

# Introduction

Hindutva is not a word but a history

**Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva***

. . . *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins

**Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"**



Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is a difficult figure. As an intellectual founder of Hindu nationalism, he has emerged as *the* most controversial Indian political thinker of the twentieth century. His arguments for Hindutva transformed political debate by rethinking the concepts “Hindu” and “Hindusthan.” He is remembered as an anti-imperialist who simultaneously longed for the resurrection of the lost Hindu Empire of centuries past. He is celebrated and condemned for his roles as a nationalist, a revolutionary, a political prisoner, and president of the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha. He gained notoriety for his programme to “Hinduise Politics and Militarise Hindudom” while also arguing for permanent war against Christians and Muslims. He was never forgotten – and for many, never forgiven – for his associations with the murderers of M.K. Gandhi – the Mahatma. The consequence: Savarkar is declared a martyr by some and condemned as *the* enemy by others.

The historical significance of Savarkar’s life is acknowledged and accepted by those familiar with modern South Asian history. Less is known about the corpus of his work. His prolific writings have certainly not received the attention of those of his contemporaries or interlocutors.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is a lack of awareness of how much Savarkar actually wrote in his lifetime. The fact that his interpretations, conceptualisations, and ideas were at the epicentre of key debates that shaped the landscape of Indian political thought in the twentieth century

<sup>1</sup> In recent years, there has been a growing interest in analysing Savarkar’s writings. See, for example, Agrawal, “Surat, Savarkar and Draupadi”; Bakhle, “Country First?”; Bakhle, “Savarkar (1883–1966), Sedition and Surveillance”; Bakhle, “Putting Global Intellectual History in Its Place”; Copland, “Crucibles of Hindutva?”; Heredia, “Gandhi’s Hinduism and Savarkar’s Hindutva”; Krishan, “Discourses on Modernity”; Kumar, “History and Gender in Savarkar’s Nationalist Writings”; Menon, “Between Bodies and Borders”; Nandy, “A Disowned Father of the Nation in India”; Pincince, “On the Verge of Hindutva?”; Pincince, “V.D. Savarkar and *The Indian War of Independence*”; Sanadhya, “V.D. Savarkar and the Impossibility of Hindutva?”; Sharma, “History as Revenge and Retaliation”; Visana, “Savarkar before Hindutva”; Wolf, “Vinayak Damodar Savarkar’s ‘Strategic Agnosticism’.”

is generally overlooked or simply ignored. There is no agreement about how his work should be represented or remembered given his polarising status within India. As a result, the reception of Savarkar's ideas remains penumbral.

Yet my own initial interest in Savarkar had little to do with academic or public debates. Instead, I was motivated for personal reasons. This is not an assertion typically made at the start of a book in academe – on the contrary. I was named Vinayak after Savarkar by one of his disciples, Dr Dattatreya Parchure – who happened to be my pediatrician. Dr Parchure was known as the “second Savarkar” in central India during the 1930s and 1940s, but what brought him international notoriety was the fact that he supplied the automatic handgun that was used to kill Gandhi.<sup>2</sup> Rather than ignore, hide, or obscure this part of the story, I begin my book with this autobiographical framing: after all, it was the discovery of the origins of my name that started my interest in reading Savarkar's writings. But, more important, it had to do with the realisation that the supporters of Savarkar's arguments about the concepts “Hindu,” “Hindutva,” and “Hindusthan” wanted to create a Hindu India through diverse cultural and political practices – including the naming of children. The “second Savarkar” was planting seeds with the hope of creating a new generation of Savarkars in post-colonial India. My own life-story was entangled with the politics of Hindu nationalism.

I suppose if I had never learned the origins of my name I would have written a very different book – in its form, presentation, and style. There would be no autobiographical context, and Savarkar would not have been on my mind for such a long time. But I imagine there still would have been an intellectual and political imperative to write about Savarkar. Let me explain.

As I was completing research for my book *Peasant Pasts* (2007), it became apparent that Hindutva was no longer a marginalised idea, as it had been for most of the post-colonial period in Indian history. The state of Gujarat experienced devastating communal violence in 2002, in which nearly 2000 individuals were killed.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 150,000 people were displaced from their homes, and, of those, 100,000 forced

<sup>2</sup> *GOI, RCI*, pt I, vol. III, 265.

<sup>3</sup> Chaturvedi, *Peasant Pasts*.

to live in relief camps. Most of the victims were Muslims. In assessing the aftermath of these events in Gujarat, many scholars, activists, and intellectuals argued that not only had the eruption of violence marked an end to the Gandhian ethos of non-violence that had come to define Gujarat in the twentieth century, but that the violence of Hindutva had now replaced the non-violence of Gandhi.

