

V.D.Savarkar

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Source: *The Hindu*

Manifest pedagogy: This year's mains paper 1 question on secularism as a threat to the diversity of India points to a gradual process of change which has set in UPSC. In this changed context and building of new narratives some of the leaders of Hindu right and their ideologies and outlook too will gain prominence. As Manifest believes in visualising and targeting the areas which can be asked as questions in UPSC and the context of promises of awarding a Bharat Ratna to V D Savarkar. The information below gains prominence.

In news: Government is proposing to confer Bharat Ratna on V.D.Savarkar

Placing it in syllabus: Great personalities in Indian history

Dimensions:

- V D Savarkar's political career
- Participation in Revolutionary terrorism
- His views on Social reform and Social Change
- His views on Hindutva and Hindu Nationalism
- Time in Andaman Prison and the petitions to the British Crown
- Accusations of the role in the Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi

Content:

Savarkar's political career:

- V. D. Savarkar (1883-1966) was a charismatic leader, who played a significant role in the freedom struggle of India.
- There were **two phases** in the ideological development of

Savarkar.

- In the first phase of his life, he was **influenced by** the philosophy of the Italian nationalist **Joseph Mazzini** and supported the concept of the composite Indian nationalism, which was not different from the nationalism of Aurobindo and Tilak.
- During this period, **religion played an important role** in his concept of nationalism, but it **did not exclude any religious community** from it.
- But in the **second phase** of his career after 1922-23, Savarkar became the **supporter of Hindu nationalism**.
- After his release from the confinement in 1937, as a response to the Muslim League, he **joined the Hindu Mahasabha and became its President from 1938 to 1945**.
- He **popularized the term Hindutva** (Hinduness), to create a collective "Hindu" identity as an essence of Bharat (India).
- Savarkar was a pragmatic **practitioner of Hindu philosophy**.
- He advocated for validating religious myths and blind faith against the test of modern science.

Participation in Revolutionary terrorism:

- Savarkar and his brother Ganesh Damodar Savarkar founded a secret society called **Abhinav Bharat Society in 1903** (influenced by Mazzini's Young Italy).
- Initially founded at Nasik as Mitra Mela when Vinayak was still a student at Fergusson College, Pune, the society grew to include several hundred revolutionaries and political activists with **branches in various parts of India**, extending to London after Savarkar went to study law.
- It carried out a few **assassinations of British officials**, after which the Savarkar brothers were convicted and imprisoned.
- The society was formally **disbanded in 1952**.

- In London, he **involved** himself with radical organizations such **India House and the Free India Society.**
- He also **published books** advocating complete Indian independence by revolutionary means.
- **In 1910**, he was arrested and ordered to be **extradited to India** for his connections with the revolutionary group India House.
- On the voyage back to India, Savarkar staged an **attempt to escape and seek asylum in France** but he was **handed back to the British** by France in contravention of international law.
- On return to India, Savarkar was **moved to the Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.**

His views on social reforms and social change:

- He exhorted the Hindus to accept **modern practices based on science and reason** and reject the religious superstitions and customs which were standing hindrance to social progress.
- He was a **critic of caste system** and held that both 'Chaturvarna' and caste system proved very disastrous for the unity of Hindu society and gave birth to **inhuman practice of untouchability.**
- The **caste** encouraged and **institutionalised inequality**, divided Hindu society into numerous compartments and sowed the seeds of hostility and hatred among the Hindus.
- He wanted the Hindus to **reject blind faith in the Vedas and customs** and tried to acquire material strength by accepting the supremacy of machines.
- He rejected the sanctity of religious scriptures and maintained that all **religious scriptures were man-made** and their teaching could **not be applied to all societies in all times.**
- He favoured the pursuit of science and reason and

criticised 'irrational and superstitious' practices of Hindus.

- He was a product of renaissance in the Western world and **from the European philosophical tradition, he borrowed three important ideas:**
 1. In life struggle, the **fittest survived** and those who could not stand the struggle got eliminated.
 2. **Violence was in-built in the creation of nature** and-the nature abhorred absolute non-violence. Hence, in this difficult life, man should acquire strength and power to overcome the problems he faced.
 3. There was **no absolute morality in the world**. The use of all weapons was desirable provided it was directed against slavery and imperialism.

