

Veer Savarkar: A true Patriot, Author, and the Man beyond the Mercy Petitions

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Abstract

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is one of the most misunderstood people in Indian independence history. His role as a revolutionary and author of several important historical writings is widely regarded as having received insufficient appreciation in Indian history. His identity as a freedom fighter has been widely contested, owing to the several pleas he sent to British officials while imprisoned in the Andaman and Nicobar islands' cellulars jail. This paper is an attempt to discuss his role in the revolutionary movement, his sufferings as well as experiences as a political prisoner of the British regime, his persona, his daunting spirit, and his authorship of several motivational historical works for the youth of India to serve the cause of the Indian Freedom Movement to analyse and re-narrate the politics surrounding his mercy petitions.

Key Words- Veer Savarkar, life sketch, revolutionary, mercy petitions, author, contribution.

Introduction

The freedom struggle of India is considered one of the most prominent epochs of Indian history. However, it was a composite movement comprising diverse streams of thoughts that converged to give it its final form just as the holy Ganges is a final product of its diverse tributaries merging at different points. One such stream of thought was the revolutionary thought which advocated the use of force to counteract the brutal force of imperialism. One of the foremost advocates of this line of thought was the daring, multidimensional patriot, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. He was one of the pioneers who introduced the idea of an armed revolution for the attainment of freedom for his motherland. He not only initiated various revolutionary acts but also played the role of a very prolific writer and thinker. He used history writing as an instrument to awaken the Indian youth with the awareness of their glorious past. He also wanted to motivate and instill in them a sense of self-confidence, pride, and self-identity. He considered the knowledge of Indian history and heritage essential for the youth to develop a better understanding of the present and to motivate them

so that they would strive for a better future. In his own words, “There is no future for a nation that is unaware of its past. A nation's capacity to claim a past, as well as to know how to use it for the benefit of the future, must be developed as well.”. [1]

By the later half of the nineteenth century, the autocratic British rule in India had taken firm roots. It severely damaged the socio-economic fabric of India. The repressive and dictatorial practices of the British government in India led to widespread discontentment, especially among the Indian youth. This led to the emergence of a new ideology among the restless young generation during the later half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century which supported the use of force to achieve their objective. The outcome of this ideology was the springing up of various secret organizations to uproot autocratic colonial rule. They had to face various hardships in carrying out the activities of these organizations due to the all-pervasive government intelligence. They had to work with utmost secrecy due to which they faced great difficulties in mobilizing finances and other resources for their cause. They also had to face the challenges posed by the traitors within their rank and file. Despite being aware of their fate at being caught, they kept on indulging in their revolutionary acts with missionary zeal. Some prominent revolutionary organizations of the period were Abhinav Bharat, Anushilan Samiti, Vyayam Mandal, etc. One of the most prominent names associated with Abhinav Bharat was the daring firebrand revolutionary, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, popularly known as Veer Savarkar, a title that justifies his courage and his indomitable spirit to serve the cause of his beloved motherland.

The dictatorial colonial regime considered all the revolutionary activities as an open challenge to their might and authority and left no stone unturned to suppress them to nip the challenge in the bud. The revolutionaries were dealt with the most brutal force and all the records and documents connected with them were confiscated and destroyed. Their motive behind this was to prevent the revolutionary thought from being contagious among the volatile youth and to check it from taking the form of a conflagration that might have shaken their colonial foundations.

One of the most damaging outcomes of this policy was that the roles of several great patriots who made the highest sacrifice for their motherland were eliminated from the annals of history. Even if there is some available information it is very limited and undocumented in which the role of the Indian revolutionaries has been underplayed. We can call them the unsung heroes of Indian history. V.D. Savarkar is one of such luminaries of Indian history. Despite playing a very pioneering role in the revolutionary movement, unfortunately, he has not been accorded the due place in the history of the Indian freedom struggle due to the suppressive policy of the authoritative colonial British regime and also by the Congress-led

Governments of independent India who branded him a coward and a traitor until the BJP led Governments resurrected him from obscurity in the mid-1980s.

