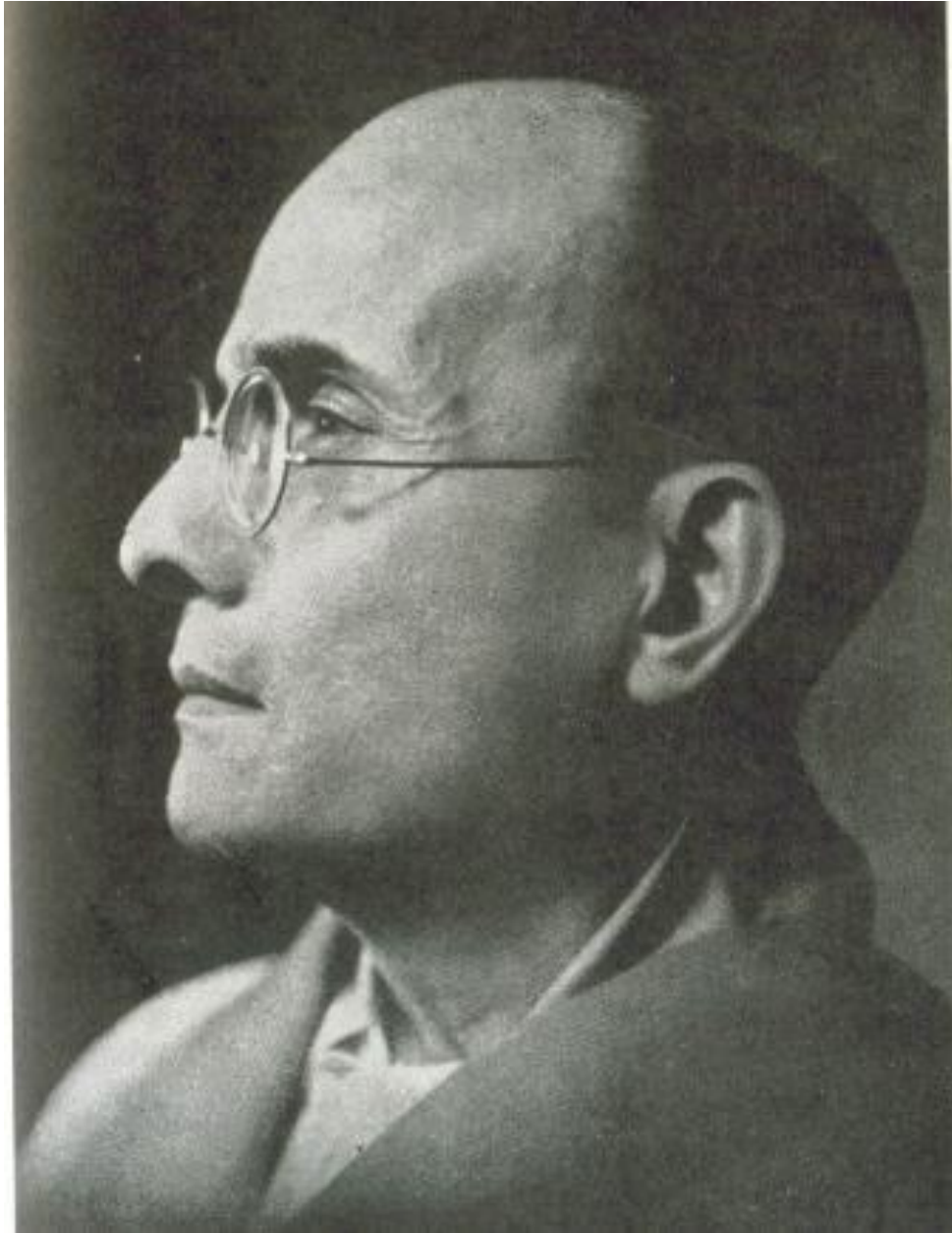


A Misunderstood Legacy:
V.D. Savarkar and the Creation of *Hindutva*

by

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Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966)

**Anonymous Photographer
Portrait from savarkar.org**

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Second, I would be remiss if I did not thank my parents, who pushed me to write this thesis even when I was bent on convincing myself not to. It has been a wonderful – if trying – experience and their constant support has gotten me through many brief moments of despair.

Finally, I want to thank scholars Sheldon Pollock and Vinayak Chaturvedi who each took time out of their extremely busy lives to thoroughly and thoughtfully respond to my questions. Though they may not have realized it, their insights truly helped to bolster my argument and, more importantly, strengthen my own confidence as a historian.

Preface:

A note on “Hindutva” and “Savarkar”

I was originally drawn to the topic of this work because of a course I took on “Modern India” in 2014, in which we discussed the electoral race which was then taking place between Narendra Modi and BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) on the right, and Rahul Gandhi and the Congress Party on the left. I was struck by Modi’s victory and the fact that a Hindu Nationalist party had gained power in a country that has, since independence, almost constantly maintained a secular government. My attention was soon drawn, more specifically, to the famous Hindu Nationalist figure, V.D. Savarkar, and his infamous tract, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* This work, published in 1923, laid the foundation for the growth of the Hindu Nationalist movement and the rise of the term “Hindutva,” which refers to Savarkar’s particular definition of what it means to be Indian, and can roughly be translated as “Hinduness.”

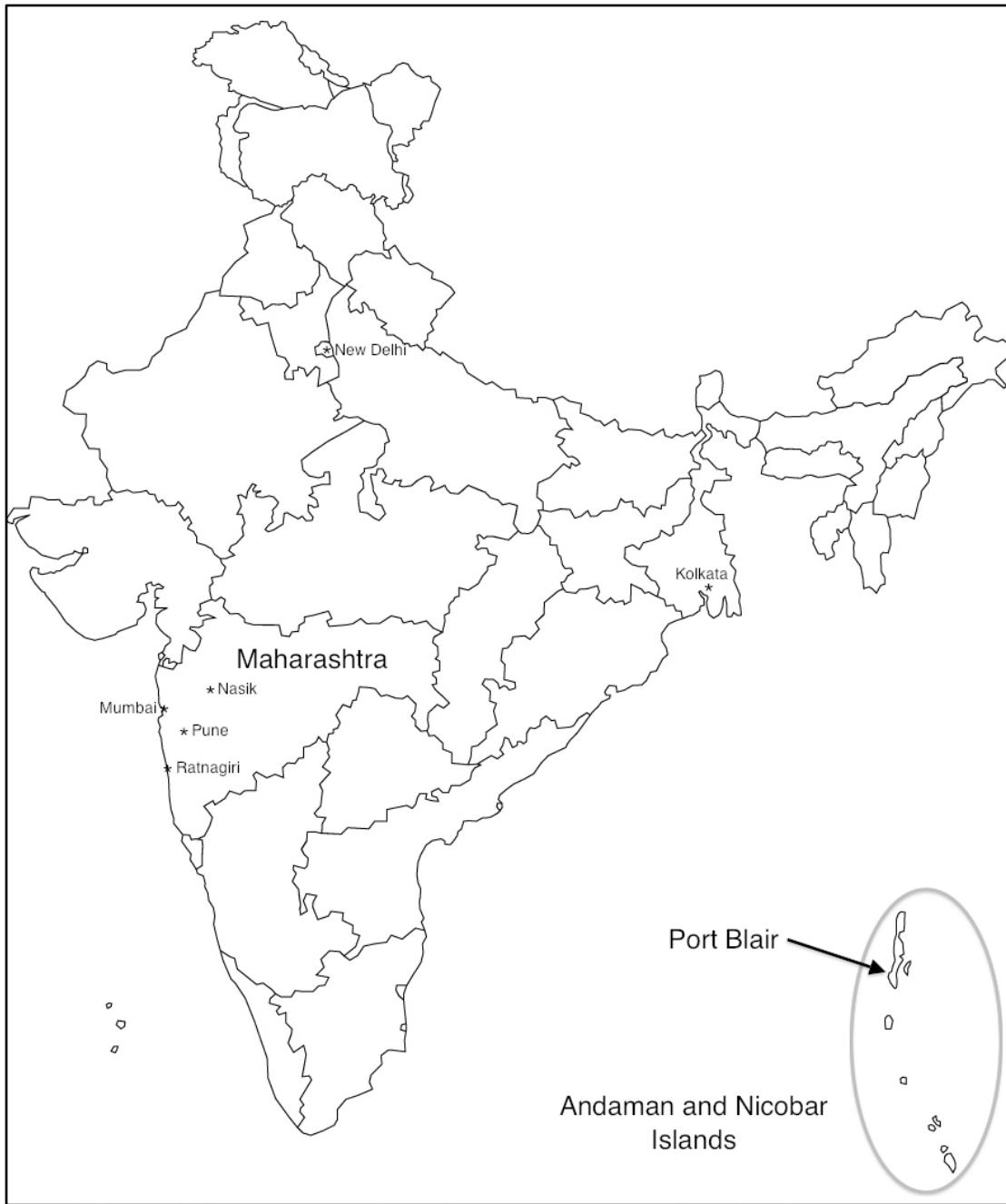
As I will discuss throughout this thesis, Savarkar has been accorded rising prominence in recent years by right-wing Indian politicians, but what is particularly interesting to me is the dramatic upswing in the use of the term “Hindutva” over the same period in books published in English. The particular significance of this rise lies in the fact that Savarkar’s own name has not seen nearly as marked a rise in usage.

That the two terms are not appearing with equal frequency suggests one of the most crucial points of this thesis – that, in recent years, the word “Hindutva” has taken on a life of its own, distinct from the idea created by Savarkar in his seminal text.

Below, I have included a graph which demonstrates the above-stated points in a visual form. This graph comes from the Google Ngram Viewer, a program run by Google which tracks the use of a particular term in all digitized publications in a specific language over time.¹ The program database runs all the way from 1800 up to the present day, but for the purpose of this thesis I have chosen 1920 as the start date. The x-axis designates the year of publication, while the y-axis designates what percentage of all “unigrams” (as the program creators describe search terms containing a single word) in books published over the period are the searched term. For instance, in 2001, the term “Hindutva” made up 0.0000392131% of all words used in the English-language publications surveyed. I use this graph, here, because I believe it provides a very compelling preface to my thesis – allowing the reader, in a way, to visualize my main argument before he/she reads any further.



¹ Jean-Baptiste Michel et al., “Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books” *Science* 331, no. 6014 (2011).



Map of India showing modern state boundaries and key locations for this thesis

Introduction:

In February of 2003, controversy erupted in India when then-prime minister A.B. Vajpayee, along with president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, unveiled a portrait of the polarizing right-wing intellectual V.D. Savarkar in the Central Hall of Parliament.² The event was boycotted by Opposition leaders who contested the image of Savarkar as a patriot and hero of Indian history. Adding to the controversy, the location of Savarkar's new portrait in the Central Hall was chosen to be directly opposite that of Mahatma Gandhi – a man whose assassination Savarkar was widely accused of orchestrating. Vajpayee's decision to include such a controversial figure in the pantheon of Indian political heroes, and the choice of current prime minister Narendra Modi to pay homage to Savarkar's portrait on the most recent anniversary of his birthday demonstrate the rising significance of a man who had, for the major part of the last five decades, been pushed into the background of Indian history.

This thesis is an attempt to shed light on the complex character of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar – a man who has been both under-studied and over-simplified in the decades since his death. I argue that Savarkar's controversial beliefs, embodied in his 1923 work "*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*," developed because of a complex chain

² See: "Savarkar Portrait Unveiled," *The Hindu* Feb. 27, 2003. and Radhika Ramaseshan, "After Atal, Modi First to Salute Savarkar" *The Telegraph*, May 29, 2014.

of events, especially following his arrest in 1909 when he was sentenced to fifty years in prison at the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands. Attempts to see Savarkar in black and white terms as either heroic or monstrous depend on an ideological reading of his life from a vantage point within or, conversely, in opposition to Hindu nationalism. By contrast, through an analysis of *Hindutva* I will provide a complete and cohesive picture of Savarkar and his ideological evolution over the course of four decades, as well as address the ways in which his ideas and legacy have often been misunderstood and misrepresented since his death. Published in 1923, at the apex of a lengthy and prolific writing career, *Hindutva* represents the accumulation of a wide range of influences upon Savarkar dating all the way from his childhood in a Maharashtrian Chitpavan Brahmin family, to his period studying at college in London between 1906-1910, and – perhaps most importantly – to his period of internment at the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands.

Realistically, *Hindutva* – and Savarkar, himself – cannot be fully understood without delving deeply into the life of the author, the national and international political atmosphere of the period, and the history of India. At its core, *Hindutva* represents an attempt on the part of Savarkar to construct a cohesive Indian identity centered on the ideas of nationality and territoriality. At the time when he was writing this text, India as a whole was grappling with many of the same questions. Faced with the frustrating and seemingly unending struggle against British imperialism, many Indians – like Savarkar – attempted to conceptualize an idea of India that would provide the highest probability of success for the young nation after independence

was achieved.³ Though many scholars and casual readers, alike, have dismissed Savarkar's ideas as too radical and exclusionary, such a view over-simplifies the complexity of *Hindutva* and the intentions of its author. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, Savarkar's transition towards an anti-Muslim belief system was a slow one, and was far from over in 1923. *Hindutva*, therefore, is far less an attack on non-Hindu Indians than it is a declaration of ardent love towards the territory of India and an attempt to understand the idea of nationality as it applies to such a vast, diverse, and ancient country.

Historiographical Analysis

As noted above, there is a decided lack of serious scholarship on Savarkar and *Hindutva*, and in this thesis I hope to fill an essential gap left by the scholars who have gone before me. Though there are a number of authors who have studied various aspects of Savarkar's life or the meaning of *Hindutva*, no one has yet attempted a complete evaluation of the treatise with an eye to the ideological evolution of the author. Since his death in 1966, Savarkar has most widely been remembered for his association with the murder of Gandhi (for which he was never convicted), but also for the authorship of this infamous text. The scholarship about him can widely be divided into three categories – hagiographies written during and soon after his death in 1966; caustic critiques written by those who perceive Savarkar one-dimensionally

³ See, for instance: Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: The John Day Co, 1942). and Mahatma Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1983).

as only anti-Muslim and anti-Gandhi; and more recent, scholarly attempts to understand various individual aspects of Savarkar's ideologies and life.

The first biography of Savarkar was published in 1926. This text, *Life of Barrister Savarkar* was not intended as a comprehensive biography, but rather as an analysis of the period from Savarkar's birth in 1883 until his arrest and incarceration in 1911. Written under the pen name Chitragupta, *Life of Barrister Savarkar* is the first of three hagiographies written to glorify the revolutionary. This work, in particular, is significant because its authorship has never been determined. Scholar Vinayak Chaturvedi has written on the issue most recently in 2013, claiming that the work is – in fact – an autobiography.⁴ However, there remains more research to be done to determine the veracity of this claim, and for the purpose of this thesis I have considered *Life of Barrister Savarkar* simply as one among a number of biographies.⁵

The second of these biographies, *Veer Savarkar*, was first published in 1950, sixteen years before Savarkar's death. Written by Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar* is the most widely renowned of all works in this category. It, too, however, is a resounding glorification of all aspects of Savarkar's life, and it is important to note that Keer relied heavily on interviews with Savarkar, himself, in writing the book.⁶ The fact that Savarkar was so closely tied up in the creation of *Veer Savarkar* makes it unlikely that Keer made a concerted effort at writing an unbiased representation of

⁴ Vinayak Chaturvedi, "A Revolutionary's Biography: The Case of VD Savarkar," *Postcolonial Studies* 16, no. 2 (2013): 126.

⁵ I want to thank Professor Chaturvedi for his personal insight into this issue. Though I remain dubious about the possibility that Savarkar authored work himself, I have been convinced that the claim is not without merit and deserves further investigation.

⁶ Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 2d ed.(Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), vii.

the revolutionary. Savarkar is portrayed as a truly patriotic Indian whose first love is his Motherland, and who has worked tirelessly all his life for the benefit of his fellow Indian countrymen. Lacking from this work is any critical exploration of Savarkar's revolutionary activities or his ideologies.

The third biography, simply titled *Savarkar* is – in many ways – a more succinct version of Keer's hagiography. Written by Vidya Sagar Anand a year after Savarkar's death, *Savarkar* is by far the briefest of the three. There is little of note within Anand's work, largely because he cites Keer throughout the book, and provides little new information. In fact, none of these three authors raise many questions about Savarkar's life. The common thread is a portrayal of him as a glorious hero of India, without any of the more controversial elements. If these works provide nothing else, however, they demonstrate the ardent love that many of Savarkar's followers had for him – people who were able to ignore all criticism and incriminating information in favor of supporting the heroic and revolutionary cause of V.D. Savarkar. It is also significant that these biographies, especially Keer's *Veer Savarkar*, have been widely accepted as *the* source on Savarkar's life, despite their openly laudatory perspectives, and Keer is cited profusely in more modern scholarship.

On the other end of the spectrum, there have been a few highly critical evaluations of Savarkar written in the years since his death. Authored by those who view his ideology as inherently exclusionary, and by some who believe strongly in his connection to Gandhi's assassination, these critiques – also – cannot be taken at face value. Perhaps the most prominent is *Savarkar and Hindutva: The Godse Connection*,

written in 2002 by A.G. Noorani, a prominent Indian lawyer, author, and historian. Noorani, one of the most outspoken critics of Savarkar, writes with a disparaging tone throughout the work, but his own political beliefs are displayed prominently in the dedication to the work: “To the victims of the pogrom in Gujarat 2002...” By using the word pogrom – a term that evokes memories of the mass violence committed against Eastern European Jews during World War II – to describe the events which took place, Noorani reveals his own highly critical views on the idea of Hindu Nationalism.

Neither the hagiographies nor these extremely critical works are particularly useful for understanding the complexity of Savarkar’s character. Only in recent decades has there been a growth of scholarship about him, mainly by two historians – Vinayak Chaturvedi and Janaki Bakhle. Though neither of these authors has yet published a full-length book on Savarkar, both have written multiple articles addressing different aspects of the revolutionary’s life and ideologies. In 2003, Chaturvedi published his first, somewhat biographical work on the derivation of the name “Vinayak,” titled “Vinayak & Me: *Hindutva* and the politics of naming.” In 2010, he followed it with “Rethinking Knowledge with Action: V.D. Savarkar, the Baghavat Gita, and Histories of Warfare,” which detailed the influence of the Gita – a major sacred text of the Hindu tradition – on the development of Savarkar’s ideology. In 2013, he also wrote “A Revolutionary’s Biography: The Case of V.D. Savarkar,” a short overview of Savarkar’s life, most prominently the years he studied in London. Significantly however, this article leaves out any mention of the period after 2011.

Janaki Bakhle's 2010 article, "Savarkar (1883-1966), Sedition and Surveillance: the rule of law in a colonial situation," addresses the same time period as Chaturvedi's "A Revolutionary's Biography" – Savarkar's time in London. In it, Bakhle questions the portrayal of Savarkar as a violent revolutionary. She argues, instead, that his power was in his rhetorical skill, and that he never actually acted violently. Bakhle's second article, also published in 2010, is an analysis of Savarkar's seminal work, *Hindutva*. The essay, titled "Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) and the Writing of *Essentials of Hindutva*," evaluates *Hindutva* by addressing the primary rhetorical strategies that Savarkar uses. The article is an astute analysis of the work, but it still leaves questions about Savarkar's life before and after *Hindutva*'s publication.

In the past decade, a new interest in Savarkar's life and work has resulted in multiple dissertations and theses on the subject. In 2007, John Pincince submitted his dissertation, "On the Verge of *Hindutva*: V.D. Savarkar, revolutionary, convict, ideologue, c. 1905-1924," to the University of Hawaii. The next year, in 2008, Juli Gittinger wrote her own Masters thesis at the University of Colorado, titled "Hindutva from Savarkar to Ayodhya: phantasmic identity of Hindu Nationalism." Though both of these works are much lengthier than any of Chaturvedi or Bakhle's articles, and though they each attempt to address – in some respect – the complexity of Savarkar's character, neither of them approaches the issue from the same angle that my thesis will.

In addition to these works which are specifically related to Savarkar, it is also useful to make a note of the more general scholarship on Hindu Nationalism.

Foremost among these texts is Christophe Jaffrelot's *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (1996), which is a thorough analysis of the development of the movement and the most prominent individuals associated with it. Though Jaffrelot is one of the only recent scholars to address the Hindu Nationalist movement, specifically, a number of other authors have focused on Indian nationalism more generally – either religious or secular. In their 1987 work, *Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, authors Andersen and Damle provide an overview of the development of the RSS – the cultural wing of the Hindu Nationalist movement. In a similar vein, Peter van der Veer published his investigation into the nature of Indian nationalism, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, in 1994. On the more secular side of the spectrum are works such as Jim Masselos' 2005 survey text, *Indian Nationalism: A History*, which follows the development of an Indian national consciousness chronologically from the mid-19th century onwards.

Given all of this recent work on both Indian nationalism and on Savarkar, himself, it is remarkable that there remains a great gap in the scholarship about his life and work. No author has yet attempted a complex and complete analysis of the revolutionary that encompasses his biographical development as well as the evolution of his ideas. Still, the existing works about Savarkar have raised a number of important questions: from where did Savarkar's violent revolutionary ideas derive? Are these ideas related to the development of his seminal work, *Hindutva*? Is it possible to trace the development of Savarkar's ideas from his youth all the way to his death, in a logical and easily explained succession? More controversially, was

Savarkar actually anti-Muslim, and did the ideas expounded in *Hindutva* come primarily from his beliefs in an exclusionary ideology, or from his fervent adoration of Hindu India? Finally, has Savarkar's legacy stayed true to his life's work and his own goals? Or have various groups appropriated his name and image for their own purposes, perhaps losing sight of the truth behind V.D. Savarkar? Certainly Chaturvedi and Bakhle, especially, have attempted to answer one or more of these questions in their works, but this thesis will attempt to address all of the issues raised above, some in a more detailed fashion than others.

