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by

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Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's 'Strategic Agnosticism': A Compilation of his Socio-Political Philosophy and Worldview

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ABSTRACT:

Since India's independence (and even before) there is a growing ideological debate regarding its identity and self-understanding. The focal point of this discussion is the much-disputed and multi-faceted Indian historical figure Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1885-1966). His life and work, and above all his literary compositions, point to numerous paradoxes and controversial phenomena, which divides the discussants basically into two essential camps. On the one side are those who see Savarkar and his socio-political vision (Hindutva) that he proclaimed as the greatest danger to the foundation of the modern, secular state, democracy, and multiculturalism. With this background, Savarkar is used as the synonym for an "anti-modern" regression, and as the ideological founder of a phenomenon that has usually been referred to as "Hindu nationalism" or "Hindu fundamentalism". This side is opposed by a second camp consisting of people who tend to see Savarkar and his perceptions of state theory as a legitimate and ambitious form of democratic self-determination. However, all these controversies about Savarkar do not take into account the philosophical tenets underlying his social and political thoughts. Both Indian as well as Western scholars have focused only on some particular fragments of his thoughts without spending the time and effort to understand his various theoretical concepts in a complex and coherent framework. Therefore, this article aims to explore the philosophical foundation of his notions and actions, and suggests crucial variables for further scientific analysis.

INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to critically examine some elements of the ideas, ideals, and principles behind the philosophy of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1885-1966) and

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his attempts to move towards the constitution of a coherent worldview. Savarkar is one of the most controversial and multi-faceted of India's personas, whose life and literary contribution present various paradoxical phenomena. He became the object of attention and the centre of academic as well as public controversy in past and contemporary India because of his militant activism and nationalism during the struggle for Independence. Yet controversies about Savarkar, mostly polemical in tone do not take into account the philosophical tenets underlying his social and political thoughts. Both Indian as well as Western scholars² have focussed only on some particular fragments of his thoughts and action without spending the time and effort to understand his various theoretical concepts in a complex but coherent framework. Yet the most outstanding attempts at studying Savarkar have been those by Jyotirmaya Sharma (2003), Harindra Srivastava (1993a, 1993b, 1983), T.C. Phadtare (1975), Suresh Sharma Suresh (1996) and V.S. Godbole (2004). The core value of Godbole's work lies within the substantial compilation of newspaper articles and further collections of writing and the rudimentary thematic categorization as well as translating the compilation in to English. Srivastava's (1983) contribution, although containing a glorifying connotation and being limited to the university years in London, is still one of the most profound and detailed works on Savarkar and should be considered in all studies focusing on him. The same is true for the extremely insightful and thoughtful discourse from Jyotirmaya Sharma on Savarkar within his work on Hindutva as mentioned above. Although the author does not agree with Sharma's fundamental idea of evolution deriving from the Hindutva concept alongside further core statements, his work still remains convincing and genuine due to his underlying investigative work as well as his attempt to meet the requirements of the vast amount of Savarkar's documents attempting to evaluate, even if sharply worded, a worthy conclusion.

The author believes that it is not possible to evaluate Savarkar's contribution to the solutions of social and political problems that India faced, and still faces, without an appropriate analysis of his philosophical tenets and worldview. Savarkar's social and political thought, in particular on the issue of social reforms, need to be examined and formulated as a philosophy of the basic transformation of India's social structure. To achieve this is, at first sight, a difficult challenge primarily because Savarkar did not offer a 'coherent overview' on his philosophical principles³. He never wrote extensively on philosophical issues and

² These authors include V. Krishna Aiyar (1989), Mani Shankar Aiyar (2004, 1999), Asaf Ali 1989, Vidya Sagar Anand (1989, 1967), Nitya Narayan Banerjee (1989a, 1989b), Sudhakar V. Bhalerao (1999), Saba N. Bhaumik/Smruti Koppikar (2004), Chitragupta/Indra Prakash (1939), S.R. Date (1989), Balasaheb Deoras (1989a, 1989b), Sudhakar Deshpande (2000, 1999), Enriko Fasana (1997), Gangadhar Gadgil (1989), M.V. Ganapati (1989), P.L. Gawade (1989), Radhika Mohan Goswami (1989), S.T. Godbole (1989), Saligram (2005), G.S. Hiranyappa (1989), Muzzafar Hussain (1989), Christophe Jaffrelot (1999), Singh K. Jagjit (1989), M.N. Javaraiah (2005), J.D. Jodlekar (1995, 1994, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c), D.B. Joshi (1992), M.V. Kamath (1989), Dhananjay Keer (1988, 1950), B.K. Kelkar (1989a, 1989b), G.V. Kelkar (1958), Ashis Nandy (2008), S.N. Navalgundkar (1989), A.G. Noraani (2003), V. S. Patwardhan (1989), John Prince (2007), T.C.A. Raghavan (1983), V.R. Rao (1989a, 1989b), H.V. Seshadri (1989), Sita Ram Sharma (2007), Shivramu (1989), Jagjit K. Singh (1989), und N.R. Waradpande (1989)

³ B.K. Kelkar in his thoughtful article points out: "As Savarkar was basically an active thinker and reformer he did not write down his philosophy in book form for simple intellectual pleasure. But his life is so full of diversity and events and his desire for self-projection so strong that in whatever he wrote – whether play, poem or autobiography – we find Savarkar himself stating his philosophy of life. In all his literature we find scattered nuggets of his philosophy, but no student of his thought has yet made a determined effort to bring them together into a concrete shape" (Kelkar 1989:53f).

his thoughts in this direction remained unorganised. An outline of his fragmented philosophy has to be extracted out of his various works⁴, which can be subsumed under three broader categories (see table 1).

Table 1: Three categories of Savarkars writings

Category 1:	Non-(party-) Political Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inside the Enemy Camp („Autobiography“ Savarkars) ▪ The Story of my Transportation for Life (1950) ▪ An Echo from the Andamans ▪ Poetry: Gomantak, Mazi Janmathep, Kalepani, O’Martyrs, Farewell; On my bed facing death[death bed]; My Will; First Offering u.a.) ▪ Plays: (Ushap, Sanyasta Khadga, Uttarkriya, u.a.)
Category 2:	Historical Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hindu-Pad-Padashahi ▪ Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History ▪ Indian War of Independence 1857 ▪ (History of the Sikhs - <i>verloren</i>)* ▪ (History of the Nepalese Nationalist Movement – <i>verloren</i>) * <p><i>Further writings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Translation of Mazzini’s Autobiographie into Marathi
Category 3:	Political Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hindutva – Who is a Hindu (Essential of Hindutva) ▪ Hindu-Rashtravad ▪ Whirlwind-Propaganda ▪ Historic Statements (Prophetic Warning) ▪ Hindu-Rashtra Darshan

* Comment: even if the literary works “History of the Sikhs” and “History of the Nepalese National Movement” have been lost, the main crucial arguments provided can be found in other books/documents. The mere fact that these historical discourses have been put into words is reason enough for mentioning them with regard to their contribution fostering an understanding of his mindset and methods as well as the motives behind his actions. Furthermore, this should be an attempt to create a broadly complete picture/imagery of Savarkar’s authorial or historical work.

