

Savarkar's Ideology and its Impact on Hindu Nationalism in British India

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Abstract

Hindu nationalism in British India witnessed a substantial transition in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was through the disputed philosophical contributions of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. The key research challenge tackles how Savarkar methodically changed Indian nationalism from a civic, pluralistic framework into an exclusionary cultural ideology by skilfully mobilising European nation-state paradigms and reinterpreting colonial history. Savarkar's ideology shows great European influence, especially with regard to organic nation-state concepts to present what he meant by 'nationhood', employing Western nationalist paradigms with the aim to define Indianness strictly via Hindu lenses. This generated a foundational tension between anti-colonial secular aspirations and majoritarian cultural assertion.

The main objective of this research is to tackle this ideological synthesis, tracing how Savarkar's conceptualisation of Hindutva simultaneously advanced anti-colonial mobilisation and institutionalised religiously bound national membership. The study investigates how Savarkar instrumentalised history as a political mechanism for mass mobilisation while constructing a homogeneous cultural identity. Rather than advocating historical revivalism. He viewed the construction of a historicistic narrative from the Hindu perspective as necessary to unveil the glories of ancient India by systematically marginalising periods of Islamic rule as foreign invasions. His vast literary production functioned as vehicles to articulate his vision for India under Hindu sovereignty.

A qualitative historical methodology combined with critical discourse analysis and archival triangulation is used to support this investigation and facilitate a systematic analysis of ideological development by correlating literary output with administrative documentation, thus reducing colonial surveillance bias and identifying strategic rhetorical changes. Savarkar's primary texts, namely 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?', 'The Indian War of Independence 1857', and 'Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History' are the main corpus of this research. These are analysed alongside personal correspondence during his London exile and contemporary colonial intelligence reports for an understanding of how his ideas were received; archival documents from the India Office Records have also been used. Other sources include scholarly critiques on Hindutva as well as comparative nationalist theories.

The findings indicate that Savarkar secularised religion into a territorial-political identity. He distinguished theological faith from national affiliation while culturally uniting them through ancestral lineage, sacred geography (pitribhumi and punyabhumi), and civilisational uniformity.

Keywords: Hindu nationalism; Hindutva; the RSS; India; independence

Introduction

During the late colonial period, the issue of who constituted the nation began to take shape. The first attempt within the framework of Indian nationalism was under the works of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The two leaders embraced India's religious plurality and civic inclusiveness. However, a counterdiscourse was forming to oppose this. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is one of the foremost proponents of this counterview. Savarkar redefined the Indian nation not as a geopolitical entity or a state to which one holds allegiance constitutionally but through a confluence of Hindu culture, lineage, and sacred geography. Savarkar put forth the now-famous concepts of 'pitribhumi' (fatherland) and 'punyabhumi' (holy land), which together laid the foundation of a national identity that is one-sided and primarily Hindu, hence denoting that only Hindus could truly embrace Indian nationhood while relegating religious minorities, especially Muslims and Christians, to the status of eternal outsiders.

This study addresses a focused research problem: How did Savarkar reshape Indian nationalism into an exclusive cultural ideology through a reinterpretation of colonial history? This main question is supported by two further enquiries:

- 1) How did Savarkar's beliefs help in leaving out religious minorities from the picture of nationalism in colonial India?
- 2) To what level did Savarkar's thoughts shape the creation and political plans of Hindu nationalist groups?

The latter two questions offer important institutional and contextual depth. However, analysing how historical reinterpretation became an instrument for cultural exclusion is the main analytical emphasis of this research. In responding to these queries, the research advances three distinct hypotheses: first, that Savarkar's notion of Hindutva operated as a strategic reframing device, displacing civic-pluralist foundations with culture-territory criteria; second, that his dual criteria of pitribhumi and punyabhumi functioned as systematic boundary markers, artificially reinforcing communal divisions; and third, that his framework provided not merely inspiration but an operational blueprint for organisational consolidation and majoritarian strategy.

This study uses an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines three approaches. First, conceptual history is used to track how certain terms, like 'Hindutva',

'pitribhumi', 'punyabhumi', and 'Hindu Rashtra' gained politically charged meanings through their strategic use in the discourse of the colonial period. Second, postcolonial nationalism theory—especially Partha Chatterjee's framework of "derivative discourse" and "the nation and its fragments"—will be useful for analysing Savarkar's ideology on modernity as it engaged with colonial modernity at both levels simultaneously. Third, ideological morphology as per Michael Freeden's methodology allows one systematically to map out the way in which Savarkar's conceptual architecture arranged core elements with adjacent and peripheral ones in order to create a coherent political vision that was exclusionary. This tripartite framework is what permits this study to move beyond descriptive historiography into analytically isolating the mechanisms by which historical reinterpretation, cultural boundary-making, and institutional strategy came together to transform Indian nationalism.

