduism as the God-universe-Salvation trio was not clearly seen.

Religion is one part of hindutva not the only, main or dominant part. The other factors in the complex are equally important. They are so important that Hinduism would be lost without them. Yet, while religion i.e. Hinduism could be a intensely private reading of, and , reflection on, the God-Universe-Salvation trio and confined to the religious spiritual space, hindutva was not private but a public reality. A shared commonality that existed in and by its public person.

These reflections should help in understanding hindutva nationalism and the concept of Indianness, the Indian identity, advanced by Savarkar. Savarkar had a clear cut and well defined political ideology, which represented his reflections on Hinduism, the composite Hindu identity and the Hindu nation.

Savarkar in his definition of Indianness and the Hindu nation uses a historical argument For him :

“Every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this Bharat Bhoomi, this land from the Indus to the seas, as his fatherland and Holy land, the land of the origin of his religion and the cradle of his faith”.<sup>10</sup>

According to this definition the term ‘Hindu’ covers, the followers of Vedism as well as Buddhism, Sikhism and all the tribal religions. Hinduism, itself is only a derivative and a small part of Hindutva. Hindutva, for Savarkar is not particularly theocratic, a religious dogma or a creed. It embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole being of

the Hindu "race". This, explains Savarkar's, definition of "Hindu" as including Buddhist etc. for they all- (i) share a common allegiance to Bharat as their Motherland and ; (ii) all acknowledge Bharat as their Holyland and the birth place of their religion.

Though their specific religious beliefs may not accord with the systems of orthodox Hindu thought they are all bound together by Hindutva. What is important here is that those who are not Hindus on the above two counts, according to Savarkar, cannot have a total commitment to Bharat Bhoomi as their religious allegiance would go beyond her frontiers.

Savarkar argues from here that by virtue of their commonality, their Hindutva, the Hindus constituted a nation. All tests that go to demonstrate a common country: race, religion, language entitle the Hindus to form a nation, 'Hindudom'.

"The ancient and the modern history of the Hindus are common. They have friends and enemies in common. They have faced common dangers and won victories in common. One in national despair and one in national hope, the Hindus by an admirable process through assimilation, elimination and consolidation are welded together during the aeons of a common life and common habitat. "<sup>11</sup>

Further, for Savarkar this Hindu nationalism is exclusive and belongs only to the Hindus and no other community in India. Territorial occupation, even acceptance of India as a motherland is not enough. Communities which cannot give an allegiance to India as the source of their religion, their Holyland cannot make the Indian nation as, the center of religious commitment is external to the country of one's birth. The political commitment itself becomes divided and somehow incomplete. In terms of Savarkar's arguments . the history of the Hindu race legitimizes their claim to the Hindu/Indian Nation. Other communities which do not share the history of the race and furthermore allegiance to an external and alien religion, to that extent, cannot be part of the social cultural fabric of Hindutva and the Hindu Nation. The political commitment for Savarkar must be coincident with a religious commitment. The Nation must be seen as the source of one's religion. However the way in which religion and politics interact here is very different from the Gandhian conception. That difference

stemmed from Savarkar's understanding of Hindu religion. He saw Hinduism as necessarily grounded in a particular socio-linguistic-cultural-historical framework of beliefs and practices i.e. Hindutva. History legitimised the rightful equation between Hindu and Indian, the Hindu Nation was really the Indian nation. The political sphere of national life then is the sphere to enact out a complete commitment to the Hindutva legacy.