⁴ The article uses mainly the followings writings by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar: SAVARKAR, S.S. and G. M. JOSHI. eds. 1992. *Historic statements (Prophetic Warnings). Statements, Telegrams & Letters. 1941 to 1965* by Veer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Veer Savarkar Prakashan: Bombay; SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. 1999. *Hindutva. Who is a Hindu?* Seventh Edition. Swatantryaveer Savarkar Rashtriya Smarak: Mumbai (Bombay); SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. 1993. ‘Abhinava Hindu Dhawaja’ and ‘An Echo from Andamans. Letters Written by V.D. Savarkar to his Brother Dr. Savarkar’, in GROVER, Verinder. 1993. *V.D. Savarkar. Political Thinkers of Modern India*. Volume 14. Deep & Deep: Publications: New Delhi, pp. 185-190; SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. 1971. *Hindu-Pad-Padashahi or a Review of the Hindu Empire of Maharashtra*. New Delhi: Bharti Sahitya Sadan; SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. 1971. *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*. Bal Savarkar: Bombay (Mumbai); SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. 1950. *The story of my transportation for life. A Biography of Black days of Andamans*. First Impression. Sadbhakti Publications: Bombay (Mumbai); SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. 1940. *Hindu Sanghatan: Its ideology and immediate programme*. Hindu Mahasabha: Bombay; SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. 1963-65. *Samagra Savarkar Vangamaya*. (Entire Works of Savarkar), Volumes 1 – 8. Edited by Manarao Daate, published by Maharashtra Hindu Maha Sabha 1963-65; SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar and Satya PARKASH. 1945. *Hindu Rashtravad. Ideology and Immediate Programme*. Rohtas Printing Press: Rohtak.

Whilst drawing deeply from biographical details, the aim of the analysis here is not to flesh out Savarkar's persona, to bring him back to life either by eulogising or deconstructing him on the basis of subjective emotional matters. Rather, the goal is to explore the philosophical foundation of his thoughts and actions, to suggest crucial variables for a scientific analysis and to identify his position on the transformation of Indian society. Such an exercise pieces together a complex picture which should help provide a matrix of measurement for Savarkar's philosophical worldview and its influence on his life and work.

THREE PREMISES

The article tries to analyse how far Savarkar's social and political philosophy is based on a rational, utilitarian and pragmatic outlook, which leads him to postulate his opinion to pragmatic programs in all facets of life. Tackling this question, the article argues that the whole structure of Savarkar's thoughts is bounded within a narrow framework of agnosticism. Consequently, each study of his philosophy must recognize these three main premises:

(1) The supremacy of Western political and social thought in Savarkar's philosophy and worldview:

Savarkar derived his 'philosophy' from various sources, both Indian and foreign. According to J. Sharma (2003:125), Savarkar had little time for all the different schools of Hinduism and was deeply suspicious of philosophical tenets founded on 'holy scriptures'. For him, the 'Nature of the Self' was something that was 'known to itself immutably and without a name or even a form'⁵. As a result, the 'classical Indian thought' or so-called 'brahmanical thinking' is not the key to a proper understanding of Savarkar's social and political philosophy. This leads to the significant premise that for an analysis of Savarkar it is indispensable to study Western socio-political and philosophical thought. Savarkar received inspiration, guidance and practical advice, according to his own predilections mainly from the writings and activities of political and social thinkers in Europe. Books written by humanists and liberal authors of the West, carrying messages of rationalism in religion, liberty in thought and equality in fundamental rights, impressed Savarkar extremely. Savarkar recognised clearly the significance of European culture which aimed at human progress. He was one of the first amongst Indian thinkers to accept as a whole the principles underlying the new ideas that flowed from European countries. The 'new attitude' from the West, presenting a novel social, political and

⁵ On this point the author has to qualify J. Sharma's conclusion: It is possible to state that Savarkar's attention in terms of his philosophical interests was mainly focused on Western writings, but this does not mean, that he had not studied carefully the 'traditional ancient scriptures' of Hinduism. During his time on the Andamans, he pored over 'all Upanishads, the Rig Veda, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Brahma Sutras, the Sankhya texts, the Karikas of Ishwar Chandra, the Yoga Sutras in translation and along with their originals' (Savarkar 1950:271). Another example of his interest and affection for 'classical Indian thought' is given in the following words by Savarkar: 'I had studied the ten principal Upanishads, finishing each of them in one month, and taking one whole year to complete them. I used to read them and ponder every night with deep thought and meditation. All of a sudden I fell upon the Yoga Vashista, and I found it of such absorbing interest that I have come to regard it ever since as the best work on the Vedanta Philosophy. The propositions were so logical, the verse is so beautiful, and the exposition is so thorough and penetrating that the soul loses itself in raptures over it. Such a fine combination of philosophy and poetry is a gift reserved only Sanskrit poets' (Savarkar 1950:272).

scientific outlook and culture, caught his attention and captured his imagination. He was deeply influenced by the philosophy and ideas of *Political Economy* (1848) by James Mill and J. Stuart Mill and studied both in detail. Their notions of liberalism, individual freedom, and ideas on democracy had a deep impact on Savarkar's mind. He also imbibed Herbert Spencer's⁶ 'sociological thinking especially his proposed *philosophy of evolution* in which all phenomena of every kind were subject to the 'law of evolution' (J. Sharma 2003:136). From Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin he adopted the controversial idea of the 'survival of the fittest'⁷, which is without doubt the underlying theorem of Savarkar's 'Panch Sheela'⁸ towards the social and political transformation of the Indian society. Furthermore, he strengthened his philosophical outlook by studying the works of Jeremy Bentham. Savarkar wrote, 'From then on I began to acknowledge this principle of morality as the touchstone of all my pursuits, of my ethical standards, and of my behaviour'⁹. In addition, it is possible to find remarkable elements of Auguste Comte in his social thoughts, for example the importance given to the service of humanity as the best of human ends (Lederle 1976:138). Furthermore, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Francois Marie Arouet (Voltaire) made him ponder on the French revolution. He was deeply impressed by their thoughts and ideas. From all these European authors he studied the basic principles of social life, interpreted them through Indian eyes, and used them to propose the best approach towards the social and political problems of his countrymen¹⁰.

⁶ Spencer was greatly admired by Shayamji Krishna Varma, who studied sociology under him. Varma was a disciple of Swami Sayanand Saraswati and an early mentor of Savarkar. After Spencer died he found a 'Herbert Spencer Lectureship' at Oxford University and various travelling fellowships for his countrymen (Herbert Spencer Indian Fellowships). See for more information Srivastava 1983:6ff.

⁷ The question of who coined this 'infamous expression' is out of the range of this article. Despite the fact that Savarkar did not explicitly mention the philosophy of 'survival of the fittest', there are various evidences that he assimilated the 'theory of natural selection where weak societies give way to strong ones', for example as he defined the future role of an independent Indian state: Only a homogenous society can build an integrated Bharat. And only such a Bharat can triumph in the global contest for power. A pledge to become a super-power was the only way to keep this gigantic country together and dynamic' (Savarkar quoted in B.K. Kelkar 1989:59).

⁸ Kelkar stated that Savarkar's theoretical constructs of social as well as political renewal are based on five guiding Principles (Panch Sheela): (1) Hinduization of politics; (2) Militarization of Hindu-dom; (3) Adoption of a constructive and regulated attitude particularly through a resolved application of the ballot ('one man, one vote'); (4) Practising patriotism; and (5) establishment of a casteless society.

⁹ V.D. Savarkar, 'Majhya Athvani', in *Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya*, Vol. 1, p. 206 translated and quoted in Lederle 1976:280.