Outline of Chapters

This thesis will be divided into four chapters, beginning with an analysis of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* and then progressing chronologically through Savarkar's life in three separate sections. Chapter One will address the text of *Hindutva* through an in-depth breakdown of its sections and ideas. This chapter will also include an evaluation of the sources referenced specifically by Savarkar as influential in the creation of the text. Chapter Two will turn to the personal life of Savarkar and will address him from a more biographical perspective, beginning with his birth in 1883 and ending with his arrest and extradition to India in 1909. Chapter Three will cover the highly influential and formative years which Savarkar spent imprisoned in the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands. I will argue that this period, more than any other, provided the impetus for the formation of the *Hindutva* ideology as articulated in *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Finally, Chapter Four will attempt to place *Hindutva* and Savarkar in the context of the decades after the work's publication. I will address

the reception of the work in the period it was produced, as well as the influence that it has had since. In addition, I will tackle the subject of Savarkar's own dramatic evolution as a character, during his period as president of the Hindu Mahasabha (Hindu Nationalist political party) and afterwards in the years before his death.

Chapter One:

Unpacking *Hindutva*

Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? is, essentially, a history of the Hindu people and an open declaration of love for the land of India. In it, Savarkar attempts to unpack Hindu history and to differentiate the Hindu people from other members of the Indian population. Before delving into any discussion of the text, itself, it is crucial to note that Savarkar distinguishes between “Hindutva” and “Hinduism.” *Hindutva* is not a work of political theology, although it is easy to view it as such on the first reading. Rather, Savarkar argues for a Hindu India based on ethnic, territorial and linguistic linkages – many of which, it may be noted, he does support by drawing on ancient religious texts. Though *Hindutva* does not appear to follow any logical structure and comes across as rather scattered, it is possible to pick through it and find the most essential statements that Savarkar attempts to make.

The thesis of the work, completely absent in the first few pages, is actually to be found near the end. In a section titled “Unique Natural Blessings to Hindusthan,” in a sentence that is quite easy to overlook, the author lays out the essence of his argument, stating: “Thus the actual essentials of Hindutva are, as this running sketch

reveals, also the ideal essentials of nationality.”⁷ In a way, then, *Hindutva* does not represent a drastic departure from Savarkar’s earlier works and revolutionary activities. Though he was forced to renounce his revolutionary behavior during his time in jail, *Hindutva* is a reflection of the author’s ability to work around restrictions and convey the same ideas by a different means. The treatise is another call for Indian independence, but this time it is a cry for independence from not only the British, but all foreign invaders – a return to the vision Savarkar held of an India rooted in Hindu ancestry. Through the pages of the work, the reader is presented with all the integral aspects of the author’s ideology as it had evolved until 1923. Savarkar is visible as highly intelligent, rhetorically gifted, and – overall – deeply committed to his cause.

Originally published under the title *Essentials of Hindutva*, Savarkar’s treatise can be divided into an introduction and three easily distinguishable sections. It must be emphasized that Savarkar himself does not provide any such three-fold division in the work; rather, he provides a number of smaller divisions, or what I would term “mini-chapters,” numbering thirty-one in all.⁸ After a brief introduction that consists of two chapters, Savarkar embarks on the first section, comprised of twenty chapters that relate the background of the Hindu people and the derivation of the name “Hindu,” among other important terms. The second section, only seven chapters in length, addresses the root of the work – the essentials of Hindutva, or what is required in order to be able to call oneself a Hindu. The third and final section consists of the

⁷ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 5th ed.(Bombay: S.S. Savarkar, 1969), 137.

⁸ For the sake of convenience, I will refer to these small sections simply as chapters throughout my thesis. However, it is useful to keep in mind that they are extremely brief – many are not even one page in length.

last two chapters of the treatise and addresses ways in which the ideas of Hindutva can be applied to real-world scenarios. In this section Savarkar addresses particular examples, such as the Sikhs, and discusses the way that they fit into his vision of a Hindu India.

Below is a table showing the titles of all thirty-one chapters, divided into the sections – and again, it should be noted that these are sections that I have arrived at upon reading the work closely and repeatedly. The aim in providing this table is to give the reader a sense of the style Savarkar adopted in his writing, especially the strange system of titling that he used for his chapters – at times extremely specific, and at others, vague and confusing. This odd system is emblematic of Savarkar’s organizational approach to *Hindutva* on the whole. In the same vein, despite the fact that I believe my system of separating his chapters into sections is the most helpful way to divide and understand the work, it is still important to note that my divisions are not absolute – aspects of one section sometimes pop up again in a later section, or vice versa.

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Introduction	Section One	Section Two	Section Three
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is in a name? • Hindutva is different from Hinduism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a Hindu? • Name older still • Hindus, a nation • Other names • How Names Are Given • International Life • Fall of Buddhism • Buddhism – a universal religion • Then came reaction! • Institutions in favour of Nationality • Commingling of Races • Back to the Vedas • Sindhusthan • What is Arya • Hindu & Hindusthan • Reverence to Buddha • Hindus: all one and a nation • Hindusthani Language • Foreign Invaders • Hindutva at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stupid notions must go • Essential implications of Hindutva • Bond of common blood • Common culture • What is civilization? • Common laws and rites • Who is a Hindu? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindus in Sindh • Unique Natural Blessings to Hindusthan

Because of the rather scattered nature of *Hindutva*, as noted above, it is difficult to analyze it by progressing through the work chapter by chapter. Instead of this type of sequential evaluation, therefore, it will better serve my purpose to address each of the broader themes of the text individually, and in conjunction with one another – assessing how they reappear throughout the treatise at different points and for different purposes. The two primary themes are: the importance of naming, and

especially the name “Hindu”; and the importance of territoriality and geography in shaping a Hindu nation. Both of these ideas play significant roles in the actual development of the Hindutva thesis, as laid out in the chapter titled “Common laws and rites.” In addition to these primary themes, there are also three key questions raised throughout *Hindutva* which relate to the author’s construction of the work: why he chose to write in English rather than his native Marathi or Hindi; what sources he used – both those cited within the text, itself, and those which influenced his ideological development in the years leading up to 1923; and, finally, what his perception of “history” was and how crucial he believed it to be for understanding the present.

The Politics of English

In the first of the two introductory chapters, titled “What is in a name?,” Savarkar immediately gives the reader a significant clue about one of the questions mentioned above – why he decided to write *Hindutva* in English. By addressing this issue first, I will both introduce the reader to the work as Savarkar intended – through the first chapter – as well as shed light on two key components of the author’s own personality – his rhetorical skill and his ability to astutely reach his targeted audience. The section begins with a reference to William Shakespeare – an utterly Western figure.

We hope that the fair Maid of Verona who made the impassioned appeal to her lover to change a name that was ‘nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man’ would forgive us for this our idolatrous attachment to it when we make bold to assert that, ‘Hindus we are and love to remain so!’⁹

⁹ Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 1.

This quote is obviously intended for a Western-educated audience who would be familiar with the canonical status of Shakespeare in English culture. Not only is Savarkar demonstrating his own education and sophisticated grasp of the English language and culture, but he is also making a subtle statement to a large group that is reading his treatise. As Juli Gittinger points out in her master's thesis, "Hindutva from Savarkar to Ayodyha,"

He was surely aware that the allusion to Shakespeare targeted a narrow audience of educated who would appreciate the reference, but also highlighted his British education which would not only give him authority as a native 'Hindu', but also as someone who was well read and worldly.¹⁰

It is also useful to recognize that in the period when Savarkar was writing, English was rapidly gaining popularity in India, especially as the accepted language of anti-colonial discourse.¹¹

Various scholars have attempted to explain the rise of the English language in this period, perhaps most prominently Shefali Chandra and Pingali Sailaja.¹² In her book, titled *Indian English*, Sailaja devotes one section to the rise of the language, noting that:

¹⁰ Juli L. Gittinger, "Hindutva from Savarkar to Ayodhya: Phantasmic Identity of Hindu Nationalism" (University of Colorado, 2004), 31.

¹¹ Both Dadabhai Naoroji (founder of the Indian National Congress) and Bal Gangadhar Tilak (leader of the Indian Independence Movement) published influential anti-colonial works in English, and it is well known that Savarkar was heavily influenced by Tilak's work.

¹² I will not address Chandra, specifically, in this thesis since her work is less applicable to the case of Savarkar than that of Sailaja. However, for insight into the idea of English being tied to demonstrations of Indian masculine dominance, see: Shefali Chandra, "Mimicry, Masculinity, and the Mystique of Indian English: Western India, 1870-1900," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 1 (2009): 216-17.

The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 and was instrumental in leading the country to independence... in the circular announcing its first meeting, the prerequisite for a delegate was knowledge of English... It was believed by some scholars and leaders that English had the effect of unifying Indians across the country and catalyzing the nationalistic impulse. Both the English language, which served as a link language, and English education, which was supposed to have sown ideas of liberty, were deemed responsible for the Indian nationalist movement.¹³

This assessment seems quite astute, acknowledging the significant influence of an English education on much of the Indian population in this period. Savarkar certainly was affected by the years he spent studying in London and the relatively liberal environment he found there. It makes sense, then, that he would have seen English as the appropriate medium for reaching his fellow British-educated Indians, many of whom (as noted in footnote four, above) utilized English as the language for their own anti-colonial scholarship.

Savarkar as a Historian

Before we attempt to address the major themes of *Hindutva*, it is perhaps helpful to also pause and consider Savarkar's role as a historian, so as to help better illuminate both his aim in writing the treatise as well as the genius that initially presents itself in the first chapter. Near the end of "Hindutva is different from Hinduism," the second chapter of the work's "Introduction," Savarkar makes an important statement which is, in some ways, rather contradictory. He writes, "Hindutva is not a word but a history,"¹⁴ and with this short sentence he offers the reader a glimpse of a crucial, yet ironic point. Throughout his life, Savarkar was attached to the concept of history as a

¹³ P. Sailaja, *Indian English, Dialects of English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), Book, 108.

¹⁴ Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 3.

teacher for the present and future. He believed very strongly in the idea that one must learn from the example of the past – especially the past of revolutions and revolutionaries. The first major work that he wrote, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, was a new history of a very controversial event in Indian history.¹⁵ In it, Savarkar argues that the rebellion of 1857 – an event characterized as a “mutiny” by the British rulers in order to minimize its political value – was actually the first stage of the Indian struggle for independence. Though Savarkar certainly loved history, he was a self-taught historian and this work, like his later ones, lacked strong evidence, leaning more in the direction of advocacy and assertions.

Indeed, within *The Indian War of Independence*, there is certainly some questionable scholarly work.¹⁶ For instance, Savarkar relies heavily on an earlier interpretation of the event – G.B. Malleson’s *The Indian Mutiny of 1857* – which famously argued that the rebellion was a premeditated event, and a result of a widespread and longstanding conspiracy between three main characters: “Nana Sahib...leader of the Marathas; Maulavi Ahmad-Allah, a Muslim religious leader; and the Rani of Jhansi the widow of a ruler of a small state in central India.”¹⁷ This argument, and Malleson’s work, on the whole, was based only slightly on factual

¹⁵ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (London 1909).

¹⁶ For more on this, see: Michael Adas, “Twentieth Century Approaches to the Indian Mutiny of 1857—58,” *Journal of Asian History* 5, no. 1 (1971).

¹⁷ Ainslie Thomas Embree, *1857 in India: Mutiny or War of Independence?* (Boston: D.C.Heath, 1968), 31.

evidence and far more on the type of suggestion that would sell books – the work’s publication was, after all, in the midst of a period of “mutiny tourism.”¹⁸

Certainly, then, it is apparent that Savarkar was perhaps more enthusiastic about the ideas he was supporting than he was engaged in accurate research. This enthusiasm carried over to Savarkar’s long jail term as evidenced by the fact that during his time in the Cellular Jail, he made a great effort to educate his fellow inmates – teaching many to read and to develop an appreciation for the revolutionary ideals of historical figures and authors such as Spencer, Tolstoy, and Tagore. As his most famous biographer wrote, “It was Savarkar’s belief that knowledge without action was lame and action without knowledge was blind.”¹⁹ It is no surprise then, that such a large part of *Hindutva* is dedicated to the background of Hindu history and myth. How could the author expect the reader to accept the tenets of *Hindutva* – and with them, effect change – if they did not first understand the derivation of the most important terms and ideas?

Though the statement “Hindutva is not a word but a history” would seem to suggest the importance of such history, as has been discussed above, historical accuracy was not Savarkar’s forte. Within the twenty chapters of *Hindutva* that deal with historical background and etymology, he attempts very little critical analysis of his sources. Savarkar seems to be suggesting that what is important is not the veracity of facts, but the ideas that have grown and developed throughout history. These ideas,

¹⁸ G. B. Malleson, *The Indian Mutiny of 1857* (London: Seeley and co., 1891). For more on “mutiny tourism” and Malleson, see: Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 2d ed. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), 120.

which he cites throughout the treatise, are primarily found in the form of religious Hindu texts or Hindu myth and legend. As Janaki Bakhle astutely points out in her article about the creation of *Hindutva*: “He recognized that nationalism did not need history; myths could provide an easy substitute for history or historical accuracy. What nationalism did need was geography, and territoriality, and Savarkar provides it in plenty.”²⁰

Source Material

It is important to note that Savarkar does utilize a wide array of sources in his text, but only within the first section – the one devoted to history of the Hindu people and the etymology of the name “Hindu.” Also, though he draws from a variety of sources, it is quickly apparent that very few of them are unproblematic. The first source cited, in the chapter “What is a Hindu?” is the Rigveda – the oldest of the sacred Hindu texts, likely composed originally around 1500 B.C.E. Just a few pages later, he cites the Bhavishya Puran, one of the Puranas – another collection of sacred Hindu texts composed of legends and myths about the history of the Hindu people. That Savarkar utilizes these sources to back his writing is not surprising – undoubtedly any source material from the periods on which he is writing is difficult to find, and he is working with what is available. In fact, many historians of this period in Indian history utilize the same material. The difference, however, is in Savarkar’s treatment of these texts – he does not acknowledge them as potentially problematic, and instead takes what is written within them, largely, as fact. Rather than provide any sort of textual analysis

²⁰ Janaki Bakhle, “Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) and the Writing of *Essentials of Hindutva*,” *Public Culture* 22, no. 1 (2010): 166.

or recognize that these sources play a (sometimes conflicting) dual spiritual/historical role, he seems to assume that his reader will accept what is written in them as unquestionably true – in the same way that he does.

In one section, he even acknowledges those who would dispute the validity of the texts he uses, and retorts, “The habit of doubting everything in the Puranas till it has been corroborated by some foreign evidence is absurd.”²¹ His argument, that we have nothing tangible to dispute these ancient sources with, is not incorrect, but it does draw attention to the significant question of why Savarkar believed these sources to be so important and indisputable. More important than whether or not the Puranas or Vedas are actually factually correct, therefore, is the point that such texts represented, for Savarkar, a way of finding new pride in his nation’s ancient history, a sort of consolation for the trials and tribulations of colonial rule.²² After all, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, is, perhaps more than anything else, a celebration of India from its ancient roots to the contemporary struggle against the British, and what better way to celebrate the country than through lauding its earliest literatures?

It is important to note, despite all this, that by solely employing sacred Hindu texts and Hindu myth to make his points, Savarkar is undermining his authority as a historian – someone whose primary role it is to question the accuracy of every text and consider what influences may have played into their development. Instead of attempting to provide a complete scholarly analysis, Savarkar is providing a narrative that fits his goals while writing in an authoritative enough manner to appear

²¹ Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 35.

²² I am indebted, for this particular idea, to Sheldon Pollock, who entertained my questions about the use of Sanskrit sources and provided me with a thoughtful insight into Savarkar’s possible motivations.

convincingly scholarly to his readers. Bakhle makes this point in her article, writing: “Savarkar’s shrewd political sense lay in accurately identifying his middle-class audience, one that he could captivate by his mixture of an older poetic modality in English prose and then impress with his seeming grasp of an array of historical sources in several languages.”²³ Importantly, it is only his apparent grasp of the source material that is significant to Savarkar. By writing for an audience that is not well versed in Sanskrit or historical theory, he brilliantly manages to make his argument as convincing as possible using the only tools he has available.

In order to give the reader a better grasp of Savarkar’s source material, a table is included below which lists each source or author cited within *Hindutva*, classified into three groups by the relative significance accorded them by Savarkar. The sacred texts are rather straightforward, but the various authors cited throughout the work provide more complication. For the most part, these sources play minor roles in the development of Savarkar’s arguments, but it is important to note the wide variety of material that he is drawing on to convince the reader of his argument. In fact, besides this relatively lengthy list of cited sources, Savarkar includes a plethora of un-cited quotes throughout his work, and also has a tendency to reference particular religious texts without any direct quotation. For the purpose of simplifying the table, these sources have been left out, but the fact that Savarkar names so many authors and texts, scattered everywhere and sometimes seemingly without purpose, supports the idea that he is attempting to convince his reader of his worth as a scholar – even if he can only do so by overwhelming them with names.

²³ Bakhle, “Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) and the Writing of *Essentials of Hindutva*,” 176.

Most Prominent	Less Prominent	Briefly Mentioned
The Vedas (in general) Rigveda Puranas (Bhavishya & Vishnu) Mahabharata	Gunadhya Chand Bardai (his work <i>Prithviraj Raso</i>) Ramadas Bhushana Tilak	Tegbahadur Guru Govindsinha Shivaji Dhondo Govind Bajirao Jaysingh Govindrao Kale

The relative significance of each of these three types of sources for Savarkar's argument is quite different. The first group, comprised mainly of sacred Hindu texts, is the most utilized and these are the only sources which are referenced throughout *Hindutva*. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, sources such as the Rigveda and the Puranas form the cornerstone for much of Savarkar's argument surrounding territoriality and naming. By contrast, the second two source categories appear only in the first section of the work – primarily, in fact, within one chapter, titled “Hindutva at work.” It is here that Savarkar attempts to demonstrate how, beginning around 1300 A.D., “This one word, Hindutva, ran like a vital spinal cord through our whole body politic...” His method is to “substantiate these remarks... [by] quoting a few eloquent lines from...some of the foremost representatives of our Hindu race.”²⁴ His use of the phrase “a few eloquent lines” is quite ironic given the veritable deluge of quotes that follows from various sources. By drawing on numerous famous scholars and poets, such as Chand Bardai and Bhushana, and referencing famous figures such as Shivaji, Savarkar manages to convey the idea that his argument has a strong basis in national historiography – whether or not that is actually true.

²⁴ Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 48.

The Importance of Naming

With a background understanding of Savarkar's methodology and inspirations, it is now appropriate to turn to an investigation of *Hindutva's* main themes - naming and territoriality. In order to understand the latter, however, it is useful to begin with the way he addresses the former. After the Shakespearean reference in "What is in a name?," Savarkar continues on to the actual point of his first chapter, which is the importance of a name for identifying something. He claims that certain words are "the very soul of a man" and that "they become the idea itself and live longer than generations of man do."²⁵ This is a crucial topic for the author, and these quotes demonstrate his unique attachment to the importance of a name – especially the name "Hindu," which he perceives as the cornerstone of developing a Hindu nation.

In the first few chapters, Savarkar spends a great deal of time developing the idea that the roots of this word "Hindu" come from the ancestors of modern Hindus, rather than from outside forces seeking to label the group. The importance of this point, which the author continues to emphasize throughout *Hindutva*, lies in his vehement desire to develop a cohesive national identity – an aim which may have taken on even greater importance for him given the rise of anti-Brahmin sentiment among lower-caste Hindus in this period.²⁶ We have already seen that Savarkar was obsessed with the importance of names, but now we are given a glimpse into his

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ Savarkar was, of course, a Brahmin himself, and although he voiced his support on various occasions for abolition of the caste system, he may have been feeling extra pressure to negotiate an all-encompassing Hindu identity in his work. For more on the anti-Brahmin movement, see: Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

fixation on one particular name over any other. The fact that, as he claims, one can trace the origins of the word “Hindu” to the Rigveda – “the oldest records of the world” – makes it, to Savarkar, a legitimate title, and one that can be appreciated and embraced by Hindus across India.²⁷ He does not stop with this reference to the world’s oldest text, however. Over the next few pages, Savarkar details the historical source material that supports his view of the development of the name “Hindu,” from the Aryan “Sapta Sindhu” to the Indian Prakrit “Hapta Hindu,” a natural alteration of letters deriving from a transition between Sanskrit and Prakrit spelling.²⁸ All of this effort seems to be a plea, on the part of the author, for Indians to cast aside other titles they may have been drawn to – primarily the term Aryan, which Savarkar addresses and dispatches with rapidity – and accept the name that history, and their ancestors, have chosen for them.

