

Social and Political Thought of India.



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Vinayak Damodar Savarkar

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (28 May 1883 – 26 February 1966) was an Indian Independence activist and politician who formulated the Hindu nationalist philosophy of Hindutva. He was a leading figure in the Hindu Mahasabha. Savarkar began his political activities as a high school student and continued to do so at college. After 1937, he started travelling widely, becoming a forceful orator and writer, advocating Hindu political and social unity. Serving as the president of the Hindu Mahasabha political party, Savarkar endorsed the idea of India as a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation). In 1948 Savarkar was charged as a co-conspirator in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, however he was acquitted by the court for lack of evidence.



Savarkar and National Movement

- When he was young, he organized a youth group named 'Mitra Mela'. He was inspired by radical political leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal and engages the group in revolutionary activities.
- He wrote a book titled "The History of the War of Indian Independence" which inspired a lot of Indians to fight against the British for freedom.
- Veer Savarkar's elder brother organized a protest against the 'Indian Council Act 1909' also known as Minto-Morley Reform. Further, with the protest, the British Police claimed that Veer Savarkar had plotted in crime and issued a warrant against him.
- He was sentenced to 50 years of imprisonment and sent back to Bombay. Later, he was taken to the Andaman and Nicobar Island on 4 July, 1911. There, he was locked at 'cellular Jail' famous as Kala Pani.

- During his prison time, he wrote an ideological pamphlet known as Hindutva And this was published by Savarkar's supporters. In the pamphlet, he described Hindu as a patriotic and proud inhabitant of 'Bharatvarsha' (India) and so influenced several Hindus.
- He also described several religions as one and the same as **Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism**. According to him, all these religions can support the creation of 'Akhand Bharat' (United India or Greater India).
- He was a fierce critic of the Indian National Congress (INC) and Mahatma Gandhi. He opposed the 'Quit India Movement' and later objected to INC's acceptance of Indian partition. He proposed the co-existence of two nations in one country.
- Veer Savarkar's philosophy was no doubt unique and consists of various elements like ethical, theological and philosophical theories. In fact, his political philosophy is a mixture of humanism, rationalism, universalism, positivism, utilitarianism, and realism.
- He also worked against some of India's social evils like caste discrimination and untouchability. His, books motivated youth and because of his courageous behavior he had earned the nickname 'Veer'.

Savarkar on Nationalism

- According to Savarkar Hindus in India were a nation and other people were communities and thus minorities.
- The Indian National Congress believed and upheld the territorial nationalism. To them a nation meant people living on a common land. Whoever came to India - the Arabs, the Jews the Portuguese, the Greeks - formed a nation together with the Hindus, because these new comers also lived in India.
- Savarkar observed that the Congress committed the serious mistake of overlooking the fundamental, social and political principle that in the formation of nations, religious, racial, cultural and historical affinities counted immensely more than their territorial unity. What they called the Indian nation Savarkar called the Indian state, because he believed that the Hindus could form a state with other minorities.
- The idea of territorial nationality alone was envisaged by the Congressmen, who in general preferred to be totally ignorant of Muslim history, theology and political trend of mind In his opinion the Hindus were the bedrock on which the Indian independent state could be built.

- Savarkar held that in adopting the Hindi as the national language no distinction was implied as regards other provincial languages.
- Hindusthan to Savarkar did not only mean the so called British India, it comprised even those parts which were under the French and Portuguese possession.
- As the Parsees were concerned, Savarkar held that they were by race, religion, language and culture most akin to the Hindus. They had gratefully been loyal to India. Savarkar opined that the Parsees were not fanatics and always displayed good intentions towards the Hindu nation.
- Regarding the Christian minorities Savarkar opined that they were civilized people and had no extra territorial political designs against India. He held that the Christians were not linguistically and culturally averse to the Hindus and, therefore, could be politically assimilated.
- So far as the Jews were concerned, Savarkar held that they were too few and had given the Hindus 'no political or cultural troubles.
- Savarkar was totally hostile to the Muslims. He opined that the attitude of the Hindus towards the Muslims should be 'one of distrust and watchfulness' in view of their 'antiHindu', anti - Indian and extra-territorial designs.
- Savarkar was of the opinion that the Hindu-Muslim conflict was neither a simple thing nor the creation of a third party, but a strife of different cultures and races.