¹⁰ Revealing his admiration for Western writings on political, sociological as well as historical issues was his compilation of books for the 'prison-library' of the Silver Jail on the Andamans: 'The principal and the largest section in our library, of course, consisted of English books. Herbert Spencer's volumes on Synthetic Philosophy, including his 'First Principles', and Sociology and Ethics; all the works of John Stuart Mill; of Darwin, Huxley and Tyndals, and Haeckel; the writings of Carlyle and Emerson; of historians like Macaulay and Gibbon; of poets like Shakespeare, Milton and Pope, constituted its main feature. We had in it *Abbot's Life of Napoleon, the Life of Prince Bismarck, of Garibaldi and Mazzini*, with Mazzini's complete works. The library contained historical works bearing on England, Italy, America and India. We had novels ranging from Charles Dickens to Count Leo Tolstoy; and we had works of Kropatkin. The library had English writings of Vivekananda and Ramtirtha; works of the German Historian Trietske and of the German Philosopher Nietzsche. Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Politics and Bluntchili's Theory of the State as well as Rousseau's Social Contract, found their place on its shelves' (Savarkar 1950:269f). All these books were compiled by Savarkar and apparently not one

(2) The ‘clash’ of two different worldviews:

Savarkar’s thought and worldview (*Weltansicht*) reflects his own interpretation of a ‘classical philosophical conflict’ between two phenomena which could be described with reference to Albert Schweizer as *world and life Negation* (Welt- und Lebensverneinung) and *world and life affirmation* (Welt- und Lebensbejahung)¹¹. According to Schweizer ‘the battle for *world and life affirmation* and *world and life negation* must be constantly fought and won afresh’ (Schweizer 1935:3). This is a battle which has influenced the Western as well as Indian philosophical worldview and religious thought.

Savarkar devoted himself to exploring all religions. He had a wide knowledge of the religious and philosophical trends of the world. It is impossible to explain in detail the evolution of Indian and Western thought in this article, but according to Savarkar’s worldview, two leading streams of thoughts are outlined, the *world and life negation* and the *world and life affirmation*. Secondly the aim is to identify Savarkar’s position between these two philosophical benchmarks. First of all, it is possible to state that, in comparison with the Western development, there is a tendency in Indian thought towards a *world and life negation*. But with reference to Schweizer this does not mean that Indian thought is completely governed by a *world and life negation* and the Western notion of *world and life affirmation*. In both of these, there are elements of these philosophical streams existing side by side. But in Indian thought the ‘tendency to negation’ is the predominant principle and in Western thought, the ‘tendency of affirmation’ (Schweizer 1935:3).

Savarkar’s rationalistic mind adopted a critical attitude towards the elements of *world and life negation* within Indian Thought. The suspicion in Savarkar’s thought emerged in response to the contradiction between these two allegedly antagonistic notions of worldviews which attempt to answer the question, what is the purpose and what are the aims of human existence? On the one hand there is the above mentioned tendency towards a *world and life affirmation*, which argues ‘that man regards existence as he experiences it in himself and as it has developed in the world as something of value per se and accordingly strives to let it reach perfection in himself, whilst within his own sphere of influence he endeavours to preserve and to further it’ (Schweizer 1935:1). On the other hand, there is the tendency of *world and life negation*, which consists of his regarding existence as he experiences it in himself meaningless and sorrowful, and he resolves accordingly (a) to grind life to a standstill in himself by mortifying his will-to-live, and (b) to renounce all activity which aims at improvement of the conditions of life in this world’ (Schweizer 1935:1f). In addition, a ‘*world and life affirmation* unceasingly urges men to serve their fellows, society, the nation, mankind, and indeed all that lives, with their utmost will and in lively hope of realisable progress’; whilst a ‘*world and life negation* takes no interest in the world, but regards man’s life on earth either merely as a stage-play in which it is his duty to

of them was unread by him: ‘I read all these books carefully. Not a single book in that library I had left unread. Some of them I read over again, and I made my companions study works on politics, political history and economics with particular attention’ (Savarkar 1950:270).

¹¹ The reader must accustom himself to these and similar forms of expression which more accurately represent the original than various words or paraphrases which might be chosen to suit the context. For example worldview (*Weltansicht*); ‘World and Life Negation’ (Welt- und Lebensverneinung); or ‘World and Life affirmation (Welt- und Lebensbejahung).

participate, or only as a puzzling pilgrimage through the land of Time to his home in Eternity' (Schweizer 1935:2).

From Savarkar's point of view, the 'classical Indian thought' or 'Brahmanical thinking' was under a strong influence of *world and life negation*. Guided by his 'personal directive that emphasized the need of action', he sensed a 'threat' to social reforms in this kind of worldview that encouraged no efforts 'to move energetically for the improvement of social conditions, the bringing about of a better future for humanity, and a progress for the Indian nation'. The *world and life negation* stream seemed not only impracticable and but also incompatible with his desire for activism. This underlying *Antagonismus* in Savarkar's view on the uses and aims of human beings is best expressed in Schweitzer words 'He who sacrifices his life to achieve any purpose for an individual or for humanity practises *life affirmation*. He is taking an interest in the things of this world and by offering his own life, wants to bring about in the world something which he regards as necessary. The sacrifice of life for a purpose is not life negation, but the profoundest form of life affirmation placing itself at the service of world affirmation. World and life negation is only present when man takes no interest whatever in any realisable purpose nor in the improvement of conditions in this world' (Schweizer 1935:6f).

To the European-educated Savarkar, through his experiences with Vedanta philosophy the emphasis given to achieving an ecstatic state of consciousness as the imperative condition for the Indian *world and life negation* seemed an unnatural and incomprehensible phenomenon. Furthermore, it contradicted the instinctive and intuitive excellence within and among his countrymen and had a paralyzing effect on his social work. Savarkar stated: 'As I went on studying Vedanta Philosophy, I began to experience one feeling above everything else. And it was that the study of these books relaxed every fibre and nerve of my mind, and merged me completely in the contemplation of the Universal, to the extent that I completely turned away from fruitless action in the world of man. It destroyed my will to power and my power to act. The highest attainment was inaction. This text resounded continuously in my brain. And words like the service of my country, altruism and humanity faded into the back-ground as useless phantoms. [...]'¹². All propaganda, all work seemed such a worthless task, a sheer waste of life. At last

¹² 'Before this supreme goal, they appeared as transient and childish pastimes. A similar feeling of higher pessimism was breathed upon me when I read master-works on geology and astronomy but for different reasons. These works describing as they did the earth and the starry heavens, brought home to me infinity of time and space, and, correspondingly puniness of human and the briefness of his life on this tiny globe. Why then struggle, why work and strive, why not live like a lotus-eater? That is what I felt. For all this was to end and to be lost in the depth of space and time. The study of Vedanta did not fill the heart of man with this kind of cynicism and despair. It did commend inaction; but in order to reveal to us the deeper joy and the higher realisation of our being, it exhorted man to cast off spurious dolls, but to endow him with something higher, deeper and more abiding than the fleeting pleasures of this world. In Vedanta the abandonment of action was in itself supreme self-realisation and supreme bliss. Not so the mood of despair and utter futility brought on by the study of geology and astronomy. In Vedanta, man is the master and the maker of his being, the spark of the divine, the emanation from the fount of life. To Science, man is the creature of Nature, and subject to her mutations, and heading for the final dissolution if the universe into the vast emptiness of space and time. When I used to be lost in the reading of the Yoga Vashistha, the coil of rope I was weaving dropped automatically from my hands; and, for hours on end I lost the sense of possessing the body and the senses associated with that body. My foot would not move and my hand was at a stand-still. I felt the deeper yearning to surrender it all' (Savarkar 1950:273f).

the mind and the matter asserted their sway over the body and swung it back to work' (Savarkar 1950:273f).