Fortunately, since him being a prolific writer, a lot of his written works are easily accessible to the students of history in particular and the Indian citizens in general. His writings give an insight into his ideology and persona. The objective of this paper is to achieve a better understanding of the eminent patriot and bring to light the actions and agenda that he had in his mind for navigating the freedom movement and dispel the various myths surrounding him due to misunderstanding of his life and ideas.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was born near Nasik in Maharashtra to Damodar Pant Savarkar and Radhabai. (2) From the very beginning, he had a revolutionary bent of mind. At a very young age (around eleven years, 1894), he organized a group of young children called "Vanarsena", the aim of which was to make them physically and mentally strong. As he grew older he was strongly imbued with the feeling of nationalism. He considered the great revolutionary leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak to be his Guru. With his inspiration, he organized "Ganesh and Shivaji Utsav" to propagate his nationalistic ideas among the youth. It was during his study at Fergusson college in Pune that he got the opportunity to mature as a leader and instill the idea of nationalism among his fellow youth. He founded the "Abhinav Bharat Society" in 1904 for this purpose. All the activities of this society were conducted in secret as the British had banned all kinds of political activities. Due to his radical thoughts and actions, he was expelled from the college but as he was a bright student who managed to get the prestigious Shivaji scholarship he was felicitated to proceed to London for the study of Law. (3)

Though he went abroad for further studies, his primary motive remained the motivation of the youth of his motherland. His scholarly urges also found fertile ground for expression as he was able to access the vast and rich India Office library. The merger of his patriotic and scholarly passion resulted in the authoring of his most prominent work "The Indian War of Independence 1857" in 1907 when he was still a youth of 23 years.

While most colonial historians interpreted the great revolution of 1857 as a mere sepoy mutiny, Savarkar refuted this claim and termed it the "first Indian War of independence". He claimed that "an author, Indian or foreign, has never recounted the history of the massive upheaval that occurred in 1857 in such a methodical manner". (4)

Unlike most historians who viewed it subjectively, Savarkar's approach was scientific and rational. He wanted to write history objectively and not as a eulogy. According to him "The past can only be used to understand the present and prepare for the future if it is comprehended rationally and objectively. Otherwise, one might as well be living in a fool's

paradise”.(5) His rational study of the events of 1857 convinced him that the revolution of 1857 was national in nature and scope. With these facts to support his claim, he urged his countrymen to draw inspiration from it and strive continuously for attaining freedom for their motherland. He exhorted: “We take up your cry, honour your flag, and are determined to carry on your ferocious mission of away with the foreigner, which you declared amidst the prophetic thunder of the revolutionary struggle.”.(6)

However, he had to endure a lot of mental and physical hardship to accomplish the task. He had to carry out this work in the most secret manner as the British regime was very suspicious of him due to his fiery speeches filled with patriotic fervor. The original draft of the book was in Marathi yet the greatest hardship faced was in getting his work published. Through his fiery speeches, the British Government got a whiff of the revolutionary nature of his work and therefore took drastic steps to check its publication in England. With great difficulty, it was transported to India but in India too due to the strict vigilance of the British intelligence, it could not be published. According to a Bombay official of the Home Department who had only been able to obtain the first chapter, "Swarajya and Swadharma," of this nearly 470-page book, “each page reeking of the most venomous language, with quotations from English authors depicting the most heartbreaking terrible scenarios, and so on.”(7) Despite these odds, Savarkar did not lose faith, however, his attempts to have the work published in Germany and France were equally unsuccessful, and it was eventually covertly published in the Netherlands in 1909. (8) The book was then smuggled to India, where it caused a stir among readers.

