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## Savarkar in Europe from 1906 to 1910: A Reappraisal

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### Abstract

*Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a renowned Indian politician, historian, and ideologue, was also a key figure in the Indian revolutionary movement during his European sojourn from 1906 to 1910. This period was marked by Savarkar's involvement with the Abhinav Bharat Society, a secret revolutionary organization that aimed to overthrow British rule in India. Savarkar, who was inspired by Italian and French revolutionaries as well as brave hearts of 1857 war of Indian independence, played a pivotal role in shaping the Indian freedom struggle. He authored the then banned book "The Indian War of Independence-1857", which presented a new perspective on the events of 1857. Savarkar's activism in London and his literary prowess helped galvanize Indian students and revolutionaries in Europe, leading to the formation of the Free India Society. His influence extended to the United States, where the Ghadar Party was established, and his works inspired many freedom fighters, including Bhagat Singh. This paper reappraises Savarkar's significant contributions to the Indian independence movement during his time in Europe, highlighting his role as a catalyst for revolution and his enduring legacy in Indian history. Also, this paper is an attempt to establish V.D. Savarkar as the main inspirational figure of Indian revolutionary activities in Europe and America.*

### Keywords

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Indian war of independence, Abhinav Bharat Society, Giuseppe Mazzini, Mitra-Mela, Shyamji Krishna Verma, India House, 1857, Revolution, Madan Lal Dhingra, Ganesh 'Babarao' Savarkar, Free India Society, Madam Bhikaji Rustom Cama, Lala Hardayal, Winston Churchill, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Brigadier Pesquie, Scotland Yard, Guy Aldred, David Garnett, Ghadar, Harish Chandra Krishnarao Koregaonkar, Anant Kanhere.

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## **Savarkar in Europe from 1906 to 1910: A Reappraisal**

The famous politician, historian and ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was also an active revolutionary of unfree India, and his revolutionary and writing works during his European sojourn are yet to be fully discovered by modern historians and researchers. His revolutionary works in Europe were results of the inspiration he acquired while he was staying in his homeland, the Bombay Presidency, reading the works of stalwarts like Giuseppe Mazzini and Voltaire, the inspirational Italian and French ideologues respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The life-story of Savarkar is so scintillating-full of ups and downs as well as turns that it resembles a storyline of a top-notch thriller movie. It is also ironical as well as sad that writers and political propagandists have seen Savarkar through their own political specs and the real Savarkar – his motivation behind enduring all the pain and toils both in unfree India as well as independent India has not fully seen the light of the day till date. Savarkar was equally concerned and active regarding revolutionary movement in India, which was secular in nature as well as he was concerned about the protection of Hindu pride and prestige which is evident from the fact that he led his fellow students in attack on his village mosque following Hindu-Muslim riots in Azamgarh and Bombay Presidency when he was only a teenager.<sup>2</sup> Vinayak Savarkar was drawn into revolutionary activities from his high school days that continued during studying at the Fergusson college in Poona. Savarkar and his brother Ganesh founded Mitra-Mela in 1899 in Nashik. It was an underground revolutionary organization, a secret society for young revolutionaries. Savarkar was famously called as ‘General’ of this revolutionary organization, which later on grew into more expansive Abhinav Bharat Society – ‘Young India Society’; this name inspired by Italian revolutionary Mazzini’s ‘Young Italy’<sup>3</sup>. In 1906, Savarkar’s Abhinav Bharat Society developed closed contacts with Anushilan Samiti, a Bengal based powerful revolutionary organization. The main objective of Abhinav Bharat were to overthrow British rule and revival of Hindu prestige. Abhinav Bharat Society’s influence also

expanded to England when Savarkar sailed to London on S. S. Persia on 9 June, 1906 for studying law with an scholarship – Shivaji scholarship on the recommendation of famous extremist leader and another inspiration of Savarkar – B. G. Tilak. Shyamji Krishna Verma who started an Indian nationalist journal *The Indian Sociologist* from 1904 against the liberal thinking ‘Indian’ (the magazine of Congress wing British committee) and also India House, that was started in 1905 as a centre for Indian student as well as Indian home rule society providing a scholarship scheme to attract & bring radical young students and activists from India.<sup>4</sup> Although Shyamji Krishna Verma was convinced that the British Raj was exploitative and Indians had right to oppose even violently, his militancy was more in theory, lesser in action supporting the philosophy of passive resistance.<sup>5</sup> But the activities of India House got more revolutionary after 1907 when Savarkar joined its circle. Savarkar was more inspirational and magnetic as compared to other revolutionary theorists of his times.<sup>6</sup> It is alleged that it was Savarkar who inspired and influenced his coeval Madan Lal Dhingra, the outcaste khatra from Punjab disowned by his influential father due to his involvement in revolutionary activities in India.<sup>7</sup>

