

Veer Savarkar's Fight for Social Equality

Swatantryaveer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar born on May 28 1883, in Bhagur, Nasik was a fearless freedom fighter, social reformer, writer, dramatist, historian, political leader and philosopher. Savarkar is largely known as a revolutionary freedom fighter and exponent of Hindutva but he is not widely known that he was also an outstanding social reformer.

During 1925, Ratnagiri district in Coastal Maharashtra was considered a bastion of conservatives. During that period the plight of untouchables brethren was far more than worse, the society was chained by the following seven shackles in the social sphere: prohibition of touch (*sparshabandi*) of certain castes, prohibition of interdining (*rotibandi*), prohibition of intercaste marriages (*betibandi*), prohibition of pursuing certain occupations (*vyavasayabandi*), prohibition of seafaring (*sindhubandi*), prohibition of rites sanctioned by the Vedas (*vedoktabandi*) and prohibition of reconversion (*shuddhibandi*) to the Hindu fold.



He was completely against these shackles and through his speeches, writings and actions, it is evident that Savarkar made concrete efforts to break the orthodoxies of his time, such as the seven shackles. He crafted many essays on abolition of caste such as '*Jatyuchchedak Nibandh*', '*Vidnyannishtha Nibandh*'. He also wrote a collection of short stories called '*Samaj Chitre*'. His drama '*Ushaap*' (Antidote to a curse) which deals with untouchability,

kidnapping of women, *shuddhi* and the duplicity of conservatives etc.

Due to such shackles, the children who belonged to marginalized communities were seated separately in schools or were completely refrained of education. He ensured these children 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 to higher authorities.

In 1932, Savarkar made a presentation on behalf of the Ratnagiri Hindu Sabha to ICS Officer Lamington who had been given special responsibility of the lower castes. Savarkar said, **“Once the children are educated together, they will not observe caste hierarchy in later life. They will not feel the need to observe caste division.** Therefore, the Government regulation of 1923 must be strictly followed. In addition, the Government should abandon the title ‘special schools for low caste children’. This very title creates a feeling of inferiority among children attending the school”, his goal seemed clear, to promote equality, cancel out the sense of inferiority amongst the marginalized communities and abolishing the chains of hierarchy.

During that period, inter-caste dining was unimaginable, it was considered a sin to interdine with people belonging to certain communities but Savarkar didn't really believe that rather he believed that, **“there is no harm in eating what is medically permissible with any medically fit individual, not in a common plate but as a common meal. It is insane to believe that caste changes forever simply by sitting and eating next to an individual from a different caste.”** and therefore, he even carried out a programme undauntedly on 08th March 1931 where 35 participants of Gandhiji's Salt Satyagraha from Ratnagiri were released. Savarkar publicly honored them and organized a ‘dining together’ programme. One more notable example, in 1934 when Savarkar visited Malvan to launch the newspaper ‘Konkan Samachar’ there he arranged a ‘dining together’. People from various communities attended this programme. Thus, Savarkar's campaign for social reform encompassed all castes. Within a period of ten years from 1924 to 1934, Savarkar had broken the shackle of prohibition of inter-caste dining. They were also unable to have darshan even from a distance therefore, Savarkar wanted to start a temple that would be freely open to all. Idols of Bhagwan Vishnu and goddess Lakshmi shall be consecrated at this temple. One who has had a bath and wore clean clothes will have the right to have darshan of these idols. The Patitpavan Mandir at Ratnagiri is a standing testimony to Savarkar's indefatigable commitment to breaking the taboos.

A man of action as he was, he resolved to make the most of life and to make the best of it. Such a person of great courage and indomitable spirit who fought against all odds for a better tomorrow.

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Reference:

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- 2) <https://savarkar.org/> : Veer Savarkar as a social reformer- Part II
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