The significance that Savarkar places on convincing his reader of this argument is emphasized by the fact that he returns, again, to the importance of the name “Hindu” in the second large section of *Hindutva*, in the chapter “Stupid notions must go.” Here, he chides the reader, once more, to rid him or herself of the idea that “Hindu” is a foreign term, and to ignore any negative connotations that may have arisen through derogatory use of it by Muslims. He notes several examples of places where “Hindu” has – historically – had very good connotations, and then completes his argument with a rather rambling discourse on the futility of taking any other names, including this quote which accurately sums up his views:

²⁷ Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

‘Is it possible to deny [the origins of the term] and coin a new word for our national designation?’ As it stands at present the word Hindu has come to be the very banner of our race and the one great feature that above all others contributes to strengthen and uphold our racial unity from Cape to Kashmir, from Attock to Cuttack. Do you think you can change it as easily as a cap?²⁹

The importance of recognizing both the positive connotations of the term “Hindu” as well as its antiquity relates to the main aim of *Hindutva* – that of organizing a nation based on “Hindu-ness.” In order to accomplish this, however, Savarkar also has to define the “Essentials of Hindutva,” from which the treatise derives its original name – those qualities necessary for being considered a Hindu. In a way, everything else within *Hindutva* is either leading to or deriving from the author’s listing of these “essential qualities.” As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the entire second section of the treatise relates to the determination of what qualities make someone a Hindu, but it is within the chapter titled “Common laws and rites” that Savarkar actually lays bare his argument. Here he writes:

A Hindu then is he who feels attachment to the land that extends from Sindhu to Sindhu as the land of his forefathers – as his Fatherland; who inherits the blood of the great race whose first and discernible source could be traced from the Himalayan altitudes of the Vedic Satpasindhus and which assimilating all that was incorporated and ennobling all that was assimilated has grown into and come to be known as the Hindu people; and who, as a consequence of the foregoing attributes, has inherited and claims as his own the Hindu Sanskriti, the Hindu civilization, as 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 rituals, ceremonies and sacraments.³⁰

Territoriality

As will be discussed later in this chapter, this all-encompassing quote provides fodder for a great deal of the controversy that surrounds *Hindutva*, especially with relation to

²⁹ Ibid., 76.

³⁰ Ibid., 100.

the “common fairs and festivals, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments” that one must adhere to in order to be a Hindu. First, however, let us address the importance of a sense of territoriality, which Savarkar introduces much earlier in the treatise but emphasizes here. The phrase “attachment to the land” is closely tied with the idea that the country of India is the ancestral territory of the Hindus and therefore must be revered in its own right, a point the author takes up throughout the first large section of the work. Interestingly, Savarkar makes a distinction throughout *Hindutva* between the Aryan and the Hindu races – something that sets him apart from the bulk of Hindu nationalists during the 20th century. While he certainly emphasizes that India is the ancestral Hindu home, in the chapter “Name older still,” he acknowledges and accepts the Aryan Invasion Theory, which proposes that the first people to populate northern India came from outside the region, crossing the Himalayas from present-day Afghanistan.³¹ While the Aryan Invasion Theory is widely supported by modern anthropologists and archaeologists, it is significant that Savarkar accepts it in *Hindutva* since the “indigenous Aryan” theory would seem to be much more advantageous for a Hindu nationalist argument.

Perhaps because he chooses not to rely on a theory tracing the Aryan origins to India, Savarkar places more emphasis in the first section of *Hindutva* on evaluating the growth of the Hindu nation based on natural boundaries, especially the

³¹ Ibid., 8-9. It is also worth noting here that authors Andersen and Damle, in their work *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, seem to overlook this point by Savarkar – wrongly suggesting that, “Savarkar accepted the notion that the Aryan people and culture had originated in northwestern India and had gradually spread out over the subcontinent.” For more: see, Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 33.

importance of India's various rivers. The very root of the name, "Hindu," derives from these rivers, according to Savarkar. In the chapter, "What is a Hindu?," he writes about how the Aryans adopted the title, "Out of their gratitude to the genial and perennial network of waterways that run through the land like a system of nerve-threads..."³² This personification of the rivers belies Savarkar's own attachment to the land and allows the reader to understand how – in some ways – *Hindutva* can be viewed as a love letter to the territory of India.

Throughout the work, Savarkar returns again and again to waterways as the source of Indian territoriality, referring to the 'Sindhu' river as the dividing line between Hindu India and the rest of the continent. By its connection to the very name of its people, this river takes pre-eminence in the history of Indian territoriality, and – as Savarkar writes – "The day on which the patriarchs of our race had crossed that stream they ceased to belong to the people they had definitely left behind and laid the foundation of a new nation..."³³ He goes on to back up this boundary line with material from the Bhawishya Puran – another of the ancient Hindu texts. Within this text, Savarkar cites a Royal Decree issued by the king Shalivahan that marked the line of boundary between India and her neighbors as the Indus River.³⁴ Through these sources, as well as a number of others dispersed throughout the remainder of the first section, Savarkar makes clear that the boundaries of India are both ancient and sacred, and that these borders are closely tied with the development of the Hindu people.

³²Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

At the start of the second section of *Hindutva*, Savarkar returns to this theme of territoriality, and intertwines it with the importance of naming. In the chapter

“Stupid notions must go” he writes:

The most important fact that contributes to the cohesion, strength and the sense of unity of a people is that they should possess an internally well-connected and externally well-demarcated ‘local habitation,’ and a ‘name’ that could, by its very mention, rouse the cherished image of their motherland as well as the loved memories of their past.³⁵

The first “essential of Hindutva,” therefore, is that a person must have a connection to the geography of India, through citizenship or ancestry, as well as that the person must “[claim] the land as his motherland.”³⁶ In the above quote, however, there is more than just a reference to what it takes to be considered a Hindu. By reference to the “cohesion, strength, and sense of unity of a people,” Savarkar is addressing the very root of his treatise. This is an argument for nationhood, and one which openly claims that the strongest nations are made up of unified people with a common history and culture. Though at first this statement may not appear particularly provocative, the remainder of *Hindutva*’s second section leaves little room for interpretation. Savarkar is clearly arguing that the strongest Indian nation will be one made up solely of those who truly have a right to, and feel devoted to, the land – Hindus.

Controversy

It is here that the most controversial aspects of the work arise, and it will be helpful to consider and unpack the actual statements of the author so as to understand what he is

³⁵ Ibid., 82.

³⁶ Ibid.

truly saying – particularly given the widespread and often overly simplified critiques that have appeared since *Hindutva*'s publication. Many Muslims and Christians, as Savarkar recognizes, have been a part of India for centuries. These people might therefore fulfill one “essential,” however according to him, they fall short in other respects, primarily in that they do not hold the same sacred attachment to India as Hindus do. Hence the necessity of claiming “common fairs and festivals, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments” as the basis for Hindutva. To Savarkar one of the most important aspects of being a Hindu is the solitary allegiance to the Motherland of India. Therefore, the dual-allegiance of Muslims, in particular, to both India and Mecca, is not acceptable. As Savarkar states, “Their love is divided,” and to a man as patriotic and devoted to India as himself, such a division is intolerable.³⁷

At this point it is important to note that what Savarkar suggests throughout *Hindutva* is not unequivocal rejection of non-Hindus. Though he sees an issue with the presence of Muslims and Christians in a nation that ought to – in his eyes – be uniformly Hindu, he does offer outsiders a chance to become a part of the fold. He observes that many former Hindus were converted to Islam in the centuries following the Muslim incursion into India. For these people, Savarkar has a particular message of open-armed acceptance:

Ye, who by race, by blood, by culture, by nationality possess almost all the essentials of Hindutva and had been forcibly snatched out of our ancestral home by the hand of violence – ye, have only to render wholehearted love to our common Mother and recognize her not only as Fatherland (Pitribhu) but even as a Holyland (punyabhu); and ye would be most welcome to the Hindu fold.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., 113.

³⁸ Ibid., 115.

It is clear, based on this statement, that Savarkar holds a strong resentment towards non-Hindu groups who may have encouraged or forced the conversion of many Indians away from Hinduism in the past. However, the quote also demonstrates the fact that he is not entirely bent on ostracizing all Muslims and making them a hated group in Indian society. Savarkar is fervent about protecting the Hindu belief system in India, and he therefore holds only contempt for those who would threaten it. At the same time, though, he does provide an opportunity for non-Hindus to avoid complete marginalization in the Hindutva system.

In order to better understand Savarkar's psychology surrounding this issue, it is useful to turn to his autobiographical work, *My Transportation for Life*. Published in 1926, three years after his release from jail, the book is an account of Savarkar's experience during his imprisonment at the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands. Throughout its pages, *My Transportation for Life* exposes a number of crucial events in the development of Savarkar's ideology. Among these is the forceful conversion of Hindus to Islam, which Savarkar witnessed, and attempted to stop during his time in jail. His caustic criticism of these events reveals the roots of his distrust of Muslims:

Fourteen years of prison experience made me assert, without fear and favour, that a prison-mosque converts in one year more Hindus to Islam than the Jamma Masjid of Delhi or Bombay is found to do it. The organized efforts of Hassan Nizami to catch Hindus in the net of Islam are not so dangerous as the insidious and wicked way of conversion practised in this jail-masjid of India and the Andamans.³⁹

Despite this clearly stated anger towards Muslims – at least those who have played a role in forced conversions away from Hinduism – one would be hard-

³⁹ “My Transportation for Life,” in *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar* (Delhi: Abhishek Publications, 2007), 266.

pressed to find any hateful rhetoric within *Hindutva*. Although it is widely viewed as Savarkar's primary platform for spewing anti-Muslim oratory, it is in fact far less exclusionary than it appears at first glance. Though it is not disputable that the author is suggesting that non-Hindus do not have a place within the India he envisions, it is important to note that, as visible in the quote above about re-conversion, Savarkar is willing to welcome many Muslims and Christians back to the Hindu fold.

Another of the radical critiques of *Hindutva*'s author that have appeared in the years since 1923 is that Savarkar was a believer in racial purity, influenced by and in favor of the ideas of Hitler.⁴⁰ This misinterpretation is understandable, given that one of the "essentials of Hindutva" has to do with a common bloodline. In addition, it is irrefutable that the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS in the early 1940's held ties with both fascist Italy and Germany. In her article, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930's: Archival Evidence," Marzia Casolari does an excellent job of providing archival evidence to prove such connections, and few would dispute that the Hindu Nationalist movement had (and still has) a decidedly fascist bent.⁴¹ However, Casolari's intimation that Savarkar, himself, ascribed to the same beliefs of racial purity and ethnic cleansing as Hitler is mistaken. It is true that during his time as president of the Hindu Mahasabha (1937-1942) Savarkar made a number of statements supporting Germany's treatment of the Jews and Hitler's fascist stance. However, in one of the speeches that Casolari quotes, Savarkar states: "Nationality

⁴⁰ See, for example, Marzia Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence," *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 4 (2000).

⁴¹ Golwalkar, especially, was a noted and far more extreme supporter of Germany's anti-Semitic measures. See: M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 3rd ed. (Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1945), 42-44.

did not depend so much on a common geographical area as on unity of thought, religion, language, and culture.”⁴² Here, we can note the important distinction between Hitler’s view of a nation – one based on racial purity and a singular blood line – and Savarkar’s own, based on common beliefs and culture. Certainly, this is not to say that Savarkar was right to condone Germany’s actions, or that he did not hold a kind view of fascism. Rather, it is an attempt to clarify Savarkar’s own beliefs, and place him at least a short distance away from the blatantly racist and genocidal figure that was Hitler.

In fact, in a very straightforward section of the chapter “Bond of common blood,” Savarkar dispels the notion that he is in favor of racial purity, writing, “After all there is throughout this world so far as man is concerned but a single race – the human race kept alive by one common blood, the human blood.”⁴³ Though he uses blood as a determining factor within *Hindutva*, therefore, it is not based on any supposition that Hindu blood is more “pure” than that of Muslims or Christians. Rather, it is an assertion that the blood shared by all Hindus signifies a shared history, one uniting factor among many.

If the examples listed above are not enough to prove that *Hindutva*’s main purpose is not to be simply or straightforwardly exclusionary, the third section of the treatise provides a final indication. In this section, devoted to applying the ideas of *Hindutva* to real situations, Savarkar addresses some examples of exceptional cases – including Sister Nivedita, a British woman who became a devout disciple of Swami Vivekananda. With this particular case as an impetus, Savarkar recognizes the

⁴² Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence,” 223.

⁴³ Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 90.

necessity of making occasional exceptions to the rule and acquiescing to majority opinion sometimes. He also makes a statement which is crucial in order to dispel the exclusionary myth that has developed around *Hindutva*, writing, “And therefore we must say that any convert of non-Hindu parentage to *Hindutva* can be a Hindu, if *bona fide*, he or she adopts our land as his or her country and marries a Hindu, thus coming to love our land as a real Fatherland, and adopts our culture and thus adores our land as the *Punyabhū*.”⁴⁴

It seems appropriate to note, here, that although Savarkar is most strongly criticized for his anti-Muslim rhetoric, it is a mistake to suggest that these ideas derive in some way from his own identification as a devout Hindu. Savarkar, according to the majority of scholars, was an atheist – a position he seems to have adopted more strongly towards the end of his life. In the most famous biography of Savarkar, written by Dhananjay Keer, the author writes that after Savarkar’s wife died, he refused to perform the customary funeral rites. He claimed that there was “no use lamenting over the dead body,” and that “the world was changing.”⁴⁵

In his article “A Disowned Father of the Nation of India: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the demonic and the seductive in Indian nationalism,” scholar Ashis Nandy makes a very interesting point about the roots of Savarkar’s beliefs. Nandy writes, “Even Savarkar’s atheism was not the philosophical atheism associated with Buddhism and Vedanta, but the anti-clerical, hard atheism of fin-de-siècle scientism, increasingly popular among sections of the European middle class and, through

⁴⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁵ Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 530.

cultural osmosis, in parts of modern India.”⁴⁶ Again, it seems, Savarkar’s European education and his years living in London likely played a major role in his development as both an intellectual and an (a)religious philosopher. That his atheism and, as discussed earlier, his choice of English as his intellectual medium may have derived from his interactions with the European world-view demonstrates a rather ironic, yet significant, aspect of Savarkar’s character. Though he may have perceived himself as vehemently anti-British, Savarkar undoubtedly owed a great deal of his intellectual and personal evolution to both his Western-education and his years of residence in Britain, which morphed him into a far more complex personality than may be apparent on the surface.

Based on this information it becomes clear that approaching a study of Savarkar with the knowledge of his religious views and background is crucial to understanding his motivations. Though he was deeply committed to Hindu civilization and deeply opposed to forced conversions, one cannot claim that his views were motivated by the tenets of religious Hinduism. Understanding Savarkar’s distrust of Muslims and desire to remove them from India, therefore, is a far more complex issue than simply that of Hinduism vs. Islam. In fact, at the very start of the treatise, if we return to the second chapter, “Hindutva is different from Hinduism,” Savarkar makes an important distinction between the words Hinduism and Hindutva, immediately attempting to dispense with the preconceived notion which, as we have discussed above, many readers have held. He is quick to point out that Hindutva is

⁴⁶ Ashis Nandy, “A Disowned Father of the Nation of India: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the Demonic and the Seductive in Indian Nationalism,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014): 104.

not a religious term, and therefore is different from the word Hinduism. In fact, to Savarkar, the word Hinduism “is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of Hindutva,” and “Had not linguistic usage stood in our way then ‘Hinduness’ would have certainly been a better word than Hinduism as a near parallel to Hindutva.”⁴⁷

Understanding *Hindutva*, as a whole, clearly goes far beyond simply dealing with religious issues, and it is a mistake for any reader or scholar to assume that Savarkar’s ideology can be broken down into a simple message of exclusion and hate. The structure of the work does not make it particularly approachable or easy to understand, but once it has been examined in some detail, *Hindutva* reveals much about its author. This is a work of love, an act of devotion towards “Mother India” as well as the Hindu civilization – an entity that Savarkar saw as losing ground in the face of both British colonialism and the growing power of various Muslim groups in both political and religious spheres. By analyzing this text, it is possible to uncover Savarkar’s strong intellect as well as his fervent enthusiasm for his cause, while dispelling notions of *Hindutva* as a gross attack on non-Hindu religions.

⁴⁷ Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 3-4.

Chapter Two:

Roots of an Ideology

In order to develop a deeper understanding of Savarkar and the roots of his ideologies, this chapter and the next one will be devoted to a biographical analysis of his life, from birth up until his release from prison in 1923. It is important to note, before embarking on any discussion of Savarkar's early life, that there is really only one English-language source that covers this period in a detailed manner. Dhananjay Keer, in 1950, published the first full-length biography of Savarkar, and his text has since been viewed as *the* authoritative source for Savarkar's life, especially the early years.⁴⁸ Keer's authority is due, in large part, to the fact that he points out in the preface of *Veer Savarkar* that the subject of the book worked closely with him in writing it.⁴⁹ The fact that Savarkar was available for interviews and discussions with the author certainly lends credibility to Keer's work, but it is also important to acknowledge the negative impact such interactions may have had. When one is writing a biography during the subject's lifetime, and with a great deal of input from the subject, it is undoubtedly more difficult to be critical.

⁴⁸ Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 2d ed. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

Indeed, *Veer Savarkar* reads like a hagiography, providing support and adoration for Savarkar's often-controversial actions. The work is clearly an effort to portray Savarkar as a patriotic hero – far from the view that many critics have taken of him as a violent, anti-Muslim radical. Despite its shortcomings, however, *Veer Savarkar* remains the most detailed and accepted source for Savarkar's early years, and I have relied on it heavily in the first pages of this chapter, noting possible inaccuracies or exaggerations where I have found them.

Early Life

V.D. Savarkar was born in 1883 in the small village of Baghur outside the town of Nasik in Maharashtra. His family was Chitpavan Brahmins, and Vinayak's father, Damodar, was a religious-minded man who kept a strict household. The parents, Damodar and Radhabai, had four children – Ganesh, the oldest; Vinayak, the second; Mainabai, a daughter; and finally, the youngest, Narayan. Growing up in a religious family, with a very pious and devout mother and father, Vinayak was exposed early to such texts as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, which were often read aloud in the evenings by Damodar or one of his sons. From his early childhood, Savarkar was familiar with many epic heroes of Hindu culture, especially Shivaji, the Hindu warrior from Maharashtra who first resisted Mughal imperialism in the latter half of the 17th century, and who provided a source of inspiration for the revolutionary fervor that grew in young Savarkar.

When he was nine, Vinayak's mother died of cholera, a heavy blow to the young boy who was very close with her. After his wife's death, however, Damodar

took up the mantle and became an attentive and loving father to his four children. Around this time, Vinayak began writing both poetry and prose. He was an ardent admirer of Lokmanya Tilak's Marathi newspaper *Kesari*, and it was later Tilak who supported Savarkar in his bid for a scholarship to study in London. In 1893, when he was ten years old, Savarkar engaged in his first militant activity in an event which foreshadowed his future as a champion of the Hindu cause. According to his biographer Keer, in response to communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in the (then) United Provinces and Bombay (today's Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, respectively),

The boy Savarkar led a batch of selected schoolmates in a march upon the village mosque. The battalion of these boys showered stones upon it, shattered its windows and tiles and returned victorious... The victory, however, was not allowed to go unchallenged. The Muslim school-boys gave battle to Vinayak, the Hindu Generalissimo. Although the number of his soldiers decreased at the time of joining the battle, Vinayak routed the enemy with missiles like pins, penknives and thorns...⁵⁰

It is probable that Keer exaggerates this episode in order to provide a compelling image of Savarkar as a patriotic hero from birth, but it is also likely that some such event took place, indicating, from a very young age, the commitment Savarkar felt to defending his fellow Hindus.

In 1896, the plague spread through Maharashtra leaving multitudes sick or dying in its wake. The British mishandled the situation, causing a great deal of unrest among the native Maharashtrians. Among those most upset were the Chapekar brothers of Poona, who killed the British Plague Commissioner and another British Officer in June of 1897. As Keer writes, this event led to a widespread reaction on the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

part of the Indian people against the injustices of British.⁵¹ The repression that followed on the British side led to Tilak being jailed and to the Chapekar brothers eventually being hanged. As Keer states, Vinayak had a strong reaction to hearing the news of these events: “Sitting at the feet of the armed Goddess Durga at dead of night, he took a vow of striving nobly and sacrificing his nearest and dearest, his life and all, to fulfill the incomplete mission of the martyred Chapekars. He vowed to drive out the British from his beloved Motherland...”⁵²

Though Keer’s rendition of this event may be dramatized, it is not implausible that such a well-known and controversial event would have had an effect on a young boy of revolutionary character such as Savarkar. Vinayak’s older brother, Ganesh (also commonly known as Babarao), was also a revolutionary, and he certainly played a large role in influencing his younger sibling. This became all the more true after 1899, when the boys’ father and uncle were killed by the plague that had been spreading across the nation. Left without parents, Vinayak and his younger siblings were taken in by Babarao and his new wife, leading to an increase in the influence of the older brother on Vinayak and Narayan. In 1901, Savarkar and his older brother founded a society called Mitra Mela (Society of Friends) while Savarkar was enrolled in high school in Nasik. This was the first of a number of revolutionary societies with which he was associated, although the activities of the Mitra Mela were on a small scale, and as Janaki Bakhle notes, “[it] was a consciousness-raising society, holding

⁵¹ Ibid., 6.

⁵² Ibid.

more lectures than anything else.”⁵³ Still, this group represented the young Savarkar’s first foray into political activities, and was the first occasion that led the local police to take notice of him.