The legitimacy of the exclusivity of the Hindu-Indian equation derives from history. Further history if gone back far enough into, shows that the Hindus alone constitute a nation in India and the other people were communities and numerically minorities. The argument from history is further strengthened by Savarkar's belief that those whose religious commitment is external to the country of their birth, cannot owe an exclusive commitment to that nation and are not on that count genuine claimants to the nation. This argument about legitimate nationhood and legitimate claim based on genuine allegiance to that nation given the historical context, was particularly relevant to the Muslims. Thus for Savarkar the Muslims who owe allegiance to an external Holy land could not have the right to be genuine claimants to the Indian Nation. Since that right was, first, denied to them by history, and secondly, denied to them as they did not have the requisite political-religious-cultural commitment to the Hindu/Indian Nation. Savarkar said,

"Muslims in general and the Indian Muslims in particular have not yet grown out of the historical stage, of intense religiosity and the theological concepts of state. Their theological politics divide the human world into two groups only—the Muslim land and the enemy land. All lands which are either inhabited entirely by the Muslims or ruled over by the Muslims are Muslim lands. To any other land no faithful Muslim is allowed to bear any loyalty."<sup>12</sup>

"But the Muslims remained Muslims first and Muslims last and Indians never!"<sup>13</sup>

Thus the Indian nation was a Hindu nation. The argument from history depended crucially on going back far enough to look for the genuine claimants to the nation. The more recent history for example of the Muslims in India could not legitimize their nationhood. Savarkar then made the

distinction between the Indian Nation and the Indian State. Though the Indian nation was legitimately equivalent to the Hindu nation, Savarkar believed that the Hindus could form a political state with other minorities.

“Congress committed the serious mistake at its very start of overlooking this fundamental social and political principle that in the formation of nations, religious, racial, cultural and historical affinities count immensely more than their territorial unity.”<sup>14</sup>

To answer the charge that such an exclusive concept of nationalism, as in, Hindu nationalism, was parochial, Savarkar’s argument was that, that was the case because in essence all nationalism and patriotism was parochial and communal. Nationalism in fact proceeded by demarcating the other and asserting the rights of a particular nation. “Why are you an Indian patriot and not an Abyssinian one, and go there and fight for their freedom. Some Englishmen born in this territory are and may continue to be Indians. can therefore the overlordship of these Anglo-Indians be a Swaraj to the Hindus ?”<sup>15</sup>

Savarkar’s defense of the exclusive hindutva nationalism is very clear. He maintains that the Indian nationalism as resisting the British is itself parochial and communal. If it can be considered legitimate in its exclusivity to the Indians; why should Hindu nationalism be illegitimate on the same charge? The world commonwealth was a good but distant ideal and in the meanwhile the survival of the fittest nations was the rule. The Hindus had to defend their Hindu nation to survive as a cultural and political unit. Savarkar warned them; Therefore, before you make out a case for unity you must make out a case for survival as a national or social unit. <sup>16</sup> The ground realities presented the world in which conflicts between nations and communities were endemic and inevitable. Therefore for Savarkar liberal humanism and its all embracing universalism were acceptable as distant ideals, while the moment demanded the aggressive defense of one’s own nation, religion and culture.

This defensive nationalism was basically supported along three different lines- practical, ethical and religious. How ever the three arguments were not clearly differentiated. Practically Savarkar entreated the hindus to survive. “As long as every other ‘ism’ has not disowned its special



dogmas, whichever tend into dangerous war cries, so long no cultural or rational unit can afford to loosen the bonds, especially those of a common name and a common banner that are the mighty sources of organic cohesion and strength.”<sup>17</sup>

This fight for survival was also ethically justifiable since it was for Savarkar purely a defense of legitimate hindutva nationalism. The legitimacy of the Hindu claim already having been established. For Savarkar as long as a nation tries to defend its legitimate just, and fundamental rights against the overbearing aggression of other human aggregates and does not infringe upon the equal and just rights of others, it is ethically acceptable. Witness the following passage; “Therefore, ye, O Hindus consolidate and strengthen Hindu Nationality, not to give wanton offense to any of our non-hindu compatriots in fact to any one in the world but in just and urgent self-defense of our race and land, to render it impossible for others to betray her or to subject her to unprovoked attacks by any of those pan-isms that are struggling from continent to continent”<sup>18</sup>

Defensive hindutva nationalism, is not just a matter of the practical survival of the hindu race, and the hindu identity but it is backed by moral and religious force. The ethical and religious arguments internal to the hindutva ideology are crucially important or they give the movement the character of a crusade for justice and God. The internal acceptance of this religious and moral confidence is completely non-hesitant. The ideology is not theoretically open to a critique from within Hinduism itself whose religious authority it completely appropriates.

