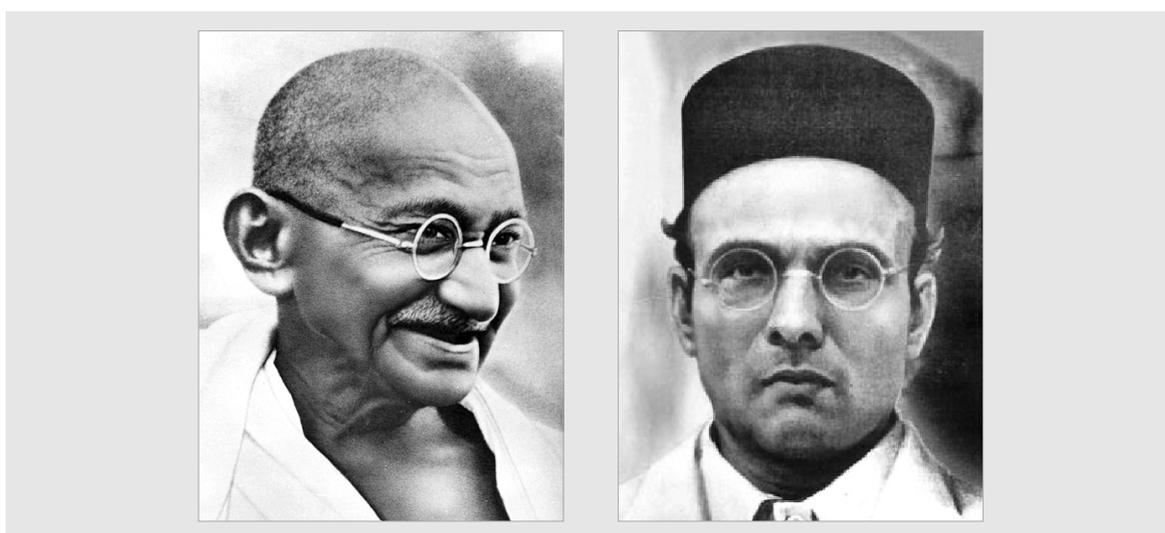


What is India?

Gandhi vs Savarkar: Debating Civic and Ethnic Nationalism

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Introduction

The 'Idea of India' is one of the most debated themes in contemporary India, given that an alternative idea of India is gaining ground. Nationalism is one of the important components of the idea of India, and has been much debated and discussed subject in India. It is important because it tells us the identity of India, and what kind of a nation we would like to be, especially, when we are witnessing the changing relationship between religion and politics in contemporary Indian society. There have been different forms of nationalism i.e. civic, ethnic, and religious. Modern India is the result of these competing ideas of nationalism.

Here, we would focus on two competing ideas of nationalism: a) Gandhi's model of Nationalism, as discussed in *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule*, a book written by him in 1909; and b) Savarkar's idea which he articulated in *Hindutva: Who is A Hindu*, first published in 1923, though the ideas in it were formulated during Savarkar's stay in England from 1906 to 1910. Both are fundamental ideas, among others, dominating Indian polity and society for the last 100 years since its emergence. At a time when the present government in India has decided to make nationalism its rallying point, it is useful to compare the differing and alternative attitudes and visions of Gandhi

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with Savarkar. At the outset, it must be stated that their ideas on identity, nationalism, religion and politics are, sometime, quite overlapping.