While the histories of Hindu–Muslim conflict and their impact on nationalism remained outside the focus of *Peasant Pasts*, my argument about violence was very different from what was being reported in Gujarat after 2002. In fact, I had examined the history of violence and conflict in the making of nationalism in agrarian Gujarat, especially in an area identified as Gandhi’s heartland. I had argued that violence was a feature of everyday life in Gujarat in the nineteenth and twentieth century – a fact that Gandhi himself readily acknowledged in his writings and speeches. Yet I ended *Peasant Pasts* by arguing that, for individuals living on the margins of colonial society, there remained the possibility of being part of the post-colonial nation on their own dynamic terms, even as I recognised the social and economic conditions of the historical actors who had been marginalised from the promises of the nationalist movement in Gujarat. I was not alone in making such an assessment. In fact, it was part of the *zeitgeist* of linking the end of formal empire with the promise of radical transformation within Indian society in the new nation-state. As scholars have argued, nations in post-colonial Asia and Africa exemplified the endless possibilities by subaltern groups of redefining how they want to be governed.<sup>4</sup>

This was, of course, only part of the story. There was also a “dark side” within post-colonial nations in which the poor, marginalised, and subordinated sometimes resorted to violence, often genocidal in nature – at times in collaboration with the state, in other instances independent of it – in order to stake a claim within the nation. The transition from being a colonial subject to a national citizen was fraught and conflictual, especially when considering that many victims of colonial societies became the perpetrators of genocidal violence in post-colonial states.<sup>5</sup> What I did not take into account in *Peasant Pasts*

<sup>4</sup> Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

<sup>5</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*.

was that some of the individuals and groups I discussed had already turned towards Hindu nationalism, or that others were going to make history as killers in the name of Hindutva.

In the aftermath of the Gujarat violence, an entire historiography developed seeking to explain the confluence of economic, social, political, and cultural factors responsible for the emergence of Hindutva in the region, and its implications for the rest of India. It appeared that Savarkar's ideas always loomed large in writings on the events of Gujarat, even if his name was not always mentioned. This was not a surprise. After all, he was the seminal figure who had theorised the concept of Hindutva. While his ideas largely remained on the margins of political culture for most of the twentieth century, it was evident that threads of his thought were now central to political debate in India. It is at this point that I returned to Savarkar's writings, especially considering his multiple strategies for promoting, circulating, and disseminating the principles of Hindutva. To be clear: my point is not to suggest that reading Savarkar's texts provides an easy explanation for the violence in Gujarat or elsewhere. That is not my purpose here. Rather, it is to point out that the contemporary debates about Gujarat provided an intellectual context in which I started considering how the complex story of Savarkar's ideas became increasingly powerful in the making of political thought in the twentieth and early-twenty-first century. In many ways, the idea for writing this book began here. That I was named after Savarkar as part of an effort to spread Hindutva certainly adds another dimension to interpreting the lasting influence of my namesake – a fact that stays with me every day.

## II

I begin this book with a simple observation: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar struggled with defining Hindutva. The publication of *Essentials of Hindutva* in 1923 marked an important juncture in the development of the conceptual history of “Hindutva.”<sup>6</sup>

Savarkar was not the first to use the concept: it was already a part

<sup>6</sup> The Box provides a brief discussion of the various titles and editions of Savarkar's most cited work.

**NOTE ON THE TITLES AND EDITIONS OF  
SAVARKAR'S *HINDUTVA***

There appears to be no agreement about the title of this book – part of the issue is due to the publishing history of the text. On the title page of the 1923 first edition, the information listed is: “*Hindutva* by ‘A Maratha,’ May 1923.” But on page 1, the title shows as *Essentials of Hindutva*, which, however, is not the title of the chapter because this edition of the book has no chapter titles. What complicates matters is that there is an edition of the book in the British Library in London with the title *Hinduism*, but the rest of the book is identical to the 1923 edition of *Hindutva*. In addition, the title page has the exact same font, but reads “*Hinduism* by ‘A Maratha,’ May 1923.” The title *Hinduism* appears to be an error: I have not seen other copies of the 1923 edition, or any other edition, with this title.

