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VINAYAK DAMODAR SAVARKAR

Swatantraveer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, popularly known as Veer Savarkar, was a prominent figure in the Indian freedom struggle known for his revolutionary ideas and actions. He was a prolific writer and wrote extensively on various topics, including history, politics, and culture. He is best known for his book "The Indian War of Independence," which argued that the 1857 Indian Rebellion was not a mere revolt but a full-fledged war of independence.



Those who disagree with Savarkar's political views start with the assumption that he was an obscurantist and a reactionary bigot. While Swatantraveer Savarkar is primarily known for his role in the Indian nationalist movement and his advocacy of Hindu nationalism, he also made significant contributions as a social reformer in India. It is not widely known that he was also an outstanding social reformer. His contribution to the field of social reform is relevant even today.

From childhood, Vinayak found the caste system that plagued Hindu society reprehensible. In his little way, he broke these barriers. Despite being an upper-caste Brahmin, and a landlord, all his childhood friends were from poor backgrounds and belonged to the so-called lower castes. The boys ate together, and the Darjis' mother treated Vinayak as her son, showering him with all her love. It is Rightly said that actions speak louder than words, and Savarkar proved it. Parashuram Darji and Rajaram Darji, who belonged to the tailoring community, were among his best friends. He and his friends played together, they supported each other, and the caste system never became a barrier between their friendship.

Veer Savarkar opined that to regard humans as untouchables and treat them worse than animals are an insult to humanity and the sanctity of our souls. He was firm in his decision to bring reform to Hindu society by working on eradicating untouchability in our Indian society. He considered untouchability is an inhuman custom; fighting against it is our duty, and Hindus should eliminate it.

He says the demand for so-called untouchables to draw water in public places and enter public temples is highly modest and justified. All-important holy places, temples, and holy and historical sites (such as the Ram temple at Panchavati in Nashik, Sethubandh Rameshwar, etc.) should be open with the same regulations to all Hindus, irrespective of varna or caste. For him, impurity is understandable but not untouchable because if a Brahmin is impure, he may be denied temple entry. Still, on the other hand, even a Mahar who is pure should be allowed temple entry. For him Building separate and exclusive new temples for so-called lower castes are not the right way to eradicate untouchability; not only temples but having different schools for untouchables is also, in a sense, harmful. The liberation of untouchables is not theirs alone; it is the liberation of those touchable whose hands and minds had been soiled by this injustice.

Veer Savarkar was a relentless champion of social reform. During his time, Hindu society had been weakened by seven shackles, namely sparshabandi or untouchability, shuddhibandi or prohibition of reconversion, betibandi or prohibition of inter-caste marriages, rotibandi or prohibition of inter-caste dining, sindhubandi or prohibition of seafaring, vyavasayabandi or prohibition of the following profession of other castes and vedoktabandi or prohibition of performing Vedic rites. Savarkar made substantial efforts to break these seven shackles through his speeches, writings, and actions. As Savarkar has said, social reforms are not for the faint-hearted; one must always be prepared for a tough fight. In 1925, Savarkar started a survey of the Maharwada, or the colony of the Mahars, a so-called untouchable low caste among the Hindus. He started organizing mass singing of bhajans, or Hindu devotional songs. He toured small towns around Ratnagiri, such as Dapoli, Khed, Chiplun, Devrukh, Sangameshwar, Kharepatan, Devgad, and Malvan. He made speeches decrying the practice of caste-based segregation and ensured that schools in these places stopped this pernicious practice. He confirmed that children of the so-called low castes such as Mahars, Chamars, and Bhangis, or Valmikis as they are now called, compulsorily attended school by distributing chalk and slates and giving monetary incentives to their parents. He exposed schools that continued the policy of caste-based segregation but sent false reports to higher authorities.

To ensure that untouchability disappeared not just from schools but also from homes, Savarkar, accompanied by people from different castes, visited numerous houses during Hindu festivals like Dassara and Makar Sankranti to distribute traditional sweets. He organized mass haldi-kumkum gatherings of Hindu women and ensured that women from ex-untouchable castes applied kumkum to women of higher castes. He gave complimentary passes of his plays to ex-untouchables so that they may freely mingle with people of other castes. Savarkar wanted to start a temple open to Hindus of all castes, so he established Patitpawan Pawan Mandir in Ratnagiri. Savarkar had invited Dr. Ambedkar for the opening of Patit Pawan Mandir. He also lent support to Dr. Ambedkar in his Mahad and Nashik campaigns against untouchability.

Veer Savarkar contributed both in the realm of thought and deed. He was never motivated by narrow considerations of politics, power, pelf, and popularity. Above all, he was a humanist. The least we can do in his memory is to follow the ideals for which he staked his home and heart!

Prachi Bandaram

Reference :1) www.savarkar.org

2) Book by Vikram Sampath, echoes from a forgotten past