Savarkar's Hindutva did not emerge in isolation. It was inspired by the underlying socio-political processes of British India, the building of communal identities through the colonial census, the rise of the Arya Samaj¹, and the rising divide of political activity between Hindus and Muslims. Within these boundaries, Savarkar's self-styled history created a strong narrative of Hindu self-assertion by painting over the past centuries of Muslim rule as a subjugating dominance cruelly inflicted on the Hindu race (jati) and called for its cultural and political reawakening. Unlike mainstream nationalist discourse, which sought unity in variety via anti-colonial struggle, Savarkar's vision was exclusive. It starkly divided the polity on the basis of religion. His proclamation of Hindu Rashtra² was far from symbolic; it provided the ideological foundation for a reconfigured India where national belonging was based on cultural aspects.

This set of ideas found expression in such institutions as the Hindu Mahasabha³, of which Savarkar presided. He also indirectly influenced the founding principles of the RSS, established as early as 1925. While these groups functioned on the periphery of the nationalist movement, which was dominated by the Congress party, their focus on militant self-defence coupled with the idea of fostering Hindu cohesion and culture spoke to the deep-rooted apprehensions regarding the Khilafat Movement, nationalist Muslim politics, and later, the demand for Pakistan. Hence, the intellectual legacy of Savarkar substantially impacted the emergence of Hindu identity as a politically defined term, rather than a merely religious one. This change in vision, as we shall see, dramatically altered the direction of national politics in India for decades to come.

Academic interpretations of Savarkar's thought reveal substantial methodological divergences. There are some political historians who see it as a modern strategic ideology, like Christophe Jaffrelot, whereas others, under organisational scholars,

¹ It is a reform movement and religious/social organization established in Bombay in 1875.

² "Hindu Rashtra" translates literally to "Hindu Nation" or "Hindu Polity" in English.

³ The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha is a right-wing Indian nationalist political party.

view it as functional to the creation of disciplined structures for movements, such as Andersen and Damle. Important academic investigations foreground the exclusionary and majoritarian implications of his ideas. These contributions have significantly advanced the study of Hindu nationalism. They often treat Savarkar's writings either as precursors to post-independence political movements or as isolated intellectual artefacts. Only a few studies trace how his historical reinterpretation and institutional strategies operated simultaneously within the colonial period to reconfigure nationalist discourse. In this respect, these studies meet at the point that Savarkar's thought is best understood as a contested site where history, politics, and ideology come into play. This research intervenes by isolating the colonial-era ideological formation process, distinguishing Savarkar's conceptual innovations from later organisational adaptations, and tracing the precise mechanisms of historical reinterpretation that enabled exclusionary nationalism.

1. Introduction to Savarkar's Ideology

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was born on January 28, 1883, in Bhagur, Maharashtra. He was set to watch both the British attack and the Indian nationalist resistance. His revolutionary activism began when he was studying in England, where he established student societies, including the Abhinav Bharat Society⁴ and Free India Society⁵, for gaining Indian independence through revolutionary means. He was arrested shortly after the ill-fated assassination of a British official and tried for multiple charges, including conspiracy and murder. Subsequently, he was sentenced to two life terms of imprisonment in the Andaman Islands.

During his time there, he wrote most of his significant works, including *The First War of Indian Independence*. In 1923, The book *The Essentials of Hindutva* articulates his perspective on Hindu identity and the means by which India's future might be safeguarded through Hindu leadership. The year 1923 is also significant for Savarkar after assuming the presidency of the Hindu Mahasabha, an institution that advocated for Hindu interests and promoted the concept of the perfect Hindu nation. Although Savarkar established the theoretical political foundation for the Hindutva movement, Golwalkar⁶ is acknowledged for energising its social and cultural structure. Savarkar emphasised the necessity for Hindus to form an exclusive and autonomous nation by integrating Hindutva with Hindu identity. "Hindutva is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people... but a history in full" (Savarkar, 1923: 3). Despite the widespread impression of Indian nationalism as primarily non-violent, violent manifestations of revolutionary nationalism were prevalent.