The Great conflagration of 1857 was a turning point in Indian history, but the British attempted to misrepresent the facts and put them in a biased light. The revolution included practically every segment of Indian society, including kings, commoners, agriculturists, warriors, men, women, and important religious groups such as Hindus and Muslims. Even though the revolt threatened the very foundations of the great British Empire, the British attempted to downplay it by labeling it a minor sepoy insurrection. They also tried to keep many facts about the rebellion hidden, and this colonial version of history was passed down the centuries. Finally, it was Veer Savarkar's essay, "The Indian War of Independence 1857," that took up the task of putting historical events into proper context. He went into the job with a variety of goals in mind. First and foremost, he saw history as a tool for educating the country's youth about the country's wonderful past and legacy, and second, he sought to fight the erroneous narrative of Indian history that was being used in a plot to undermine Indians' self-confidence. His goal was to refute the different falsehoods about this key event that had been perpetuated by colonial historians. He also wanted the youth to grasp the flaws that

contributed to the revolt's failure so that they might learn from it and develop a more comprehensive strategy for the liberation struggle to prevail in the end.

He expressed the idea that history is more than a collection of random facts and events in the opening of his magnum opus. To churn out the ultimate truth and provide a larger and more vivid image, one must delve beyond the physical and technical elements. He asked his fellow citizens to put the numerous facts and events into context.

The aggressive and deceptive colonial expansion under different British Governor Generals, according to Savarkar, was one of the key causes of the revolt. He also faulted the British racial supremacy mindset for remaining aloof and heaping the most severe humiliation and condemnation on the Indians, which was a major blow to their self-respect and confidence. The severe economic exploitation of the Indian populace wrecked the economy and nearly bankrupted the world's most rich nation. These many circumstances had a significant impact on the Indians, causing a wave of widespread discontent that eventually erupted into an insurrection. Savarkar, filled with patriotic zeal, decided to investigate the true causes and character of the rebellion after researching the relevant materials at the India Office library to learn more about the so-called Indian Mutiny. (9) From the study materials, he found that the enigma about the mutiny was that it was a regular war of princes and people to turn the British out of India. The use of greased cartridges was only the immediate cause of the explosion-the materials for the war which lasted three years have accumulated since the battle of Plassey. (10) Therefore, he debunked the imperialist concept that the use of greased cartridges was the primary cause of the rebellion. He said that the Indian sepoys were driven by "swaraj and swadharma" ideals. (11)

When the 19th and 34th regiments at Barrackpore were disbanded after Mangal Pandey's martyrdom, their taking a dip in the holy Ganges to cleanse themselves of the sins committed while under British slavery and keeping the uniform caps they had purchased with their own money was highly symbolic of this very sentiment of "swaraj and swadharm."(12) Savarkar further refuted the British view that the eruption was an act of irrationality on the part of Indians, describing it as a pre-planned revolution devised by major figures like as Nana Saheb, Tantya Tope, and others. Even the day of the rebellion, May 31, 1857, was set. (13) He wrote, "Even the uninformed understand that even the tiniest house cannot be erected without a foundation strong enough to hold its weight. When writers claiming to tell the history of the Indian revolution of 1857 ignore this obvious concept and refuse to explore the underlying factors that led to it, they must be either fools or, more likely, knaves. In any case, they were unsuited for the sacred task of the

historian.”.(14)

The great revolt, according to Savarkar, was truly national in character because it included people from every sect, strata, and class in Indian society. Royalty, commoners, peasants, traders, professionals, Hindus, Muslims, men and women, and others all took part. By emphasising this issue, Savarkar refutes British historians' claims that it was merely a scattered and small sepoy rebellion. Even royals who were assumed to be pro-British, such as the Holkars of Indore, were not, in reality, pro-British because they were afraid of the consequences of backing the rebels if the British were triumphant. (15) As a result, they decided to sit on the fence. He also contends that the outcome of the rebellion would have been significantly different if the pro-British Indian royals had remained neutral or supported their Indian brethren.

As a result, Savarkar concludes that the uprising was the first war of Indian independence because it brought together people of all classes, creeds, and genders. It was a well-planned revolution, with even the date of the uprising set in stone, but it exploded unexpectedly owing to unforeseen circumstances. He also refutes the claim made by some historians that it was a failure because it was violently suppressed. According to him, the revolutionary spirit of this historic rebellion lived on and became the primary motivator for the Indian independence war.