It was in this period, also, that Savarkar began taking a great interest in history, and especially the lives of previous revolutionaries. With the intention of drawing more of his friends and fellow members of the society to his anti-colonial aims, he encouraged them to “read works dealing with major historical figures, biographies of Mazzini, Garibaldi, Napoleon Bonaparte, and along the way, study a little bit of Spencer and Mill.”⁵⁴ From a young age then, Savarkar was clearly a well-read intellectual. He idolized a number of historical figures, especially Shivaji and Mazzini, both of whom he wrote about later in life. For Savarkar, the importance of history lay in its lessons for the present. He strongly believed, as he was later to repeat while in jail, that by reading about the revolutionaries of the past, one could more readily understand the need for a revolt in the present. The influence of sociologists and philosophers, especially Herbert Spencer, became more acute during Savarkar’s time in London under the tutelage of Shyamji Krishnavarma – a period which will be discussed later within this chapter.

In 1902, Savarkar left Nasik to attend Fergusson College at Poona. It was here that the small society of the Mitra Mela morphed and grew into the Abhinav Bharat, a nationally recognized group. Because of his superior intellect and rhetorical skills, Savarkar was an adroit leader, influencing those around him to ascribe to his own

⁵³ Janaki Bakhle, “Savarkar (1883-1966), Seditious and Surveillance: The Rule of Law in a Colonial Situation,” *Social History* 35, no. 1 (2010): 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

anti-colonial views. It is likely, although impossible to prove, that Savarkar was induced to form the society based on his readings about Mazzini's "Young Italy," a similar revolutionary group of young people founded in 1831. The goals of the Abhinav Bharat, including a boycott of foreign goods and strong support of the Swadeshi movement, culminated in 1905 when Savarkar organized the first bonfire of foreign-made cloths in India, and arranged to have Lokmanya Tilak as a speaker at the event.

Not long after, in 1906, Savarkar applied for, and received, a scholarship to study at India House – a hostel for Indian Students in London run by Shyamji Krishnavarma, who encouraged a decidedly anti-British attitude among his mentees. It was Tilak who sent a letter of recommendation to Krishnavarma – yet another reason Savarkar had to look up to the great revolutionary figure. In his application for the scholarship, Savarkar made a notable statement foreshadowing the activities he was to undertake in the next few years in London: "Independence and Liberty I look upon as the very pulse and breath of nation. From my boyhood, dear sir, up to this moment of my youth, the loss of Independence of my country and the possibility of regaining it form the only theme of which I dream by night and on which I mused by day."⁵⁵ All that Savarkar needed, then, was the proper environment and the proper mentor to help his revolutionary aspirations bloom.

⁵⁵ Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 25.

Savarkar in London

It was, in fact, at India House where Savarkar found such a mentor and came into his own. Krishnavarma, a well-known revolutionary in his own right, served as a guide for the young Vinayak, and introduced him to the wide circle of like-minded Indian students living in England at the time. Krishnavarma's hostel, India House, was well recognized as a haven for young Indian revolutionaries, but with the arrival of Savarkar the house became more radical. In 1905, Krishnavarma had founded the Indian Home Rule Society, a group whose aims were stated in the name and into which Vinayak was quickly adopted. The India House founder was also responsible for the publication of an English monthly newspaper, *The Indian Sociologist*, which served as a forum for political, religious, and social issues. It was within this newspaper that Krishnavarma first made public his strongly held beliefs about Indian independence, and it is also where he touted his immense respect for Herbert Spencer.

As mentioned earlier, Spencer was influential in the evolution of Savarkar's own ideologies, but the sociologist's ideas likely gained new weight when the young student became involved at India House. Krishnavarma was such an ardent admirer of Spencer that at the man's funeral in 1903, he announced plans to donate a large sum of money to Oxford University with the intention of establishing a Herbert Spencer fellowship. In addition, as Paul Schaffel discusses in his thesis "Empire and Assassination – Indian Students, India House, and Information Gathering in Great Britain, 1898-1911," Krishnavarma included two quotes from Spencer at the top of every edition of *The Indian Sociologist*: "Every man is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man," and "Resistance to

aggression is not simply justifiable but imperative. Non-resistance hurts both altruism and egoism.”⁵⁶ This move was a way to both acknowledge his British readership, as well as tout Krishnavarma’s own knowledge of British intellectual history, discounting critics who might otherwise write him off as distinctly un-Western.

It is important to note, here, that this period in London – around the turn of the century – was particularly suitable for Indian students interested in revolutionary activities. Though the Indian government was notoriously oppressive, and applied widespread surveillance and censorship to deal with radicals inside the country, the British – in Britain – were far more liberal. In general, it was much more difficult to be arrested for revolutionary activities while in London than while at home in India. As Nicholas Owen points out in his article on the subject, this was especially true for students studying at British universities. He notes that many such institutions in Britain, “in contrast to those in India, were, if not exactly tolerant of Indian radicalism, opposed to policing it.”⁵⁷ He goes on to note that in general, “discussion of politics was...not controlled as it was in India.”⁵⁸ Thus, in the period when Savarkar arrived in London, the city was a veritable playground for anti-imperial revolutionaries. In the years that followed, however, the liberal approach that the government adopted towards Indian students shifted rather abruptly, in part due to the activities of Savarkar and those who followed him closely.

⁵⁶ Paul Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination: Indian Students, ‘India House’, and Information Gathering in Great Britain, 1898-1911” (Wesleyan University, 2012), 28.

⁵⁷ Nicholas Owen, “The Soft Heart of the British Empire: Indian Radicals in Edwardian London,” *Past & Present* 220, no. 1 (2013): 173.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Soon after his arrival at India House, Savarkar took charge of the Indian Home Rule Society, changing its name to the Free India Society – a more transparent announcement of the group’s opinions and aims. For Savarkar, this group was likely an opportunity to take the ideals, and some of the same members, of the Abhinav Bharat, and transition them into a more modern, European form. In 1907, just a year after his arrival in England, Savarkar took over complete leadership of India House when Krishnavarma fled to Paris over concerns that he might be arrested for statements made in his publications. While in Paris, he continued to publish *The Indian Sociologist*, but the baton had been passed to Savarkar with regard to the large majority of Indian revolutionary activity in Great Britain. As the new head of the hostel, Savarkar found himself in a position to advance his own, more radical ideas about the best way to throw off the British yoke. The transition to the Free India Society was only the first step.

In 1907, when the anniversary of the Indian Rebellion in 1857 was celebrated in London as a victory of the British over the rebels, Savarkar wrote and circulated an extremely patriotic pamphlet titled “Oh Martyrs,” which lauded the bravery and sacrifice of the Indian leaders instead. The leaflet was yet another opportunity for Savarkar to showcase his impressive rhetorical skills, and it quickly became notorious, attracting the attention of both British and Indian police. In one fiery excerpt, which gives a good idea of the tone of the author, Savarkar writes:

We take up your cry, we revere your flag, we are determined to continue that fiery mission of ‘away with the foreigner,’ which you uttered, amidst the prophetic thunderings of the Revolutionary war. Revolutionary, yes, it was a

Revolutionary war. For the War of 1857 shall not cease till the revolution arrives, striking slavery into dust, elevating liberty to the throne.⁵⁹

The violent revolutionary fervor is hardly being disguised in this passage, and the quote speaks to Savarkar's unapologetic devotion to his cause, whatever the consequences. Bakhle notes, in her essay on police surveillance during the period, that the British police became aware of the pamphlet only a month after its publication, and that Savarkar was quickly likened to Krishnavarma and his "dangerous" revolutionary rhetoric.⁶⁰ Despite this connection, Savarkar was not arrested for two more years but local police did increase the watch kept on him. The relative freedom afforded the young revolutionary by British liberalism provided Savarkar with exactly the environment he needed to develop into a full-fledged radical. Though, from a young age, he had been both clear and vocal about his beliefs, it was in London between 1906-1910 that he emerged as one of the most notable figures of the Indian independence movement.

If he had not been well known before, Savarkar gained both fame and increased police surveillance in 1909 when he published his now infamous book, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*. As discussed in Chapter One, this work was a re-interpretation of the 1857 event which was characterized by the British as, first and foremost, a military mutiny that soon grew to a widespread civil rebellion in the Hindi-speaking region of the North. Though the government immediately proscribed it, *The Indian War of Independence* was widely read and circulated within Great Britain as well as smuggled illegally into India. It had a great impact on the way that

⁵⁹ V.D. Savarkar. "Oh Martyrs," London 1908.

⁶⁰ Bakhle, "Savarkar (1883-1966), Sedition and Surveillance: The Rule of Law in a Colonial Situation," 61.

Indians viewed the rebellion, and, in fact, continues to be recognized as an authoritative text, despite gaps in its author's scholarly analysis.

It is important to note, in the context of this thesis as a whole, that *The Indian War of Independence* did not take any sort of anti-Muslim stance. In fact, in one section, Savarkar even praises the rise of a Muslim leader, writing:

...the raising of Bahadur Shah to the throne was no restoration [of Muslim power] at all. But rather it was the declaration that the longstanding war between the Hindu and the Mahomedan had ended, that tyranny had ceased, and that the people of the soil were once more free to choose their own monarch. For, Bahadur Shah was raised by the free voice of the people, both Hindus and Mahomedans...⁶¹

The tone of this quote is a far cry from the violently anti-Muslim rhetoric that Savarkar displayed much later – beginning in the late 1930's – and it is, in fact, emblematic of *The Indian War of Independence* as a whole. Bakhle observes this in her analysis of the work, writing: “In chapter after chapter, he noted that 1857 had ushered in a new era – in particular the end in perpetuity of Hindu-Muslim enmity – and he imagined a future for India with two distinct religious communities bound together in an unshakeable unity.”⁶²

It seems, therefore, that whatever strong prejudice Savarkar may have developed later towards non-Hindus, he was still relatively open-minded in 1909. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that, during this period, he was heavily absorbed in anti-British activities and therefore was more interested in creating an “us” vs. “them” mentality with all Indians forming a united front than in dividing the

⁶¹ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (London 1909), 234.

⁶² Bakhle, “Savarkar (1883-1966), Sedition and Surveillance: The Rule of Law in a Colonial Situation,” 58.

budding nation in a way that might hurt the independence struggle. In addition, at the time when Savarkar was writing *The Indian War of Independence*, the Morley-Minto Reforms (1909) had not yet been passed. These laws provided for the first separate electorates for Muslims in India, an issue which became a major point of contention between Hindu Nationalists and members of the Muslim League in later years. As Chapter Three will address, the attitude of acceptance and unity that Savarkar projected in *The Indian War of Independence* shifted radically during his time in the Cellular Jail between 1910-1921. For a variety of reasons, he had a dramatic change of opinion, leading eventually to the publication of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* in 1923.

Early Social Influences

Though his time in jail certainly may have had the largest impact on Savarkar's evolution, it would be incorrect to assume that his earlier life – both in India and in London – played no role in it whatsoever. There are few clues as obvious as those that are available from the period between 1910-1923, but by digging below the surface it is possible to uncover relevant details from the previous years. Among these is the fact that Savarkar was, for most of his life, surrounded primarily by Hindus. This point, in and of itself, may not seem particularly significant. However, if we consider the important role that the various revolutionary societies he was a part of played in the ideological development, it becomes apparent that the membership of the Mitra Mela, the Abhinav Bharat, and later the Free India Society, comprised a major part of Savarkar's social life up to 1910.

As Schaffel notes in his thesis, the members of India House and the Free India Society were overwhelmingly Hindu.⁶³ In addition, “Although he occasionally cited Mazzini, Savarkar more often turned to Hindu scripture such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, arguing that the text justified violence against those who would harm Mother India.”⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, his upbringing in a spiritually devout and pious family had a heavy influence on Savarkar, even if his own religious identity became more ambiguous later in his life. His reliance on Hindu religious texts as justification for his ideological beliefs would have automatically isolated many non-Hindus wishing to join his cause. Certainly, there is no proof that Savarkar and the members of India House were intentionally excluding Muslims or Christians from joining, but it seems likely that an environment of almost exclusively Hindu tenor would have imbued Savarkar with the roots of an ardent loyalty to his fellow Hindus.

Early Intellectual Influences

As we consider the roots of Hindutva, it makes sense to pause here and examine some of the other influences on Savarkar that manifested themselves most prominently during his early life, especially in London. As mentioned before, Savarkar was a strong admirer of Mazzini and the Italian revolutionaries who worked to form a united Italian Republic in opposition to the occupation by the Austrian Empire. Upon his arrival in London, one of Savarkar’s first acts was to publish a Marathi translation of Mazzini’s biography – an act which demonstrated the important role the Italian had

⁶³ Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination: Indian Students, ‘India House’, and Information Gathering in Great Britain, 1898-1911,” 38.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

had in shaping Savarkar's beliefs.⁶⁵ Though Mazzini was less often quoted than a variety of other sources during Savarkar's speeches and meetings, it would be a mistake to discount his influence on the young Indian revolutionary.

Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) was exiled to France at the age of twenty-six after joining a revolutionary group that plotted to overthrow the absolutist Italian government. While living in Marseille, he founded the famous Young Italy, a group created to unify the divided Italian states and throw off the yoke of foreign rule. A staunch republican, Mazzini believed strongly in a democratically governed Italy, and although Italy did achieve unification during his lifetime, it was ruled by a monarchy – a major disappointment for him. He died after years of discouraging setbacks and defeats, forced to face the failure of his vision for an Italian Republic. After his death, Mazzini remained a relatively controversial figure, with some celebrating him as a hero and others claiming that he betrayed his country. In many ways, therefore, the lives of Mazzini and Savarkar can be seen as parallel to each other, and it is no wonder that the young Indian was so drawn to the ideas put forth by his Italian predecessor. Perhaps the strongest tie between the two men was the belief that independence from foreign rule could only be achieved through a unification of the populace in opposition to the occupying power. Both India and Italy were, at the time when these revolutionaries lived, quite fragmented, with numerous smaller states practicing a great deal of autonomy within the nation as a whole. It was essential, therefore, to unite these divergent states under a unified banner of opposition in order to effect any true change with relation to foreign rule. For both Mazzini and Savarkar,

⁶⁵ V.D. Savarkar, *Josepha Mējhinī: Ātmacaritra Ni Rājakāraṇa* (Pune: Vhinsa Buka Stōla, 1946).

a popular uprising was the chosen method for creating this unification and throwing off the foreign yoke, and both advocated for a violent revolution to continue until such an end was achieved.

Another primary influence on Savarkar was Shivaji – a 17th-century Indian king who founded the Maratha kingdom in India. Shivaji was, by the late 19th century, being heralded as a Hindu patriot, who resisted Mughal (read: Muslim) domination. According to the traditional story of his life, at age twenty-five he began gathering followers and attacking Mughal outposts and strongholds, amassing a large army along the way. Although he ultimately failed in his goal to free India, Shivaji did manage to found an independent Hindu kingdom that he ruled for the remainder of his lifetime. He is remembered as a reviver of Hindu spirit and religion during a period heavily overshadowed by Muslim rule. Significantly, as author James Laine discusses in his historiographical analysis, *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*, a great deal of the commonly accepted knowledge about Shivaji is actually myth and legend that has emerged in the centuries since his death.⁶⁶ What has become apparent is that the truth surrounding specific details of this Maharashtrian hero is far less important than the ideals that he represents. Indeed, well before Savarkar referenced him in *Hindutva*, Shivaji had become an icon for many members of the Hindu nationalist movement – most prominently, Bal Gangadhar Tilak.⁶⁷

Although Shivaji was a well-recognized figure throughout India, and Savarkar certainly knew of him from a young age, it is likely that his increased familiarity with

⁶⁶ James W. Laine, *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁷ For more on this, see: Malavika Vartak, “Shivaji Maharaj: Growth of a Symbol,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 19 (1999).

the founder of the Maratha kingdom came from association with Tilak. A fellow Maharashtrian, Tilak – like Savarkar – was both a committed intellectual and a militant freedom fighter. He is viewed by many Indians as one of the most prominent founders of India’s independence movement, and he both created and served as president of the Indian Home Rule League beginning in 1914.⁶⁸ As John Pincince notes in his dissertation about *Hindutva*, beginning in 1896 Tilak had also organized Shivaji festivals in Maharashtra to subtly support “the re-birth of Maratha (or Hindu) power.”⁶⁹ In addition, he published numerous articles in his newspaper, *Kesari*, indicating support of violence perpetrated by Indians against the British, specifically the assassination of the Plague Commissioner Walter C. Rand and Lt. Charles Egerston Ayerst by the Chapekar brothers in 1897 – an event, as noted earlier, that inspired Savarkar to declare his commitment to the cause of Indian independence.⁷⁰ Savarkar read Tilak’s publications widely, especially *Kesari*, the Marathi-language newspaper devoted to the cause of Indian independence, and he looked up to Tilak as a sort of ideological idol. Because of their similar backgrounds and intellectual parallels, Savarkar and Tilak became somewhat close – a connection that led to Tilak recommending Savarkar for his scholarship in London.

Tilak’s fascination with Shivaji, as noted above, likely influenced Savarkar’s own interest in the martial hero. This interest is further visible in Savarkar’s 1925 work, *Hindu Pad Padashahi*, a review of the history of the Hindu Empire in

⁶⁸ For a complete biographical analysis of Tilak, see: Dattatraya Parashuram Karmarkar, *Bal Gangadhar Tilak: A Study* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1956).

⁶⁹ John Pincince, “On the Verge of *Hindutva*: V.D. Savarkar, Revolutionary, Convict, Ideologue, C. 1905-1924” (University of Hawai’i, 2007), 28.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Maharashtra. Though he does not take on any lengthy analysis of the great Maratha king, writing in the foreword, “As the public outside Maharashtra is acquainted better with the life of Shivaji...we have referred to that period but in passing...”⁷¹ Savarkar does acknowledge the significant role that Shivaji played in creating the basis for a massive movement. In the third chapter of the book, he writes

...the real greatness of Shivaji and Ramdas lay in the very fact that their movement, not only survived them long, but characters as able and patriotic, organizers and captains, heroes and martyrs, rose in hundreds and in an unbroken succession and fought for the same cause mightily, pressing towards the same goal of Hindu-pad-padashahi, and achieved such glorious results as would have dazzled the eagle eye of Shivaji himself.⁷²

Though *Hindu Pad Padashahi* was written two years after the publication of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, it is clear that Savarkar was well-aware of Shivaji and the important role he played in the development of a Hindu kingdom even before he traveled to London in 1906.

Finally, it would be remiss to discuss intellectual influences on Savarkar without addressing Herbert Spencer in more detail, as well as his contemporary Johann Kaspar Bluntschli. Both of these men may be considered political theorists, among other pursuits, and their views about the evolution of society and the state were undoubtedly influential in the development of Savarkar’s own ideology. Bluntschli was a Swiss jurist who most famously wrote *The Theory of the Modern State* (1885) – a work which compared states to organic bodies, with a similar cycle

⁷¹ V.D. Savarkar, “Hindu-Pad-Padashahi,” in *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar* (Delhi: Abhishek Publications, 2007), 8-9.

⁷²Ibid., 20-21.

of life, growth, and death.⁷³ Bluntschli believed strongly in national unification – specifically, in the cases of Germany and Italy – suggesting that many of the smaller, individual states within these polities would not be capable of surviving on their own. Undoubtedly, this idea appealed to Savarkar, who saw his own country as fragmented and in need of national unification; only through the strength of a united India could the British yoke be thrown off once and for all. In fact, in his prison memoir – *My Transportation for Life* – Savarkar notes that Bluntschli’s *Theory of the Modern State* was included in the prison library he helped to assemble at the Cellular Jail, suggesting the importance he placed on the work.⁷⁴

Herbert Spencer, like Bluntschli, equated states with living bodies – originating the term the “social organism” to describe society within his theoretical system.⁷⁵ Though many have regarded him as primarily an evolutionist, more recent scholars such as David Wiltshire have developed an image of Spencer as a political theorist above all else. As Wiltshire notes, “Spencer was an individualist liberal first and an evolutionist second.”⁷⁶ This emphasis placed on individualism is perhaps the most integral part of all of Spencer’s theory, which includes coining the phrase “survival of the fittest” to describe Darwin’s findings on evolution.

Spencer’s own work, too, focused largely on evolution, although he formulated theories about whole societies rather than individual species. He believed,

⁷³ Johann Caspar Bluntschli, *The Theory of the Modern State* (Clarendon Press, 1885).

⁷⁴ V.D. Savarkar, “My Transportation for Life,” in *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar* (Delhi: Abhishek Publications, 2007), 270.

⁷⁵ David Wiltshire, *The Social and Political Thought of Herbert Spencer* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 225.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

like Bluntschli, in the inevitable growth and development of states, but unlike his German counterpart, he saw the “evolution” as leading to some ideal end – a teleological approach to societal study. Along with evolution, Spencer’s theories on state intervention made up the bulk of his work. He believed in “limitation of the state to the purely negative duty of the protection of citizens,” an idea which echoes the quotes used by Krishnavarma at the heading of every issue of *The Indian Sociologist*, as discussed earlier in this chapter.⁷⁷ Certainly these beliefs would have been appealing to Savarkar, who found himself facing off against a British government that he must have seen as far too interested in interfering with individual affairs. Spencer’s vehement disapproval of imperialism also undoubtedly added to Savarkar’s admiration of him, but – in an ironic twist – Savarkar may have used some of Spencer’s theories to justify his own beliefs in the preeminence of Hindu rights over those of minority groups. Indeed, by combining Spencer’s ideas about the inevitable evolution of the state towards some greater goal, and the concept of “survival of the fittest,” it is easy to see how Savarkar – who indubitably saw Hindus as “the fittest” – may have justified to himself a vision of a future Hindu nation, superior to all others.