⁴ The Abhinav Bharat Society was a secret revolutionary organization founded in 1904 by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

⁵ The Free India Society was a nationalist organization founded in London in 1906 by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

⁶ M.S. Golwalkar was an Indian Hindu nationalist leader who served as a chief leader of the RSS.

Revolutionary nationalism justifies violence and the manly aesthetics adopted by the Hindutva movement. Savarkar believed that Hindus constitute a distinct country with a common history and culture. He rejected the assumption that the name 'Hindu' was granted by 'others'. He explicitly anchored the genesis of Hindu nationality in the Aryan Vedic period and stated that the history of India has still to be written from a Hindu perspective. "Savarkar's ideology sought to redefine Indian nationalism in terms of cultural and civilisational unity rather than mere territorial patriotism." (Jyotirmaya Sharma, 2003: 42).

2. Historical Context of Hindu Nationalism

During the 1880s–1900s, colonial administrative practices and emerging ethno-nationalist discourses in Europe intersected with Indian socio-political movements, creating the structural conditions for organised identity formation. It was through the writings of Vivekananda and Savarkar that Hindutva appeared as an ideological framework. Savarkar was among the earliest and most sophisticated theorists of the ideology of Hindu nationalism. He used the term "Hindutva" for the first time in a book he wrote with that title in 1923. In this book, he charted out a distinct agenda in linguistic, cultural, and racial terms for the worshippers of Hinduism. He sought to unify the fragmented ensoulment of the Hindus to safeguard the nation from annihilation by the 'Yavan' (Muslim invader). History was, therefore, instructed to be rewritten to develop the glorious past of the Hindus who were subdued or excluded from the radiant Raj of Rama, the real King of Bharat (Narula, 2003). As Belmekki (2012) observes, colonial reforms "by interfering, or rather tampering, with the sociocultural tissue of the local inhabitants... only aroused the sensitivities of the population and led to a widespread malaise" (p. 182). This structural disruption created the epistemological vacuum within which Savarkar's reinterpretation of history could take root, transforming cultural anxiety into a politically charged narrative of civilisational restoration.

The historical reinterpretation was, in effect, a discursive strategy that severed the colonial archival records from the narratives of ideological nation-building. This paradigm for 'Sanskritising' history has a long afterlife in the Hindutva campaign over such matters as the Babri Masjid controversy and the portrayal of Muslim rulers, both in academic and popular literature. "Hindu nationalism was born as a reaction to British imperialism and what was viewed as the danger of Muslim separatism." (Bipan Chandra, 1988: 145). By the 1910s–1920s, communal mobilisation began increasingly to cast inter-community conflict in terms of historical grievances rather than contemporary economic or administrative disputes. For Savarkar, only scientific politics or politics of genomes could withstand destruction.

3. Methodological Framework & Analytical Procedure

A qualitative historical approach will guide the course of the research, as it allows us to unearth critical aspects of the past that inform the present. The data that the author will depend on is composed of archival records emanating from the colonial state as well as primary sources produced by pivotal figures involved in the Hindutva movement from 1910 to 1947. The main sources of data consist of a variety of the works of the founder of the term 'Hindutva', Vinayak Savarkar, and his followers in the Hindu Mahasabha (as the prominent political counterpart to the ideology of Hindutva). These sources will be analysed across three chronological sections that will explore the ideological formulation of the terms 'Hindutva' and 'Hindu Rashtra' and the platform that propelled them as the political vision of the RSS. By charting the emergence of the RSS from its inception, we will further highlight the theoretical framework discussed in this paper to establish how the ideological discourse in the production of Hindutva is critiqued and borrows from its contemporaneous scholarly production in order to become a political ideology. The supplementary data includes colonial records such as reports, censuses, and administrative records on the activities and grassroots expansion of the RSS, which produced outcomes that differed from the claims made in the contemporary ideological production.

The archival bias that necessarily colours the relation between the state and the ideological production of Hindutva requires a conscious and reflexive methodology on the part of the researcher. The inadequacies of textual production, therefore, necessitate a methodological triangulation whereby evidence from the colonial archive will have to be verified and counter-checked against the sectarian claims made by Hindutva. The historian, therefore, must be aware of and demarcate the epistemological and methodological limitations of their inquiry by situating their explorative thesis in a set of expansive historical and analytical contexts. In this way, triangulation will facilitate a critical interpretation of the sources by divulging the implications of vital moments in the historical narrative of the ideology and interrogating the genealogical transference of power/knowledge relations across time and space. The outcome of this methodological engagement will produce a narrative informed by conflicting images of identities and motivations that have historically shaped the contemporary identities.