(3) Savarkar's agnosticism - Religion as an extension to the portfolio of political strategies:

Savarkar was neither a religious man nor an atheist, he did not abandon religion but accepted nothing that was irrational. Metaphysical statements and theological debates concerning religious beliefs were of no interest to him (S. Sharma 1996:190). In this context, Lederle identified Savarkar, as agnostic¹³ and referred to G.V. Ketkar who aptly named Savarkar's agnosticism as 'believing agnosticism' (Lederle 1976:287)¹⁴. There we find a profound influence of Bentham on Savarkar. 'Spencer thought it impossible to have an appearance if there was nothing which could appear. There must be a reality independent of thought and independent of ourselves – the Absolute' (Lederle 1976:287). Savarkar's agnosticism finds its best expression in the following examples:

I.) In his recommendation to examine all religious scriptures in terms of their relevance for the present. This kind of evaluation was necessary to avoid the social evils implicated in religion. Savarkar considered the scriptures to be not divine, but written by unknown thinkers. It was not to be assumed that what was written in the holy books are the last words because according to him all religious texts are written by man and for man and were therefore time and space-bound. Therefore, they had to be treated as human products fulfilling human needs. The people had to be told that they were divine revelation for otherwise they would not have accepted the scriptures as holy¹⁵.

Savarkar points out that there are no unchangeable or unchallengeable codes in the interpreting and construction of social reality. This meant, that no religious text

¹³ To prove his 'antagonistic-thesis' he referred to Savarkar's poem 'The Closed Gate of the Unknowable' in which 'he explain how the words of bards and of the Puranas, devotions and revolutionary activities, enjoyment and renunciation, comfort and hardship reveal something of God and hide him at the same time' and quoted the closing words:

*'You do not allow [us] to build another house,
Yours you do not open to anyone.
[Though our] effort does not lead us on,
Keep on, do not give up the effort.
Today, therefore, I knock again at the gates,
At the ever closed gates of your house'.*

According Lederle, this words are presenting 'the resignation of the agnostic'. For Savarkar, 'the gates leading to the understanding of God are always closed' (Lederle 1976:287).

¹⁴ G. V. Ketkar. 1958. 'Vira Savarkarance Dharmakarana', in PADHYE, S. K. *Savarkar Vividha Darsana*. Pune, p. 101f translated and quoted in Lederle 1976:287.

¹⁵ Here, it is instructive to refer to Godbole who compiled four common factors in Savarkar's view on the common phenomena among all religions, which he studied: (1) Everyone says that only their text is God-sent and others are not so. Therefore there is no consistency in them; (2) People say that, as the orders in their particular book are not contained in others, those texts are not God-sent; (3) Men need to decide by logic, experience and other tests who was the true prophet and who was not; and (4) Religious followers insist that once someone accepts their religion that person can only follow the orders of that religion (Savarkar, compiled, translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:473f).

was eternal¹⁶, i.e. one that contained rules and regulations applicable for all times. Savarkar claimed that he identified contradictory orders in the religious scriptures and that this was proof they could not be God-made. Instead, he suggested that the holy books be regarded as the common ancestral property of the entirety of humankind. All this religious property however, was to Savarkar meaningless and worthless in the age of reason which held science and technology as the forces of progress¹⁷ (Deshpande 1999:96). Savarkar concluded that in various old texts it was possible to discover some writings that were quite useful to the present as well as for the future. They needed to be recognised as useful and beneficial because they could provide valuable guidance to contemporary problems and not simply because they were found in ancient texts. But for that, 'every thought and idea, principle and ideal found in the religious book must be subjected to rational scrutiny and scientific test'¹⁸. Savarkar observed that many of the ancient scriptures like the *Manusmriti* (Law of Manu)¹⁹ contained various teachings that had been proven false over the course of time. Applying principles of necessity and utility as the only criteria of acceptability, Savarkar stated, 'Whatever we find in *Manusmriti* to be harmful or ridiculous today should not be followed, but that does not make *Manusmriti* harmful or ridiculous'²⁰. 'If we ignore those teachings and take only those that are useful today we will all benefit. If we accept that the religious texts, though claimed to be of divine origin, have failings like that of any human creation, they become the inheritance of all mankind'²¹ and the social evils presented and defended in the name of religion would come to an end. The social organisation and transformation of the Hindu society had to be founded or reconstructed and consolidated on secular and scientific principles as well as human experience and not on holy and eternal teachings. 'In future, whenever we have to decide whether a reform is good or bad, changes are desirable or not, there should be only one test. Is it useful or harmful for today? We must never ask the

¹⁶ In this context, Savarkar emphasised that it is difficult for human beings to imprison time. 'A book can be saved from termites by bringing out a new or improved edition, but to save a religious text or a holy book from the *termite of Time* is impossible even for angels. The *termite of Time* not only eats away the pages of such a text, but also devours its meaning and makes it irrelevant. It is impossible, therefore, to bring out an improved version of an unchanging and rigid religious text because such improvement is prohibited by that religion itself. Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar. 'Uprooting of Arab Culture from Turkey by Kemal Pasha', (in Savarkar Samagra, Volume 5, p. 519 translated and quoted in J. Sharma 2003:187).

¹⁷ Savarkar did not attach any value and worth to the 'holy scriptures' simply on the grounds of their antiquity, sanctity and so-called divinity. However, his scientific approach to history does not lead him to deny them their historical or sociological significance and value. As a treatise on history and not as inviolable and unalterable sacred books, Savarkar appreciated them by giving them their place of honour in the libraries of the world. According to Savarkar, 'religious books serve the purpose of fossils for the study of the then existing socio-political institutions and organisations, systems and patterns and so on'¹⁷ (Deshpande 1999:96).

¹⁸ Savarkar quoted in Deshpande 1999:96.

¹⁹ The *Manusmriti*, or *Dharmashastra* (Laws) of Manu, is one of the holy books of the Hindus, which in the view of many reformers like Savarkar justifies the humiliating position of the untouchables. It is manifested in the Law of Manu that intermixing with untouchables pollutes the Hindus, brings ill-luck to him and his kin and is equal to committing a crime. To burn some copies of this book was a popular sign of protest of the social reform movement in India.

²⁰ Savarkar translated and quoted by Godbole 2004:514. See also in detail Deshpande who wrote: 'Though Savarkar does not attach any value and significance to the religious books simply on the ground of their antiquity, sanctity and so-called divinity, he refers them by giving them their place of honour in the libraries of the world (Deshpande 1999:96).'

²¹ Savarkar translated and quoted by Godbole 2004:514.

question – is it sanctioned by the scriptures? We must never again waste time on that futile discussion. If a change is desirable, implement it today. [...] It is easy to prove whether a reform is useful or not. But it is impossible even for the Lord Creator to decide whether the same is sanctioned in the scriptures or not. We therefore do not regard any religious text as eternal and to be followed at all times’.

II.) Savarkar’s view on the Universe and Nature: About the universe, Nature and the place of human beings within both dimensions, Savarkar had peculiar views. According to him, human beings live in this world and not in a transcendental one. The universe had nothing to do with his countrymen and how they arranged their worldly life. Going one step further he claimed that ‘the forces in the universe are to a little degree for Man, but to a greater extent they are against him’²². Against this background he argued, the ‘universe exists and continues to function by certain rules. All that we can do is to find out what they are and use them for the benefit of mankind. We must say that what is beneficial for mankind is good and what makes us suffer is bad. It is absurd to say what God likes is beneficial for man or vice versa, because they are false notions. We live in the Universe but the Universe does not belong to us. To a great extent, it is unfavourable and to a very small extent favourable to us. We must appreciate this and face the heavenly occurrences. That is true Nature. That is the real worship of the God of universe.’²³ Spurred on by his agnostic approach to life, Savarkar endeavoured to learn the laws of Nature and universe as best a human being could. The need of the moment was to tap and apply them for the benefit and welfare of the people. He pointedly remarks: ‘Man is the maker of his fortune and cause of his misfortunes. No divine power does any good or evil to human life. Man himself is responsible for the successes and failures, sweets and bitters of his life. Reason and intelligence leads one to light and ignorance to darkness.’²⁴