Bound for Prison

Returning to the period after his arrival in England, it is now appropriate to discuss the events that led up to Savarkar’s arrest and extradition to India in 1910. As stated earlier, Savarkar took over the leadership of India House and the Free India Society after Krishnavarma’s departure from London in 1907. With his newly gained position

⁷⁷ Ibid., 135.

of power, Savarkar was able to promote his goals of training Indian revolutionaries for targeted acts of violence towards the British, and of smuggling weapons and books back to India for use against colonial forces. In this period, one of the Indian students living in London and attending Savarkar's lectures was Madan Lal Dhingra. Though, at first glance, he appeared an unlikely candidate for radical revolutionary activity, it was Dhingra who – on July 1, 1909 – shot and killed William Curzon-Wyllie, a prominent India Office official, at a party held by the National Indian Association. It was this act that was the eventual undoing of Savarkar, who was found by the police to be a primary conspirator in the assassination. As Schaffel notes in his analysis of the event, Dhingra may have seemed a strange choice of hit man, but “[his] absence at most India House events represents not his lack of interest in India House's radical message, but rather his own beliefs that the speakers and meetings were ‘mere talk’ and not worth attending.”⁷⁸ Underlying the ostensibly moderate personality of Dhingra was, apparently, a young man filled to the brim with anger and resentment towards the British colonial forces.

The assassination of Curzon-Wyllie rocked London, a city that had previously seen no outright violence from the Indian students living in its midst. Though British police forces had been steadily increasing surveillance up to 1909, the attitude of the government towards Indians, overall, was still relatively lax. After 1909, however, that shifted dramatically as British officials cracked down hard on any suspected radicals, leading eventually to the closure of India House and the arrest of a large number of Indian students associated with it. Most prominent among those arrested

⁷⁸ Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination: Indian Students, ‘India House’, and Information Gathering in Great Britain, 1898-1911,” 82.

was Savarkar, himself, whom the police had been hoping to pin down for a number of years. Though, as discussed previously, he had been writing and distributing revolutionary pamphlets since his arrival in England, as well as assisting in the smuggling of weapons and books back to India, there had been little concrete evidence with which to arrest him under the more liberal laws of Great Britain, and the government was forced to bide its time until an opportunity presented itself.

Curzon-Wyllie's assassination proved to be just such an opportunity, as well as a catalyst for how Indian students were to be treated in England. Many Londoners were horrified that such an act of violence could have been committed under the noses of the British police, and the relatively lenient attitude that had been so far adopted towards India House and Indian students, in general, came under intense criticism. Even many of his own countrymen took a stance against Dhingra's act – a fact demonstrated by a meeting in Caxton Hall on July 5th, convened by a diverse group of Indian leaders to “censure Dhingra and India House in a public forum.”⁷⁹ Schaffel notes that two of the men heading the discussion, Bipin Chandra Pal and Surendranath Banerjea, “who represented opposite ends of the Indian political landscape, were easily united against India House by Dhingra's act. Savarkar was the only member of the meeting who actively supported Dhingra...”⁸⁰

Here, it is important to note that, though India House had a healthy membership, the majority of Indian students in Great Britain stayed away from revolutionary activity, eager to be accepted into British society and to make their families proud. As Nicholas Owen writes: “More significant than any external

⁷⁹ Ibid., 88.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

discipline was the often paralyzing weight of parental and community expectations...[Savarkar] estimated that 90 percent of the Indian students were too anxious to fit in to be of any use for revolutionary work.”⁸¹ Therefore, although it is easy to fall into generalizations about “all Indian students,” such sweeping statements are far from correct. It was not until the assassination of Curzon-Wyllie, however, that the divide between the radical revolutionary contingent and the much larger moderate group became vastly apparent. Savarkar’s willingness to support Dhingra until the end, both in the July meeting and in an open letter to the *Times of London* written soon after, demonstrates his own strongly held convictions about right and wrong, and his commitment to the use of violence, when necessary.⁸²

Clearly, during this period of his life, Savarkar was still most strongly dedicated to the Indian independence fight, viewing the enemy as the British Empire. His commitment to freedom at all costs isolated him from a large majority of both British officials and Indian leaders. Most prominently, he loudly disagreed with the message of Mahatma Gandhi, who – in the same period – was developing his non-violence movement. In fact, some scholars have suggested that Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*, published in 1909, was a direct response to a meeting he had with Savarkar and others at India House in London.⁸³ In later years, Gandhi and Savarkar would

⁸¹ Owen, “The Soft Heart of the British Empire: Indian Radicals in Edwardian London,” 175.

⁸² The *Times of London* letter is referenced in this context by Pincince, who notes that he was unable to find the letter during his own research, and drew his information from Keer. See: Pincince, “On the Verge of *Hindtuva*: V.D. Savarkar, Revolutionary, Convict, Ideologue, C. 1905-1924,” 82.

⁸³ See, for instance: Claude Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi: The Life and Afterlife of the Mahatma* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 133. and Mahatma Gandhi,

disagree again, but about a very different issue – the place of Muslims in a newly created India. Still young and idealistic in 1909, the Savarkar who lived and worked in London was focused entirely on the fight at hand. The evolution that took him towards *Hindutva*, however, rapidly gained momentum when he was arrested and jailed in 1910.

As stated earlier, Savarkar had – for almost four years during his time in London – escaped arrest by the British police. This was due to a combination of factors: the lenience of the British government towards Indian students (and revolutionary groups, in general); the desire of the government to obtain as much information about the members of India House as possible before making any moves towards arrest; and, finally, the difficulty in obtaining concrete evidence to frame Savarkar for crimes dangerous enough to put him away for lengthy period of time.⁸⁴ With the assassination of Curzon-Wyllie in 1909, all these factors were overturned as the British government scrambled to react to an unforeseen act of violence. After Dhingra's arrest, Savarkar and the other members of India House attempted to keep a low profile, recognizing the danger they were in. In late 1909, Savarkar – following in the footsteps of his mentor, Krishnavarma – moved to Paris to join a group of expatriate revolutionaries.

Hind Swaraj and Other Writings (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xxvii.

⁸⁴ These factors are drawn from a combined reading of: Owen, “The Soft Heart of the British Empire: Indian Radicals in Edwardian London,” and Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination: Indian Students, ‘India House’, and Information Gathering in Great Britain, 1898-1911.”

On March 13, 1910, however, he returned to London and was arrested as he stepped off the train. The charges against him, reproduced by John Pincince from the original *Times* article on the subject, were as follows:

The first charge was framed under the section which made it an offence, punishable by death or transportation for life, to wage war against the King or to abet in so doing; and the property of any offender might be forfeited. To wage war or to abet the waging of war against the King in India was nearly but not quite equal to the offence of treason in England. The legal definition of war did not necessarily mean war in an ordinary sense, but any over act to subvert the Government. The second charge... [was] an offence to conspire to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India or any part of it. The third charge was for collecting arms or ammunition or otherwise waging war against the King. The fourth charge was based on another section... which made it an offence for a person to utter or write any words and make any signs or visible representations with intent to bring into hatred or contempt, or to excite disaffection against the Government of India... The fifth charge was for abetment of murder.⁸⁵

In his dissertation, Pincince provides an excellent account and analysis of the complete court proceedings during Savarkar's trial.⁸⁶ For the purpose of this paper, however, the intricacies of these events are not particularly relevant, and so I will provide only an overview.

Because laws in Britain during the early 20th century were far more lenient than those of India, the Indian government strongly desired Savarkar's trial to take place in his home country. In order to achieve this, one of the primary charges against him – sedition – was derived from a publication he had written in Pune before leaving India for London. As a result, under the Fugitive Offenders Act of 1881, the Indian government was able to charge him for his crimes, and despite his best efforts to

⁸⁵ Pincince, "On the Verge of *Hindutva*: V.D. Savarkar, Revolutionary, Convict, Ideologue, C. 1905-1924," 98.

⁸⁶ For more, see Chapters 2-4 of Pincince's "On the Verge of *Hindutva*: V.D. Savarkar, Revolutionary, Convict, Ideologue, C. 1905-1924."

avoid it, Savarkar was extradited to Bombay for his trial in July of 1910. In India he faced two trials which took place over the course of 1910-1911, resulting – finally – in his conviction and a sentence of two life terms in the Cellular Jail at the Andaman Islands.

Savarkar's arrest and subsequent conviction are notable for a number of reasons. He was the first man in Indian history to be sentenced to two separate life terms of imprisonment, a sentence he unsuccessfully attempted to dispute by arguing that he had only one life to give. In addition, the significance of the charge against him for sedition should not be overlooked. As noted previously, this charge was the primary reason the British government was able to extradite Savarkar back to India, but the government's concern over Savarkar's writings represents more. It is important to note that although he was almost certainly linked to the assassination of Curzon-Wyllie in London, the government never successfully connected Savarkar to Dhingra's plot. Whether this gap was an oversight, or simply a desire to close the case with the conviction of Dhingra, alone, is impossible to say, but it is noteworthy that Savarkar was not pinned for his connection to the violence.

The truth is that, although he strongly believed in using violent means if pacific ones failed, Savarkar never committed any violence, himself. His danger, therefore, lay in his use of words. As an excellent speaker and an extremely convincing writer, Savarkar posed the largest threat to the Indian government through his speeches and – more importantly – his writings, which were continually smuggled into and throughout India. Even once it jailed him, however, the government could not stymie the revolutionary's voice. As will be addressed in the next chapter,

Savarkar composed and wrote his most famous and controversial work, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* while interned in both the Cellular and Ratnagiri Jails between 1910-1923. Though at first glance *Hindutva* appears to be a dramatic shift away from the political issues Savarkar had addressed in the years before his arrest, a closer reading of the work reveals it to be tackling many of the same issues. The difference between *Hindutva* and Savarkar's pre-prison writings lies, rather, in the author's fascinating evolution from young, fiery revolutionary to shrewd and mature intellectual.

Chapter Three:

The Prison Years

In July of 1911, Savarkar was transported by train from Thane Central Jail in Maharashtra to Madras, where he – along with a group of fellow prisoners sentenced to transportation – boarded a boat destined for the Cellular Jail at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands. This chapter will analyze the time between that entry into the Cellular Jail and Savarkar’s later release to Ratnagiri Jail on the Indian mainland in 1921. It is undoubtedly true that the decade he spent at Port Blair transformed Savarkar in a number of ways, and I will demonstrate that this period also represents the culmination of his ideological journey towards Hindutva. By tracing and analyzing the events in his life between 1911-1921, especially his experience as a political prisoner at the lowest rung of the prison hierarchy, I argue that Savarkar’s time in the Cellular Jail was crucial to the evolution that he underwent in the years leading up to the publication of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*

The weeks just before his incarceration, along with the entirety of his stay in the Andamans, are detailed in Savarkar’s autobiographical work, *The Story of My Transportation for Life*. Clearly, this resource is invaluable for crafting any analysis of his life in the years between 1911-1923, and – as such – it will be relied on heavily

in this chapter. However, it is important to note, as mentioned in Chapter One, that *My Transportation for Life* was not published until 1926, five years after Savarkar left the Cellular Jail, and even then the work appeared only as a serial publication in the magazine *Kesari*. It was not until 1930 that the first publication of *My Transportation for Life* in the complete book format occurred. The text, therefore, must be approached with a critical eye, noting that some details may have been forgotten or embellished and that certain episodes may well have been crafted by the author with an eye to developing his own legacy, rather than sticking assiduously to historical fact.

An Historical Outline of the Cellular Jail

Some background on the Andamans and the Cellular Jail is appropriate. The Andamans comprise a district within the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are a part of The Republic of India. “The principal town [of the Andaman Islands] is Port Blair, with a population of a hundred thousand. The islands are isolated, the closest part of the Asian mainland lying nearly 125 miles (about 200 kilometers) to the east in modern Burma (Myanmar). The nearest Indian landfall is nearly 620 miles (about 1,000 kilometers) distant.”⁸⁷ Although the British attempted to create a penal settlement on the islands as early as 1788, clashes with indigenous tribes prevented any full-scale operations until after the 1857 mutiny, which led to a massive influx of prisoners. In 1898, the Cellular Jail at Port Blair was opened, based on the Panopticon design originally created by Jeremy Bentham. The idea behind the design was

⁸⁷ Charles Higham, “Andaman Islands,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

initially described in a series of letters that Bentham wrote to a friend in England while visiting Russia in 1787.⁸⁸ He believed that by placing a central guard tower in the middle of the complex, with all the cells in a wide circle surrounding it, prisoners could be kept better disciplined and controlled. In this panopticon design, each prisoner was unable to view his neighbors, enhancing a sense of isolation and loneliness and supposedly preventing comradery and collusion. Though Bentham's design was never widely accepted, the ideas behind it may have influenced the rise of the radial prison design – the same as that used at Port Blair. In the Cellular Jail a central guard tower was surrounded by seven spokes, extending outwards as in a wheel. The idea was to focus on isolating prisoners from each other, while allowing the guard in the central tower to view all the cell doors at once. In essence, as historian Satadru Sen notes in *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands*, "...the Cellular Jail in Port Blair was designed to function as a machine, stripping prisoners of their 'humanity' – i.e. their criminal selves – in the process of punishment and reform."⁸⁹

Due to its location, as well as the extreme isolation and dehumanization prisoners encountered within its walls, Port Blair's Cellular Jail was reserved

⁸⁸ For more, see: Jeremy Bentham, "Panopticon: Or, the Inspection-House. Containing the Idea of a New Principle of Construction Applicable to Any Sort of Establishment, in Which Persons of Any Description Are to Be Kept under Inspection. And in Particular to Penitentiary-Houses, Prisons, Houses of Industry, Work-Houses, Poor-Houses, Manufactories, Mad-Houses, Hospitals, and Schools. With a Plan of Management Adapted to the Principle. In a Series of Letters, Written in the Year 1787, from Crecheff in White Russia, to a Friend in England.," (1787). These letters are available from Gale, in the Eighteenth Century Collections Online database.

⁸⁹ Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (Oxford; New York; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10.

primarily for those convicts assigned to the lengthiest and most severe sentences. Directly following the 1857 Rebellion, the Cellular Jail saw its first shipment of political prisoners, who were largely considered by the government to be the most dangerous of all. Since the early 19th century, a number of scholars have conducted exemplary investigations into the history and significance of both the Andaman Islands and the Cellular Jail, itself. Perhaps most prominent among these in recent years are Sen and Clare Anderson, who has written extensively on the history of confinement in the Indian Ocean, including two articles with a focus on the Cellular Jail. In “The Politics of Convict Space: Penal Settlements in Southeast Asia,” Anderson notes the significance of the Cellular Jail’s location, writing: “Transportation was a punishment that removed offenders from society, isolated them in distant settlements overseas and put them to work. At the same time, colonial officials believed that the journey across the ocean (black water, or *kala pani*) which transportation entailed threatened convicts with loss of caste and hence social exclusion.”⁹⁰

The issue of crossing the *kala pani* and traveling overseas from India is one that raises some important points. According to traditional caste regulations, as outlined in the ancient Dharmasūtras, leaving India by traveling across the ocean was grounds for loss of your caste status.⁹¹ The reasons behind this include a fear of contamination through interactions with *mlecchas* (foreigners); the inability to

⁹⁰ Clare Anderson, “The Politics of Convict Space: Penal Settlements in Southeast Asia,” in *Isolation: Places and Practices of Exclusion*, ed. Bashford and Strange (2003).

⁹¹ Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āstamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 168.

perform the proper prayers and rituals; the cutting of family bonds and ties; and, finally, the loss of the all-important connection to the River Ganges, which is widely acknowledged among Hindus to hold restorative waters that are closely tied with the cycle of reincarnation. In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi describes his own ordeal when faced with the choice to travel from India to London to study. Many of his caste leaders threatened him with expulsion if he followed through on plans to cross the *kala pani*, although he did so anyway and was able to regain his position within his *Varna* through ritual dieting and prayer.⁹²

Thus, as Anderson discusses in her article, many British officials believed that the prospect of transportation to the Andamans and other island penal colonies would prove a deterrent for criminals – who the British hoped would fear loss of their caste status. In reality, however, Anderson notes that “only half of the convicts transported to Mauritius in the period 1815-37 were even Hindus...By far the largest proportion – over half – of Hindus were low-caste peasants or *dalits*, who had a quite different relationship to caste to higher status communities.”⁹³ The reality was that the fear of transportation among convicts was far lower than officials had hoped – a fact that did not prevent them from continuing to send prisoners to the Cellular Jail.

Another important feature of the jail, and its location in the Andaman Islands, was the presence of local, indigenous tribes who were extremely isolated from the modern world and – as noted earlier – proved to be a powerful deterrent for the British even in settling the islands. Savarkar discusses these natives within *My*

⁹² Mohandas Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1983), 36-37.

⁹³ Anderson, “The Politics of Convict Space: Penal Settlements in Southeast Asia,” 7.

Transportation for Life, and his description is extremely telling in that it reveals the way government and prison officials continued to use the native tribes as a tactic for increasing fear and deterring escape attempts among prisoners. On arriving in Port Blair for the first time, Savarkar and the other convicts are met by the infamous prison superintendent, David Barrie. Savarkar quotes the warnings issued by Barrie:

“I would give you one more tip,” and it is this: “You will be involving yourself in a terrible mess if you ever try to run away from this place. The prison is surrounded on all sides by vast, dense, impenetrable jungles; the cruellest of aborigines make their abode in them; they are cannibals. If they catch you, they kill you, and make a meal of tender, young bodies like yours; as easily as we may eat cucumbers!”⁹⁴

Whether or not these claims are true has little bearing on the fact that Savarkar’s description of Barrie’s warning reveals the way prison officials continually attempted to manipulate convicts and instill in them a sense of fear and complete isolation. Even before entering the jail, therefore, prisoners were sure to feel anxious and alone, at the least.

Once inside the walls of the prison, life certainly did not improve. Perhaps more than any other penitentiary of the time, Port Blair’s Cellular Jail has become infamous for the details that have been revealed in recent decades of the horrific cruelty, deprivation, and punishment inflicted on prisoners housed there. Savarkar’s own experiences, as written in *My Transportation for Life*, will be addressed a little later in this chapter, but it will be useful to first discuss some of the other sources that serve to corroborate the story of incredibly cruel treatment. Though he may perhaps

⁹⁴ V.D. Savarkar, “My Transportation for Life,” in *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar* (Delhi: Abhishek Publications, 2007), 88.

be faulted for exaggerating or misrepresenting some incidents of his internment, Savarkar seems not to have overstated the trials that he and other prisoners endured.

Corroborating Sources

In a 2001 article from *The Guardian* titled “Survivors of our hell,” authors Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy both uncover previously unnoticed official records from the Cellular Jail, as well as interview a number of former prisoners who survived their confinement there. Among the shocking incidents recounted by survivors is the story of prisoner Mahavir Singh, who was interned in the Cellular Jail during the 1930’s. When he – like many other prisoners – chose to begin a hunger strike, he was restrained and force-fed through a rubber catheter inserted into the nose. Though this practice was, apparently, commonplace when prisoners refused to eat, Singh suffered the ultimate price when the catheter pierced his lung, essentially drowning him in milk.⁹⁵

Perhaps even more shocking, Scott-Clark and Levy write that “within four years [of founding the penal colony in 1858] 3,500 out of 8,000 transportees had been killed or had died of fever...”⁹⁶ Indeed, this high death rate is corroborated by Sen, who notes in *Disciplining Punishment* that near the middle of the 19th century the colonial government was acknowledging a mortality rate approaching thirty percent among convicts at Port Blair.⁹⁷ Though the death of Mahavir Singh occurred almost a century later, it mirrors the earlier data in that it reveals the shocking and

⁹⁵ Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy, “Survivors of Our Hell,” *The Guardian* 2001.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* 140.

unimaginable conditions placed on prisoners. It is true that mortality rates in the Cellular Jail had dropped dramatically by the 20th century, but it seems that prisoners were still often seen as dehumanized subjects on whom officials and doctors could conduct experiments and satisfy sadistic urges with little oversight. In addition, there was virtually no recourse for the suffering convicts; although prisoners were allowed to submit petitions to the government for early release or improved living conditions, such pleas were largely ignored.

Scott-Clark and Levy's *Guardian* article portrays a number of first-person accounts of life in the Cellular Jail, but for even more detail, it is helpful to look at another autobiographical account. Barindra Kumar Ghosh was a revolutionary and journalist living and working in the same period as Savarkar. He was deeply involved in a Bengali revolutionary organization called Jugantar. In 1908, Ghosh, along with a number of his compatriots, was arrested in connection with the attempted bombing murder of a magistrate – Kingsford – who was known for handing down particularly harsh rulings against nationalists. Ghosh was sentenced to death, which was later commuted to transportation for life, and in 1909, he, along with six comrades, was shipped to the Cellular Jail. In 1920, Ghosh was released from prison, and in 1922 he published his autobiographical account of events, titled *The Tale of My Exile*.⁹⁸ Unlike Savarkar's work, *The Tale of My Exile* was published within only two years of Ghosh's release, making it, perhaps, a more credible source. The reality is that much of what Savarkar states in *My Transportation for Life* is corroborated by Ghosh's

⁹⁸ Barindra Kumar Ghosh, *The Tale of My Exile* (Pondicherry: Arya Office, 1922).

version of events, but it is helpful to note some particular similarities and differences to help further understand Savarkar's experience.