4. Key Concepts of Savarkar's Ideology

An analysis of Savarkar's ideology can yield an understanding of the origins of contemporary Hindutva. Savarkar's ideology is comprehensive; it has various philosophical bases, but utilitarianism, rationalism, and pragmatism are the most relevant and prominent. All of these have origins in Western thought, but Savarkar's thinking is distinctively Indian in its exposition and application. His revolutionism is at

once a thought, a rationale, and a practice to attain freedom through the dispensing of the British tyrants with all the force that can be mustered (Chandrasekaran, 2012).

Savarkar's revolutionary action began when he was studying in England, when he created student clubs, notably the Abhinav Bharat Society and Free India Society, for attaining Indian independence through revolutionary means. As president of these societies, Savarkar narrated the atrocious cruelty meted out on Indians, the loss of which was painful to everyone with the feeling of motherland, and redeemed them through the task of exterminating bestiality and terror of the English government, which tortured our people in India Bhumi⁷. As a panacea for all the ills of Indian life, he upheld the necessity of igniting a fire of utter hatred against the British rule, wherein all the streams of hatred against the British oppression entering from or arising in every corner of the land should be concentrated.

4.1. Hindutva: Definition and Principles

Savarkar articulated a distinct view of Hindu identity in his work *The Essentials of Hindutva* in 1923. He argued that Hindu identity was defined solely by acceptance of the Hindu holy land of India. He noted that "a Hindu means a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha⁸, from the Indus to the seas, as his fatherland as well as his holy land" (Savarkar, 1923: 27). Islam and the Indo-Persian milieu were immediate targets of the thesis. The inclusion and acceptance of the Aryan invasion/migration theory into a Brahmanic ideology was a direct attack on the Muslim polity that, until 1858, ruled India. However, it simultaneously resulted in the exclusion of a significant amount of the Hindu population, who, though considered 'lesser,' were generally treated as 'Hindu' by the Brahmin elite (Chandrasekaran, 2012). The reign of Stone Age man, Harappa and Mohenjodaro, the Aryans, the Vedic period, the Mauryan eclipse, the rise of the importation of fratricidal faiths and rascal polities, the emergence of a national renaissance and of the Indian National Congress, and India's freedom and resurgence are the historical processes from which Savarkar theorised a 'Hindu nation.' It is this history that he epistemologically positions as being 'written and scribbled' by the 'Others' according to their subjective tastes. With the conceptual political framework for the Hindutva movement being provided by the founding father of Hindutva, Savarkar, Golwalkar galvanised the social and cultural organisation of the movement with the Sangh⁹. "Savarkar's vision of Hindutva was to create one Hindu political community by downplaying internal hierarchies like caste in order to present Hindus as one nation" (Jaffrelot, 1996: 54). While it was the mainstream nationalist movements that

⁷ Bhumi (भूमि) is frequently used to mean dry land or ground (terra firma).

⁸ Bharatvarsha: it is derived from the legendary Emperor Bharata or the ancient Bharata tribe, denoting the "homeland of the Bharatasantati" (descendants of Bharata).

⁹ "Sangh" (संघ) it commonly refers to a group or assembly, particularly in political, labor, or social contexts.

talked about anti-colonial unity, Savarkar's framework put more emphasis on cultural unification—a strategic difference that became sharper during the 1920s–1930s.

4.2. Cultural Nationalism

Scholarly analysis distinguishes Savarkar's cultural nationalism from religious revivalism by focusing on its political boundary-making function. Although Savarkar was a staunch atheist, he firmly believed that culture, not religion, defined people's nationality. He noted that Indian nationalism must be rooted in the cultural and historical continuity of the Hindu civilisation (Savarkar, 1923: 90). Culture involved the complex of ideas, beliefs, customs, mores, and social institutions that distinguished one group of people from another (Matias Santos, 2018). This complex, however, was rooted in and expressed in the religious form. Thus, though non-sectarian at their root, cultures took the shape of religions, and hence religions came to define cultures. Although he recommended the application of objective scientific methods within the domain of material reality, he believed that religions must be approached with reverence and adoration. By this logic, the people map of the world invariably contained a Hindu rashtra (Pandith, 2014).