Savarkar’s argument for hindutva gives it the character of a fight for justice, for legitimate rights, and for the good. It becomes for him a matter of righteousness. The “ethical” again needs to be expanded. It is not enough simply to say that ethical language is part of the hindutva nationalist discourse. Freedom to flourish is the need of the motherland, the race, the culture and the religion. without freedom to have evolution and development, hindutva will be lost. And Hinduism which is so bound up with and crucially dependent on hindutva, will disintegrate. Thus Savarkar can speak of defensive hindutva in terms of moral duties. The language of moral duties, righteousness, are applicable to this discourse.



The religious and moral arguments are mixed up to give the politics of hindutva the character of a religious and moral crusade. The crusade is supported by an extravagant use of religious historical symbolism. The epics become religious history and Rama and Krishna are the heroes all providing powerful arguments to strengthen the hindutva argument. In Savarkar then there is a reading of history and if religious texts to draw support for the defensive hindu nationalism. The epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* offer power precursors in terms of the hindus waging righteous wars. The whole concept of a righteous war was used to translate the politics of establishing the hindutva social cultural linguistic mileau, into a self righteous just and religious war.

“If ever I deemed it legitimate to have recourse to the exceptional and severe rules of emergency, it was only because duty led me and my generation into circumstances so abnormal and urgent as to render them indispensable in the interest of righteousness itself.”<sup>19</sup>

Very interesting in this connection is the poem Savarkar wrote in jail in 1922.

“Even so this our motherland  
craving the assistance  
of the Lord that she too be rescued from the crocodile.  
Cultures of bondage, enters our garden plucks a fresh flower  
from the bough and offers it at his feet in worship.”<sup>20</sup>

Here the identification of God and Hindu nation is complete. God and Bharat Mata have a coincident aim and welfare. So hindutva is not a political programme alone. It is a fight for justice, demanded by the religious commitment to Hindusim. It is indeed as if the gods are restless without the hindutva social-cultural-linguistic custom and belief framework, and crave the establishment of the Hindu nation or Indian State.

The transition to militancy and the advocacy of violence from the above reasoning is not too difficult since all moral, religious, political authority, rests exclusively with the Hindus, the supremely worthwhile ‘end’ of establishing hindutva justifies all means. Militancy, and violence, are therefore justified. There are certain factors here,

- (1) For Savarkar the practical, ethical, and religious justification, of the hindu nation argument, translates in the language of morals into a universal moral blueprint.
- (2) Consequently, the all-embracing goal of the religious, moral and political life of the hindu identity is itself sufficient justification for the employment of any means.
- (3) The means are not morally indifferent but assertions of Kshatriya hood and sacred actions in defense of religion and morality.

The translation of the hindutva ideology in the field of political action, leads to an advocacy of violence, militancy and revolution. This translation becomes very significant. The argument uses history to legitimize the Hindu nation claim, clarifies the content of Hinduism as having the very important hindutva framework. It then uses a complex three-tier justification of hindutva and Hindu nation: practical, moral and religious. Thereafter this all-embracing universal moral blueprint becomes the significant legitimization of hindu militancy. With Savarkar and after Savarkar the argument is obviously very significant:

1. Historically this ideology provided commitment and zeal to Hindu youth during the pre-independence days. This led to murders, assassinations etc.
2. The *Gita*, *Ramayana* etc. were said to be precursors in the Indian tradition. Through terrorism, and militancy could not be said to be part of the traditional Hindu thought, these texts were seen as legitimizing the notion of a war for righteousness or dharma.
3. What is more interesting is that Hinduism and Hindu history is completely appropriated and yet the Hindu militancy argument is not subjected to a reflection and criticism with the Hindu tradition itself. The means are sacred as means, which serve the end of hindutva. Yet hindutva represents, in fact, appropriates Hinduism. Hinduism though bound up with a cultural social political milieu, does yet stand for a complex network of religious beliefs as well as allegiance to certain purusarthas. Again, Jainism, Buddhism as well as orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy, locate the moral life with certain virtues like asteya, ahimsa, aparigraha, satya and

brahmacharya. A critique is therefore available within tradition itself and it is in this context that the Gandhi-Savarkar relationship becomes so significant. It is also especially relevant, given the politics of present day Hinduism. A self criticism of method and chosen end, is not admitted theoretically or practically by Savarkar's hindutva ideology even in terms of principles internal to Hinduism, which it appropriates completely.

4. The hindutva appropriation also seems to be completely unmindful of the complexity of the Hindu tradition. At one level it overlooks the internal problem within the Hindu identity, and at another deeper level it fails to see different kinds of spiritual relationships that are possible within the self same Hindu framework. To look here at the surface level itself: Revolution and militancy are not permitted to dissensions within the Hindu identity itself. So Savarkar maintains with confidence that : "the moment the foreign power is destroyed, in order to guard the country from the evils of anarchy, a constitution liked by the majority of the people should be at once established and that constitution should be obeyed with reverence by all. In short, the rule should be revolution outside and law within"<sup>21</sup>

However Savarkar disregards the possibility that the self same hindutva programme and legitimization can also be used internally by separate identities within hindutva framework, to then, fight that framework from within. The hindutva legitimization of militancy and violence can surely be used with the same moral and spiritual confidence by smaller internal groups. Savarkar fails to see the absence of self contained spaces in the moral life. Moral life and norms are not exclusive to moments and identities. There cannot really be a moral justification of militancy for one particular identity which is exclusive to it and none else. Nor is morality confined to the ends and not to the means used.

The problem with Savarkar and his hindutva argument is a misappropriation of the moral argument. In his argument from justice Savarkar sees justice as belonging exclusively to the Hindu cause. Savarkar thus understands hindutva in the sense of Indian undivided state and Hindu nation as a just and righteous end. The ethical argument needs to be at the very least, evaluated. Savarkar speaks strongly of fighting a just war and

so on. and thus appeals to the oral instinct of the masses. Therefore it is important to understand the strength of his and the hindutva moral claim. Justice is certainly central to morality. However "Justice" must be seen not only in the sense that my assessment of human situations and my fellow human beings must be capable of being justified- but also, more importantly, that my perception and assessment of the other must do justice to him. A necessary condition for ensuring justice is that I remove all traces of ego from my perception and assessment. Thus it is that the Gandhian ideas of truth and of ahimsa (taken from the same Hindu tradition) become central to an adequate conception of the moral life. These ideas can be read as related to moral episteme: real or genuine knowledge of the other and of the self. The central idea here is of the conquest of deception rather of self-deception. Once self-deception is removed by the conquest of the powerful ego centered framework, man can be in touch with the truth of his being. Deception involves distorting one's own reality as well as that of the other.

In terms of real or genuine knowledge of oneself and of the other, of developing the capacity to attempt to do justice to the hostile other i.e. to live the moral life, Gandhian ahimsa becomes relevant. The first and the major step in the overcoming of the ego is the practice of ahimsa in Gandhi's sense of the term. Ahimsa is frequently taken to mean "non-violence". A more accurate translation of the word would be 'non-injury'. The practice of non-injury involves abstaining from physical injury as well as injury to the soul; as we might say genuine ahimsa is incompatible with the demands of the ego. To use a person only as a means is to do him a moral injury. The way of ashimsa is the way of the gradual overcoming of the ego and therefore the achievement of the truth of being. "It may entail continuous suffering and the cultivation of endless patience. Thus, step-by-step we learn to make friends with the entire world; we realise the greatness of god or truth. Our peace of mind increases in spite of suffering. We become braver and more enterprising; we understand more clearly the difference between what is everlasting and what is not. Our pride melts away, and we become humble. Our worldly attachments diminish and so does the evil within us from day-to-day."<sup>22</sup> Ahimsa and truth are thus very important to the concept of justice as central to the moral life. In this context the

