



SWATANTRYAVEER VINAYAK  
DAMODAR SAVARKAR



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Swatantryaveer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was a valiant freedom fighter, an enthusiastic social reformer, a prolific writer, an eloquent orator and a devout nationalist.

Shri Savarkar was born on 28 May 1883 in a middle-class family at Bhagur, a village near Nasik in Maharashtra. He joined the village school at the age of six and grew up listening to passages read out by his father from the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and Ballads and *Bakhars* on the nationalist leaders. An inborn genius that he was, Savarkar had a rare talent in poetry and his poems were published by well-known newspapers when he was hardly ten years old.

Even as a young boy, Vinayak was conscious of the sufferings of the people. He was emotionally stirred by the miseries caused by famine and plague. To add to this was the harsh treatment and excesses committed by the British rule. In such an atmosphere, young Savarkar felt very disturbed. He took a vow of sacrificing his nearest and dearest, to fulfil the incomplete mission of the martyrs to make India free by driving out the British from his Motherland. In 1899, when he was just 16 years old, Savarkar formed *Mitra Mela*, a group whose principal aim was to attain the complete political independence of India. The name of the group was later changed to *Abhinava Bharat*.

Savarkar left for London in 1906 and continued his mission there also. The same year, he started the *Free India Society*. According to him, the struggle for the liberation of the Motherland should necessarily include the teachings of *Swadeshi* and boycott of foreign goods; imparting national education and creating a revolutionary spirit; and inculcating the spirit of patriotism into the ranks of the military forces. A resolution demanding *Swaraj* was unanimously passed at a Conference held in December 1908. At the same Conference, Turkestan was congratulated for becoming a Republic.

Savarkar was among the first Indian leaders who realized the importance of international support for

India's freedom struggle. The Indian revolutionaries of *Abhinava Bharat* were in constant touch with the revolutionary forces of Russia, Ireland, Egypt and China. Savarkar wrote articles on Indian affairs in the *Gaelic America* of New York, got them translated and published in French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Russian languages.

Alongside his political work, Savarkar pursued his academic career as well. Though Savarkar passed the final examination of the Gray's Inn, the Benchers of the Inn refused to call Savarkar to the Bar. They wanted him to give a written undertaking that he would never participate in politics. Savarkar rejected their offer. Savarkar's activities finally led to his arrest in March 1910. While he was being extradited to India, the engine of his ship developed trouble and had to anchor at Marseilles in France. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Savarkar made two attempts to scale out but failed. He ultimately squeezed himself out of the port-hole of the water closet and made his famous escape. He touched the shore at Marseilles with a view to securing the protection of the French law. However, in the hot pursuit, the English guards caught him and brought him back to the ship. At the young age of 27, he was sentenced to two transportations for life and imprisoned in the Andamans. The life in prison (1911-1924) was one of untold hardships. He was yoked to the oil-mill like a bullock and was not even given more than a certain quantity of water. His health deteriorated fast due to the harsh treatment meted out to him and he was soon reduced to a skeleton.

After his release from jail in 1924, Savarkar took up the task of social reform with full earnestness. He waged a war against casteism and untouchability and fervently wrote against the taboos regarding inter-caste marriages, sea-crossing and re-conversion. He was able to ensure just, civic, humane and legitimate rights for the 'untouchable' children and made them sit along with upper caste Hindu children in public schools. Savarkar whole-heartedly supported Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's struggle for liberation of the 'untouchables'.

Savarkar was elected President of the Hindu Mahasabha at its Ahmedabad Session in 1937. For five successive years thereafter, he presided over the Mahasabha Sessions. With Independence round the corner, he vehemently spoke against partition. Savarkar's vision of India was one in which all citizens would have equal rights and obligations

irrespective of caste, creed, race or religion, provided they avow and owe an exclusive allegiance to the State. All minorities were to be given effective safeguards to protect their language, religion, culture etc. Further, the fundamental rights of freedom of speech, of conscience, of worship, of association, etc. were to be enjoyed by all citizens alike. In the event of imposition of any restriction, the interest of public peace and order or national emergency would be the guiding principle. There would be joint electorates and 'one-man-one-vote' would be the general rule. Services would go by merit alone. Primary education would be free and compulsory. *Nagari* would be the national script, Hindi, the *lingua franca* and Sanskrit, the *Devabhasha*.

Savarkar realized the importance of the economy and suggested a few broad principles of economic policy which *inter alia* included making efforts to reinvigorate the peasantry, the working class and the villages; nationalization of some of the key industries or manufactures, and steps to be taken by the State to protect national industries against foreign competition.

Savarkar's literary works were marked with vigour, sublimity and idealism. Being deeply influenced by the philosophy of Guiseppe Mazzini, Savarkar translated his autobiography into Marathi, which, however, remained proscribed for forty years. In the absence of any writing material, in Cellular Jail in the Andamans, he etched his poems on the walls of his cell. The collection of his poems is aptly named as *Wild Flowers*. Though complete in themselves, *Kamala*, *Gomantak*, *Saptarshi*, *Virahochhvas* and *Mahasagara* are parts of the incomplete epic. His other poems, *Chain*, *Cell*, *Chariot Festival of Lord Jagannath*, *Oh Sleep* and *On Death Bed* have a philosophical basis.

Savarkar's renowned works, *Hindutva* and *Hindu Pad Padashahi* were written in Ratnagiri jail under his pen-name *Mahratta*. The book defines the principles of Hindu nationalism at length. Another book, *The First Indian War of Independence, 1857* written by him earlier in London in 1907-1908 became the source of inspiration for many revolutionaries. *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History* has nearly a thousand references. He also wrote *My Transportation for Life*, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan* and *An Echo from Andamans*. One of Savarkar's notable contributions was that he introduced blank verse metre *Vainayak* into Marathi poetry. He also launched the movement for the purification of the Marathi language.

Towards the later years of his life, Savarkar's health deteriorated fast and he was confined to bed. On 3 February 1966, he began his fast unto death. To the surprise of doctors, he survived for twenty-two days with little or no medicine, taking only five or six tea-spoonfuls of water every day. Ultimately, on 26 February 1966, at the age of 83, he breathed his last.

In his tributes on the passing away of Veer Savarkar, the then President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said that Savarkar was "a steady and sturdy worker for the Independence of our country, his career was for many a youngster a legendary one".

The then Vice-President Dr. Zakir Husain, in his tributes to Veer Savarkar, said: "A great revolutionary as he was, he inspired many young men to work for the liberation of our Motherland".

Paying rich tributes to Savarkar, the then Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi called Savarkar a great figure of contemporary India whose name was by-word for daring and patriotism. He was cast in the mould of a classic revolutionary and countless people drew inspiration from him.