Indra Prakash, the general secretary of the Central Hindu Yuvak Sabha, published an edition of the book in New Delhi in 1938. *Hindutva* is the title on the dust jacket and title page. Instead of listing “A Maratha” as the author, as in the 1923 edition, he is identified as “Swatantrya-vir Br. Vinayakrao Damodar Savarkar.” After the title page, copyright information is provided (followed by an image of Savarkar) which lists the title of the book as *Hindutva*. On the next recto, an epigraph is included in Sanskrit with the English translation, but the title above the epigraph is “Who is a Hindu?” A foreword is included in this edition, in which Bhai Parmanand states, “I have been asked to write a foreword to Vir Savarkar’s ‘Hindutva.’” Note that Parmanand did not refer to the book as either *Essentials of Hindutva* or *Who is a Hindu?*

By the fourth edition of the book, published in 1949, the dust jacket retains the title *Hindutva*, but the title page now lists it as *Who is a Hindu?*, with V.D. Savarkar given as the author. In addition, quotes from the text are now printed on the title page (this is an expansion of the epigraph found in the 1938 edition). *Hindutva* appears on the dust jacket of the sixth edition published in 1989, but the title page gives the title *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Page 1 of the book lists the title as *Essentials of Hindutva*, as in the original 1923 edition, but it now also includes chapter titles and subheadings throughout the text. To further complicate matters, the running heads, i.e. the headers

on top of each page, are *Hindutva* on the verso and *Essentials of Hindutva* on the recto.

The same jacket title, title page, and running heads are found in the 2003 edition. The 2007 edition of the *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar, volume 4*, simply lists the title of the book as *Essentials of Hindutva*. An official website of Savarkar's work provides an online edition of the book and also identifies the text as *Essentials of Hindutva* (www.savarkar.org, accessed November 9, 2019).

The Marathi and Hindi translations of the book follow a similar pattern: the dust jackets of the books give the title *Hindutva*, and the first page of both books includes a translation of *Essentials of Hindutva* as the subtitle. In the Marathi, the translation is *Hindutvaci Mulabhuta tattve*; in Hindi it is *Hindutva ke pramukhatam abhilakshan*.

There are other editions and translations of the book that were not considered in this context; those editions may have further modifications. In the secondary literature on Savarkar, scholars have used all three titles in their analyses of the text: *Hindutva*, *Essentials of Hindutva*, and *Who is a Hindu?* For the purposes of this book, I have chosen *Essentials of Hindutva* as it avoids some of the confusion of differentiating between *Hindutva*, the text, and all the other uses and meanings of *Hindutva* as a concept. *Who is a Hindu?* is a later addition that served more as a subtitle of *Hindutva* in subsequent editions of the work. More important, from my perspective *Essentials of Hindutva* captures the meaning of Savarkar's ideas more succinctly and critically – a point that will be further discussed in this book.

of Bengali vocabulary in the nineteenth century. Chandranath Basu is identified as the individual who invented or conceptualised “Hindutva” – a term he discussed in his book *Hindutva* (1892).<sup>7</sup> However, Savarkar was undoubtedly responsible for the proliferation of the concept in the twentieth century. He explained that *Hindutva* should not be confused with its “cognate,” Hinduism.<sup>8</sup> For Savarkar, Hinduism was a “code” or a “theory” founded on what he called a “spiritual or religious dogma or system.”<sup>9</sup> He explains: “Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of *Hindutva*.”<sup>10</sup> And he continues: “Had not linguistic

<sup>7</sup> Basu, *Hindutva*.

<sup>8</sup> Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, 3. All citations are for the 1923 edition of *Essentials of Hindutva*, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

usage stood in our way then ‘Hinduness’ would have been a better word than Hinduism as a near parallel to Hindutva.”<sup>11</sup>

But Hinduness is not Hindutva; it only serves as an approximation. To further complicate matters, Savarkar posited that Hindutva was indefinable: “The ideas and ideals, the systems and societies, the thoughts and sentiments[,] which have centred round this name are so varied and rich, so powerful and so subtle, so elusive and yet so varied that the term Hindutva defies all attempts at analysis.”<sup>12</sup> The argument is that Hindutva is conceptually defiant. If Hindutva were only the name of an ideology, a theory, a religion, or a movement, it may have been possible to define the term. But it was in fact indefinable because Hindutva was ontological: “Hindutva embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race.”<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps Savarkar’s greatest innovation was to link Hindutva with Being. For him, Hindutva was not *the* ontological Being; rather, in his view Hindutva may best be described as the entity by which Being could be understood. Hindutva was an entity that had priority over other entities. Hindutva – in its anthropomorphic form, as described by Savarkar – not only touched Being, it also embraced all that constitutes Being. Despite this, there is in Savarkar’s conceptualisation a distinction between Hindutva and Being – they are not synonymous. Hindutva and Being are posited as having an intimate relationship which is completed in what may be called Hindutva’s “embrace of belonging” to Being.<sup>14</sup> It is his characterisation of this embrace that brings together what may otherwise appear impossible: that is, for Savarkar Hindutva is a crucial aspect *of* Being. But Hindutva is not all that constitutes Being, it is only a part of Being.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, there is a conceptual tension, or what seems a philosophical difficulty, that Savarkar introduces in his discussion of Hindutva. According to him,

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>14</sup> I have borrowed the useful conceptualisation of an “embrace of belonging” from Aggleton, “The Crystallization of the Impossible,” 282–3.