First, it is significant that Savarkar and Ghosh experienced the Cellular Jail during almost exactly the same time period. Ghosh arrived in 1909 and remained until 1920, while Savarkar arrived in 1911 and was released to Ratnagiri Jail in 1921. In addition, both men were political prisoners and ought to have been treated roughly the same way. Given these similarities, one would expect to read extremely comparable accounts of the jail. And, in fact, the two do start out the same. It is almost uncanny how Ghosh's description of the speech given to prisoners by David Barrie at their arrival mirrors that of Savarkar. In addition, Ghosh, like Savarkar, depicts Barrie as a fearsome and terrible leader writing, "The goat does not fear the tiger half so much as the prisoners feared this king of the Black Waters."⁹⁹ Later, though, Ghosh seems to recant some of his earlier statements, declaring:

It must not be concluded from this, however, that I say anything in disparagement of Mr. Barry... a diamond like Mr. Barry was absolutely necessary to cut such diamonds [as the common prisoners of Port Blair]. If the present prison-system is continued... then there is no other way but to have recourse to the principle of counteracting poison by poison.¹⁰⁰

Certainly, he is still equating Barrie with "poison," but this is far from the scathing descriptions that he and Savarkar both use in the beginning chapters of their works.¹⁰¹

Later, Ghosh even goes so far as to write "Mr. Barry was stern and grim and yet kindly to us,"¹⁰² a sentiment which Savarkar echoes in his own later chapters, where

⁹⁹ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Savarkar, "My Transportation for Life," 124.

¹⁰² Ghosh, *The Tale of My Exile* 73-74.

he acknowledges the inner kindness of Barrie which became obvious, especially, at Christmas.¹⁰³

The parallels between the two men's works are further visible in the fact that Ghosh has a very similar perspective about the role of Muslims within the jail as Savarkar does. As will be discussed a little later, Savarkar, in *My Transportation for Life*, places a great deal of emphasis on the way in which Hindus were persecuted and forced into a second-class status in the Andamans, while Muslims were often put in positions of power over other prisoners. Ghosh supports this description of events when he notes that the Petty Officer put in charge of the Bomb Prisoners (as Ghosh and his companions were called), was "a Pathan, by race... There was an apprehension that Hindu guards might sympathise and fraternize with us. Therefore all the masters of our fate... were chosen from among the Mahomedans." He then goes on to describe Pathans, writing, "Lazy and slothful and corrupt themselves, they are violently overzealous in extracting work from other people."¹⁰⁴ Clearly, then, whatever reservations Ghosh may have had about criticizing prison officials did not extend as far as defending his Muslim co-prisoners.

Psychology of Imprisonment

The fact that those in charge of the Cellular Jail felt threatened enough by the Hindu convicts to ensure they were guarded only by Muslims is very telling for a number of reasons. First, it is important to note that during this period the British were beginning to feel a serious threat from Indian independence movements. Political prisoners such

¹⁰³ Savarkar, "My Transportation for Life," 365.

¹⁰⁴ Ghosh, *The Tale of My Exile* 66-67.

as Ghosh and Savarkar were causing havoc both within India and on British soil. In addition, 1909 saw the passage of the Morely-Minto Reforms, which provided the first separate electorates for Muslims within India. This change represented a significant push on the part of India's Muslim minority to gain some measure of equality within a population over eighty percent Hindu. The actions of prison administrators within the Cellular Jail, then, can be viewed as a sort of microcosm for the way the British began acting towards India as a whole in this period. Recognizing the growing division between Muslims and Hindus, British officials adopted a "divide and rule" policy, hoping to befriend Muslims by supporting measures like the Morley-Minto Reforms.

The result of such actions by the British, especially in the smaller world of the Cellular Jail, was the marginalization of the Hindu prisoners, who were very aware of the favoritism shown towards their Muslim counterparts. It is unsurprising, then, that Savarkar came to resent many of the Muslim prisoners surrounding him – he, naturally, felt that they were given undue power. Significantly, though it may be tempting to view Savarkar's caustic remarks about his Muslim guards as emblematic of the anti-Muslim beliefs many critics have projected on him, it is not such a simple matter. In order to understand these remarks, and the evolution of Savarkar's attitude towards Muslims during his prison term, it is important to address the psychological effect of imprisonment, in general.

Unquestionably the most famous study on this subject is the Stanford Prison Experiment, conducted by Philip Zimbardo and three other researchers in the summer of 1971 at Stanford University. The findings from this experiment were shocking and

instantly controversial, raising questions about whether we, as humans, have an innate tendency to become violent and pitiless when handed unrestricted power over others. In a reflection on his infamous study, Philip Zimbardo discussed the most prominent aspect of its results, stating: “The Stanford prison experiment is but one of a host of studies in psychology that reveal the extent to which our behavior can be transformed from its usual set point to deviate in unimaginable ways, even to readily accepting a dehumanized conception of others, as ‘animals?’...”¹⁰⁵

Certainly, Zimbardo’s work has played a significant role in the development of the American – and perhaps global – consciousness about the violence and cruelty that many prisoners worldwide are forced to endure. However, Zimbardo and the Stanford Prison Experiment have also drawn a great deal of criticism since 1971 from groups and individuals who believe that the study was not conducted correctly, and that Zimbardo, himself, may have influenced the outcome through directives given to the prison “guards.”¹⁰⁶ Putting aside Zimbardo, therefore, there is a surprising dearth of scholarly research about the psychological effects of imprisonment on prisoners in a hierarchical system such as that which Savarkar encountered in the Cellular Jail. The unique environment at Port Blair contained a complex dual hierarchy, placing

¹⁰⁵ Philip G. Zimbardo, “Revisiting the Stanford Prison Experiment: A Lesson in the Power of Situation”, 53, no. 30 (2007), <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=25307670&site=eds-live>.

¹⁰⁶ For example: Thomas Carnahan and Sam McFarland, “Revisiting the Stanford Prison Experiment: Could Participant Self-Selection Have Led to the Cruelty?,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33, no. 5 (2007). and John Mark, “Letter to the Editor,” *Stanford Alumni Magazine*. See also: Stephen Reicher and S. Alexander Haslam, “Rethinking the Psychology of Tyranny: The Bbc Prison Study” *The British journal of social psychology / the British Psychological Society* 45, no. Pt 1 (2006).

Muslims above Hindus within a larger system that consigned political prisoners such as Savarkar to the bottom rung of the ladder. Investigating the psychology of such a system is undoubtedly not a simple affair, and the closest research available to draw upon seems to be that related to bullying in prisons. In her review of research on the subject, Jane Ireland discusses the relatively limited literature available on the topic of bullying among prisoners, and notes that there is still much work to be done.¹⁰⁷ Even within this subset of the scholarship on prison psychology, however, it is difficult to find links with Savarkar and the Cellular Jail. The largest and most applicable takeaway from Ireland's discussion seems to be that bullying is omnipresent within all prison systems, and that those in charge often overlook it.

Perhaps one reason behind the lack of research on the psychology of prisoners in situations such as Savarkar's is that their suffering seems rather obvious. We take it for granted that prison is an unpleasant and often cruel place, and assume that an inmate low on the food chain will suffer the most. Indeed, whether his guards had been Muslims, Sikhs, or even fellow Hindus, it is likely that Savarkar would have come to have very similar feelings towards them. Given that political prisoners were already at the lowest rung in the Cellular Jail hierarchy, it takes no great stretch of the imagination to believe that convict officers given power over Savarkar and his companions might have taken their role a little too far and faced no negative consequences as a result.

¹⁰⁷ Jane L. Ireland, "Bullying" among Prisoners (Elsevier Ltd, 2000).

My Transportation for Life – An Introduction

Now that the ground has been laid with an overview of the Cellular Jail, as well as narratives from two outside perspectives, the rest of this chapter will be dedicated to an analysis of Savarkar's own account of his time in the Andamans, as well as a discussion of how his internment, specifically, led to the creation of *Hindutva*.

Though the reader has been exposed to excerpts from *My Transportation for Life* in the sections above, it will be helpful to begin with a general overview of the text, before working through the most important sections individually.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, *My Transportation* was published five years after Savarkar's release from the Cellular Jail, which makes it quite notable that the work totals over five hundred pages. By contrast, Barindra Ghosh's narrative, published in 1922, numbers only 188 pages. Certainly, writing styles vary from author to author, but it is significant that Savarkar was able to write more than double that of his compatriot, despite a five year gap between his release and the work's publication – a period in which he undoubtedly lost track of certain details. One way of accounting for this disparity is to remember that, throughout his life, Savarkar was recognized as a rhetorical genius and a skilled author who had already penned a number of hefty texts by 1930, most notably his *Indian War of Independence of 1857*.

In a similar vein, in one of the earliest sections of *My Transportation for Life*, Savarkar declares his intention to “write at least one epic during my period of incarceration.”¹⁰⁸ At this point in the narrative, there is no mention of *Hindutva* or any related ideas. Instead, Savarkar tells the reader, he was intent on writing about the life

¹⁰⁸ Savarkar, “My Transportation for Life,” 15.

of Guru Govind Singh. Still, it seems that his declaration of intent so early on within *My Transportation* provides some foreshadowing for the later creation of his seminal treatise.

The fact that *Hindutva* is not discussed at all in the first sections of the book owes itself, in part, to the fact that Savarkar takes his time in describing the events that passed after his conviction, almost day by day. He goes into such great detail that it is not until Chapter VI that the reader is introduced, for the first time, to the Andaman Islands. The previous five chapters are devoted to describing the jails at Dongri and Thana where the author spent the weeks leading up to his transportation, and these sections provide a crucial stage for allowing Savarkar to develop himself into a sympathetic and likeable character. It is in these first chapters that Savarkar most carefully distances himself from his fellow prisoners, describing them often as either brutal and heartless or timid and weak¹⁰⁹ By comparison, Savarkar, himself, is portrayed as a victim of the justice system (although he does not actually deny his crimes) while also being strong, stoic, and compassionate.

Life in the Cellular Jail

Chapter VI of *My Transportation for Life* introduces the reader to the Andaman Islands through a series of short historical segments combined with scientific observations about the local environment and the indigenous tribes. It is not until Chapter VII, that Savarkar and his companions actually reach Port Blair, and it is in this section that the infamous Mr. Barrie is first introduced to our author. In the very

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 41-42.

first conversation between the two, Savarkar makes the prison superintendent out to be dim-witted, ridiculing an attempt made by Barrie to open an avenue for camaraderie between the two. Clearly, the implication is that Barrie is no match for Savarkar's calm-headed intellect.

Once Savarkar reaches the prison itself, the reader is exposed to the first instances of anti-Muslim rhetoric. He notes that all the warders of political prisoners were Muslim because, "We were Hindus and a Hindu warder may be kind towards us. Hence the authorities put upon us Mussalman warders who reported our movements to them in an exaggerated form, or invented stories about us..."¹¹⁰ This reasoning is almost identical to that given by Ghosh in *The Tale of my Exile*, but Savarkar goes even farther, writing:

...the Pathans, as a rule, were bigoted Mohamedans, and were especially notorious for their fanatical hatred of the Hindus. The Officers had pampered them to serve their own ends. To persecute the Hindus was natural to them... The Pathans, the Sindhis and the Baluchi Muslims, with a few exceptions, were, one and all, cruel and unscrupulous persons, and were full of fanatical hatred for the Hindus. Not so the Mussalmans from the Punjab, and less even than they, those of Bengal, Tamil province and Maharashtra. But the fanatical section always belittled and held up to laughter their co-religionists from other parts of India. It twitted them as 'half kafirs.'¹¹¹

Evidently, the author holds strong feelings towards Pathans, especially. But it is significant that he is not suggesting that all Muslims are "cruel and unscrupulous persons." It is only those by whose hands he suffered while in jail that he identifies as being particularly terrible and malicious towards Hindus. There is no excusing Savarkar's strongly worded excoriation of Muslims, but again, it is essential to note that the situation was a complex one.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 93.

If one accepts, as seems likely, that the British were intentionally playing Muslims against Hindus within the prison walls, then it is not improbable that much of what Savarkar describes actually did occur. In any prison environment, it is natural for prisoners to attempt to curry favor with their superiors, in order to lessen the punishment and improve daily living conditions, a fact which likely motivated convict officers to act harshly towards the prisoners they oversaw. In addition, because political prisoners were at the lowest rung of Cellular Jail hierarchy, and had almost no hope of rehabilitation, they had little reason to strive for any such promotion to warder. Savarkar and his companions, therefore, became completely powerless at the hands of the convict officers who watched over them.

Undoubtedly, prison officials were entirely cognizant of the power games at play in the Cellular Jail. Moreover, in *Disciplining Punishment*, Sen notes that the pitting of convicts against one another often began even before arrival at the prison. On board the ships, transit superintendents chose certain prisoners to serve as warders and gave them red armbands “as markers of their political position. The visibility of their status effectively separated these convict officers from other prisoners, setting them apart as the intended objects of either admiration and emulation, or fear and deterrence.”¹¹² Sen, throughout his book, largely overlooks the issue of religion in jail segregation and hierarchy, but if Muslim warders were, in fact, given very visible status as officers in positions of power over Hindu prisoners, it is no great surprise that Savarkar reacted the way that he did.

¹¹² Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* 208.

It is difficult to overstate how significant this aspect of Savarkar's experience in the Cellular Jail was in shaping his philosophies later in life, yet it is something that has been largely overlooked in the scholarship on Savarkar and Hindutva. Ashis Nandy is one of the few who mentions the influence of the Cellular Jail on Savarkar's evolution, but he dismisses the idea of mal-treatment by Muslim warders as "rumor," writing: "...Savarkar's own account forces one to ask if his sufferings in the hands of his Muslim warders were not at least partly a result of his self-fulfilling, anti-Muslim prejudices."¹¹³ Such a dismissal ignores the complexity of Savarkar's development, as well as the total lack of anti-Muslim rhetoric in any of his publications previous to incarceration. A revolutionary, certainly; a freedom fighter, no doubt; a religious zealot, however, he was not. As mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, Savarkar even went so far as to highlight particularly heroic Muslim leaders in his *Indian War of Independence of 1857*. Undoubtedly, then, something changed between 1910-1923 that caused Savarkar to emerge from prison with a very different philosophy and to publish a treatise advocating an India with a decidedly pro-Hindu policy.

Closely linked with the issue of Muslim warders at the Cellular Jail is the treatment that Savarkar received there on daily basis. It has been mentioned briefly, above, that political prisoners, especially, suffered at Port Blair, but in Chapter IX of *My Transportation* the author details just how bad the conditions were. At the beginning of this chapter, Savarkar notes that life for the political prisoners before him had been difficult, but not unbearable. However, a few months into the

¹¹³ Ashis Nandy, "A Disowned Father of the Nation of India: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the Demonic and the Seductive in Indian Nationalism," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014): 98.

imprisonment of the first group – from the Bengali Bomb Case – a “high official from Calcutta” (who remains mysteriously nameless) visited the jail and was extremely disappointed by the way the “Bomb-Makers” were being treated. As Savarkar tells it, this man proclaimed that political prisoners “...are the worst prisoners in the world and they must be treated in this prison in a way that will break their spirit and completely demoralize them.”¹¹⁴ Sen corroborates this statement in the afterword of his book, writing:

The nationalist convicts were, for the most part, seen by the jailors as beyond rehabilitation, and as impervious to the mechanisms that were typically used in the Andamans to generate and sustain loyalty. As such, with these prisoners, the goals of transportation were isolation and containment, rather than reform and reclamation.¹¹⁵

The British government clearly feared revolutionaries and freedom fighters more than any other menace that it faced during this period – a fact which led to this distinct treatment of the political prisoners at Port Blair.

By the time Savarkar arrived at the Cellular Jail, all political prisoners were facing a much stricter regimen than was applied to ordinary convicts. The group was divided and the men were not allowed to speak with one another. In addition, even the smallest infraction of prison rules would result in one of the innumerable punishments meted out by the warders. Worst of all, the daily labor allotted to the political prisoners was changed to turning the oil-mill, the most difficult job at Port Blair. This particular work, which is singled out in almost every account by survivors of the Cellular Jail as cruel and unusual, involved being “yoked like animals to the

¹¹⁴ Savarkar, “My Transportation for Life,” 111.

¹¹⁵ Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* 264.

handle that turned the wheel...Twenty turns of the wheel were enough to drain away the strength of the strongest cooly and the worst, brawny badmash. No dacoit past twenty was put on that work. But the poor political prisoner was fit to do it at any age.”¹¹⁶

The incredible difficulty of working the oil-mill is corroborated by countless other reports including that of Barindra Ghosh and those by the former-prisoners interviewed in the *Guardian* article. There is no doubt that the political prisoners underwent serious torment and that many were worked so hard that they were physically unable to continue with the labor allotted to them. In fact, Sen notes that “...it is clear that the labour to which political prisoners were subjected in the Andamans was intended to function as a form of torture...There was, in such labor, no question of ‘reform,’ and no possibility of rehabilitation. Political prisoners were not expected to actually meet their quota of oil; those who did were not rewarded...”¹¹⁷ It demonstrates, then, a certain iron will and determination that Savarkar survived his ten years in the Cellular Jail relatively unscathed – at least physically. Significantly, though, Savarkar writes in Chapter XI that thoughts of suicide entered his mind at various points during his sentence and that he was only barely able to convince himself of the foolishness of the idea.¹¹⁸ Suicide is the ultimate end and Savarkar’s consideration of it is a sign of the extreme mental strain placed on the prisoners.

¹¹⁶ Savarkar, “My Transportation for Life,” 111-12.

¹¹⁷ Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* 268.

¹¹⁸ Savarkar, “My Transportation for Life,” 143-44.

The emotional toll of life in prison has been mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, but here it is useful to make an additional note. At the same time that Vinayak Savarkar was interned at Port Blair, his brother was also an inmate there. Ganesh Savarkar (also known as Babarao), Vinayak's older brother, was an ardent revolutionary like his younger sibling. He had been deeply involved in the freedom movement within India, itself, and was arrested for leading a rebellion against British rule. Throughout *My Transportation for Life*, Savarkar makes occasional references to his brother's imprisonment and it is clear that having his sibling suffering nearby caused as much pain as anything else for Vinayak. In one section from Chapter IX, Savarkar describes, in detail, the torment his brother underwent when forced to work the oil-mill despite being extremely ill. As Savarkar recounts it, the prison doctor, although well aware of Babarao's condition, was afraid to remove him from his labor for fear of being accused of sympathizing with his fellow Hindus.¹¹⁹ Although Babarao survived his sentence in the Andamans, the physical toll on his body was extreme. No doubt, then, whatever pain and suffering Savarkar was forced to undergo was more than doubled by the fear that his brother was undergoing the same.

It is likely that Babarao's presence in the jail also accounts, at least partially, for the number of work strikes and protests that Savarkar details in *My Transportation for Life*. As he describes it, the prisoners became fed up with the conditions in the Cellular Jail and with watching their friends suffer and be punished. As a result, a number of work strikes were taken up, and it appears that Savarkar was often at the lead of these. As he writes, Mr. Barrie declared that "Savarkar was the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 116.

father of unrest in the Andamans...”¹²⁰ His involvement in numerous inmate demonstrations during his time in jail reveals Savarkar’s commitment to his causes, even under the most trying circumstances. Between 1910-1923 he was certainly not bowing completely out of the political scene; although he was not an active part of national politics at the time, Savarkar was continuing to develop his ideas and his strength as a leader within the walls of the Cellular Jail.

In Chapter XII, as the author discusses daily life in the prison, he notes the importance of books to the prisoners. Although their access to literature was extremely restricted, Savarkar stresses the importance of reading both for maintaining sanity and for furthering the revolutionary political agenda. After several years of battling with the prison officials, Savarkar and some of his companions were able to establish a prison library, which came to include books by Swami Vivekanand, Tolstoy (*My Religion*), Mazzini, Bluntschli, Herbert Spencer, and works on theosophy by Annie Besant – among many others. Access to books of this sort was undoubtedly an essential part of the development of Savarkar’s *Hindutva*. As noted in the earlier chapters of this thesis, Savarkar had long admired such men as Spencer, Mazzini, and Bluntschli, even before his imprisonment. Given the leisure of a decade to read and re-read and study in detail the works of these men, it is no wonder that Savarkar began to develop similar ideas about nationality, statehood, and social institutions.

In the section of *My Transportation* where he discusses the importance of reading for the prisoners, Savarkar also notes that because of his excellent memory he

¹²⁰ Ibid., 246.

was able to produce written outlines of many books that he had read previously. These outlines, scribbled either on scraps of paper or on the walls of the prison, proved immensely useful for education other prisoners and for motivating Savarkar, himself, to continue his philosophical studies. In particular, he describes writing “a full outline of Spencer’s ‘First Principles’” onto one wall, and “all the definitions of political economy as I had learnt from Mills’ work on the subject” on another.¹²¹ It is in this same manner, etching words into the stone walls of his cells, that Savarkar later wrote the beginning drafts of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*

The Issue of Shuddhi

In Chapter Two of Part II of *My Transportation*, Savarkar addresses the issue that provides, perhaps, the greatest motivation for the development of his anti-Muslim rhetoric later in life. In the chapter just previous to this one, he discusses how, while in jail, he studied all of the religious books that he could get his hands on. Among these were the Christian Bible and the Muslim Koran.¹²² In mentioning his study of the Koran, Savarkar makes only positive, if vague, evaluations. He certainly comes across as open to the study of various religions and not as though he holds any particular vendetta against the Muslim holy text. It is particularly interesting, therefore, that Chapter II delves into the massive issue of forced conversions. It is here that Savarkar writes, “I was sent to the Andamans in 1911, and I soon found out that some Hindu prisoners had been converted to Islam and assumed Muslim names after their transportation.” He goes on later in the paragraph to question:

¹²¹ Ibid., 157.