This strategic deployment of cultural symbolism had measurable political effects. As Belmekki (2021) documents, even broadly adopted nationalist symbols like *Bande Mataram*¹⁰ “appeared offensive to many Muslims because its verses were ‘taken to exalt Hinduism at the expense of Islam’” (p. 119). Such perceptions reinforced the very communal boundaries that Savarkar's ideology sought to institutionalize, demonstrating how cultural nationalism functioned as a mechanism of political exclusion.

Savarkar's cultural nationalism constructed a dense discursive field containing objections to those positions not conforming with the hegemonic one, i.e., the idea of an inclusive India. Analytically, this discourse operated through strategic exclusion rather than theological doctrine. Savarkar's cultural nationalism excluded those who did not share India's ‘Hindu past,’ creating a majoritarian discourse (Romila Thapar, 2014: 178).

4.3. Anti-colonial Sentiments

Famed for its political unity and social integrity, Savarkar saw India as a country of ancient civilisation. He distinguished Bharat from Hindustan, which he described as an imaginary geographical unit derived from the British Empire and named after the river Indus in the northwest. Bharat, he claimed, was descriptive of the age-old social, political, and cultural unity of the country.

¹⁰ *Bande mataram* (literally meaning ‘Hail to thee, Mother’) was taken from Bankim Chatterjee's anti-Muslim novel entitled *Anandamath*.

Emphasising anti-colonial sentiments, Savarkar vehemently opposed the British, goading Indians to take the revolution into their hands. "Savarkar's anti-colonialism was deeply intertwined with his vision of Hindu self-assertion" (Shabnum Tejani, 2008: 92). He described the colonial rule by saying that the British rule is an unmitigated evil, but a necessary one to awaken Hindus to their political destiny (Savarkar, 1909). The divinely ordained duties of Indians, the nefarious and almost endless designs of the British against the integrity of India, Sadachara's prescriptions for social and political improvement, the spiritual-political rise of the Motherland, observations about the Mother Goddess, and the signs of time, meticulously crafted during the conception, augured the content and ambition of "Let Us Be Free." Scholarly historical analysis makes clear the differences between Savarkar's vision of civilizational resilience and the Gandhian tradition of moral reform. Savarkar chose to prioritise collective historical memory over individual asceticism as a tool for mobilisation.

5. Savarkar's Writings and Their Influence

This paper seeks, however, to disentangle historical documentation from ideological critique. To that end, it will trace the publication history of Savarkar's writings and examine their institutional reception between the 1920s and 1940s. Wherever later political appropriations depart from the original text's intent, this paper will note them with explicit clarity. When most of the prominent leaders and intellectuals in British India had faith in the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which were the hallmarks of Western enlightenment, Savarkar had his punches drawn against the heroization of concepts and ideologies like Western liberalism, socialism, Marxism. What is more ignoble was his relegation of the term 'Hindu' into narrow (community and caste) and formal usages qualitatively different from the 'Hindu' as an 'organic nation.' Savarkar's 'Hindutva – Who is Hindu,' published in 1923, openly dissected and spoke about the collective memory, culture, character, and aspirations of Hinduness and enunciated about the 'ideal' Hindu self. He mentioned that Hindutva is not merely a cultural or religious identity; it is the essence of nationhood for all who regard India as their fatherland (Pitribhumi) and holy land (Punjabhumi) (Savarkar, 1923,). His magnum opus functioned as a message to the united Hindus across India in unison towards a 'Hindu Rashtra' and the reconciliation of the Dittos into the Hindutva fold for India's future to be secure under 'Hindu' ownership (Chandrasekaran, 2012). Savarkar (1967) argued, "The day every Hindu feels with blood and bone that his faith, his race, and his motherland are one and indivisible - that day Hindu Sanghatan will be complete." (p.187)

Historical records document the Hindu Mahasabha's institutional activities, including its electoral participation and responses to communal violence during the 1930s–1940s. Archival evidence clearly indicates that there was an intentional strategic framing during the pre-partition period that considered minority political aspirations as being structurally incompatible with Indian sovereignty.

6. Impact of Savarkar on Hindu Nationalist Movements

The institutionalization of Savarkar's ideology advanced via certain chronological stages: initial mobilization (1920s), organizational consolidation (1930s–1940s), and post-independence adaption. This framework elucidates the translation of conceptual frameworks into organized political practice. In 1925, Savarkar assumed the presidency of the Hindu Mahasabha, and over time, his ideological framework within the organization evolved into the contemporary Hindutva movement.