III.) In Savarkar’s view on the relation between religion and politics, it is possible to find yet another proof of his agnosticism. There is no doubt that religious faith and especially Hinduism was one of the most significant elements in Savarkar’s thinking, but the author cannot overlook that this was also an instrument of his social as well as political struggle. Against this background, Savarkar’s vehement implementation of Hinduism in politics was not based on an orthodox attitude, neither spiritual conviction nor religious traditionalism but on the contrary was more worldly, material and strategic. It should instead be seen as a strategy, the use of elements from an already existing value-based-system guiding the greatest number of his countrymen, to create a feeling of belonging amongst them. Savarkar was aware of the potency of religious enthusiasm and claimed that ‘man cannot remain without religion. Religion is a source of stupendous strength’²⁵. To harness this strength he highlighted certain elements of Hinduism as a ‘leading culture’ (Leitkultur) for Indian people. He did not advocate introducing Hinduism as a state religion, but merely as a method of defining a collective identity. This was to be a fundamental pillar of belonging, upholding his ‘imagined nation’. In this aspect, he was very much influenced by the western belief in the separation of politics and religion, like ‘the Wall of Separation’ between church and state propounded by Thomas Jefferson. Politics was defined as the means of serving the nation and contributing to the welfare of Society. Savarkar also stated how his icon

²² Savarkar translated and quoted in Keer 1988:204.

²³ Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:338f.

²⁴ Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:339.

²⁵ Savarkar quoted in Phake et al. 1989:219.

of social and political visions, Giuseppe Mazzini, was tormented by the question of how to keep Religion and Politics separate and stated: 'He [Mazzini] savagely attacked the notion of the gates of Heaven, if there be such a thing, being open to anyone who had neglected to serve the nation, whiling away his time in empty rituals of religion'²⁶.

Savarkar's solution was to instill the idea that service for the nation ought to be the religion of his countrymen. For him, religious worship and national and civil service were separate and distinct. If Savarkar believed in the spiritual aspects of life, it was purely at the individual level (Phadtare 1975:271). He supported the notion that religion was a private matter and defended religious freedom in principle, enshrining it in his proposed constitution for a postcolonial Indian state: '(C) All citizens shall have equal rights and obligations irrespective of caste or creed, race or religion – provided they avow and owe an exclusive and devoted allegiance to the Hindusthani State'; (D) 'The fundamental rights of conscience, of worship, of association etc. will be enjoyed by all citizens alike whatever restrictions will be imposed on them in the interest of the public peace and order or national emergency will not be based on any religious or racial considerations alone but on common national ground'; and (E) 'One man one vote' will be the general rule irrespective of creed, caste, race or religion'²⁷ (Savarkar and Parkash 1945:67f). He was nevertheless aware that religiosity in private as well as public spheres, promoted by the scriptures, reactionary forces like the Hindu orthodoxy in Indian society, could prove to be a hindrance in the path of social and political progress. As a result, religious beliefs took on only a limited role in Savarkar's temporal-materialistic approach to the interpretation and construction of a *social reality*.

IV.) Another example of Savarkar's agnosticism is apparent in his use of one of his most critical terms, *Punyabhū*, or 'Holyland'²⁸. The definition 'Holyland' is one of

²⁶ Savarkar quoted in Phadnis 2002:84.

²⁷ For information this article should mention the remaining paragraphs of Savarkar's 'National Constitution of Hindusthan: (A) Hindusthan from the Indus to the Seas will and must remain as an organic nation and integral centralised state; (B) The residuary powers shall be vested in the Central Government; (C), (D), and (E) are above mentioned in the text, (F) Representation in the Legislature etc shall be in proportion to the population of the majority and minorities; (G) Services shall go by merit alone; (H) All minorities shall be given effective safeguards to protect their language, religion, culture etc but none of them shall be allowed to create 'a state within a state' or to encroach upon the legitimate rights of the majority; (I) Every minority may have separate schools to train up their children in their own tongue, their own religious institutions or cultural and can receive government help also for these, but always in proportion to the taxes they pay into the common exchequer; and (J) in case the constitution is not based on joint electorates and on the unalloyed national principle of one man one vote, but is based on the communal basis then those minorities who wish to have separate electorates or reserve seats will be allowed to have them, but always in proportion to their population and provided that it does not deprive the majority also of an equal right in proportion to its population too' (Savarkar and Parkash 1945:67ff.). This constitution best expresses the main critical elements in his social as well political thinking and his notions of what the Indian State should look like. It captured precisely Savarkar's conflict between the 'unquestioned' demand for the principles of liberty and equality in western political thought on one side, and the assumed need for diversity and multiculturalism in the Indian context. In particular his principle of the majority leads his theoretical constructs in opposition to a politics that is described with reference to terms such as reservation, positive discrimination and affirmative action etc.

²⁸ Eminent scholars like Dietmar Rothermund emphasize that the translation of *Punyabhūmi* as 'Holyland' is not correct; it has to be translated as a country in which you

the most misunderstood conceptions in Savarkar's political thoughts on 'Hindutva'²⁹ and leads both his antagonists as well as his promoters towards remarkably wrong perceptions of its meaning. Generally accepted, *Punyabhu* or *Punyabhumi* is defined as a country where you earn your 'religious merits'. But in Savarkar's particular point of view, he interprets this more in a patriotic way than a religious one. In this context, his sense of patriotism is expressed by his notion of 'martyrdom', conceived as heroism and hero-worship³⁰. If one deconstructs his attempt to define this term it is possible to find elements that are formulated in a religious as well as a 'patriotic-cultural' language. On the one hand, Savarkar describes *Punyabhu* as 'the land of [his] prophets and seers, of his godmen and gurus, the land of piety and pilgrimage' (Savarkar 1999:72) and on the other hand, it is also the land in which 'every stone [here] has a story of martyrdom to tell!' (Savarkar 1999:70). This means that the 'Holyland' is where one earns merit through patriotism and not through religious worship. In addition, the notion of *Punyabhu* implies, or is expressed through the word *Sanskriti*, the 'civilisation' and culture of a nation.

According to Savarkar, civilisation, and culture generally, 'is the expression of the mind of man' and 'the account of what man has made of matter' (Savarkar 1999:57). In this context, Savarkar proposed, that 'the story of the civilisation of a nation is the story of its thoughts, its actions and its achievements. Literature and art tell us of its thoughts; history and social institutions of its actions and achievements. In none of these can man remain isolated (Savarkar 1999:58). As

can earn merit through good deeds. This means good deeds in a worldly and not in a religious sense. Despite the fact that this is also Savarkar's understanding of this word, he used the term 'Holyland' as a direct translation: '*Punyabhu* signifies the meaning expressed by the English term 'Holyland' and may be regarded as its synonym' (Rothermund 2003:n.n.).