¹²² Ibid., 260.

How strange it is, then, that...the Pathan and other Mussulman warders, petty officers and jamadars of that prison could convert the Hindu prisoners to Islam, by methods of conversion and coercion. Leave alone the prisoners who knew by their age what they were doing. But what of lads of tender age who were so forcibly converted to Islam by their Muslim warders? Is it not the duty of the British officers to care for their spiritual welfare as it is their care to look after their physical and moral well-being?¹²³

Savarkar discusses at length the issue of forced conversion, and makes what amounts to a serious accusation, against both the Muslim warders and the British prison officials.

I have not found any independent corroborating accounts of such practices within the Cellular Jail, specifically, but if what Savarkar writes is true, even if not to the extent that he proclaims, then it is no wonder that he developed such strong negative feelings towards Muslims. If experiencing severe punishment and cruelty inflicted by Muslim warders was not enough, Savarkar was also apparently forced to witness a number of young Hindu men being converted away from their religion. Though Savarkar, himself, did not ascribe to religious Hinduism, there is little doubt that he felt very strongly about the sacred ties between Hindu-ness and the Motherland of India. If we assume, therefore, that forced conversions did actually take place at Port Blair, then Savarkar's distrust of Muslims becomes all the more understandable.

At this point in the discussion it is worth raising, again, a point that has been noted elsewhere in this chapter and the previous ones. In order to understand the complexity of the issues discussed throughout this thesis, it is essential that the reader distinguish between the true Savarkar and the man who is portrayed in stories

¹²³ Ibid., 265-66.

circulated by those who deeply disagree with his views. It is one thing to criticize Savarkar for the statements that he actually made later in life, and it is undoubtedly fair to note that his opinions became more and more radical and less politically correct after his release from jail. It is unfair, however, to ignore the reasons behind this transition and to not acknowledge the various trials that Savarkar endured while in jail that may have conditioned him to believe the worst about Muslims, in general. The reality is that before his release from prison in 1923, there is no proof that Savarkar was in any way radically anti-Muslim – a fact which indicates that some event or occurrence during his time at Port Blair caused him to change his views.

Final Years and Release from Prison

The later chapters of *My Transportation for Life* largely echo what is written in the earlier sections. Savarkar continues to relate the day to day life of prison and the struggles that particular prisoners faced, as well as numerous strikes that were undertaken seeking improved conditions. There is not a great deal of note, for the purpose of my argument, but the issue of Savarkar's petitions to the government, and his eventual release, merits some discussion. A number of scholars, most prominently Ashis Nandy, have suggested that Savarkar gave up on his revolutionary aims while in jail and, through a series of petitions for clemency, essentially submitted to the will of the British government.¹²⁴ The implication is that Savarkar became something of a teacher's pet, doing whatever it took to curry favor with his superiors and avoid further punishment.

¹²⁴ Nandy, "A Disowned Father of the Nation of India: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the Demonic and the Seductive in Indian Nationalism," 99.

Although it is true that he submitted a number of petitions, and even repudiated his revolutionary past, I believe it is a mistake to vilify Savarkar for such actions. First, it is worth noting that Savarkar openly acknowledges, within *My Transportation for Life*, both the petitions that he sent as well as the discussion that he had with members of a Commission sent by the British Government to investigate conditions at the Cellular Jail. In a section of the conversation that he quotes within the pages of his memoir, Savarkar is addressing a plea for constitutional reforms, stating, “The constitutional reforms will enable me to do some constructive work for the country. And I would try to do my work in a constitutional manner. If the reforms prove fruitful that way, and clear the path to the goal all have in view, a political revolutionary like myself will prefer that path to bloodshed and unnecessary murder.”¹²⁵ Far from hiding his compliance with the British Government, Savarkar – on this occasion – is openly suggesting his willingness to cooperate if certain aims are met.

In addition, it is well worth noting here that it is hardly out of the ordinary for a prisoner, living under harsh conditions, to desire freedom at any cost. Already in this chapter, the immense suffering of Savarkar and his companions has been detailed at length. It is easy for any outsider, especially someone seeking to undermine Savarkar’s position, to disparage him for weakness under duress. However, such flippant criticism fails to acknowledge the incredible strain placed on the political prisoners at Port Blair. As Savarkar notes in one of the final sections of his memoir,

¹²⁵ Savarkar, “My Transportation for Life,” 439.

by the last years of his sentence he was struggling with continually disintegrating health, including a yearlong stint in the prison hospital.¹²⁶

Regardless of the means by which it was brought about, Savarkar was transported from Port Blair to Ratnagiri Jail on the mainland in 1921. He remained in Ratnagiri Jail for another two years before he was provided with a probationary release, under which terms he was required to remain in Ratnagiri and refrain from all political activity until 1937. That period, along with the remainder of Savarkar's life and his legacy after death are the subject of the next, and final chapter of this thesis. It is only through an analysis of the impact which Savarkar and his work, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, had on political and social thought during his lifetime as well as in India, today, that one can fully understand the complexity of the ideological evolution which culminated during Savarkar's internment in the Cellular Jail.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 404-05.

Chapter Four:

Hindutva since 1923

The previous sections of this thesis have been devoted to events leading up to the creation and publication of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* In this chapter, however, I will go beyond 1923 and the publication of Savarkar's seminal work to address the confusing and often misinterpreted legacy of both *Hindutva* and Savarkar, himself. It has been almost a century since *Hindutva* was written, and in that time a great deal has shifted, both within the Hindu nationalist movement and the country of India as a whole. In order to understand the continuing evolution of V.D. Savarkar's character and legacy, it will be helpful to look first at the ways in which many of his contemporaries responded to his writings and ideologies, some blatantly, and some in a much more subtle manner. Secondly, addressing the way that Savarkar's ideas were utilized and/or cherry-picked by the various right-wing groups associated with the Hindu nationalist movement will create a more complete picture of who Savarkar really was and how he has been appropriated – often wrongly – to serve individual purposes. Finally, this chapter will end with an analysis of the way that Savarkar, and the Hindu nationalist movement, as a whole, have re-emerged in recent decades. Since the BJP rose to prominence in the 1990's, and especially with the recent prime

ministerial victory of Narendra Modi, questions of Indian identity and the meaning of the word “Hindutva” have once again come to the fore.

Savarkar and Gandhi

In 1923, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* was published for the first time. Only two years later, Savarkar’s *The Story of My Transportation for Life* began appearing in serialized form in the magazine *Kesari*. As has been mentioned previously, *Kesari* was originally founded by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a man widely viewed as the father of Hindu nationalism – especially in his home province of Maharashtra. It seems quite fitting, then, that *My Transportation for Life* was published for the first time in his Hindu nationalist publication. In the previous chapter, the reader has been exposed to a thorough analysis of this autobiographical work, and the way that it portrays what is perhaps the most important stage in Savarkar’s evolution towards the more radical anti-Muslim stance that he held in later years. This work served as a forum for Savarkar to air his opinions and ideas about not only his everyday life in the Cellular Jail, but also about goings-on in the world outside the Andaman Islands.

Throughout *My Transportation for Life*, Savarkar discusses the struggles that prisoners endured in attempting to garner news from the outside world.¹²⁷ It is clear that the prison officials did everything within their power to limit the entrance of any news that might serve to enflame revolutionary fervor further. Despite their precautions, however, prison guards were not capable of completely stopping the flow of information. Through various clandestine means, Savarkar and his fellow

¹²⁷ V.D. Savarkar, “My Transportation for Life,” in *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar* (Delhi: Abhishek Publications, 2007), 172-74.

prisoners came to hear about the death of Gopal Krishna Gokhale,¹²⁸ the repeal of the Partition of Bengal,¹²⁹ and Indian involvement in World War I,¹³⁰ among a number of other issues. On the occasion of each piece of news, Savarkar, in *My Transportation for Life*, gives his opinion of the situation and manages, often, to relate the event to his own ideological beliefs. These snippets, and the way that they afford the reader a more complete picture of Savarkar's political views, prove useful when one compares *My Transportation for Life* with the works of some of his contemporaries in the National Congress.

Though it may have been coincidental, it is worth noting – along these lines – that Gandhi's own autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, was being serialized in exactly the same period as Savarkar's memoir. *My Experiments with Truth* was published in Gandhi's own weekly newspaper, *Navajivan*, starting in 1925. Given their temporal coincidence and the fact that both texts use the phrase "The Story of" in the title, it is impossible not to compare the two works. In addition, it is notable that *My Experiments with Truth* leaves off in 1921, at almost exactly the same point as Savarkar's work. It does not seem farfetched therefore, to assume that Gandhi was seeking – in some way – to counteract Savarkar's influence and ideologies in the 1920's.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ibid., 177.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 188.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 313.

¹³¹ This topic merits more research, largely depending on the specific serialization dates of the two works in *Kesari* and *Navajivan*. Although I was able to find these dates for *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, I have not yet gained access to the *Kesari* archives for the same purpose with *My Transportation for Life*.

After all, this was the period right after Savarkar's release from jail, when his re-emergence into the political scene seemed inevitable. Though he had been in prison for over a decade, it is important to remember the influence and widespread fame that Savarkar had garnered as a revolutionary and freedom fighter in his youth. His passion for his country and ardent devotion to his cause attracted the attention and admiration of many other young Indian nationalists of the period. No surprise, then, that Gandhi likely viewed this recently released Marathi-intellectual as a rival and threat, especially since the two held such opposing views with respect to a number of issues including the treatment of Indian Muslims. It is a widely known fact that Gandhi, in attempting to create a unified India, went to great lengths to woo his nation's Muslim population – even declaring open support for the Khilafat Movement. This support is voiced within *My Experiments with Truth*, where he writes:

It was not for me to enter into the absolute merits of the [Khilafat] question, provided there was nothing immoral in them. In matters of religion, beliefs differ, and each one's is supreme for himself... Friends and critics have criticized my attitude regarding the Khilafat question. In spite of the criticism I feel that I have no reason to revise it or to regret my cooperation with the Muslims. I should adopt the same attitude, should a similar occasion arise."¹³²

This approach to the Khilafat Movement issues stands in stark contrast to Savarkar's own very critical views, as voiced in both *My Transportation for Life* and *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Although, in the 1920's, Savarkar was not yet as staunchly anti-Muslim as he would become later in life, he was certainly far from eager to join hands in support of an Islamic movement.

¹³² Mohandas Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1983), 399.

Given the drastic differences in opinion between Gandhi and Savarkar, it bears mentioning a very interesting suggestion made by author Sanjeev Kelkar in his work, *Lost Years of the RSS*. In the book, which fills a previously empty space in scholarly analysis of the RSS, Kelkar notes: “Hindsight allows us to consider the possibility that anyone who presented a challenge to Jawaharlal Nehru’s leadership was systematically sidelined by Gandhi.”¹³³ Though Kelkar is not speaking specifically in relation to Savarkar, and although it is not likely that Savarkar ever did pose a real threat to Nehru’s political climb to power, the idea raises an interesting point. Certainly Nehru looked up to Gandhi greatly in the late 1910’s and through the 1920’s. This was the beginning of Nehru’s political career with the Congress, and Gandhi, at the time, was the organization’s leader. It makes sense that the more experienced man would take his young counterpart under his wing. It is perhaps a stretch, but not unimaginable, therefore, that Gandhi would have viewed such men as Savarkar, Jinnah, and Subash Chandra Bose as overly radical threats to the future of India, and that – by extension – he would have made attempts to sideline such figures in favor of Gandhi’s own chosen successor, Nehru.

Certainly, Gandhi was well aware of Savarkar’s presence in the political arena during these years, having first become acquainted with him during a meeting in 1906 at India House in London. As noted previously, several scholars have suggested that Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* was written as a direct response to the radical views of Savarkar and Shyamji Krishnavarma that he encountered at India House. Later, during Savarkar’s imprisonment, Gandhi also wrote a petition to the Indian

¹³³ Sanjeev Kelkar, *Lost Years of the R.S.S.* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2011), 31.

government seeking the release of both Vinayak and his brother Babarao – perhaps a puzzling move, on the surface.¹³⁴ In reality, however, writing such a petition was an astute political move on Gandhi’s part – drumming up support for imprisoned Indian revolutionaries as a way of gaining widespread support for his own causes. And, indeed, during his time in jail Savarkar had not yet made his more radical beliefs public – it was not until 1923 that *Hindutva* was first released. If further proof is necessary for linking Gandhi and his Hindu Nationalist counterpart, it can be found in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, where Savarkar’s name arises ten different times. Certainly, considering the vast scope of the *Collected Works*, ten is not a huge number, but it is enough to indicate a certain familiarity between the two men, and – as a few specific examples demonstrate – to indicate the dissension between them.

The first of these examples appears in Gandhi’s “Discourses on the Gita,” written between 1926-27. In it, he reminisces about meeting Savarkar and Shyamji Krishnavarma (Savarkar’s mentor) in London and discussing the meaning of the Gita with them. “[They] used to tell me that the *Gita* and the *Ramayana* taught quite the opposite of what I said they did. I felt then how much better it would have been if the sage Vyasa had not taken this illustration of fighting for inculcating spiritual knowledge.”¹³⁵ This particular quote refers to the quite contrasting views of the *Gita* and the *Ramayana* as held by Gandhi and Savarkar. While Gandhi saw all violence portrayed in the works as symbolic of inner struggles, Savarkar and his compatriots

¹³⁴ Mahatma Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Gandhi Heritage Portal, 1994), <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/the-collected-works-of-mahatma-gandhi>. Vol. 17, 460.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, 102.

viewed it – instead – as evidence that violence, when used after all other methods of negotiation have failed, can be justified.

Another moment in Gandhi's *Collected Works*, from more than a decade later, continues to show the tension between the two men. In 1939, in a letter to a friend, Gandhi revealed his frustration with Savarkar and his compatriots. The issue, this time, was a statement issued by Savarkar and Ambedkar, along with a number of other leaders, claiming that the Muslim League and National Congress, combined, “did not represent the whole or even the bulk of India and that any constitutional or administrative arrangement arrived at between ...[them] could not be binding on the Indian people.” As Gandhi notes in his letter, “I have tried to woo him and his friends. I have walked to Savarkar's house. I have gone out of my way to win him over. But I have failed.”¹³⁶ Clearly, although the dissent may never have risen to a head in public, the 1920's and 30's were not a time of amiable friendship between these two opposing leaders, and Gandhi may well have sought some method of fighting back against Savarkar's publicized and quite radical right-wing ideas.

Savarkar and Nehru

As noted earlier, Jawaharlal Nehru was, from the late 1910's being groomed to be Gandhi's successor as leader of the Indian National Congress. Nehru, like Gandhi, was certainly exposed to Savarkar's ideas and writings in this period, and responded in his own, rather subtle way. Like many Indian leaders of his day, Nehru studied at Harrow and Cambridge in England. It is significant that although Nehru and

¹³⁶ Ibid., Vol. 70, 248.

Savarkar's dates in the country overlapped almost exactly, the two seem to never have come in direct contact. Neither makes any mention of such an interaction in their personal writings, and, as scholar Nicholas Owen points out, Nehru actually faced serious pressure from his father (in the form of letters between the two) to completely avoid India House and its radical inhabitants.¹³⁷

Regardless of the reasoning, Nehru completely avoided becoming embroiled in revolutionary fervor that swept up many young Indians during this period in London. Having completed his studies, he returned to India in 1912 to practice law. In 1919, he joined the Indian National Congress and in the ensuing two decades he became very close with Gandhi. In 1928, he was elected president of the National Congress for the first time, and by the mid 1940's, there was little question that Nehru would be the nation's first prime minister after Independence. In the 1920's and 30's, Nehru was imprisoned multiple times by the British government for various acts of civil disobedience, and in 1942 he was arrested again for his involvement in Gandhi's "Quit India" movement. It was during his jail term from 1942-46 that Nehru wrote what has become, perhaps, his most famous book – outshining even his autobiography. *The Discovery of India*, published in 1946, is essentially a prison memoir combined with a complete history of the Indian nation, from the days of the Indus Valley Civilization all the way through British Imperialism. The work is exceptionally well written, and is replete with Nehru's own impressions and beliefs about his country.

¹³⁷ Nicholas Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire: Indian Radicals in Edwardian London," *Past & Present* 220, no. 1 (2013): 175.

While *The Discovery of India* is a masterpiece in its own right, it – like Gandhi’s writings – also reveals a number of parallels with Savarkar’s prison works. As both Savarkar and Nehru discuss in the opening sections of their texts, prison is a place where time is in abundance, and for these men that time was often spent in deep intellectual and philosophical thought and discussion. Moreover, a period of multiple years in prison unquestionably proved conducive to writing and it is no surprise that both men took advantage of the situation. Interestingly, though, it is difficult to get through *The Discovery of India* without perceiving some very distinct similarities between it and Savarkar’s *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Both works devote a lengthy portion to developing a history of India as a way of leading to some definition of what it means to be Indian. As has been discussed at length in this thesis, Savarkar’s definition of being Indian is linked inextricably with being Hindu – though that term is certainly not synonymous, in his mind, with religious Hinduism. Nehru, in his own work, arrives at a very different conclusion. In an early section of *Discovery of India*, while discussing his previous travels throughout the country, he makes a statement that reveals his own perceptions of India and Indian-ness:

Though outwardly there was diversity and infinite variety among our people, everywhere there was that tremendous impress of oneness, which had held all of us together for ages past, whatever political fate or misfortune had befallen us. The unity of India was no longer merely an intellectual conception for me: It was an emotional experience which overpowered me. The essential unity had been so powerful that no political division, no disaster or catastrophe had been able to overcome it.¹³⁸

This is indisputably a very different view of India than the one Savarkar portrays in *Hindutva*. To Nehru, despite the “diversity and infinite variety” of people,

¹³⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York The John Day Company, 1946), 47.

India presented itself as an essentially unified whole, without division based on politics or religion. It is significant, too, to note that within *Discovery of India*, Nehru mentions only one example of a time when India was “a slave country” – during British rule.¹³⁹ This selectivity reveals Nehru’s strong devotion to secularism in his vision of a unified India and contrasts directly with Savarkar’s belief that Mughal rule also represented a time of subjugation for the Indian people. Unlike Savarkar, Nehru refused to view religion as a dividing factor within the nation, and his pointed statements within *Discovery of India* about the “oneness” of India seem written almost to directly oppose a *Hindutva* view of the country.

Furthermore, in the postscript to his autobiography, written in 1941, Nehru voices his own vision of “the Idea behind India” – an idea that openly challenges Savarkar’s perception of Indian identity. Nehru writes: “...This cultural inheritance of the ancient Indian past, as well as what followed it in later years, is not confined to any one race that inhabited India or came to it. It is the common heritage of all of us, to which every race in India contributed...”¹⁴⁰ By referring to the “cultural inheritance,” specifically, it seems that Nehru is making a pointed stab at Savarkar and his use of culture as one of the primary means of unifying Hindus and excluding all other groups within *Hindutva*. Nehru does not ignore the complicated past of the Indian nation in his conception of its history and identity, but instead faces the complex issues head on – even utilizing the same terms, phrases, and ideas as Savarkar, only to present a completely opposing view. The ideas of heritage and

¹³⁹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁴⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarvepalli Gopal, and Uma Iyengar, *The Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru* 2 vols. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), vol. 1, 13.

inheritance are equally as important to Nehru as they are to Savarkar, but unlike his radical counterpart, Nehru stresses the ways in which the disparate pieces and members of the Indian past and present make her a stronger unified whole. He writes optimistically of a future where Indians can embrace all aspects of their nation's past and appreciate the shared inheritance – regardless of religion. In a statement which perfectly spells out this optimism, he states: “But India will carry on, as she has done for countless ages, and forge yet another synthesis between the past and present and between the varied elements that go to make her.”¹⁴¹

Savarkar and the RSS

Though a large portion of this thesis has been devoted to exactly what Savarkar's vision of Hindutva was, it may be helpful – here – to take a closer look at implications of this ideology, both religious and/or secular. When contrasted directly with Nehru's views, Savarkar does seem extremely religious. However, as author Aparna Devare makes clear in *History and the Making of a Modern Hindu Self*, the issue is much more complex. Devare addresses Savarkar's ideology from a different point of view than the majority of scholars have – focusing on his use and perception of history in the creation of a modern India. Along the way, she notes that though he was far from “secular” as most of us would understand the word, Savarkar also distanced himself from “religion” in the most common sense. Devare writes: “...[Savarkar] relegated religion entirely to the realm of the historical and the secular. Religion had no living basis for him except as a political ideology, shorn of all its

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 14.

spirituality or transcendental qualities... The 'Hindu nation' is a profoundly secular category, but holds the outer shell of a religious identity."¹⁴²

Indeed, it is this strange juxtaposition of the secular and religious in Savarkar's view of Hindutva that separated him so distinctly from the majority of his contemporaries. As noted above, neither Gandhi nor Nehru could find common ground with the idea of an India that was exclusionary towards a large portion of its population. However, even in the right-wing Hindu Nationalist groups, Savarkar was often ignored or his ideas cherry-picked – leaving out those aspects that were too controversial, or, perhaps, not controversial enough.