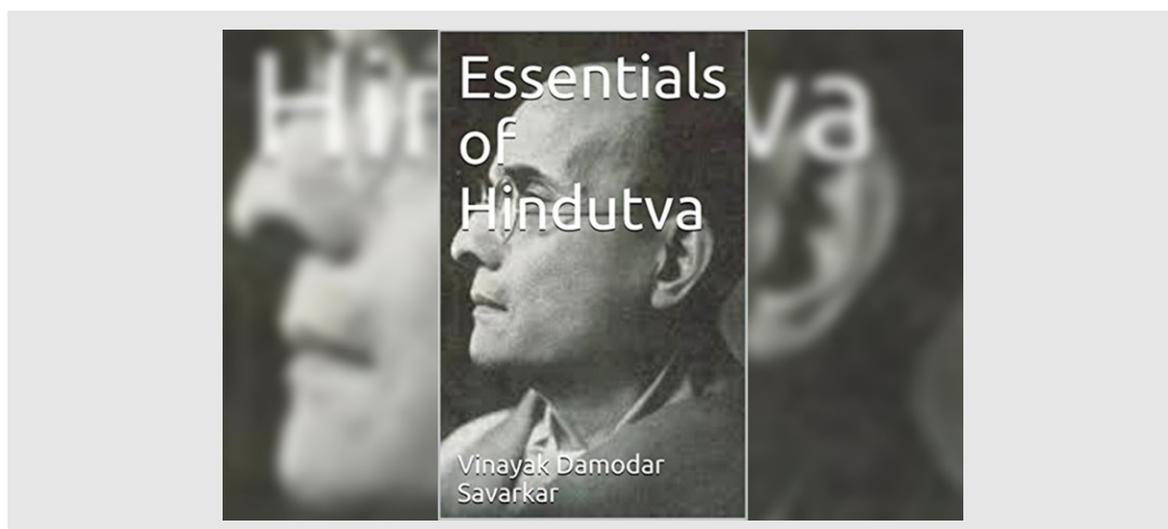
Out of many ideas of India, Gandhi's Hind Swaraj and Savarkar's Hindutva represent two dominant ideas. They represent two alternative and competing ideas on nationalism, Indian identity, civilization, religion, politics and violence. They differed in their methods as well. Savarkar rejected Gandhian principle of ahimsa and political action through "passive resistance". Both were in an adversarial relationship. In the given context of Indian politics today where Savarkar's Hindutva has gained ground, it is important to revisit both the competing ideas. Gandhi encountered Savarkar's hostile militant Hindutva with his philosophical and spiritual understanding of Hinduism.

It is important to mention that the previous BJP-led government had put Savarkar's portrait in Parliament. On Savarkar's birthday, the Prime Minister Modi paid homage to him and tweeted about Savarkar's "tireless efforts towards the regeneration of our motherland" (Economist: 2014). One can witness the ideological shift in Indian polity today; hence, there is a need to revisit these competing ideas.

Every country and society may have differing and contesting narratives of the past and for its future. It is natural to see these narratives alternate each other, but it is important to analyse how one is attempting to replace another and what are the contrasting visions which are going to become dominants.

Identity and Nationalism

Savarkar introduced the concept of Hindutva and clearly made a distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva. Savarkar contended that Hindutva is broader than Hinduism. For him, Hindutva encompasses the religious, social, cultural, political and linguistic spheres. Savarkar's offers Hindutva as a doctrine for Hindu Nationalism, discusses Hindu civilisation, purity, concept of nation, cultural nationalism, while Gandhi in his book Hind Swaraj critiques the modern civilization and its materialistic bias, and defines Swaraj in terms of man's spiritual mastery over his material desires, when he says 'Home Rule is Self Rule'. He also goes on to discuss Hindu religion, caste, economic development etc.



Savarkar, writes "Every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this Bharat Bhoomi, this land from Indus to the seas, as his Fatherland and Holy Land, the land of the origin of his religion and the cradle of his faith". According to this definition, only the followers of Vedas, Buddhism and Sikhism will constitute 'Hindu'. It excludes Muslims, Christians and Jews. In order to possess Hindutva, a man must regard India as his "fatherland" (the land of his ancestors, pitra-bhumi) and his "holy land" (religious allegiance); he must also be attached to this land, this territorial entity called "Bharat" through his birth here, not only that, through ties of blood to his family, his forefathers, his race of fellow-Hindus, and moreover through a love for Hindu "civilization, as characterized by a common history, common heroes, a common literature, a common art, a common law and a common jurisprudence, common fairs and festivals, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments." (Vajpeyi: 2014)