²⁹ Hindutva (literally 'Hinduness', the quality of being Hindu) was a term originally coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his book '*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*' published in 1923. He regarded all inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent as Hindu and specifically those who (1) regarded it as their fatherland (*Pitribhu*); (2) descended from Hindu parents and (3) considered this land holy (*Punyabhu* or *Punyabhumi*). According to Savarkar these constituted the three 'essentials of Hindutva': a common nation (*Rashtra*), a common race (*Jati*) and a common civilisation (*Sanskriti*). For the first two essentials of 'Hindutva' *Rashtra* and *Jati* are clearly denoted and connoted by the word *Pitribhu* while the third essential, *Sanskriti*, is pre-eminently implied by the word *Punyabhu* (Savarkar 1999:72). Savarkar used the term Hindutva to emphasise its distinctiveness from the word *Hinduism*, which Savarkar associated with disunity and social as well as political grievances among the Hindu community. In this sense Hindutva captured the imagined lack of national identity. As a result, one of the main purposes behind the concept of Hindutva was to construct a collective identity to support the cause of 'Hindu-unity' (*Hindu Sanghatan*) and to avoid too narrow a definition of *Hinduism* which would exclude Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains from the Hindu community. Later hindu-nationalist ideologues transformed the original 'Hindutva'-concept by Savarkar into a strategy to include and exclude non-Hindus to widen their social base as a mean of political mobilisation. Against this background 'Hindutva' faces the challenge of determining the ambit of the intended Hindu-nation, the *Hindu-Rashtra*, for which it will provide the ideological justification and legitimisation. Today, 'Hindutva' as an ideology adopted by the *Sangh Parivar*, promotes a form of cultural nationalism and is used in this sense as the equivalent of 'Hindu-nationalism'. In this function the concept has emerged in recent years as a key instrument in electoral campaigning in India.

³⁰ Savarkar's notion on 'martyrdom' is best expressed in his poem *Oh! Martyrs*. These lines are dedicated to the 'Martyrs', who challenged the British in 1857 and is a remarkable example of the formulation of political aims in religious language SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. 1989. 'Oh! Martyrs', in JOGLEKAR, J.D. and Madhav PATHAK 1989:21f.

such, *Sanskriti*, the Hindu civilisation and culture ‘is represented in a common history, common heroes, a common literature, common art, a common law and a common jurisprudence, common fairs and festivals, rites and ritualism, ceremonies and sacraments’ (Savarkar 1999:62). Even in this attempt to define the term ‘Holyland’ in an patriotic-cultural sense, it is impossible to exclude the religious connotations of words like rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments. He was aware of this problem and stressed first, that this was an individual’s perception and attitude,³¹ and second, that he had not referred ‘to any institution or event or custom in its religious aspect or significance’ but to the common inheritance’ (Savarkar 1999:62) at the national level.

The above-described difficulties in the attempt to detach the term ‘Holyland’ from all conceivable religious connotations results in a continuum of possible interpretations of Savarkar’s *Punyabhu*. The continuum is characterised by two diametrically opposed benchmarks, or poles. One benchmark could be called the ‘contextual interpretation’ and the other, a ‘literal interpretation’. One of the significant indicators demarcating the different perceptions of ‘Holyland’ is *desabhakti*, the undivided love for the country³². This patriotic love, which makes the country ‘holy’ for some, has to be proved as a kind of loyalty to Hindu society.

The ‘contextual interpretation’ focuses on the notion of patriotism in Savarkar’s definition. According to this, under certain conditions it is possible for ‘non-Hindus’ to claim India as their ‘Holyland’. To do so, it is necessary that they accept and assimilate *Sanskriti*. It is not required to practice and imbibe all cultural practices but the ‘non-Hindus’ in India ought to have more in common with a Hindu than with an Arab or an Englishman (Savarkar 1999:62f). The *desabhakti* is proven through ‘skilled participation’ in the cultural habits, rituals and customs of Hindu society.

In contrast, a more narrow ‘literal interpretation’ proclaims that India has to be one’s ‘holiest land’ or that one’s holiest places had to be located in India. Interpreting *Punyabhu* in this way involves the *a priori* exclusion of followers of non indigenous religions like Muslims or Christians. For Christians the ‘holiest places’ like *Bethlehem* and *Rome* are abroad in Israel or Italy, and for the Muslims there is *Mecca* in Saudi Arabia. This interpretation of the religious connotations of *Punyabhu* disregards Savarkar’s constitutive element of patriotism as an opportunity to prove one’s loyalty. Such a perception has been fuelled by one of Savarkar’s most debated statements: ‘For though *Hindusthan* to them [Christians and Muslims] is Fatherland as to any other Hindu yet it is not to them a ‘Holyland’ too. Their ‘Holyland’ is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and God-men, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of a foreign origin. Their love is divided’ (Savarkar 1999:70)³³. This supposed suspicion towards the *desabhakti* of ‘non-Hindus’ makes a Indian *Punyabhu a priori* impossible.

³¹ ‘The quaint customs and ceremonies and sacraments they involve, observed by some as a religious duty, by others as social amenities, impress upon each individual that he can live best only through the common and corporate life of the Hindu race’ (Savarkar 1999:62).

³² The term *desabhakti* has its origin in the social- and philosophical concepts of the construction of a national and religious Hindu identity by *Hariscandra von Benares* (1850-1885) and means the ‘undivided holy love’ for the country. Though Savarkar didn’t use this word, he demanded such undivided love from his countrymen, but as mentioned above de meant it merely in a patriotic not a religious way (Klimkeit 1981:249).

³³ Elsewhere Savarkar mentioned that Hindus and Muslims cannot be recognized as Hindus; given that since their adoption of the new cult they had ceased to be imbued with

In addition to these two extreme interpretations, there is a ‘third approach’, a ‘broader literal interpretation’ that combines both dimensions, the contextual and the literal. This interpretation points to two constitutive indicators in the definition of *Punyabhu*. Beside the above-mentioned requirement of patriotism, in the sense of *desabhakti* there is the requirement of having one’s ‘holy places’ in the claimed *Punyabhu*. This ‘literal’ interpretation finds its expression in the fact that the definition of *Punyabhu* still depends largely on a religious constituent which refers to the places for significance of one’s own religion. At a broader level it draws the distinction that to constitute a *Punyabhu* it is adequate to prove that the ‘holy places of importance’ of one’s own religion are located in India. This interpretation stresses the option of including ‘non-Hindus’ in Hindu society by emphasizing the opportunity to demonstrate loyalty through patriotism. Thus a counterbalance is suggested to the entrenched, mistrust of someone whose holiest places are located abroad and the common conclusion that a whole-hearted *desabhakti* is not possible.

These different interpretations of Savarkar’s *Punyabhu* draw attention to a ‘soft-corner’ in Savarkar’s approach towards religion, and the implications and difficulties he encountered. It shows too, without doubt, his readiness to utilize religious language for political purposes and as a strategy. As a result, the author reemphasizes that Savarkar’s *Punyabhu* has its origin in the conviction that it is necessary to use all possible opportunities to mobilize one’s countrymen for political aims and not in the name of any one religious belief. Despite the fact that Savarkar proclaimed his concept of ‘Hindutva’ and *Punyabhu* as having ‘little to do with agnosticism, or for the matter with, atheism’, Savarkar’s article argues that following such a rational approach towards *religion in politics* required not only a ‘believing agnosticism’ in the sense of Lederle but a ‘strategic agnosticism’. Only an agnostic would say, ‘some of us are monists, some pantheists; some theists and some atheists. But monotheists or atheists – we are all Hindus and own a common blood’ (Savarkar 1999:56).

THE FIVE PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF SAVARKAR

From the above mentioned framework of Savarkar’s three philosophical premises, five main features or touchstones can be highlighted: utilitarianism, rationalism, humanism (and universalism), pragmatism and realism. Here one has to state, that these five features, described below, are not necessarily comparable with the general understanding of them as philosophical concepts. Indeed, they are more ideal types to frame Savarkar’s philosophical thinking in his one terms:

(I) Utilitarianism:

Savarkar’s ‘strategic agnosticism’ is deeply rooted in his utilitarian outlook. Since the time he studied Herbert Spencer, he internalised utilitarianism as his leading ethical principle as did his idol in the field of social reform, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar. Savarkar was a devoted follower of the Utilitarian school of England, also called the *Philosophical Radicals*. The tenets and aims of this school were the following: the greatest good of the greatest number, rationalism, secularism,

Hindu civilisation (*Sanskriti*) as a whole. They belong, or feel that they belong, to a cultural unit altogether different from the Hindu one. Their heroes and their hero-worship, their fairs and their Hindu festivals, their ideals and their outlook on life, have now ceased to be common with ours’ (Savarkar 1999:63).