Thus, in Savarkar's theory of social change, the **principle of life struggle** played an important role. For him, reason, science and technology were important to bring about the change in the society.

His views on hindutva:

- Savarkar described a **"Hindu" as a patriotic inhabitant of Bharatavarsha**, venturing beyond a religious identity.
- He outlined his vision of a **"Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu Nation) as "Akhand Bharat"** (United India), purportedly stretching across the entire Indian subcontinent.
- He defined Hindus as being neither Aryan nor Dravidian but as **"People who live as children of a common motherland, adoring a common holyland."**
- **Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains**, in his view, met both conditions and **were therefore Hindus**.
- All Hindus were the members of the nation. **Non-Hindus** (according to him, Muslims and Christians) might **not become the members of the Hindu nation but they were members of the Indian state**.

- He wrote a book called '**Hindutva**' in 1924 to explain the basic principles of Hindu nationalism.
- He **launched the Shuddhi movement** to reconvert the converted Hindus to Hinduism and to purge Marathi language of Arabic and Persian words.
- In **1925, the R.S.S. or the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh was formed** by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar to protect the Hindus from the Muslims aggression.
- In the subsequent period, **Savarkar and the R.S.S. propagated the Hindu nationalist ideology against the ideology of the composite Indian nationalism expounded by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress.**
- He opposed the Quit India struggle in 1942, calling it a "Quit India but keep your army" movement.
- He became a fierce critic of the Indian National Congress and its acceptance of India's partition.

Time in Andaman prison and petitions to British crown:

- He was sent to the notorious Cellular Jail in the Andamans in 1911 for his revolutionary activity.
- He first petitioned the British for early release within months of beginning his 50 year sentence.
- Then again in 1913 he submitted his next mercy petition and presented it personally to the Home Member of the Governor General's council, asking for forgiveness, and he described himself as a "**prodigal son**" **longing to return to the "parental doors of the government"**.
- He wrote that his release from the jail will recast the faith of many Indians in the British rule.
- In 1917, Savarkar submitted another mercy petition, for a general amnesty of all political prisoners.
- In 1920, the Indian National Congress and leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Vithalbai Patel and Bal Gangadhar Tilak demanded his unconditional release.
- **In 1921 after signing a plea for clemency that required him to renounce revolutionary activities, he was**

released.

- He was eventually moved to Ratnagiri, Maharashtra, where he stayed until 1937.

Though his defenders insist that his promises were a tactical ploy his critics say otherwise, as he stayed true to his promise after leaving the Andamans by staying away from the freedom struggle and actually helping the British with his divisive theory of 'Hindutva', which was another form of the Muslim League's Two Nation theory.

Accusations of his role in the Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi:

- Following the assassination of Gandhi on 30 January 1948, police arrested the assassin **Nathuram Godse** and his alleged accomplices and conspirators.
- Godse was a member of the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS.
- Godse was the editor of Agrani – Hindu Rashtra, a Marathi daily from Pune which was run by the company "**The Hindu Rashtra Prakashan Ltd**" (The Hindu Nation Publications) in which Savarkar had invested ₹ 15000.
- **Savarkar**, the former president of the Hindu Mahasabha, **was arrested on 5 February 1948** and was charged as a co-conspirator in the assassination of Gandhi.
- Due to lack of evidence, Savarkar was arrested under the Preventive Detention Act.
- Godse claimed full responsibility for planning and carrying out the assassination.
- However, according to the approver **Digambar Badge**, on 17 January 1948, Godse went to have a last darshan with Savarkar in Bombay before Gandhi's assassination.
- The prosecution had no difficulty in showing that Nathuram Godse had organised the conspiracy, but it was a difficult task to prove the direct complicity of Savarkar.
- **Badge's testimony was not accepted as the approver's evidence lacked independent corroboration and hence Savarkar was acquitted.**