<sup>15</sup> I have found Jacques Derrida’s formulation of a “particular regional ontology” and “particular type of being” useful in this context. See Derrida, *Heidegger*, 11.

Hindutva's embrace of Being – “the whole Being” – is qualified, for it is an embrace of the “whole Being of our Hindu race.”

The inclusion “of our Hindu race” is both important and problematic. It adds a new dimension to Savarkar's conceptualisation. Hindutva as an entity could only be known by understanding all the actions and thoughts that have happened in its human form – in other words, that have taken human shape as a Hindu, or, in the plural, in the shape of the Hindu race. It is important to note that, at this moment, Savarkar asserted himself as a Hindu too, staking a claim within and for “our Hindu race” as part of his conceptualisation of Hindutva. In sum, Savarkar was using the personal pronoun “our” on behalf of the Hindu race.

Conceptualising Hindutva could for Savarkar have been as close to an embrace of Being as was possible. His representation of the entity “Hindutva” in its human form – as a Hindu or as the Hindu race – marks the starting point of any study for Savarkar – and, one might add, *of* Savarkar. However, to suggest that Hindutva was the entity by which Being could be understood did not resolve how to interpret Hindutva. Savarkar pointed out that a single word, such as Hindutva, had the power to “imply an idea,” but the word might function at the level of an “abstract generalisation.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, language provided the possibility for conceptualising Hindutva, but language was also limited in providing a way to explicate its meaning. As a result, Savarkar explained that his purpose was to investigate the essentials of Hindutva as a word. He asserted that Hindutva had an “essential nature,” an “essential significance,” and an “essential meaning” because it had existed for over four millennia.<sup>17</sup> The task was to interpret the meaning of Hindutva's essentials – the essentials of a special word that had embraced Being, but which was nonetheless a word.

It was over this ongoing conceptual struggle that Savarkar tried to reveal his method for understanding Hindutva: namely, History. Perhaps the most audacious passage he penned appears in *Essentials of Hindutva*, where he states, “Hindutva is not a word but a history.”<sup>18</sup> He explained that Hindutva was not a “spiritual or religious history,”

<sup>16</sup> Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

it was “a history in full.”<sup>19</sup> Savarkar first identified Hindutva as a word in his text; he then asserted the negation of Hindutva as a word. This should not be seen as a negation of Hindutva *per se*, but as the negation of a word – and, by extension, language – that could not adequately represent the essence of Hindutva. And yet Savarkar knew he could not abandon the word “Hindutva” either; it was irreplaceable.

It is in this moment of what might be called an existential impasse for “Hindutva” – as a word and not a word – that Savarkar immediately offers “history” as an alternative to provide meaning to “Hindutva.” To clarify matters once more: Hindutva is not simply “history,” or “the history,” but it is “a history,” or more specifically “a history in full.” Hindutva as *a history* is the singularity of Hindutva’s history – a single and singular history that is finite. And yet simultaneously Savarkar’s characterisation of it as a form of fulness suggests multiplicity, plurality, and completeness within that singularity or finitude. Savarkar concluded that the question of the meaning of Hindutva is not to be found in the word “Hindutva” itself, but within the multitude that is encompassed within *a history*. The essentials of Hindutva are truly the essentials of history.

### III

*Hindutva and Violence* tells the story of the place of history in Savarkar’s thought. The book is organised around Savarkar’s formulation of “a history in full” as the central conceptualisation in his writings. In many ways, I have been guided by Savarkar’s own argument. Hindutva may be indefinable, but the articulation that “Hindutva is not a word but a history” provides meaning to both “Hindutva” and “history.” For Savarkar, the key point is that “a history in full” is Hindutva, too. In other words, he not only linked Hindutva to Being, he also made it clear that history was going to be his method of interpreting Hindutva: his “a history in full” was going to provide the ultimate interpretation of how Hindutva may be actualised, recovered, or approximated in language.

Even before Savarkar wrote *Essentials of Hindutva*, he had already conceptualised the centrality of “a history in full” in *The Indian War*

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

of *Independence of 1857* (1909).<sup>20</sup> And even from that earlier book it seems that for Savarkar “a history in full” is not a complete history, a total history, a comprehensive history, or even a detailed history. Nor is it even a history that is necessarily archival or scientific. Rather, the purpose and practise of his own “history in full” seems to be to trace key historical events to a source – to a powerful unnamed source – which he defined as “desire” or “motive” within historical actors.<sup>21</sup> Whether this source was a manifestation of Being (or Being itself) in human subjects is not fully articulated in Savarkar’s oeuvre. To begin to understand what Savarkar meant by Hindutva, I argue that it is necessary to trace the genealogy of his notion of “a history in full” in his writings on history, as well as in his historical writings.