Another prominent historical work authored by Savarkar is “Hindupadpadshahi”. The book is titled "The Maratha Movement" in English. The book written in 1925 gives a detailed description of the Maratha struggle to reestablish the Hindu empire in India. The main theme of the book is the Maratha victory over the European navy and it was only the subsequent arrogance of the Marathas that brought about their downfall. "It is full of facts crammed in a tiny area prepared with skill and made to speak with tongues of fore and love," cried great Indian nationalist Lala Lajpat Rai about the book. “Every Indian politician, in my opinion, should read it.” (16)(17)

Another prominent work of Savarkar is "BhartiyaItihasteelSahaSoneri Pane". The original work is in Marathi which has been translated into English as "Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History". "It is a commentary, not a history in the academic sense, on the key events and times in our national life, taking a broad survey of our Hindu race's progress and survival," says S.T. Godbole. (18) Savarkar believed that, throughout the colonial period, the common trend in history writing was to glorify foreigners while depreciating the Hindu race, depending solely on the prejudiced records of foreign historians and explorers. This work is an attempt by Savarkar to recreate and restate India's history from a national perspective, using all accessible native records of coins and inscriptions, as well as some other non-

historical material. (19) The criterion for determining the Glorious Epochs, according to Savarkar, was "the history of that warlike generation and the brave leaders and successful warriors who inspire and lead it on to a war of liberation to free their nation from the shackles of foreign domination, whenever it has the misfortune to fall prey to such powerful fatal aggression and to grovel abjectly under it, and who eventually drive away the enemy making it an absolutely free and sovereign nation" (20)

In his first epoch, Savarkar dealt with Alexander's invasion of India. He has mentioned that during that period various kingdoms and republics existed in northwest India. However, when Alexander invaded India these various kingdoms and republics probably did not have sufficient time to put up a united front against the invader. Porus, one of the kings who ruled the kingdom near Taxila fought bravely but due to the various facts including torrential rains, use of chariots & elephants against the more agile army of Alexander consisting of brisk cavalry, Porus was defeated despite putting up a brave front. Despite being defeated, the resistance put up by the army of Porus was so fierce that Alexander's army was terror-stricken and they refused to venture further. Moreover, as the Greek soldiers had heard stories about the mighty Magadha Empire beyond the river Ganges, they dared not proceed further. Although Alexander, intoxicated with his victories & lust for power wished to proceed further his war-weary, the homesick and exhausted army was hesitant to indulge in any further bloody warfare. He tried to convince them but in vain. When he realized the chances of sedition among his troops he had no option but to retreat to Greek. Instead of going back straight, he decided to follow an oblique path to avoid confrontation of the principalities whom he had conquered earlier".(21)

"On the way back two prominent republics of Malavas and Shudrakas existed. They were hostile to each other. When they watched Alexander's formidable navy conquering every Indian state in several engagements, they changed their minds. These republics decided to correct the mistake made by these several Indian democracies which fought singly with a vastly superior enemy, a mistake which was proving fatal to their wider national interests. So, instead of fighting the Greek army singly, they decided to amalgamate their fighting forces under unified control. Not only did they unite their men at arms but they intermarried to bring about political and social unity among them. For the intermingling of castes and blood, they had a great collective marriage ceremony, wherein at least a thousand girls from both the 'Ganas' (republics) intermarried to the youths of the other republic".(22)

"This combined brave resistance forced Alexander to give up his vanity and arrogance and use tact and diplomacy to reach out for an honorable solution. For the cease-fire talks a hundred representatives of the joint Malava-Shudraka republic were elected and for them,

Alexander held a grand reception ceremony in his camp”.(23) “In the end, a treaty was signed by both parties according to which the Greek and the Indians had jointly agreed to put a stop to their hostilities and that the Malava-Shudraka republic was not to cause any harassment to the retreating army of Alexander”.(24)

Through this whole episode, Savarkar has tried to dispel the misconception that there was no sense of unity and patriotism among the Indians in ancient times. By this Savarkar has tried to prove the point that there have been several instances in the long Indian history where the rulers, as well as the commoners, have put up a brave united front against foreign aggressions.