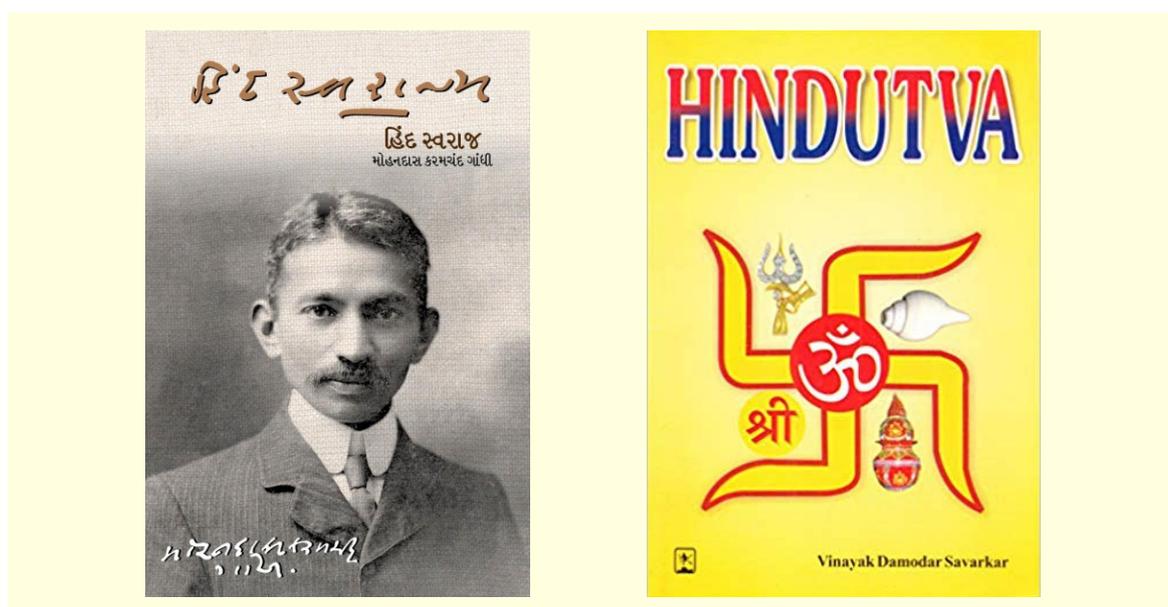
For Savarkar, this understanding leads to Hindu nationalism which excludes all others, and argues that India belongs only to Hindus. Political identity and religious affiliation becomes the basis for each other. Savarkar highlighted that for Muslims, as the Holy land is outside India, and therefore, they can't be given the right to be genuine claimants or equal citizens to the Indian nation.

Gandhi believed in a different idea of India where he mentions "India can't cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. The introduction of foreigners doesn't necessarily destroy the nation as they merge in it. India has ever been such a country". (Hind Swaraj:52) For Gandhi, India's religious and linguistic diversity was an asset not a liability. Gandhi's use of metaphors like 'clay pot' and the 'oceanic circle' (Parel: 2006) is opposed to Savarkar's understanding, and he wants to see a deep emotional tie between different sub-national groups.

Gandhi's vision for the future was swaraj or self-rule, where the "self" was at once each individual striving to overcome their own inner demons, and a vast conglomeration of Indians struggling

for freedom from British rule. It is interesting to note that while Gandhi himself was deeply religious, but he never defined the “self” of “self-rule,” as Hindu, Muslim or even Indian. Gandhi's pursuit was for the self and for its sovereignty.

The reading of both these books shows that both had very different approaches to the nationalism and the struggle against British rule. While, Gandhi was a pacifist with an inclusive approach towards Muslims and Christians, Savarkar's revolutionary activities began while studying in England, where he was associated with the India House and founded the Abhinav Bharat Society and the Free India Society, as well as published pamphlets and books espousing the cause of complete Indian independence by revolutionary means. His stand towards Muslims, who constituted more than 25% of the population before partition, and other non-Hindus was highly problematic. He regarded these minorities as other, alien and separate, in effect not real/full Indians.