I have also examined a corpus of Savarkar’s other writings and speeches and unpublished texts that further illustrate the importance of the essentials of history in Savarkar’s thought. A continuity in Savarkar’s argument is found throughout his oeuvre: history is everywhere. Savarkar did however make a distinction between genres in his work. While he claimed that his poetry and dramas were inspired by history, and he wanted his histories to be aesthetically more like his poetry, he classified history as separate from his poetry, dramas, and novels. He was also aware of other disciplinary approaches for interpreting Hindutva. He began *Essentials of Hindutva*, for example, with a discussion of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* on the importance of naming: “We hope that the fair Maid of Verona who made the impassioned appeal to her lover to change ‘a name’ that was ‘nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to man’ would forgive us for this idolatrous attachment to it when we make bold to assert that, ‘Hindus we are and love to remain so!’”<sup>22</sup> He then turned to a brief discussion of the importance of understanding the links between language and meaning for the study of names, words, and concepts. He explained that “as the association of [a] word with the thing it signifies grows stronger,” over time it becomes “impossible to separate” the word from what it signifies within the “two states of consciousness”

<sup>20</sup> An Indian Nationalist, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, 4. All references to this text are from the 1909 edition, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>22</sup> Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, 1.

experienced by humans.<sup>23</sup> At the level of what he called “secondary thoughts and feelings,” the simple utterance of the word evoked an affective response which further reinforced these links.<sup>24</sup> Continuing to clarify matters, he said there are some words that not only signify “a complex idea or ideal,” but they function like “living beings” that “grow like organisms.”<sup>25</sup> Some words, such as “Hindutva”, have longevity, or even immortality, because the ideas inscribed within words “live longer than [the] generations of man.”<sup>26</sup> Savarkar appeared to be adopting a number of disciplinary practices to study Hindutva by engaging with concepts and ideas from literature, linguistics, semiotics, psychology, and biology. Yet he was clear that his disciplinary priority was history.

As a result, I have limited myself to writing about select texts; this book is not a complete or total analysis of Savarkar’s entire work. His oeuvre is quite large, and there is even some uncertainty about its actual size. As early as 1933, the publisher of one of Savarkar’s dramas included an advertisement for his Collected Works called *Savarkar Vanmaya*, listing all of Savarkar’s published texts, including those he had written under various pseudonyms.<sup>27</sup> In 1963, his official Collected Works, entitled *Samagra Savarkar Vanmaya*, were published in nine volumes: seven volumes in Marathi and two volumes in English.<sup>28</sup> These, when reprinted in 1993, included select writings absent from the original edition.<sup>29</sup> In 2000, a Hindi translation was published in ten volumes as *Savarkar Samagra*.<sup>30</sup>

The works collected not only include Savarkar’s main books, such as *Joseph Mazzini* (1907), *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (1909), *Essentials of Hindutva* (1923), *Hindu Pad-Padashahi* (1925), *Majhi*

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> MSA, HD Spec File 60-D-V-1934, Advertisement for *Savarkar Vanmaya*, in Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Uttarkreya* (Ratnagiri: Balvant Press [1933]), S-112-114.

<sup>28</sup> Savarkar, *Samagra Savarkar Vanmaya*, 9 vols.

<sup>29</sup> Savarkar, *Samagra Savarkar*, 10 vols.

<sup>30</sup> Savarkar, *Samagra Savarkar*, 10 vols.

*Janmathep* (1927), and *Bharatiya Itihastil Saba Soneri Pane* (1963), but also newsletters, speeches, poems, plays, memoirs, essays, and short stories. Even so, what is published as the Collected Works represents only part of his writings. For example, some of his journalism and one pseudonymous book are not included in the official Collected Works. According to Savarkar's personal secretary Balarao Savarkar, his employer was responsible for writing "3 dramas, 2 novels, ten thousand lines of poetry[,] 25 short stories, 4 books on history . . . and hundreds of articles that are compiled in about 20 books."<sup>31</sup> The problem is that Balarao Savarkar did not provide the titles or publication details of these works, making it impossible to work out whether some of the listed material was unpublished or merely uncollected or already published in the Collected Works or elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> More specifically, which four books Balarao Savarkar classified as works of history is unclear, as are the publication details of the twenty or so books he mentions.