Madan Lal Dhingra assassinated William Hutt Curzon Wylie on the evening of 1 July 1909 in England. Curzon Wylie was political aide-de-camp to the secretary of state for India and also the head of the secret police. Later on when Madan Lal Dhingra was hanged on 17 August 1909 at Pentonville Prison and several Indian political leaders condemned the murder of Wylie and criticized the brave Dhingra, it was Savarkar who voted against the formal resolution rebuking Dhingra’s act.<sup>8</sup> Savarkar also questioned the resolution procedures and appealed to the Indian leaders to treat the acts of Madan Lal Dhingra fairly and not with imperialist eyes. Even when Mahatma Gandhi failed to see the patriotism of Dhingra properly, it was Savarkar led Abhinav Bharat Society that printed a postcard which showed Dhingra as a patriot of his country. As a result, several British and Indian leaders criticized both Savarkar and Dhingra. It is remarkable to note that two famous British politicians-who were known for their immense patriotism towards their own country, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill praised the defiance of Dhingra as “the finest ever statement in the name of patriotism.”<sup>9</sup>

Savarkar was also involved with the Free India Society too, an organization of Indian students in London active to overthrow the

British rulers from India. It was co-founded by Bhikaji Rustom Cama, famous as Madam Cama. She was fondly called as mother of Indian revolutionaries. Savarkar and Cama were active members of India House along with Lala Hardayal, V. V. S. Iyer, P. M. Bapat, V. N. Chatterjee and others.<sup>10</sup>

One of the major contribution of Vinayak Savarkar during his London days was that he authored the book on Indian Revolution of 1857, "The Indian War of Independence-1857", which was later banned by British rulers. Before that the 1857 revolution was generally called "Sepoy Mutiny" and armed rebellion. It was Savarkar's work on 1857, which established the new viewpoint to see that through Indian perspective. This book was written to mark the golden jubilee of the revolution. This book became so incendiary in England that Scotland Yard captured some of its Marathi Manuscripts and its English translation was eventually published in Holland in 1909. It mentioned 'An Indian Nationalist' as its author. In India too, this book on revolution of 1857 remained banned for many years until 1946. But, it still inspired many revolutionaries from Bhagat Singh to modern day politicians like L. K. Advani.<sup>11</sup>

Two incidents which influenced Veer Savarkar and other Indian revolutionaries in Europe at that phase of time were the infamous partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon and the resultant dominance of the extremist leadership within the Indian National Congress, which shunned the 'mendicancy' ways of prayer, protest and petitions and advocated the 'passive resistance' way of struggle.

Indian Youth residing in UK and US during 1906 to 1910 who were already warming up to use the revolutionary ways erstwhile devised and used by Italian revolutionaries like Mazzini and Garibaldi and popularized by Russian anarchists of those days felt charged up by the change of guard within the congress when 'Lal-Bal-Pal' trio started to forefront the struggle after the Bengal partition of 1905. Youths like Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Vinayak Savarkar, multi-talented Lala Hardayal and Bhikhaji Cama were already in contacts with revolutionary secret societies of Ireland, Russia, France and Egypt.<sup>12</sup> Savarkar's activism in Abinav Bharat Society as well as his literary prowess - the articles in pamphlets like 'Khalsa' as well as many European journals with the help of his European comrades in prints like. David Garnett and Guy Aldred proved pivotal in conglomerating the other budding revolutionaries studying in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

Free India Society attracted students from all over Europe and the speeches that Savarkar and other illuminaries gave there inspired youths like Dhingra, Bapat and Chattopadhyaya. Free India Society was a very popular organization and the golden jubilee celebrations in the memory of martyrs of 1857 revolution which was held in London at the house of Nitin Dwarkadas on 10th of May 1907, attracted the ire of British rulers.<sup>14</sup> Savarkar celebrated Shivaji Jayanti in London as well as he wrote the famous poem named 'Priyakar Hindusthan'. The publication of Savarkar's "Indian War of Independence-1857" was banned in England as well as in India and France. Later on, it was secretly printed by Savarkar's elder brother in India and also in Holland and England by a marathi-knowing group of students.<sup>15</sup> First, they translated and published it in English and later on it was translated in many other Indian languages. First, this masterpiece was distributed among youths and revolutionaries in Europe free of cost. Later on, it was Lala Hardayal who started journal 'Ghadar' in United States, did publish some portions of '*Indian War of Independence-1857*' in his journal too. It became a source of inspiration for many freedom fighters later on. Even J. L. Nehru praised it for its Indo-centric approach regarding the elaborate description of the events and heroes of war of independence-1857.