THE FIVE PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF SAVARKAR



1. Utilitarianism
2. Rationalism
3. Humanism and Universalism
4. Pragmatism
5. Realism

Utilitarianism

- Savarkar's 'strategic agnosticism' is deeply rooted in his utilitarian outlook. Savarkar was a devoted follower of the Utilitarian school of England, also called the Philosophical Radicals.
- The concept of utility, and not the sanctity of social structures through ancient documents and tradition, was the guiding principle underlying Savarkar's ideal of a transformed Indian society.
- He emphasized that his comprehension of utilitarianism was not based on the individual's selfish reasons for happiness and pleasure but was catered more towards the public good and happiness of the largest possible section of society.
- The tenets of utilitarianism were the following: **the greatest good of the greatest number, rationalism, secularism, individual freedom, and equality, omnipotence of education and simple living and high thinking.**
- Social and political convenience and utilitarianism are the only variables of measurement for development strategies to push the society in India on to a higher level.

Rationalism and Positivism

- ❑ To propagate his social and political philosophy, Savarkar used “rationality” as his touchstone. All thoughts, comments and arguments needed to be based on logical inference and applied to propositions grounded in observable facts.
- ❑ An appropriate understanding of Savarkar’s thoughts would remain incomplete without an analysis of his passion towards science, technology and modernization. He believed in adopting both an intelligent as well as a scientific attitude and approach.
- ❑ As a rationalist and a believer in science and technology he rejected the surrendering to Nature which he witnessed in response to phenomena such as earthquake, floods, eclipses of sun and moon, droughts and famines. He firmly believed that what one held to be a mystery could be grasped through direct observation, experience and experimentation.
- ❑ This led him to the conclusion that each of his countrymen should believe only in things that were logically and scientifically proven.

Humanism and Universalism

- ❑ Savarkar's thinking was based on humanitarian values and a belief structure founded upon a faith in science, equality and liberty and not on charity or religious considerations.
- ❑ Savarkar's message was that liberty and equality were of equal value and importance. His concern for liberty and equality should also be seen in the light of his definition of liberty. The collective liberty of the group rather than the freedom of individuals within the group.
- ❑ His definition of liberty left a certain amount of flexibility for reciprocal obligations among the members of society. Savarkar claimed not only to be rational and scientific, but also professed a love for humanism and universalism as ethical values.
- ❑ Savarkar used humanism to justify his demand for independence. He argued that the absence of freedom retarded any evolution towards intellectual, moral, social, political as well as economic progress. A country which was not free could not contribute any share to the development of mankind.

Pragmatism

- ❑ He pursued the motto 'be practical not philosophical' , accepting that there is a need for philosophical and intellectual debate.
- ❑ Savarkar identified a deep contradiction between the fatalism found in religious or philosophical doctrines and the need for action or practical advice for the progress of Indian society.
- ❑ Practical utility was the key which Savarkar used to prove the 'stable value' of not only morality but also of each social, economic and political endeavor.

Realism

- ❑ In addition to the pragmatism underlying Savarkar's social and political philosophy is his distinctive sense of realism. No thought, tradition, method, mechanism, institution or organization can effectively serve the people of all countries, at all times and under all circumstances .
- ❑ For him, human conduct had to adapt to the need and necessity of the time and could not remain the same ever.
- ❑ He was realistic enough to realize that certain conditions were necessary for social and political progress to be possible and was aware of the fact that carrying out reforms was a difficult and complex challenge.
- ❑ His version of realism is his firm belief in the maxim, 'might is right' as the leading principle in International Politics. That is protecting the interests of one's own country and its people had to be right.
- ❑ He argued that the state or government needed to promote physical force more than moral feelings.

Conclusion

- ❑ Savarkar welcomed the prospects of reforming society along modern and egalitarian principles.
- ❑ He attempted to compose a worldly philosophy of life consisting of a portfolio of elements drawn from 'classical Indian thought', western social and political philosophy and his own experience and observations.
- ❑ He used religious language to a tremendous extent, but at the same time he could not agree with various aspects of the Hindu faith. On the one hand he considered the existence of an omnipresent soul as a possible hypothesis, but on the other hand he stressed that this was also not a 'scientific reality'.
- ❑ According to him, for the survival of the Indian nation in this competitive world, some of the prevalent religious concepts and social customs that were outdated and worthy of rejection needed to be modified.
- ❑ He was neither a liberal nor a socialist.