Gandhian critique of Hindu militancy and terrorism, particularly in *Hind Swaraj* becomes very relevant. Gandhi tries therein to point out the lacuna in the moral stance adopted by the terrorists.

“Do you not tremble to think of freeing India by assassination. What we need to do is kill ourselves. It is a cowardly thought, that of killing others. Those who will rise to power by murders will certainly not make the nation happy.”<sup>23</sup>

The whole notion of ‘swaraj’ as self rule, control of the ego by ahimsa and truth is relevant to the above argument. Gandhi speaks of ‘swaraj’ as moral self-rule which is true freedom. Gandhian swaraj is about self-control, ego-control and about the self-denial, fearlessness and the self-discipline it involves. In short it is nothing if not the moral enterprise itself. This inward freedom is according to Gandhi the condition of political freedom. His stance against the militant terrorist movement then involves a moral argument.

That argument points out the lack of understanding of the moral life on the part of militant ideology. He sees their adoption of the just and moral stance as problematic in its complete disregard for genuine understanding of the other, for doing justice to the other’s reality, for attempting to reach political freedom. Gandhi was able to see that despite pretensions to a morally upright position Savarkarian ideology was not from within an authentic moral life. Thus Gandhi says in *Hindi Swaraj* ;

“It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves.”<sup>24</sup>

Another problem with Savarkar’s adoption of the moral stance for Hindutva and militancy is that it sees the moral life as fragmented and mechanical. For Savarkar, noble ideals are good as ideals while ground realities dictate practical i.e. militant terms. Ends need to be ethically upright and the means adopted become sacred in their moral light. In other words the moral life functions in mechanical and fragmented ways. There are moral and practical spaces, it is morally possible to separate ends from means adopted. Savarkar thus missed the idea of the moral life as permeated by a sense of dynamic unity. The moral life is one whose motivating force is the virtues; it is also a life that is free from selfdeception; and it is truth that gathers the virtues into the vital unity of the moral life, while it is

ahimsa as love that is the surest way to truth. This makes it possible to understand moral life as non-fragmented and pervasive. It is then not possible to restrict morality to ends or ideals. To so restrict the moral life is to disrupt its dynamic unity and harmonious exercise of virtues, and therefore, to destroy the moral motive altogether. Gandhi tried to make the latter point in Hind Swaraj where he stressed the problematic at the heart of the militant distinction of end and means adopted.

“Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crime.”<sup>25</sup>

“The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree.”<sup>26</sup>

Related to the above moral problematic at the heart of Savarkar’s vision, is also the complete epistemic confidence from which Savarkar uses his argument about justice, righteousness and duty. There is no consciousness of the complexity of moral life, of the possibility of being mistaken. Basically, there is no space for moral indeterminacy. The last meeting of Gandhi and Savarkar is really interesting on this point. It appears that when Gandhi was leaving, he said to Savarkar : “It is clear that we disagree on some problems. But I hope you have no objection to my making experiments”. Savarkar replied in a moment. “You know the story of the boys and frogs. You will be making the experiment at the cost of nation”.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it is that Savarkar’s justification for violence, revolution, militancy, and assassinations makes use of this hindutva ideology with frightening and confident disregard for other ways of being. The enterprise of moral episteme, real knowledge of the other from outside one’s own scheme is not even attempted. So this militant defensive Hindu nationalism is inherently incapable of doing justice to the other.