This hype and mass-popularity led to the ban of the book by British authorities and despite many efforts by many Indian, the ban was only lifted in 1946. The moderate section of Congress also did not put in required effort for lifting of the ban. Still this book remained available to the revolutionary Indians secretly and they got inspiration from the heroes of 1857. Mangal Pandey, Dhan Singh, Nana Saheb, Rani Laxmibai, Ajimullah, Khan Bahadur Khan became household names and people's heroes and heroines as a result. G. V. Subbarao, famous editor of Goshti and K. F. Nriman gave credit to Savarkar as chief inspiration behind the idea of Indian National Army and the famous war waged upon British forces under Subhas Chandra Bose's leadership during the second world war. Due to Savarkar's work—*1857 Swatantrya Samar*, the 'war' waged by the I.N.A. was not termed as 'mutiny'. G. V. Subbarao called Savarkar as 'sun of our Indian firmament'. Indian revolutionaries escalated their efforts to terrorize the British for India's freedom by assassinating infamous British Officers in England while they had returned to their homeland after serving in India. The chief strategist was Vinayak Savarkar. The plan to kill some of the infamous Britishers like

ex-vice-roy Lord Curzon, Lord Kitchner and Curzon Wylie was made in the secret meetings of Abhinav Bharti and as a result techniques of Russian anarchists and revolutionaries were chosen.<sup>16</sup>

The revolutionary from Maharashtra, Harish Chandra Krishnarao Koregaonkar has mentioned about the revolutionary activities of Vinayak Savarkar in his testimony that Savarkar had talked to him about his plans of smuggling arms into India for violent revolution against British after getting from Belgium, America, Switzerland and Egypt.<sup>17</sup> Later on, his plans were executed to some extent by the Gadar revolutionaries who came from United States and Canada to incite fellow Indian as well as Indian soldiers in British Army. The articles and other literary works of Vinayak Savarkar like 'Khalsa' and 'O !Martyrs !' were distributed in Germany, United States and France. These articles were frequently published in many newspapers like Ghadar in America and also through Indian Information Bureau founded by Virendranath Chattopadhyay famously known as 'Chatto'<sup>18</sup>. On the indication from Savarkar, some Browning Pistols were brought by Govind Amin and also some of them were used by Madanlal Dhingra in his practice sessions at Tottenham Court shooting range.<sup>19</sup> Some of the pistols were also sent to India via USA, France, Germany etc. for armed revolution in India as well as assassination of cunning British officials like 'Pandit' A.M.T. Jackson by Anant Kanhere in Nashik.<sup>20</sup>

Savarkar was at the helm of affairs at the India House, when international socialist conference was going to be held at Stuttgart in Germany in August 1907, Savarkar saw a golden opportunity to highlight the cause of Indian independence at the international stage. He sent Madam Bhikaji Cama and Sardar Singh Rana as Indian representative.<sup>21</sup> It was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar who designed one of the earliest flags which was to be unfurled by Madam Cama on 18 August 1907.<sup>22</sup> This historic flag had three horizontal strips of three colours-green representing the Muslims, saffron at the center denoting the sacrifice and valour of Buddhists and Sikhs and red at the bottom representing Hindus.

Savarkar's name also came up when 'Pandit' A.M.T. Jackson was assassinated by Anant Kanhere, as the source of the pistol used for the murder.<sup>23</sup> Jackson was the person who was responsible for the arrest of Vinayak's elder brother and Abhinav Bharat Society's mastermind in Maharashtra, Ganesh 'Babarao' Savarkar. Babarao was convicted

of organizing an armed revolt protesting against the Morley-Minto reforms and sent to Andaman Islands' infamous prison for life imprisonment. Savarkar brothers were now considered to be the one of the most prominent dangers for the British rule, and Vinayak's name came up in a conspiracy to overthrow British Government in India by organizing assassination of infamous British officials.