The confusion is worse confounded by the evidence that Savarkar not only published books under various pseudonyms that have been identified – such as "An Indian Nationalist" and "A Maratha" – but that he may have also penned texts subsequently published under the names of his brothers Ganesh Damodar Savarkar and Narayan Damodar Savarkar.<sup>33</sup> This point was discussed by several British officials in the 1930s, when Savarkar was restricted to living in Ratnagiri. The subterfuge of publishing under the name of a trusted relative may have been necessary for Savarkar to shake off the government's censors at a time when he had agreed to refrain from writing on any topic related to politics. Since the colonial officials did not fully investigate the

<sup>31</sup> Savarkar, "Life Sketch of Veer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar," 16.

<sup>32</sup> Balarao Savarkar published writings as Bal Savarkar and S.S. Savarkar (Shantaram Shivram Savarkar). See Savarkar, *Historic Statements*, ii. The copyright page states, "S.S. alias Balarao Savarkar." Also, "3 Independents File Papers in City," *The Times of India*, December 4, 1979.

<sup>33</sup> Savarkar also used "A Maratha" as a pen name for select essays. See BL, L/P&S/12/484, A Mahratta, "Future Emperor of India," *Khyber Mail*, November 17, 1940. Officials suspected that a pseudonymous book by Durgatanaya titled *Rashtra Mimansa Va Hindusthanchen Rastriya Swarup* was written by Savarkar or Ganesh D. Savarkar. MSA, HD Spec File 60-D-V-1934, October 16, 1944. S-297-299, 316-318. (The signatures and initials are not legible in the document.)

authorship conundrum that they themselves had raised at the time, the difficulty of being able to pinpoint the authorship of certain texts has remained unresolved.

A large number of Savarkar's writings, including many hand-written letters and petitions, are in the Maharashtra State Archives (Mumbai). But the most substantial collection of Savarkar's work, most of it unpublished, makes up the "Papers of V.D. Savarkar" (hereafter, "Savarkar Papers") in thirty-four reels of microfilm at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi. As each reel includes approximately 800–1000 pages of written work, the "Savarkar Papers" are roughly 25,000 to 30,000 pages in length. To complicate matters, this calculation does not consider writings by Savarkar in the "Hindu Mahasabha Papers," also housed at the NMML. Since the "Savarkar Papers" also include letters sent to Savarkar and letters written on behalf of Savarkar, exactitude of authorship in the "Savarkar Papers" remains unclear. On the other hand, some of the material in the "Savarkar Papers" includes early versions of Savarkar's writings that were subsequently published in newspapers, pamphlets, or elsewhere. The drafts of Savarkar's presidential addresses, for example, are in the "Savarkar Papers," but the final versions were published annually as pamphlets; these were later put together in two volumes. Savarkar's first three addresses were published as *Hindu Sanghatan, Its Ideology and Immediate Programme* (1940), while a second volume titled *Hindu Rashtra Darshan* (1949) included all his presidential addresses from 1937 to 1944.<sup>34</sup> A.S. Bhide, Savarkar's secretary in the Hindu Mahasabha, collated Savarkar's statements, messages, interviews, and extracts from Savarkar's diary from the "Papers" for 1937–41 into one large volume titled *Veer Savarkar's "Whirl-wind Propaganda."*<sup>35</sup> G.M. Joshi and Balarao Savarkar published a similar volume of Savarkar's writings over 1941–65, titled *Historic Statements*, but some of the material in it is not to be found in the "Savarkar Papers."<sup>36</sup>

Another collection of Savarkar's writings and speeches was put together by Satya Parkash as *Hindu Rashtravad* (1945).<sup>37</sup> More recently,

<sup>34</sup> Savarkar, *Hindu Sanghatan*; Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*.

<sup>35</sup> Bhide, ed., *Veer Savarkar's "Whirl-wind Propaganda."*

<sup>36</sup> Joshi and Savarkar, eds, *Historic Statements by V.D. Savarkar*.

<sup>37</sup> Parkash, ed., *Hindu Rashtravad*.

Himani Savarkar, the copyright holder of Savarkar's writings till her death in 2015, was responsible for publishing the *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*.<sup>38</sup> She also appears to have been involved in starting [www.savarkar.org](http://www.savarkar.org) – a website dedicated to promoting Savarkar's writings.<sup>39</sup>

## IV

Hindutva as “a history in full” is, as discussed, a conceptual conundrum because Savarkar did not provide an explanation for his choice of “history” as *the* central idea, discipline, or method in his work. He was not trained as a historian, but he wrote as if the concept “history” was always a central part of his thought. Indeed, for Savarkar most things were historical or had a history. Hindutva, however, is special: it *is* a history – or, in Savarkar's framing “Hindutva *is* . . . but a history.” His coupling of Hindutva with history was now linked for posterity.