Yet, it is avowedly fighting for justice all the time. In “The Indian War of Independence of 1857” for e.g. Savarkar maintains, “But so long that divine age has not arrived, so long as the highly auspicious end remains only in the lines of saintly poets and in the prophecies of the divinely inspired, and so long as even to make that state of human justice possible,

the human mind has to be busy eradicating sinful and aggressive tendencies, so long rebellion, bloodshed and revenge cannot be purely sinful: ”<sup>28</sup>

He proceeded : “And when justice uses these terrible means for her salvation, the blame of it does not lie, on justice but on the preceding cruel injustice, the power and insolence of which called forth the means. We do not hold the justice which gives the death sentence responsible for bloodshed, but rather the injustice which is taken to the gallows. ”<sup>29</sup>

The moral epistemic confidence involved here is therefore completely unaware of indeterminacy in *human-and-moral* knowledge situations. The justice involved is itself incapable by definition of doing justice to the other. It is a justice of revenge and bloodshed and translates into injustice. The moral argument thus fails to hold and its adoption by Savarkar’s militant stance is problematic.

The adoption of the argument for justice along with the spiritual call of god, makes the appeal of the ideology frightening. Frightening because of its complete moral religious and epistemic confidence, frightening because it’s call for justice, has injustice as its major motivator. Frightening again because of the elaborate deception involved here; self-deception in the appropriation of the morally upright stance with complete disregard for the other - whether British, Muslim or Hindu. Given that this disregard is practical, political, moral and academic, it becomes frightening indeed.

Savarkar himself was a supporter of modern science and civilization and wanted to model India after the Western mode; witness for e.g. the letter he writes to his brother from the Andemans;

“The Americans need Vedanta philosophy and so does England, for they have developed their life to that fullness, richness and manliness to Kshatryahood and so stand on the threshold of Brahminhood wherein alone the capacity to read and realize such philosophy can co-exist. ”<sup>30</sup>

The India that Savarkar envisaged, the goal of hindutva, defensive Hindu nationalism’ would therefore be one closely modelled along modern Western lines. He basically envisaged a democratic state based on one man one vote where minorities could live with equal rights. Hindustan would remain one undivided state. Science would lead to material progress and there would be the spread of modern rational scientific temper.



However in the Indian state the Hindus would constitute the majority group. The Indian state would still remain primarily the Hindu nation. Though the majority would be just and fair, yet they would not allow themselves to be exploited by minorities.

“Thirty crores of people with India for their basis of operation, for their Fatherland and Holy land, with such a history behind them, bound together by ties of a common blood and common culture can dictate terms to the whole world. A day will come when mankind will have to face the force. Equally certain it is that whenever the Hindus come to hold such a position whence they could dictate terms those terms cannot be very different from the terms which the Geeta dictates or the Buddha lays down. A Hindu is most intensely so when he ceases to be a Hindu, and with a Shankar claims the whole earth for a Benares -Varanasi, Medini- Or with a Tukaran exclaims ; my country Oh brothers the limits of the universe- there the frontiers of my country lie.”<sup>31</sup>

What then does Savarkar’s position about hindutva amount to ? The India of Savarkar vision is a modern state. Such a state would be committed to defensive Hindu nationalism in order to safeguard the identity of the Hindu community. However given the distinction between Hinduism and hindutva basically the defensive Hindu nationalism would be committed to safeguarding the Hindu culture, language, history, politics etc. The hindutva programme as envisaged by Savarkar would involve an aggressive defense of the hindutva identity. That identity defined in terms of certain socio-cultural linguistic elements; the definition itself being internal to the hindutva programme.