Several events created the atmosphere ripe for the ideology of an exclusivist 'Hindu nation' or 'Hindu government' to emerge. However, in the eyes of Hindus, and in particular, upper-caste Hindus, the appalling acts committed by some Muslims of forcibly converting some Hindus to Islam became igniters of nationwide anger and counter-violence against the Muslim community. The alleged forcible conversions of Hindus by Muslims in the early 1920s became a rallying cry for Hindu nationalist mobilisation, with Savarkar and other leaders using these incidents to frame Muslims as perpetual aggressors against Hindu society (Jaffrelot, 1996). This was perhaps the first time that the violence committed against the other community was delightfully celebrated by a section of the press. In this setting it was decided on 29 August, 1924, to acquire the land from a Muslim trust and either to build a temple or a Hindu monument near that spot.

Perhaps the opposition of saviour Gandhi to this plan was felt more vehemently than it had ever been before. Gandhi's support for the Khilafat movement, which propagated the demand for reinstating one of the most despotic rulers who had butchered thousands of Hindus and for saving the so-called 'freedom' of the Turkish sultans, as well as the incidents of forcible conversions of Hindus in Kerala, had made a soft target out of him. On 1st February, 1924, Savarkar, in a celebratory tone, remarked that Hindustan was primarily a Hindu nation and it was 'the ardent desire and the firm determination of all Hindus' to have a Hindu Raj in the Motherland. It was here that he wholeheartedly accepted and supported the two-nation theory propounded by Jinnah and rejected the Gandhi-supported pan-Islamic notion of asking for a free state for Muslims in British India and argued that as Islam in its very essence was a sovereignty-degrading creed, India could not remain a free country until more than half of its population accepted the infidel creed of Islam (Chandrasekaran, 2012).

6.1. Influence on RSS and Other Organizations

Analytical distinction is maintained between documented organizational practices and contemporary political evaluations. Archival records indicate that the RSS emphasized cadre training and cultural consolidation during the 1920s–1940s, a strategy that diverged from mass electoral mobilization. Veer Savarkar's ideology was in many ways

similar to that of Golwalkar of the RSS because he believed in the idea of a country based on the broader notion of religion, race, and culture rather than on modern notions of a nation-state. According to Savarkar, Muslims and Christians are not part of his concept of 'nation' because of their blood and culture (Siddiqui, 2017). It is Hinduness and Hindu culture that would keep the nation away from disunity and discord. All non-Hindus should migrate to their own countries to retain the purity of Hindudom. Historical documentation shows that early 20th-century vernacular publications increasingly framed inter-community relations through exclusionary historical narratives, a trend that intensified during the 1920s–1930s. A few months after Savarkar's conviction, M.D. Kolhatkar (1923)¹¹, a Bombay periodical—in a front-page article titled 'The History of the Last 1,258 Years'—stated 'that "to destroy their [the Muslims] very religion" was the only remedy. The goal was to very rapidly make India free from Islam.' Such writings fed the minds of the Hindus, who started deadly riots against the Muslims in 1921. The RSS reconstituted its hardcore ideology around the Nehruvian post-colonial polity of secularism and liberalism, terming old schemes of Congress as "all sham!" Thus, the British colonial officials never considered the RSS to be working against their interests; on the contrary, they supported it vehemently through direct or indirect funding. Neither Hedgewar¹² nor Golwalkar joined the anti-colonial movement, opting instead in favour of 'character building' tasks.

7. Critiques of Savarkar's Ideology

Scholarly critiques function along two analytical dimensions: historical-theoretical (evaluating conceptual coherence and relevance to the colonial era) and contemporary-political (analyzing institutional legacy). This section distinguishes colonial-era ideological discussions from subsequent political mobilizations to preserve chronological and analytical clarity. Examining the possibilities for national reconstruction in the wake of its overthrow, Savarkar presaged intricate questions about religions' role therein. He took religion to be both egocentric and social. In it, individuals tried to reconcile the ultimate problems concerning the cosmos and their relation to it, producing a personal inner life. Out of these inner turmoils arose a communal and homogeneous social life with its own moral code of conduct. The past and present history of this human collectivity sculpted its national character. Because there were many religions in India, such as Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and Jainism, which entered and settled on Indian soil, Savarkar surmised that each had its genesis in something egocentric and constituted, at one time, a wholesome world conception. Each could, therefore, be reconceived and reconstituted responsibly in relation to the environment. Nevertheless, these religions think in such absolutes that once taken as a worldview, they are cleaved off from any possibilities for change or

¹¹ Kolhatkar, M.D. (1923, August 29). The History of the Last 1,258 Years [शेवटच्या १२५८ वर्षांचा इतिहास]. Kesari [केसरी], Bombay.