Savarkar's personal introduction to “history” had happened prior to his engagement with the concept of Hindutva. He was likely introduced to the concept of *itihāsa* in Marathi even before he learned the English term “history.” *Itihāsa* is generally translated as “history,” but its literal meaning is closer to “it so happened.”<sup>40</sup> As has been noted, vernacular uses of *itihāsa* often differ conceptually from uses of “history” in English.<sup>41</sup> The example of M.K. Gandhi is cited since he made a distinction by arguing that history is too limited a term that centres on wars and celebrates individuals engaged in acts of violence.<sup>42</sup> *Itihāsa*, on the other hand, is a much more expansive concept for Gandhi; it allows for writing about *ahimsa* (nonviolence), especially satyagraha (soul force), which is not accurately captured when using “history.”

<sup>38</sup> Savarkar, *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, 4 vols.

<sup>39</sup> Himani Savarkar was the daughter of Gopal Godse – a conspirator in Gandhi's murder and the brother of Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse. Himani married Savarkar's nephew, a son of Narayan D. Savarkar. See [www.savarkar.org](http://www.savarkar.org) (accessed November 23, 2019).

<sup>40</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> Skaria, “The Strange Violence of *Satyagraha*.” Also, Suhrud, “Gandhi's Key Writings.”

<sup>42</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 89.

However, Savarkar's interpretation of *itihāas* functioned independently of Gandhi's critique of history and his interest in both *itihāas* and history followed a different intellectual trajectory.

Savarkar noted that, already in his childhood, he was well versed in "old events and heroic incidents out of [*sic*] Maratha history."<sup>43</sup> His father, Damodar pant Savarkar, had introduced him to a diverse body of writings, including Marathi chronicles and biographies known as *bakhars*.<sup>44</sup> These texts provided an initial framing for Savarkar's understanding of *itihāas* – and, by extension, history. Approximately two hundred *bakhars* had been written in Marathi, some dating back to the sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The greatest production of these texts had happened in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>46</sup> At the centre of the writings Savarkar was reading on Maratha pasts were debates about the importance of *bakhars* for scholars. It is clear that Savarkar selectively cited a few *bakhars*, such as the *Sabhasad Bakhar* (c. 1694) and the *Chitnis Bakhar* (c. 1811) but offered no lengthy engagement with these texts.<sup>47</sup> Some scholars have dismissed *bakhars* as unreliable because they combine facts with myths, while also violating temporal protocols of dates and chronology found in modern history-writing. *Bakhars* neither included enough factual evidence to be considered "scientific," nor were impartial or objective enough to be considered analytical. One argument is that *bakhars* provided local narratives connected to a bureaucratic strategy of Maratha statecraft while also playing a central role in the construction of knowledge of a Maratha past in the region.<sup>48</sup> They included diverse information – from discussions about taxes, land documents, and state administration, to detailed descriptions of battles and wars. They also provided accounts of key events, including biographical narratives of the lives of kings

<sup>43</sup> Gupta, *Life of Barrister Savarkar* (1926), 3. All reference are to the 1926 edition, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, 49–50; Savarkar, *Hindu Pad Padashahi*, (1925), 293, 296. All references are to the 1925 edition, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>48</sup> Guha, "Speaking Historically."

and genealogies of important and powerful men. Administrators also often turned to *bakhars* to settle land disputes or conflicts about status within the polity.

Another argument is that *bakhars* played a central role in the construction of a Marathi historical imagination.<sup>49</sup> Modern historiography of the Marathas was born out of a concatenation of social and political processes that witnessed the transformation of the very understanding of history-writing itself. If *bakhars* served as a convention of “pre-colonial history-writing,”<sup>50</sup> then the context of colonial modernity directly shaped both “historical consciousness” and “historical practice.”<sup>51</sup> Standard conventions of disciplinary practice informed by positivist methods became normative in colonial India, but the impact of *bakhars* could not be ignored, and scholars continued to debate their veracity as historical narratives. In other words, modern historians debated the importance of *bakhars* as a source while continuing to underscore the epistemic and methodological limits of these texts in the creation of a modern historiography.

Savarkar later explained in his writings that he was familiar with a growing historiography that engaged with debates on whether *bakhars* were actual works of history, or sources for writing history. He had read the writings of major contemporary scholars in India, especially individuals who wrote about the history of the Marathas in English (and the *itihaas* of the Marathas in Marathi), such as Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade, D.P. Parasnis, Govind Sakharam Sardesai, Mahadev Govind Ranade, and Jadunath Sarkar.<sup>52</sup> There was some continuity in using both history and *itihaas* to describe this historiography. However, he explained that he was not interested in subscribing to the scientific or positivist parameters or methods applied by some contemporary historians to his own writings. He further mentioned scholarship in the field of what he identified as “[O]riental research,” but was also not concerned with explicitly engaging these debates in his work.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> See Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Savarkar was likely familiar with the historical fiction of Bankimchandra, given that Bankim’s “Vande Mataram” enjoyed a pan-India popularity.