The story is further carried through the instance of Chandragupta Maurya. When after overthrowing the Nanda dynasty, Chandragupta Maurya asserted himself as a mighty monarch. He envisioned restoring his empire to the original boundaries of the Indian subcontinent which extended right up to the Hindukush range. To attain this he decided to overthrow the foreign Greek rule, ruling the western part of Indus. This led to a bitter conflict in 315 B.C in which the Greek army was completely routed and the overconfident Seleucus had to capitulate to the victorious Chandragupta. (25) According to Savarkar, “the vanquished Seleucos humbly accepted all terms of the victorious Chandragupta”.(26) As a result of this subjugation Seleucus had to give up his authority to the Indian region from the west of the river Indus right up to the Hindukush range which ultimately came under the regime of the mighty Mauryan emperor. So in this way, Savarkar has tried to dispel the prevailing myths formulated by the western historians regarding Indian history that India was a country fragmented on the lines of religion, caste and culture, etc and that the notions of common identity, patriotism, and nationalism were missing. According to Savarkar, it has also been a tendency of the western historian to highlight western heroes and their achievements and to downplay the exploits and achievements of the Indian heroes. He has tried to prove his point by quoting the example of Mallava- Shudraka republics which though being hostile to each other buried their hatchet and put up a strong united front to face the foreign invader. The success in their endeavor is proved by the fact that Alexander had to agree to a truce on equal terms. His acknowledgment of their might is also verified by the fact that he hosted a grand feast to appease them.

Savarkar has also objected to the undue glorification of Alexander that he had conquered India which he considered factually wrong. According to him, "When Alexander came invading the western frontiers of India with the lofty design to capture the Empire of Magadha and the entirety of India, his goals were crushed,". He further writes that Alexander was a conqueror as well as a courageous warrior but he was never a true

conqueror of India. (27)

Similarly, he has also tried to dispel the misconception that the ancient Indian rulers did not have any concept of a nation. He validated his point by the example of Chandragupta Maurya who had envisaged the vision of a greater India by encompassing the region of Hindukush in his empire. He also considered Chandragupta as “Super Alexander” in comparison with Alexander. (28) He writes "Alexander gained the throne of a powerful nation as well as a formidable army already created by his father King Philip. He valiantly constructed a great Greek kingdom on the strength of this familial inheritance! Chandragupta, on the other hand, had no such ancestors! He wasn't in charge of a single troop. There was only one man by his side, Acharya Chanakya. He had to start over in these circumstances from the scratch. Despite this, he gathered a formidable army, seized the ancestral empire, wiped off the Greek conquests under Alexander, and his leader Seleucos Nicator and established an Indian Empire even more powerful than Alexander's." (29)

In “Six Great Epochs Of Indian History”, Savarkar also states that “after the abolition of the East India Company in 1858, the Queen’s Proclamation stated that the mutineers who would stop fighting openly or covertly, shun violence against the English people and would begin living a peaceful life, would be awarded royal clemency, irrespective of anything they might have done during the mutiny”.(30)

“Another important submission made in the proclamation was the discontinuation of the obnoxious, ‘Doctrine of Lapse’ and it was expressly promised in the said proclamation that the traditional rights of the Indian rulers to adopt their heirs to their estates would be honored. Their adopted heirs were promised the same political and administrative rights as they enjoyed under the old tradition(31).

“Although the queen’s proclamation was exhibited on every wall throughout India, thousands of revolutionists, including Totya Tope, Shreemant Nanasahib, Balasahib, “Jhalka Rambahu”, Amar Singh, Firozshah, and other eminent leaders of the revolution continued fighting till their death and refused to surrender before the mighty British although they knew that they are no match before the vastly superior alien government in terms of all kinds of resources whether men or material. (32)

According to Savarkar, the whole episode depicts that first of all, they did not trust the Queen’s Proclamation, and secondly, even if the Proclamation might have proved to be true due to the immediate circumstances in which the top priority of the British was to pacify the public emotions, the leaders of the revolution did not go for it. They wanted to pursue their fight till the attainment of their final goal which depicts that although they may not be nationalistic according to western notions they were determined to fully uproot an alien

subjugative power from their motherland.