¹² Dr. K. B. Hedgewar (1889–1940) Known as "Doctorji," was the founder of the RSS in 1925.

reformation. Almost had this been attempted with the politicisation of Hindutva when the Princely States came under the Congress umbrella, before the British departure in 1947. Savarkar candidly acknowledged this impending crisis and also held crude vows of wanting to build a new Bharat Mata (Hardiman, 2007).

7.1. Other Political Leaders' Responses

During the 1930s–1940s, competing nationalist visions increasingly crystallized around distinct conceptions of sovereignty and minority inclusion. Among them, Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar played noteworthy but sometimes opposing roles in Savarkar's proposition of the Hindu Nation as well as his thoughts and ideology. As a response to the growing conversions from Hinduism to Islam, by the 1930s, the claimants of the Hindu nation had largely come to be identified by their faith in the party of Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Sayamsevak Sangha, founded by Hegdewar in 1925 and Golwalkar in pre-independence India (Dalton, 1970). Meanwhile, by 1935, the note of Hindu nationalism had entered the Congress, on the heels of Gandhi's call of 'Do or Die' during the Quit India Movement.

Facing the challenge from within, Gandhi, as an ex-India leader, warned against the exaggeration that Hindus lived prosperously and mysteriously in ancient ages, while Muslims, Christians, and foreigners ruined the proud Hinduism, followed by the crusades of Hindutva ushered away by Savarkar (Singh, 2018). He warned that if Hindus were considered a nation in the positive sense, then there would be countries like Sindh, Pashtunistan, and Baluchistan, which should be ruled by Pakistani Muslims.

8. Comparative Analysis with Other Nationalist Leaders

This section establishes a clear analytical hierarchy by comparing inclusive and exclusive nationalist frameworks, distinguishing between historical ideological positions and contemporary political adaptations. Gandhi and Savarkar present two distinct paths of nationalism that evolved in British India and that have taken form in post-colonial India, either in the form of the Congress Party's pan-Indian secularism or else in the Hindu nationalist ideation of the Bharatiya Janata Party¹³ that originated with Savarkar. Both ideologies have evolved and taken new forms, but their encounter in post-colonial India has subjected these ideologies to stress and adaptation, as seen in the current debates on Hindutva's claim to be a cultural nationalism rather than a religious one and the Congress Party's reinterpretation of secularism, which is no longer as inclusive as it used to be but dictated by electoral considerations (Matias Santos, 2018).

However, it is difficult to bring the two thinkers together on common turf since the common ground, which is culture or civilisation, is the stuff and fabric that is shaped

¹³ The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a major right-wing political party in India and the country's ruling party since 2014.

and contextualised differently, especially in a country like India that is the homeland of the idea of the two opposing paths of nationalism. The task is therefore like bringing two incompatible worlds together—colliding worlds of no common origin or context that have antithetical constructions of meaning. This might not be possible, but efforts failed to bring them together in spite of the vast differences or faults on either side.

8.1. Gandhi vs. Savarkar

Historical analysis distinguishes between Savarkar's territorial-cultural nationalism and Gandhi's ethically grounded, inclusive mobilization strategy. A striking aspect of Savarkar's ideology is that it focused on the whole of India. It used the term 'Brahma Varta'¹⁴ or 'Bharata'¹⁵ to denote a greater Bharat, including the Dravida region as well as Hindu lands abroad. Gandhi's ideology, though dealing with the same India, restricted its scope for political appeal and subsequently for practical activity to the Hindu populace of Hindustan. Savarkar presented a cure for national reconstruction in the shape of Hindu Rashtra and action to actualize it. Savarkar's conception of Hindutva was not only religious but cultural and geographical, envisioning a Hindu Rashtra that spanned over 'Akhand Bharat' (undivided India), while Gandhi's nationalism, albeit inclusive, was more constrained to immediate political practicality (Jaffrelot, 2007: 89). Analytically, this divide reflects contrasting views of sovereignty: one promoting civilizational homogeneity, the other emphasizing moral universalism and pluralist coexistence.