<sup>53</sup> Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, 5.

Rather, he relied on the emergent historiography of the Marathas to construct his arguments about history, explaining that he did not want to replicate existing works on the Marathas within his own analysis. His purpose was to write “a history in full.” Yet, in his writings in Marathi, and the official translations into Hindi, this category, “a history in full,” was generally subsumed within the concept of *itihaas*. Savarkar’s distinction between the two had become blurred: his use of *itihaas* appeared closer to his conceptualisation of “a history in full” rather than just another Maratha history.<sup>54</sup>

While Savarkar’s understanding of history emerged out of these developments and debates about *bakhars*, he also explained that while attending Fergusson College in Pune he had read volumes of the “Story of the Nations” series, and they had influenced his thought.<sup>55</sup> T. Fisher Unwin started publishing books in the series in the 1880s, in London, and later collaborated with the New York-based publisher G.P. Putnam’s Sons to bring out nearly seventy volumes – such as works on Greece, Holland, Mexico, Scotland, and the Tuscan Republics.<sup>56</sup> These were popular histories written by experts in the field for general audiences. The purpose of the series, as described in one of the books, was to produce “historical studies intended to present in a graphic manner the stories of the different nations that have attained prominence in history.”<sup>57</sup> While the story of each nation was identified as “distinct,” each volume was also meant to compare national history to “universal history.”<sup>58</sup> (The idea of “universal history” is simply stated

<sup>54</sup> In the Marathi translation of *Essentials of Hindutva*, “a history in full” sometimes appears as *sarvangina itihaas* (literally, all-round history), while in the Hindi translation it is *sarva* (whole, entire, complete) *sangrahi* (collection, accumulation) *itihaas* (history). It is also translatable simply as *itihaas*, without any adjectives.

<sup>55</sup> Gupta, *Life of Barrister Savarkar* (1926), 19.

<sup>56</sup> The exact dates for the collaboration between the two publishers remain unclear. See <http://www.public.coe.edu/~theller/soj/not/nor-series.html> (28 accessed November 28, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> This information is provided in an advertisement for “The Story of the Nations” series in Orne Jewett, *The Normans*. The page number for the advertisement is not printed in the book.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

in the copy of the advertisement, without further explanation.) On the other hand, the plan for each book was to narrate “the real life of the peoples,” while also to interpret the “myths with which the history of all lands begin” and narrate “the actual history” of the nation.<sup>59</sup> In the late-1880s, libraries and bookstores in Bombay started receiving copies of books in this series, with advertisements and book reviews appearing in newspapers.<sup>60</sup> By 1893 Sayajirao Gaekwar III, Maharaja of Baroda, commissioned a Marathi translation of three volumes in the series for readers in western India.<sup>61</sup> Savarkar did not say which specific texts he read in this series, nor whether he read any of the Marathi translations available at the time. However, in his writings he noted their importance as “history was his special pursuit.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, they were different in form, structure, and methodology from the *bakhars*, providing him with an alternative framing for an interpretation of history where, at the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of a universal history was embedded in the writing of national histories.<sup>63</sup>

Savarkar’s writings about his introduction to history are incomplete. He did not provide further information about his exposure to or interest in history as a subject or discipline. He says he was introduced to newspapers, poetry, novels, and religious texts, but little more about history *per se*.<sup>64</sup> The fact that he turned to history at this historical conjuncture in colonial India is not a surprise, for history as a form of knowledge was thriving.<sup>65</sup> Children were taught history as part of the new

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Many advertisements and book reviews for the “Story of the Nations” series appeared in *The Times of India*, starting in the 1880s. One of the earliest was the Sassoon Institute’s announcement of new books in the classified section of *The Times of India*, January 10, 1887.

<sup>61</sup> “The Story of the Nations,” *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record of British and Foreign Literature*, 59, 1415 (August 12, 1893), 168. (The author’s name is not given.) And, “Bombay Vernacular Literature,” *The Times of India*, May 23, 1895.

<sup>62</sup> Gupta, *Life of Barrister Savarkar*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> By 1893, the series consisted of nearly forty volumes, ranging from histories of antiquity to the modern world. The advertisement is found in Boyesen, *The Story of Norway*.

<sup>64</sup> Gupta, *Life of Barrister Savarkar*, 1–32.

<sup>65</sup> There is debate about the origins of history or *itihās* as an episteme