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. 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. Furthermore, 'the greatest good of the greatest number' was to be not only the ethic and moral touchstone for his countryman but also the guideline for policy making. In other words it was not merely to be employed as an ethical theory, shedding light on the various human aspects of life, it was also intensely practical. To promote this Savarkar started a campaign against extreme empathy and compassion as the foundation of peoples' value-systems, for he saw this as detrimental to humanity. In response to his critics, he emphasised 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 society³⁴.

In applying the tenets of utilitarianism Savarkar did not regard them as being of foreign origin. In his view, the concept had already been taught by *Lord Krishna*³⁵. Savarkar explains this at length with reference to the teachings of the *Bhagavadgita* and considered *Lord Krishna* to be the greatest, 'ideal utilitarian'.³⁶ Savarkar defended the dichotomy and contradiction in the life of *Lord Krishna* from his particular point of view arguing that life itself was the accumulation of tensions and contradictions. For this reason he rejected absolutism of any kind for that hindered the progress of humanity. The ambit of Savarkar's utilitarian attitude is best illustrated in his extensive discussion on the place of the 'cow' in Hindu society and his defence of non-vegetarianism.

(a) On the utility of the cow: Savarkar argued that what India needed was cow protection and not cow worship. He pointed out that his demand for cow protection was based on the notion that the cow was a remarkably useful animal. Proclaiming a practical and rational view he stated 'the cow is neither God nor mother but purely a useful animal. We should not worship it but we must breed and nurture the animal because we can reap the best advantages from it'³⁷. Savarkar emphasised at various times the crucial role that cows played in a country like India where the development process was so dependent on the performance of the agricultural sector, highlighting the economic measurement of the cow's role in Indian society³⁸. The various religious functions of cow-worshipping had to be replaced through scientific methods and a thorough knowledge of animal breeding. Building cow wealth and the maximum use of it ought to be a foundation of India's prosperity. For that it was necessary to transform the Hindu mind to accept that

³⁴ See also Savarkar translated and quoted in Phadtare 1975:269.

³⁵ The use of Lord Krishna is another example of his strategic use of religious language to apply Western political concepts in the Indian context. V.D. Savarkar, 'Majhya Athvani', in *Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya*, Vol. 1, p. 206 translated and quoted in Lederle 1976:280.

³⁶ SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. *Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya*, Vol. VI, p. 107.

³⁷ SAVARKAR, Vinayak Damodar. *Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya*, Vol. VI, p. 37 translated and quoted in Phadtare 1975:270.

³⁸ To illustrate the disadvantages for his country, he compared it with Western nations and their economic growth in the field of cow husbandry: He stated that in India 'where the cow is worshipped, the total production of milk is the lowest in the world and general cow wealth is very poor from a qualitative point of view. Why in countries like England, Sweden and France cows yield maximum quantity of milk which helps the people to build up their physique and health even though they do not follow stupid customs of cow worship?' Savarkar translated and quoted in Phadtare 1975:269f.

science and not religious devotion towards cows, was a key condition for economic growth.

(b) Defence of non-vegetarianism: Savarkar was one of the first amongst Hindu public figures to not only advocate abandoning the traditional and agreed customs of cow worshipping but also supporting the utilisation of cow meat as nutrition. In this context his strong defence of cow slaughter combined with non-vegetarianism is a powerful example of Savarkar's application of utilitarian directives. Savarkar was firmly convinced that the lack of food and the unbalanced nourishment of his countrymen could be solved by taking to non-vegetarianism including the consumption of cattle meat.

(II) Rationalism and Positivism:

To propagate his social and political philosophy, Savarkar used "rationality" as his touchstone. As a result of his rational and positivist attitude he was skeptical of any religious or metaphysical propositions and excluded them from his logical reasoning. 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 modernisation. He believed in adopting both an intelligent as well as a scientific attitude and approach. His espousal of positivism may be described as a 'rational-scientific materialism', which reflected his deep admiration for the modern technological and scientific civilization of the Western sphere. This kind of materialism was a 'theory of time, change and progress' (J. Sharma 2003:135) and presupposed that one's intelligence ought to be the final reference point for moral and ethical values. Against this background, Savarkar contended that nature was ever geared towards progress. For Savarkar, progress was to be defined - among other things - in terms of science, technology and social reform. 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. The logical truth of a tenet had to be ultimately grounded in an accordance with the (physical) material world.

Savarkar also identified the limits of rationalism. In his point of view, a boundlessness of rationalism also signified a kind of 'bigotry'. If that happened, rationalism, instead of being useful to the people, did harm³⁹. In the article 'What a reformer should remember' Savarkar pointed out his notion of where the limits of Rationalism ought to lie: 'Any rationalist must use human resources for the maximum benefit of a society. He must remember that when one deals with a group of people a single banner does not help. He must find a common ground, which will be acceptable, to all. Therefore, even if a tradition or a custom is based on blind religious faith, but public good can be achieved because that blind faith brings people together, it should be accepted. Only when the traditions and customs are definitely harmful to the nation, should a reformer propagate for their abandonment. While he would want to be aloof from blind faith, try to carry people

³⁹ Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:628.

on that route, but he would not cause a rift and set aside from the masses⁴⁰. This shows too, how Savarkar's pragmatism was opposed to naive and utopian notions of society.

(III) 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. His definition came from Mazzini who refers to the Italian historian Jean Charles Sismondi. Sismondi traced the origins of liberty to the history of the republican medieval commune, where what was valued was the collective liberty of the group rather than the freedom of individuals within the group. Individualism was the creed of materialists who could not see beyond their particular interest. Bentham's utilitarianism and the implied calculus of pain and pleasure made Savarkar sensitive to the relationship between the conflicting interests of the individual and the national community. He was deeply suspicious of self-seeking individualism regardless of whether it was rooted in egoistical materialism or in a religious or philosophical worldview. His definition of liberty left a certain amount of flexibility for reciprocal obligations among the members of society. Furthermore, at the core of his notion was the concept that liberty must not be separated from duty towards the Indian nation. Savarkar claimed not only to be rational and scientific, but also professed a love for humanism and universalism as ethical values.

Savarkar's scientific outlook was not opposed to universalism. With reference to the anti-brahmanic poet Gyanba Tukaram, Savarkar stated that 'the limits of the universe – there the frontiers of my country lie', and, in a letter to Guy A. Aldred, editor of *The World*, he wrote the following, 'I hold that although Mankind must march on through nationalism and federalism, through larger incorporations to their ultimate political goal is not and cannot be nationalism but Humanism, neither more nor less. The ideal of all political science and art must be a Human State. The earth is our Motherland, mankind our Nation and a Human Government based on equality of rights and duties is or ought to be our ultimate political goal⁴¹. Employing this outlook, 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. The limiting of individual freedoms and the loss of national independence even inhibited the development of the then-ruling colonial powers. Foreign rule that stifled the growth of human dignity (among 300 million people) represented an offence against the human race and had to be extinguished. This was a national as well as a religious duty.⁴² Each country had the obligation to contribute to the welfare of humanity.

⁴⁰ Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:628f.

⁴¹ Savarkar quoted in Varma 1985:390f.