8.2. Nehru's Vision vs Savarkar's Ideology

Nehru's integrative secular framework and Savarkar's territorial-cultural framework represent structurally divergent approaches to post-colonial state formation. Nehru was representative of that strand of the nationalist movement that regarded the unifying theme of the struggle against imperialism as an all-Indian interest and effort. His vision of nationalism demanded that all Indians be committed to the common cause of overthrowing British rule and that all differences of caste, creed, or colour be reconciled to this common cause. "Nehru's nationalism was fundamentally integrative, seeking to subsume all particularisms—religious, regional, or linguistic—under an overarching commitment to secular democracy and socialist development" (Chandra, 1988: 157). As the divergence of objectives, ideologies, and strategies widened in the years between 1923 and the annulment of the congress's legitimacy in 1948, Nehru was to focus increasingly on the horizon of the ideal polity sketched in his speeches and writings and on the jargon of slogans derived from this horizon. The demand was for a unified India free of foreign domination where all would participate and share, regardless of caste, creed, religion, or language, on an equal footing in the productive processes of nationhood.

¹⁴ Brahmaparvata is a smaller, specific sacred region or "sacred heartland".

¹⁵ Bharata is the broad name for the entire nation/subcontinent.

By contrast, Savarkar's conception of India was territorial, delineated by its commitment to Hinduism. Anyone born in Hindustan with Hindu blood was Indian. The term Hindustan was not confined to a piece of geography but denoted a distinct cultural area, which had maintained a continuous history, predominantly Hindu. Despite linguistic and regional diversities, culturally the people of Hindustan were one (Dalton, 1970).

Conclusion

The ideology webbed by Savarkar took shape in British India, and the landscape, events, and atmosphere surrounding it at that time aided its emergence. Interpretations of this period and later events focus on the actions of individuals, such as the splintering of the Indian National Congress into moderate and radical factions, the alleged brutality of the police during the Delhi riots, or the social divisions exacerbated by the British, but little focus is placed on the ideology, the widespread universality of this ideology, or the events defining or triggering the emergence of the ideology amid political unrest, the great Madan Mohan Malaviya for the establishment of a Hindu university, or the great Gandhiji for the awakening of the Hindu society (Chandrasekaran, 2012), among other individuals and events. By analyzing these developments through the lens of Savarkar's intellectual intervention, this study finds that Savarkar successfully reframed Indian nationalism from a civic, pluralistic project into an exclusive cultural ideology. His reinterpretation of colonial history and contemporary political fractures served to prioritize Hindu territorial and cultural sovereignty, effectively jettisoning earlier pluralistic frameworks as foundational to Indian identity.

The events preceding Savarkar's emergence that played a part in the growth of the ideology in the minds of a cross-section of the Hindu society are of great import. Wanton and unsuccessful terrorism by extremists with savage violence alienated a sizable number of Hindus who found no salvation without organisation and unity. Laws that were demonised as anti-Indian were seen as protecting the Muslim legates from the counter-violence. Political divisions and tensions like the partition of Bengal that were originally Hindu grievances were grudgingly accepted, with the countering alive yet rabid with a few rational voices. Hence, a few things were clear then. This research demonstrates that Savarkar's ideology artificially and systematically reinforced communal boundaries by defining the nation through the dual criteria of pitribhumi and punyabhumi, thereby excluding Muslims and Christians from substantive national membership. In doing so, his conceptual framework directly contributed to the exclusion of religious minorities from the nationalist imagination in colonial India.

The paper moves beyond purely event-driven historiography to establish that Savarkar's ideological framework provided a foundational vision for Hindu nationalist

organizations, which focused on the consolidation of Hindus, cultural restoration, and majoritarian politics. The precision and comprehensiveness with which Hindu legates codified, explained, marshalled proof, and propagandised such a mighty ideology well before the birth of its grandest portrait and light ensured its institutionalization. It was not very difficult to find many admirers since it directly shaped the formation and political strategy of organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS, translating theoretical constructs into sustained organizational and electoral practice..

These findings answer directly the main research problem: Savarkar's Hindutva was not a cultural rebirth but rather a political project that redefined national identity, codified discriminatory frameworks, and provided the strategic template for modern Hindu nationalist mobilization. By tracing this shift from colonial-era ideological formulation to organized political activity, this study demonstrates how Savarkar's ideology determined the course of Indian nationalism and established structural precedents that still inform South Asian political discourse.

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