In 1937, Savarkar became president of the Hindu Mahasabha – the political arm of the Hindu Nationalist Movement. Though the Mahasabha never actually gained much political power, Savarkar – during his time at its head – made an effort to match the influence of the Congress and the Muslim League. Despite his involvement in the politics of Hindutva and the Mahasabha, however, Savarkar was notably absent from membership of the RSS – the cultural wing of the Hindu Nationalist Movement. Although his ideas are often linked with RSS ideology, Savarkar never became officially affiliated with the group. The reasoning behind this, according to scholars Walter Andersen and Shridhar Damle, has to do with both an ideological divide and a petty personal dispute between Savarkar and the RSS. As Anderson and Damle note, Savarkar was quite close with the original founder of the RSS, K.B. Hedgewar, and when Hedgewar began developing the ideas which led to the foundation of the cultural organization, he was heavily influenced by Savarkar's

¹⁴² Aparna Devare, *History and the Making of a Modern Hindu Self* (New York; New Delhi; London: Routledge, 2011), 9.

*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*¹⁴³ From the beginning, however, Savarkar and Hedgewar disagreed about the stance of the RSS. While Hedgewar staunchly maintained the organization as purely cultural, Savarkar openly criticized its members for avoiding political issues and refusing to ally openly with the Mahasabha. As Anderson and Damle write: “Neither Hedgewar nor his successor wanted the RSS to be closely associated with a group whose political activities would place the RSS in direct opposition to the Congress.”¹⁴⁴ The rift between Savarkar and the RSS deepened after Hedgewar’s death, when M.S. Golwalkar rose as the new leader of the organization. According to Anderson and Damle, “Both [Savarkar and Golwalkar] were apprehensive regarding the other’s role in the Hindu unification movement. Savarkar did not appreciate Golwalkar’s saintly style, and Golwalkar had reservations about Savarkar’s unwillingness to compromise.”¹⁴⁵ The conflict between these two men was undoubtedly significant in shaping the paths of their two organizations, and it therefore warrants further discussion.

In the *Lost Years of the RSS*, Sanjeev Kelkar, too, discusses the relationship between Savarkar and Golwalkar, echoing and furthering the argument made by Anderson and Damle. It is important to note that Kelkar, himself, was a lifelong member of the RSS – a fact which both adds to the authenticity of his interpretations and also perhaps detracts, slightly, from his credibility as an unbiased scholar on the subject. Regardless, he provides one of the few in-depth analyses of the RSS, and his

¹⁴³ Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 33.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

insights are valuable when coupled with such works as *Brotherhood in Saffron*. In *Lost Years*, Kelkar makes it clear that Savarkar was never fully accepted into the RSS as an ideological leader, largely because of the disputes mentioned above. In his discussion of Golwalkar as leader of the organization, Kelkar also notes that Golwalkar once gave a statement, making "...amply clear the difference between his [Savarkar's] brand of Hindutva and the RSS brand."¹⁴⁶ Clearly, during his period as head of the RSS, Golwalkar was attempting to distance himself from Savarkar. This fact becomes all the more interesting when one takes into account the extremism of Golwalkar's own ideas.

In *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, Golwalkar's most famous text, the author develops a number of very radical opinions, including such quotes as:

... the non-Hindu peoples in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language... must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture... or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen's rights.¹⁴⁷

Even Savarkar never went so far as to make such statements denying citizen's rights to non-Hindus. Indeed, it might be argued that Golwalkar was more openly radical and anti-Muslim than Savarkar ever became. It is particularly interesting, therefore, that *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* became the recognized tract of the RSS, rather than *Hindutva*. Clearly the difference between the two works - and, indeed, the two men – lay in Savarkar's decidedly political tilt, as opposed to Golwalkar's unwavering dedication to the cultural side of the movement. It makes sense that the

¹⁴⁶ Kelkar, *Lost Years of the R.S.S.* , 40.

¹⁴⁷ M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 3rd ed. (Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1945), 52-53.

RSS would distance itself from men such as Savarkar if the group became concerned about the image it projected to the public. Regardless, it is fascinating the Golwalkar has become inextricably linked with the foundation of the RSS, while Savarkar has been relegated to the sidelines of a movement based largely on his framework and rhetoric if not his ideas.

Savarkar's Legacy – Part One

As noted above, Savarkar's absence from the RSS in the decades after his release from prison is puzzling but not inexplicable. Beginning in 1937, he became entrenched in the Hindu Mahasabha, and spent the next decade attempting to bring it to the main stage of Indian politics. Despite Savarkar's best efforts, however, the 1930's and 40's were dominated by the National Congress, which managed to maintain popular support largely through the emblematic figure and unmatched political maneuvering of Gandhi. The death knell of Savarkar's political career was the murder of Gandhi in 1948, for which he was arrested and placed on trial. Despite numerous and damning ties that were revealed between himself and Nathuram Godse, the assassin, Savarkar was acquitted in February 1949. Even after his acquittal, however, Savarkar's image never recovered from the implication, and – to this day – his memory is inextricably linked with the notorious event.

V.D. Savarkar died in 1966 with little to show for his decades of political and cultural work. After the assassination of Gandhi in 1948, the RSS was banned and the Hindu Mahasabha suffered an extreme marginalization. It was in this period that Syama Prasad Mookerjee – previously a leader of the Mahasbha – led a group of

followers to found a competing Hindu Nationalist party – the Jana Sangh. Between 1951-1977, it was the Jana Sangh rather than the Hindu Mahasabha that served as the political arm of the Hindu Nationalists and the RSS. Still, backlash against Savarkar and his fellow Hindu Nationalists after Gandhi's death was too extreme to allow for the great success of any party affiliated with Hindutva ideology. As a result, the Congress Party gained massive support in the aftermath of the assassination, and its monopoly on power held true for the next few decades.

In an unsurprising chain of events, Jawaharlal Nehru became India's first prime minister in 1947, and was followed after his death by his daughter Indira Gandhi. In fact, the reign of the Congress Party lasted, uninterrupted, until 1977, when the Janata Party – a weak coalition of opposition parties, including the Jana Sangh – defeated Indira Gandhi in the general elections. These 1977 elections followed the period of Emergency which was declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975 to combat widespread strikes and protests against the Congress party government. It was under the Emergency that the RSS was banned, for the second time, once again dealing a major setback to Hindu Nationalists.

Following another decade of turbulent political changes, the Hindu Nationalist movement, under the new BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) rose to the fore in the 1990's. The BJP grew out of the Mookerjee's Jana Sangh party, after the coalition and then split of the Janata Party in 1980. By the early 1990's, the unbroken reign of the Congress Party was coming to an end, and space appeared in the political arena for competition from outside groups. Seizing the opportunity, the BJP – led by such figures as L.K. Advani – began attempting to garner support based on a very different

platform from that of the secular Congress party. As Jim Masselos notes in his work *Indian Nationalism: A History*:

As the dust settled at the end of 1990 it revealed an altered political terrain. Communalism had entered the immediate political agenda; the national consensus over Congress-style secularism was under severe challenge; and a new Hindu nationalism drawing on Savarkar's ideas of Hindutva, the Hinduness of the Indian territory and of those who lived in it, was firmly placed in the political limelight.¹⁴⁸

Indeed, this period marked the re-emergence of Savarkar and his ideas which, to a large extent, had not gained much notoriety during his lifetime, but it also interesting that in the above quote Masselos makes no distinction between the idea of Hindutva actually propagated by Savarkar, and that appropriated by people such as Golwalkar for use by the RSS and other Hindu Nationalist organizations.

While Masselos is certainly not alone in his use of Savarkar as a symbol more than anything else, he takes the trend to such an extreme that he provides a perfect example for discussion. In fact, despite the emphasis that he places on "Savarkar's ideas of Hindutva" in this instance, Masselos fails to mention Savarkar at any other point in the three hundred pages which make up *Indian Nationalism: A History*. Certainly, Savarkar is less important than many other figures, but it is also unquestionably true that he and his treatise played a major role in the development of a national consciousness during the formative years of the 1920's and 30's. By comparison, Bal Gangadhar Tilak appears on no fewer than nineteen pages within Masselos' work. Somehow, even in the entire chapter devoted to "Hindu Militancy and Extremist Politics," Savarkar manages to be completely excluded. The one

¹⁴⁸ Jim Masselos, *Indian Nationalism: An History*, 5th ed. (New Delhi: New Dawn Press, 2005), 264.

mention of his name and ideology, from the quote at the beginning of this paragraph, actually appears in the final chapter – “Into a New Century.” My discussion here is not intended as a critical review of Masselos’ *Indian Nationalism*, but rather as a way of highlighting the position that Savarkar has adopted in much of modern scholarship on India in the first half of the 20th century. Masselos’ flippant use of Savarkar’s name without any investigation into the complexity of his ideas is emblematic of the way Savarkar has, to a large extent, been utilized in recent decades by scholars who name-drop him and his famous work purely as a seemingly perfect example of “Hindu Right Wing Extremist.”¹⁴⁹

Savarkar’s Legacy – Part Two

Without a doubt, in the thirty years between his death and the re-birth of the Hindu Nationalist movement – in the form of the BJP – Savarkar’s image underwent a massive change. During his lifetime Savarkar was associated most strongly with his time as a young freedom fighter, and then later as president of the Mahasabha and possible accomplice in the murder of Gandhi. The importance of his tract, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* was largely overshadowed by other, more public, aspects of his life.

¹⁴⁹ For more examples of this type of usage, see: Barbara Daly Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). and Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994). Metcalf and Metcalf reference Savarkar in only one place, under the telling section heading “The Hindu Right and the Assassination of Gandhi.” By comparison, Tilak’s name appears on ten separate pages. Similarly, van der Veer references Savarkar – largely in passing – on only four pages. Gandhi and Nehru, however, appear on thirty-three and eight pages, respectively. It is particularly notable, here, that Nehru appears more times than Savarkar in a book titled *Religious Nationalism*, despite Nehru’s being a staunch secularist.

Since 1990, however, the ideas of Hindutva have re-emerged more prominently than ever, and Savarkar is being recognized far more widely for his work. In fact, there have been new editions of *Hindutva* published every two years since 1999, an indicator of the continued relevance and popularity of the tract.

Certainly, there are numerous detractors in Indian society, even today, who openly criticize Savarkar for either his radical ideas or his ties to Gandhi's death. The views of these people are apparent in newspapers ranging from *Economic and Political Weekly* to *The Hindu*.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps more significant, however, are the supporters of Savarkar – including two recent prime ministers. In 2003, BJP prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee unveiled a portrait of Savarkar in the Central Hall of Parliament.¹⁵¹ The portrait – which sits directly across from that of Gandhi – has raised a great deal of controversy since its installation, but it stands as an indication of Savarkar's rising prominence in today's Indian politics.

Indeed, Narendra Modi, the recently elected prime minister, was noted in 2014 for paying homage to the portrait in the Parliament Hall on Savarkar's birthday. Modi, a BJP candidate who bears close ties to the RSS (he joined the group as a child), has raised Savarkar's public profile in a number of ways since entering the political scene. "In 2008, Mr. Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat, inaugurated a website (Savarkar.org) that promotes a man 'largely unknown to the masses because of the vicious propaganda against him and misunderstanding around him that has

¹⁵⁰ See: Sukla; Ram Sen, P.R.; Mehta, Uday; Engineer, Irfan; Bin Saif, Asad, "Savarkar Memorial," *Economic & Political Weekly* 33, no. 52 (1999). and Suchitra Vijayan, "Rewriting the Nation State" *The Hindu* March 17, 2015.

¹⁵¹ "Savarkar Portrait Unveiled," *ibid.* Feb. 27, 2003.

been created over several decades.”¹⁵² In addition, it is significant that Modi has made little attempt to distance himself even from the more controversial aspects of Savarkar’s ideology. Though he, himself, has made a number of inclusive statements wooing non-Hindus throughout India, he has also not made any attempts to discipline members of his party who have made far more pointedly exclusionary statements. This point was raised in an opinion piece from *The Caravan* last year, which cites a statement made in August by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat: “Hindustan is a Hindu nation. Hindutva is the identity of our nation. There are different communities in it. And such is its strength that it can incorporate these other communities in itself.”¹⁵³ The fact that this statement drew no criticism from Modi has angered many Indian who perceive the prime minister as slowly moving the nation towards the ideas of Hindutva, and away from the secularism it has embraced for the past seven decades.

It seems likely that such fears are unfounded, given Modi’s actions so far in office. In public, he has certainly steered clear of controversial issues and instead focused on his economic promises. However, Modi’s simple acknowledgement of Savarkar’s significance in the nation’s development cannot be discounted. And, leaving aside the man, himself, the term “Hindutva” has seen a dramatic increase in usage over the last two decades.¹⁵⁴ It is a word which has mutated and taken on a life of its own since Savarkar first made it famous in 1923. In fact, Hindutva, today, no longer connotes the same meaning that it did when it was first introduced in

¹⁵² “The Man Who Thought Gandhi a Sissy: The Controversial Mentor of the Hindu Right,” *The Economist* Dec. 20, 2014.

¹⁵³ Hartosh Singh Bal, “Hindutva’s Head of State,” *The Caravan* (October 1, 2014).

¹⁵⁴ See the Google Ngram chart included in the Preface to this thesis.

Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? Instead, it has become a blanket term for the “communal agenda” of the BJP and, to a greater extent, the RSS – particularly as understood by Golwalkar. Perhaps the specifics of Hindutva no longer seem important when dwarfed by the massive implications of a program which would exclude non-Hindus from the Indian identity. But to ignore the details is to do a dis-service to the legacy of Savarkar, a man who spent a decade in jail developing a complex ideology in which he believed deeply.

Conclusion:

The question of national identity in India has perhaps never been more pressing than it is now, with issues of religion and politics causing controversy almost daily worldwide. India is the world's largest democracy, with a widely diverse population. However, it is exactly its size and diversity that have caused so many issues for the country historically, and many of these issues remain at the forefront of national and global politics as we move through the 21st century. Although Muslims and Hindus have coexisted, and even overlapped, in India for over one thousand years, the divide between the two groups has never been completely overcome, and it is this question – perhaps more than any other – that poses the greatest threat to a cohesive Indian national identity.

In the years leading up to Indian independence, and the eventual Partition which created Pakistan, many of the pre-eminent scholars and political leaders in India were grappling with these questions of identity and what it means to be an “Indian.” Like many of his counterparts, V.D. Savarkar made an attempt to put his own ideas on these issues down on paper – an effort which resulted in the publication of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* in 1923. As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis, *Hindutva* is a work which has often been overlooked or oversimplified by scholars addressing the first half of the 20th century in Indian

political and ideological thought. Because of the rather controversial aspects of his personality, Savarkar has too often been relegated to a historical footnote, overshadowed by his more prominent contemporaries such as Tilak, Nehru, and Gandhi. However, in order to truly understand the evolution of various strains of Indian national identity over the past six decades, especially in the iteration currently being formulated by Narendra Modi and the BJP government, it is essential to have a grasp of the ideology put forth by Savarkar in *Hindutva*. As shown in my introduction, use of the term “Hindutva” in English-language publications has drastically increased in the years since 1990, demonstrating the rising prominence of both the idea, itself, and of Hindu nationalist groups such as the BJP and RSS.

However, the fact that use of the word “Savarkar” has not increased as drastically over the same period also demonstrates that the term “Hindutva” has taken on a life of its own, being appropriated by various groups and individuals for specific aims that do not necessarily stay true to the intentions of Savarkar. Because of this recent trend, and the general lack of scholarship surrounding Savarkar and his treatise, I have attempted – in this thesis – to create a truer and more complete picture of the thought behind *Hindutva* and the intentions of its author.

Territoriality Revisited

I have argued in this thesis that *Hindutva* is not simply a religious text. Although it is impossible to dispute that Hindutva is – to some degree – an ideology of religious nationalism, the complexity of the concept requires us to dig deeper to understand a debate that appears both within Savarkar’s work, and within India, as a whole. This is

the ongoing debate between religious and secular nationalism, an issue addressed most prominently by Peter van der Veer in his work, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*.¹⁵⁵ As van der Veer notes, “Nationalism has a very urgent and contradictory need to show, in a historical account, that the nation has always existed...,” a fact which he ties to the controversy surrounding various Indian religious sites, especially Ayodhya.¹⁵⁶ This need to demonstrate a historical basis for nationalism ties directly into the religious-secular debate, as well as the work of Savarkar. *Hindutva* is, perhaps more than anything else, an effort to write a history of India that link the territory of the subcontinent inextricably to the Hindu people – at the risk of excluding all other groups. Throughout the entirety of the text, Savarkar makes constant reference to the physical landscape of India – its rivers and mountains, especially – both to demonstrate the natural boundaries that demarcate the country, and to emphasize the spiritual connection between the land and her people.

This type of connection is hardly unique to Savarkar, alone; the Hindu understanding of religion has long been tied to the ideas of sacred spaces or territories. As van der Veer discusses in his section on “Pilgrimage,” “A large part of the subcontinent is interconnected by clusters of pilgrimage centers [for Hindus.] There is a verse in many Sanskrit texts enumerating ‘seven cities that grant release.’”¹⁵⁷ As he goes on to note, each of these cities is associated with a particular god and a particular sacred event – for instance, Ayodhya is the reputed birthplace of

¹⁵⁵ Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, xii-xiii.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

Rama. Because the seven sacred cities are spread across the entire subcontinent, Hindus have – for hundreds of years – been traversing the same paths on pilgrimage. Therefore, “coupled with trade and migration, pilgrimage must have contributed to a precolonial sense of the “sacred geography” of Hindu India.”¹⁵⁸

Despite his staunch atheism, then, there is no doubt that Savarkar was heavily influenced by the longstanding links between Hinduism and the sacred spaces of India. In *Hindutva*, he attempted to take many of the same ideas and reformulate them into a conception of Hindu identity that was less religious and more historically based. His use of sacred texts such as the *Rigveda* to craft a “factual” history of India is indicative of this somewhat naïve or misdirected effort. It is the same failure to completely disconnect *Hindutva* from religious Hinduism, however, which sets Savarkar apart from other intellectuals of his period. *Hindutva* is a concerted attempt to craft a conception of Indian identity that was, before 1923, completely unheard of. Certainly, it would be almost impossible to describe the tract as “secular,” but at the same time – as I have argued throughout this thesis – it is also a mistake to categorize it as religious. Rather, *Hindutva* is the conceptualization of a type of Indian identity distinct from religion, but centered on the cultural and historical aspects of being a Hindu. It suggests a new and unfamiliar departure from traditional religious nationalism, but maintains – at the same time – the ancient traditions which link Hindus with the territory of India.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 122.

A New Vision of Savarkar

In light of the foregoing, the recent elevation of Savarkar among the leadership of the BJP merits close scrutiny. Narendra Modi and the new BJP government have been facing a great deal of scrutiny since taking control in the 2014 elections, driven by an ongoing concern among Indians about the role of religion in politics, and especially the question of whether a non-secular political agenda might alienate the nation's minorities. Given such concerns, as well as the rising prominence accorded Savarkar by Modi and his government in recent years, it makes sense to consider the possibility that Savarkar is being rebranded by the Hindu right as a more moderate figurehead.

As discussed in Chapter Four of my thesis, it is K.B. Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar who are viewed as the traditional ideological father-figures of the Hindu nationalist movement. Golwalkar, especially, has been idolized as the author of the favored RSS tract, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*. However, as I noted in my previous discussion of the RSS, this text holds a number of statements that are more radical than anything written by Savarkar in *Hindutva*. Indeed, many scholars acknowledge the openness with which Golwalkar idolized Nazi Germany and Hitler's political style. As Christophe Jaffrelot notes in his discussion linking Golwalkar with the ideas of fascist Germany, "Even more obviously than Savarkar's *Hindutva*, it [*We, or Our Nationhood Defined*] reveals the strategy of stigmatization and emulation of 'threatening Others' at work."¹⁵⁹ And indeed, within *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* there is a section where Golwalkar glorifies the purging of the

¹⁵⁹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 52.

Jews, claiming that Germany represents “race pride at its highest.”¹⁶⁰ This un-ironic admiration of Hitler and his deeply disturbing policies is shocking, and coupled with the blatantly exclusionary statements quoted in the previous chapter of this thesis, paint a picture of Golwalkar that hardly makes him an appealing icon for a national government.

Certainly, Savarkar is not without his own blemishes – some of the statements made during his speeches as president of the Hindu Mahasabha were unequivocally exclusionary. The difference between him and Golwalkar, however, lies in the disparities between the two men’s ideological tracts. Modi and the BJP can adopt Savarkar’s *Hindutva* without fear of condoning the actions of fascist Germany or blatantly excluding non-Hindus from a nationalist conception of India. The reality is that the BJP has no spotless figurehead to rely on – the past of the Hindu nationalist movement is riddled with controversy. By returning to the roots of the ideology upon which so much of the BJP and RSS belief system is based, Modi and his government can at least claim an attempt to step away from the most extremist aspects of the movement. After all, as I have argued over the past one hundred pages, *Hindutva* represents no more than an ardent attempt to establish a cohesive national identity based on shared history, culture, and – most importantly – territory. When read closely, it can form the basis for construction of a type of nationalism far more inclusive than that put forth by more radical figures such as Golwalkar.

¹⁶⁰ M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 3rd ed. (Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1945), 40-41.

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