Fearing arrest, Vinayak Savarkar had to leave London and shift to Paris at Madame Bhikaji's home. The lookout for Savarkar persisted, and suddenly Savarkar decided to return back to London. He is said to be honey-trapped by a lady Lawrence Margaret, set-up by British agencies. Although there is little evidence found in the support of this theory, Savarkar seemed to foolishly believe British sense of justice in this case and as he stepped out of train at Victoria Station, he was arrested by police officials, chief inspector John McCarthy and inspector E. John Parker of Scotland Yard. This happened on 13 March, 1910.<sup>24</sup> He was taken to the Bow Street Police Station. In his belongings, Scotland yard found two copies of his historic creation, '*The Indian War of independence-1857*', seven copies of pamphlet '*Choose O!Princes*', another copy of Mazzini, his idol as well as several papers of journals and newspapers. As expected, Vinayak Savarkar was denied bail after the preliminary hearings.

His counsel Reginald Vaughan of Gray's Inn exclaimed, 'No bail at all?' towards the magistrate Sir Albert de Rutzen.

Vinayak Savarkar was ordered to be transported to India. The British government had evidence about Savarkar's involvement in smuggling of the 20 Browning handguns to India, one of which was used by Anant Laxman Kanhere in the killing of A.M.T. Jackson, in 1909.<sup>25</sup> Savarkar's pamphlets and books were also found to be enticing Indians to wage war against British empire. He was put on the commercial ship S. S. Morea on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1910 and sailed from Tilbury docks escorted by Metropolitan Police Officer Inspector Edward John Parker and CID official, Charles John Power along with two Indian head constables Amar Singh of the Nashik police as well as Muhammad Siddik of the Poona Police.<sup>26</sup> On 8 July morning, when the ship S. S. Morea was docked at Marseilles, France, Savarkar tried to escape by jumping from ship's twelve-inch-diameter porthole. He swam in hurry for about ten feet to get to the quay. As Savarkar was about to get away Amar Singh found the plot and hurriedly followed back along with other head constable Siddik. Brigadier Pesquie of the French Gendarmerie Maritime also joined

the chasing party and at last Savarkar was caught.<sup>27</sup> But, by now he was on the French soil. Savarkar appealed to the French officer to arrest him and take him before magistrate. Savarkar knew that he was eligible for asylum in France. But officer Pesquie, knew no English and out of confusion, he handed Savarkar back to the head constables who dragged him back to the ship. When the repairs were done Savarkar and his escorts left Marseilles and when they reached the port of Aden on 17 July, they boarded another ship—Salsette. Before that when the French government came to know of the incidences of Marseilles and hurriedly they asked for Savarkar to be brought back to France and also lodged an appeal with the Permanent Court of Arbitration. They accused Britain of not taking proper measures for his renditions. The court gave its decision in 1911 that the British authorities did not have to return back Savarkar to the French as their was neither fraud nor force involved there. But it indeed mentioned the ‘irregularities’ in Savarkar’s arrest and delivery over to the Indian Army Military Police. The decision was much criticized by many journals of Holland, Belgium, France, USA, India and other countries. They questioned the sense of justice and equality of the Permanent court of Arbitration.

*The Morning Post* condemned the verdict as regressive that had ‘reduced the right to asylum and the international law to farce.’<sup>28</sup> Another newspaper *The Berlin Post* of Germany expressed its dis-satisfaction in its critical editorial dated 25 February 1911 about the Hague Court of Arbitration:

“.....National prejudices and prepossessions determine their judgement from the onset. Nevertheless, who should hardly have thought it possible that a court of arbitration in the Savarkar case would accord an exhibition of such touching naivete’, such an exhibition of ‘pure folly’.”<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, Belgium’s famous journal *La Society Nouvelle* in 1912 criticized the verdict stating that ‘England’s infamous Empire rests on blood, ferocious repression and officially acknowledged systematic tyranny’.<sup>30</sup>

The trial and conviction of Veer Savarkar was turning point for the Indian revolutionaries in Europe. Britain now seemed to be dangerous for any revolutionary activities, and subsequently other places in Europe like France, Belgium and Germany as well as American continent became the hosts to many revolutionaries.



Finally, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's European sojourn ended when he landed on the Indian soil at Bombay (now Mumbai) on 22 July, 1910. He was then taken to Nashik where he was put behind the bars before being transported to cellular jail in Andamans.

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