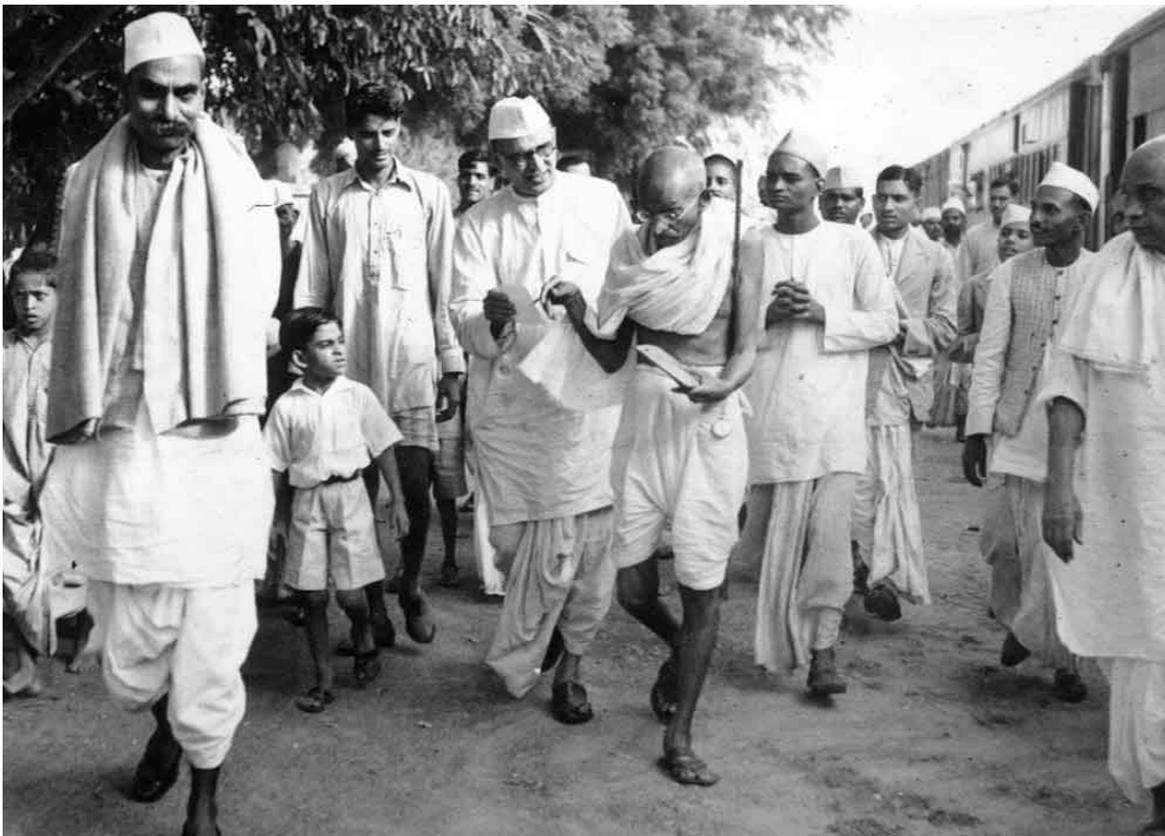
Savarkar emphasizes that “Our nationalist vision is not merely bound by the geographical or political identity of India, but defined by our ancient cultural heritage. From this belief flows our faith in 'cultural nationalism', which is the core of Hindutva. That, we believe, is the identity of our ancient nation—Bharatvarsha. Hindutva is a unifying principle which alone can preserve the unity and integrity of our nation.” Further, we can see that both stand apart when it comes to the question of identity and nationalism.

Violence

Apart from other concepts, the big difference between Savarkar and Gandhi lay in their contrasting views on violence. For Savarkar, use of violence is perfectly fine and justifies the murder. His writing is immersed in a desire for revenge against those who have 'humiliated' Hindus, and he is also disappointed with the apathy of Hindus on these issues. Savarkar's enthusiasm for violence goes in contrast with the pacifist narrative of history and concept of Ahimsa by Gandhi. Savarkar was a fierce critic of Gandhi.

Gandhi's Hind Swaraj was the mission of his life. “This is nothing other than showing the way for moral regeneration of Indians and political emancipation of India”. (Parel, 1997). Non-violence and truth are two major aspects of Gandhi's political philosophy.

Gandhi promoted ahimsa which Savarkar called "mealy-mouthed". Ahimsa also means 'non-injury'. The very practice of non-injury means one will avoid the possibility of any physical injury and injury to the soul as well. For Gandhi, the way of ahimsa is the way or gradual overcoming of the ego and finally the achievement of the truth of being. Gandhi critiques Hindu militancy and revolutionary terrorism in Hind Swaraj. He tries to point out the demerits of that ideology in these lines, "Do you not tremble to think of freeing India by assassination. What we need to do is kill ourselves. It is cowardly thought, that of killing others. Those who will rise to power by murders will certainly not make the nation happy". Therefore, for Gandhi, means adopted is equally important as is end.