Besides being a prolific writer, Savarkar was a patriot of the highest order. He was a pragmatic patriot. He fully understood the fact that unless the Indians, especially the Hindus were motivated to rise above the distinctions of caste, creed, regionalism, etc., and also without the necessary military skills the success of another such uprising shall be doubtful. With both these objectives in mind, he urged the Indians to volunteer for military training. During the Second World War, he urged Indian youth to join the army not just for national independence but also because Savarkar envisaged military recruitment as an opportunity for caste-ridden Hindu society to remove the ills of caste divisions. So, he actively supported Dr. Ambedkar's call for Mahar youths to join the British army. Dhananjay Keer, the official biographer of Dr. Ambedkar states that Savarkar wished the Hindus to be reborn into a martial race and expressed his hope that under the able guidance of Ambedkar the Mahar brethren would be re-animated with military qualities and their military uplift would contribute to the consolidation of Hindus. (33)

This move later helped Subhash Chandra Bose in his organizing of INA. Bose openly acknowledged in his Azad Hind Radio broadcast (June 25, 1944), this vision and role of Savarkar that when due to misguided political whims and lack of wisdom, almost all the leaders of the Congress Party are decrying all the soldiers in the Indian army as mercenaries, Savarkar is fearlessly exhorting the youth of India to enlist in armed forces. These enlisted youths themselves provide us with trained men and soldiers for our Indian National Army.”(34)

Savarkar was a patriot in the true sense is also evident from the fact that even in the direst and trying circumstances enough to cow down a human being with the most daunting spirit, Savarkar continued with his mission of stirring the patriotic fervor among his fellow inmates at the cellular jail. He used education as a means for achieving his objective of sowing the seeds of nationalism not only among the political prisoners but also among the petty criminals like thieves, dacoits, swindlers, etc. “He believed that knowledge without action was lame and action without knowledge was blind”(35). In his memoir, “ My transportation for life” in which he vividly describes his endeavors to propagate his ideals of nationalism, he states:

“By our teaching, we are not only making them learn to spell their rudiments; but we are opening the windows of their soul upon the world, and making them understand interests in life. In contact with us, they come to know about their country, their notion, and their people. They imbibe the right notions about them from us. (36)

All this comes to the logical conclusion that Veer Savarkar was a versatile persona who was not only a great patriot but also an author and thinker of the highest order. He not only played an exemplary and pioneering role in the revolutionary movement but also did yeoman service to the youth of the nation by making them aware of their rich and glorious past and thus boosting their morale and self-confidence. Due to his high-profile revolutionary acts, he had to face a lot of hardships under the authoritarian and suppressive foreign regime. Yet he found time to write extensively on various historical subjects. The main objectives behind his historical writings were two-fold. He used history as a tool to inculcate a feeling of deep patriotism and a sense of self-confidence and self-respect in the Indian youth by bringing them face with their glorious heritage. He firmly believed that for the success of the freedom struggle it was necessary that the negative and distorted version of India's past and British assertion of their racial and cultural superiority be cleansed from the Indian mindset so that they could get rid of their feelings of inferiority vis-à-vis the western race and the western civilization.

For long the imperialistic historians had been disseminating the notion that the Indians were a barbaric and uncivilized race with no sense of unity, culture, patriotism, and nationality. According to them, India was just a collection of several infighting states which were used to foreign subjugation during all epochs of history. Veer Savarkar dispelled this distorted notion of western superiority and downplaying of Indian achievements through his prolific and rational writings.

He specifically counters the imperialistic notion of Indian disunity. Savarkar quoted the following words from George William Forrest, State Papers which states that “ Although the muting teaches us various lessons but the most important lesson taught is that when needed the Indians will shun their distinction of caste and religion. The Brahmin will unite with the Shudras and the Hindus with the Muslims against their hated alien rulers”(37)

Unfortunately, despite being an ardent nationalist and a true patriot, he has been unjustly decried as a coward, traitor, and a British collaborator due to the various petitions filed by him addressed to the British Government in India. This distorted version of his personality is due to the incomplete understanding of his life and ideas, the circumstances which molded his ideology, and most importantly the fact that the Congress-led Governments did not wish the people to know about this man. Therefore, he was not accorded any place in the history textbooks.