Moreover the interesting philosophical issue here is, to my mind, how this agenda would promote hinduism. What for Savarkar is the relation between the use of Sanskrit and Hindi, the Hindu culture and social norms, the vigorous participation in Shivaji and Ganesh festivals, and Hinduism? For Gandhi as well as for Savarkar the socio-linguistic cultural framework of a religion was crucial to the religious identity. However for Savarkar the secular and socio-linguistic cultural elements that accompanied Hinduism and constituted hindutva were the all important and the only ideological programme. Hinduism, as in, the specifically religious beliefs, would take

care of themselves once hindutva was actualized. For then, Hindus would be truly Hindu and, "cease to be Hindus" attain a sense of Vedantic oneness.

If Hindus are indeed Hindu when they attain a vision of Vedantic oneness with all of humanity according to Savarkar, one fails to understand, how such Hinduism could be actualized by the defensive Hindu nationalism of aggressively assuming the dominant role. The dominant role model would necessarily be one where the Hindus would demonstrate strength and majority power. Issues here would be a display of religious power by the use of religious symbolism the vigorous revival of Shivaji and Ganesh festivals (in Savarkar's times) to e.g. display strength and to keep the minorities in their place.

Yet this kind of hindutva would not strengthen the specifically religious core or make the Hindus "cease to be Hindus". On the contrary it would if anything, entrench them firmly in exclusivity. It would far from taking them to Sankara, Buddha, or the Geeta's vision, entrench them in power displays and symbolism of control.

I see here the crucial problem with Savarkar's hindutva ideology and its understanding of Hinduism. An aggressive defensive hindutva would not be able to actualize a Hindu vision which participated in Vedantic oneness.

Savarkar's hindutva ideology builds up a legitimizing argument from history, nationalism to the dominant Hindu majority being the true claimants, to the Hindu nation. The Hindus would then be in a position to dictate terms. Savarkar then claims that such terms would be non-exclusive open and one informed by a vision of oneness. Coupled with defensive Hindu nationalism the state hindutva envisages is an aggressive defensive military state enlightened by modern science and technology. How can this kind of institutional framework coupled with an aggressive espousal of Hindu symbolism, make Hindus truly Hindus in Savarkar's sense? A modern state and society totally secular as far as specifically religious beliefs are concerned which would develop rational scientific temper in place of religiosity. Yet, in terms of material and secular spaces such a state would be non-secular sectarian and decidedly Hindu. It would then ideologically work to a state of affairs where Hinduism would be replaced by enlightened rational modern scientific temper and hindutva would be aggressively

established. The hindutva ideology theoretically suffers from this serious lacuna. Its distinction of Hinduism and hindutva disperses hinduism and espouses hindutva. A commitment to hindutva gathers strength- following from the specifically religious argument- yet it only pretends to be a religious movement, ideologically it is clearly a cultural, linguistic social and political movement. Yet this clarity is not given even to a thinker like Savarkar who assumes that Hinduism will simply happen, no matter if the means adopted work systematically at the destruction of all its specifically religious beliefs. No wonder then that the movement could lead to a Ram Mandir and no Ram.

Savarkar and his hindutva ideology was certainly correct in apprehending the difference between Hinduism and the semitic religions like Islam, Christianity and Judaism, in as much a, unlike the latter, hinduism cannot be located within any centralized body of canonical teaching. It is not associated with the sacred personage of any one founder, it developed over centuries of thought in which millions of men contributed. It is a complex network of beliefs that are specifically religious in character as also other beliefs and practices which are social in character.<sup>32</sup> The point is that Gandhi was also equally appreciative of the cultural, linguistic and social identity of the Hindus. He stressed the importance of the cultural tradition inherited from the ancestors. Yet for Gandhi the "truth -ahimsa-God" trio made up the core of Hinduism and all the other elements could be internally understood and evaluated from within an authentic religious way of life. It was the religious that breathed life into culture and society.

The problem with hindutva was then, that it failed to see the complexity of the religion-culture relationship in Hinduism. It failed to appreciate that different kinds of sustenance were drawn from the self same Hindu religious tradition and the complex question of the Hindu identity could not be simply reduced to hindutva.

#### NOTES

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