Religion and Politics

Gandhi's idea of India accommodates all religions, castes and tribes. For him all religions are good and truth can be found in any religion. He studied all major religions and had equal respect for all religions and cultures. Gandhi believed that religion and morality cannot be separated from politics. By this he did not mean any particular religion but a set of values which will guide your politics. For him unity of all Indians for the cause of India is a must in order to achieve the goal of Independence. He believed that the real enemy is not British government but it is within, materialism and aspiration to be modern, which needs to be overcome with spirituality. (Parel: 1997)

Gandhi provides a critique of modern civilization and he believes that it is based on exploitation of man and nature for material gain. He offers his own idea of society based on mutual respect, truth, courage, dignity and high standard of ethics. "To believe that what has not occurred in

history will occur at all is to argue disbelief in the dignity of man". (Parel: 1997). By writing Hind Swaraj he gave a course of action how to achieve independence through non-violence and high moral standards, not by engaging in violent activities or accepting modern civilization. , In contrast, Savarkar espoused a kind of militant nationalism where violence was seen as being natural response.

Savarkar's idea of nationalism begins not by asking who is an Indian, but who is a Hindu? When he says Hindu it doesn't mean Hindu religion, he considers Hindu as an umbrella concept which means whole of Hindu movement not a mere Hindu religion. According to Savarkar, this nation belongs to Hindus only, it includes all interpretations of Hinduism; also it includes Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. There is no place for others like Muslims, Christians, Jews, etc because their Holy Land is not within Bharatvarsha. Savarkar writes, "We are one because we are a nation, a race and own a common Sanskriti (civilisation) in the case of some of our Mohammedan or Christian countrymen who had originally been forcibly converted to a non-Hindu religion and who consequently have inherited along with Hindus, a common Fatherland and a greater part of the wealth of a common culture—language, law, customs, folklore and history— are not and cannot be recognised as Hindus. For though, Hindusthan to them is Fatherland as to any other Hindu yet is not to them a Holyland too" (Hindutva, p.113-14).

"National identity rest for him on three pillars: geographical unity, racial features, and a common culture. Savarkar minimises the importance of religion in his definition of a Hindu by claiming that Hinduism is only one of the attributes of Hinduness". (Jaffrelot, Hindu Nationalism: A Reader, p.86).

Hindutva has the potential of undermining the very strength of Hinduism, which is its ability to accommodate complex diversity, its fluid, heterogeneous, and tolerant character. Savarkar wrote that India is composed of Hindus and must only be run by them. Through his concept "Hindutva", he attempted to unite disparate Hindus in a political project, making use of religion.

According to Raghuramaraju, "While Savarkar sought to politicize religion, Gandhi pleaded for spiritualizing politics." Recognizing this difference would immensely help us in articulating, and understanding the larger tensions between Gandhi's and Savarkar's books which is also reflected in contemporary Indian society.

Gandhi shares with Savarkar the view that religion and politics should be intertwined. However they differ immensely on the nature of its relationship. Gandhi's religious thought believed in Hinduism as a religion of love, not political might or tool, in keeping with a doctrine of non-violence. Thus, one can argue that Gandhi was interested in spiritualizing politics; therefore, he rejected Savarkar's militant views on politicizing spirituality through Hindutva.

Gandhi's arrival in India in 1917 marks the major shift in congress led national movement, i.e. from class based to a mass based movement. It is important here to mention the context in which Gandhi is articulating these positions. He wanted to educate that violence, urge to become modern, materialism is taking us backward, and we should leave these practices. Gandhi was a philosopher and thinker and read a lot of other western literature including Tolstoy's works.

Conclusion

There were differences of opinion between Gandhi and Savarkar on almost every political and social issue and methods and means of struggle against colonialism. These differences were very much rooted in their understanding of nationalism, modernity, its epistemologies and different variants present in Europe at that time. They tried to see their relevance for Indian context and freedom movement. Gandhi's idea seems to be rooted in indigenous traditions yet he is influenced with the 'scientific temper' and 'modern politics' which, undoubtedly, has its roots in West. Moreover, Savarkar, on the other hand, was influenced by the intellectual tradition and the practice of the Right-wing politics in Europe.



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