After his arrest in London at Victoria railway station on March 13, 1910, he was deported to India. (38) Savarkar was awarded double life imprisonment which was to run consecutively which meant that he was to be released after fifty years i.e. in 1960. After he arrived at the

cellular jail in July 1910. (39) During his incarceration at Andamans for ten years, he wrote at least seven mercy petitions. (40) In jail, he was tortured in the most barbaric manner to break his spirit both mental and physical. The conditions in the jail and the torture accorded were so inhuman that many prisoners including one named Indu Bhushan Roy, a young man convicted in the Maniktola Bomb case committed suicide (41) and another convict named Ullaskar Dutt also convicted as a conspirator in the Maniktola Bomb case suffered mental derangement. (42) Therefore, the prospect of spending fifty years in a hell hole from which Savarkar had no hope of coming alive must have wreaked havoc upon him. So it was but natural for any human being and especially Savarkar himself being a barrister to explore all legal provisions available for an early release from that dungeon or at least to alleviate his condition in prison. Moreover, being an active revolutionary himself he considered his foremost priority to get himself released to be able to contribute to the freedom struggle for his beloved motherland. (43)

Savarkar is said to have written seven petitions asking for mercy and requesting an early release. Among these petitions, the most hotly debated is the petition that he filed on 14 Nov. 1913 that is more often cited to malign his image. This option of the petition was also offered to various other convicts such as Barin Ghose, Nand Gopal, Hrishikesh Kanjilal, and Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, who too submitted their petitions. (44)

In this petition, Savarkar states that the conditions in the Cellular jail were deplorable and the concessions which were given even to the most hardcore criminals convicted of heinous crimes, were denied to him. He further stated he and other revolutionaries were forced to take up the path of violence as they had no other option available to them because the process of constitutional reforms was not initiated before 1909. Now since the British Government in India has started these reforms, he, if released, will be the staunchest advocate of the constitutional progress and will have an unflinching loyalty to the Government. His example will be emulated by the other Indian youth who have taken to the path of revolution, to come into the fold of the Government and tread on the path of constitutional reforms. In this way, a” prodigal son will return to the parental doors of the Government”. (45)

Many writers like A.G. Noorani have condemned Savarkar of becoming a British stooge to secure his release. The reference of “prodigal son willing to return to the parental doors of the government” is especially quoted by his detractors to denounce him as a traitor and a coward. They say that while patriots like Gandhi and Nehru were sleeping on the dirty floors of the prison cells and while a true patriot like Bhagat Singh did not beg for any mercy from the despotic Government, Savarkar was cowed down by the harsh jail conditions that he

succumbed to the British Government begging for mercy. But a careful perusal of the petition it does not appear that he agreed to surrender unconditionally, there was a condition of positive constitutional reforms to be taken by the Government. Moreover, the term prodigal son' should not be taken literally because his future conduct depicted otherwise. His jail tickets entries reveal that in less than a month of filing his petition on December 16, 1913, he once again went on a strike from work and was punished with month-long solitary confinement. Again, a few months later he refused to work and was made to stand handcuffed for seven days as a punishment. Even after that, he went on strike many times for which he was punished with crossbar fetters for days together. These incidents of strikes and punishments after his petition of Nov. 1913 depict that he was not a man to come into the arms of the British Government at any cost.

Also, as he was not the only person to file such petitions which were too filed by many an eminent revolutionary lodged not only in the Cellular jail but also imprisoned in the various jails on mainland India where conditions were much less harsh. These fellow revolutionaries included Sachindranath Sanyal, Ramprasad Bismil, Barindra Kumar Ghose, and many others. When these celebrated and most revered revolutionaries are not branded traitors or cowards, it is highly unjust to label Savarkar with these derogatory remarks.

It goes to his credit that he rendered a yeoman service not only to the revolutionary movement but also to Indian youth by inspiring them through his prolific and motivational historical writings. In this way, he contributed immensely towards the attainment of freedom of his beloved motherland.

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