⁴² V.D. Savarkar, 'Majhya Athvani', in *Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya*, Vol. 1, p. 248f translated and quoted in Lederle 1976:280. This regard for the whole of mankind remained one of Savarkar's basic ideas. In 1920 he wrote that it was higher than any restricted form of patriotism and rendered each nation 'better fitted to realise, enrich and enjoy life in all its noble aspects'. V.D. Savarkar, *An Echo from Andamans*, pp. 88f.

(IV) Pragmatism

Savarkar is not merely a disciple of utilitarianism but is also a pragmatist in his approach to the social and political challenges of his time. Following his 'directive of activism' he pursued the motto 'be practical not philosophical,' stating, 'I accept that there is a need for philosophical and intellectual debate. I love such debates. But we have been wasting so much of our time in such debates that we have become feeble in practice, we have lost our kingdoms time after time. We have succumbed to foreign aggressors. I feel more strongly about that loss'⁴³. 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. He wrote, 'even today we are just as lethargic as we were in the 13th century. I worked in the fields of politics, social work and literature. But everywhere I experience lethargy of our people. I am one of you. The only difference is that I feel so strongly about inaction compared to others'⁴⁴. To stress Savarkar's practical attitude towards solving the country's various problems, Godbole stated that he 'never preached for the sake of it. He always proposed some action' (Godbole 2004:315). To underline this feature he quoted him: 'Time has come for various movements to progress from seminars and resolutions to doing something practical. People make resolutions to the effect that we need to raise volunteer force for the protection and preservation of our dignity or that we need to start orphanages. But what is the point in merely passing resolution? Afterwards the question arises, 'where is the money for putting into practice these resolutions?' But then, why do these delegates waste money in travelling and organising seminars? Stop that waste and use the money thus saved to raise the volunteer force and open an orphanage.'⁴⁵ 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 endeavour⁴⁶.

(V) 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 organisation can effectively serve the people of all countries, at all times and under all circumstances (Godbole 2004:413). For Savarkar, human conduct had to adapt to the need and necessity of the time and could not remain the same forever (Kelkar 1989:53). In a significant lecture in Pune on 11 October 1938, Savarkar emphasized that one should only adopt administrative and political institutions that suited one's circumstances: 'When we look at suitability of various political philosophies, we must ask – Did the philosophy in question benefit the particular country? If it did, that philosophy should be considered good for that country at that time. [...] What may be a poison to one nation may be nectar to another. It is therefore unwise to say that a particular philosophy is good or bad under all the circumstances'⁴⁷. Savarkar 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.

⁴³ Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:326.

⁴⁴ Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:326.

⁴⁵ Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:315.

⁴⁶ One of Savarkar's practical propositions was that Hindus should shed their preference for excessive virtuosity. With regard to the law of progress building up skills in virtuosity is a waste of time which is not desirable and practicable.

⁴⁷ Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:467.

Processes of transformation in each society did not happen ‘over night’. In addition, for the Indian context he suggested that his countrymen were usually not ready or had been retarded by too many repressing powers that had dominated the socio-political landscape.

The most outstanding example of Savarkar’s version of realism is his firm belief in the maxim, ‘might is right’ as the leading principle in International Politics.⁴⁸ According to Savarkar, protecting the interests of one’s own country and its people had to be right. That was the law of Nature or what Herbert Spencer expressed in his general idea of the ‘persistence of force’. The one who was powerful and had material strength would win kingdoms, authority and wealth. It did not matter whether he believed in the *Puranas* or the *Koran*. We are only concerned with what happens on earth. We are not discussing ‘life after death’⁴⁹. Following Spencer, Savarkar argued that the state or government needed to promote physical force more than moral feelings. ‘If you want success on earth, you must acquire earthly power and strength. If your movement has material strength you will succeed whether or not you have divine blessing for it.’⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

In sum it is possible to state that Savarkar welcomed the prospects of reforming society along modern and egalitarian principles. Therefore, he interpreted various concepts like utilitarianism, rationalism, humanism (universalism), pragmatism and realism and tried to apply them in the Indian context as cornerstones for the progress of his countrymen. 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. Therefore, the abandonment of religious scriptures, the rejection of symbols of traditional religiosity like idol-worshipping or the theory of rebirth as the basis of social reconstruction was necessary. However, to understand Savarkar’s ‘spirit of agnosticism’ as the most significant of his philosophical foundations, it is important to analyse his notion of religion. Savarkar 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’.

Religion and spiritualism were to him purely individual matters based on faith and belief whilst science and technology were the constituent and common variables at the individual’s social life as well as at the national level. According to

⁴⁸ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:377.

⁴⁹ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:354f.

⁵⁰ ‘I am not advocating that a powerful society should be tyrant. However, one must appreciate that your cause may be just but if you are weak you will be defeated by the unjust but materially superior society. The performance of 108 or even 1.108 Satyanarayan Pujas will not help you to defeat your enemies, because success depends on acquiring power. Even those who do not believe in God will succeed if they have material strength. Has not atheist Soviet Russia become a World Power?’ (Vinayak Damodar Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:355). Another example of Savarkar’s realism was his acceptance of the limits to human achievement. ‘But no one should ever arrogantly say: we won over the Nature. America had sent man on the Moon, but still faced with severe drought, floods, hurricanes, volcanoes and earthquakes,’ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar translated and quoted Godbole 2004:346f.

Savarkar, 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. The main directive of his philosophy advocated the dissolution of linkages between society and forms of religion, spiritualism, customary practices, faith as well as the traditions and superstitions which imposed various social evils on his countrymen. The transformation of society and any kind of progress was not feasible through a religious approach. The social benefit of any thought and action had to be assessed using a temporal outlook with utilitarianism, rationalism and pragmatism as the main bases of measurement.

Savarkar's philosophy is difficult to classify in ideological and political terms. The basic philosophical tenets which are found in his social as well as political thoughts on the transformation of Indian society, were neither purely exclusive nor explicitly inclusive. He was neither a liberal nor a socialist⁵¹ and was never entrapped by a specific school of thought or any 'Grand Theory'. Against the background of his agnosticism and the strategic use of religion it is truly difficult to categorise him in terms of being 'secular' or 'anti-secular' as seen from a Western point of view. Despite that, it is possible to state that Savarkar, given his affection towards 'Occidental Philosophy', was influenced by Humanism. This emphasized the importance of rationalism, a secular worldview, a scientific materialism and a belief in a humanistic morality and universal values as the main foundations for a progressive and developed society. In his time already, Savarkar's philosophical foundations were identified as radical to both conservatives and to the orthodox, appearing as extreme to moderates, and moderate to extremists. People of common sense regarded his social and political notions as impractical and dangerous not only for the stability of the Hindu community but for Indian society as a whole. Many of Savarkar's above-mentioned statements and his efforts to establish socio-political reforms awoke unprecedented waves of criticisms from inside and outside of India.

Savarkar's personal link with the people implicated in the assassination of Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi and his breaching of religious sentiment have made him an object of unquestioned judgements in the public as well as in the academic sphere. This, in combination with a highly stringent and one-dimensional criticism of him arising from his philosophy, have metaphorically turned Savarkar and his thought into a *persona non grata in society as well as academia*. Yet it is high time now to make him the object of renewed analytical and scientific study in order to discern what foundations Savarkar's vision of the Indian nation-state was and continues to be grounded upon.

⁵¹ Despite the fact that Savarkar was deeply moved and influenced by various thoughts of Lenin he was free to write in the 1930s, 'The Russian Revolution' is indeed a revolution – a great experiment. But that does not mean that it will succeed. And even if it did, we do not have to follow it blindly. We must examine if it will suit our society, our conditions and lead to our progress and prosperity.' That is why Savarkar treated the Russian revolution as a 'revolution of life', which is not based on religious scriptures. Savarkar translated and quoted in Godbole 2004:413.

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