

Excerpts of Savarkar's interview by an American journalist

"O Goddess of Freedom . . .

Here is The Bounteous One, our very own Motherland,

Why oh, why did you push her away?

Oh why did your Motherly love of old wither away?

Oh so anguished is my soul!

For she is now but a slave to others,

Why oh why did you abandon her so,

Answer me, I pray!"

- V. D. Savarkar, *Jayostute*

(translation by Anurupa Cinar)

Hi, Everyone! Here are some rare excerpts of an interview of Savarkar with an American journalist. The exact date is not known, but the year is 1943, judging by the content.

The interview is entirely from the perspective of an American. But point to note is that here is proof indeed that Savarkar had become a force to be considered in a very short time. Specific comments to highlight this are in red.

The journalist makes some very puzzling comments re Savarkar's appearance. Savarkar, of course, must have worn his dhoti which may have appeared like a nightgown to American eyes. But why should it have been dirty? Why were the glasses specked? Why the unshaven cheeks? From all reports, Savarkar wore pristine clothes and was immaculately turned out.

· Was it the journalist's imagination? Was Savarkar prone to the 5 o'clock shadow? Or had he just returned from a hectic tour and had no time to tidy himself?

I don't know.

There was no ostentation in Savarkar's room. It was austere in the extreme—maybe even dull and dreary. Perhaps that colored Treanor's opinion.

Anyway, here are the interview excerpts:

"Would you wish that I should confess to you everything?" asked old man Savarkar.

I hadn't meant to ask an awkward question. I thought perhaps since he'd been convicted and served time it was all a matter of record. He had already admitted they wanted to hang him and that he had gotten off with 50 years.

What I was curious to know was whether the old man, now so respectable, had actually thrown the bombs which killed the high government officials in England. That was when he said:

"Would you wish that I should confess to you everything?"

It was some other fellows and he wasn't saying who. It's not important now, anyway. That was way back at the beginning of the century when Savarkar was sowing his wild oats as a terrorist.

It was before my time. It's like storybook stuff when bombs had fuses that revolutionaries lit with a match. That was Savarkar's time as a revolutionary in London and later in India.

Now he's in good odor despite the fact that some of his fellow terrorists threw a bomb at a viceroy. Those were the days.

Savarkar is quite a sight to western eyes. He's a leading politician at the moment, head of the Hindu Mahasabha . . .

Savarkar was not specially dressed for the occasion of this interview. He looked at his worst. His sunken cheeks were unshaven, his perfectly round, metal-rimmed eyeglasses were specked, and he was dressed in a soiled length of cloth which looked like a nightgown and was insecurely fastened in front with silver studs, some of them missing.

But he didn't appear to give damn. He is interested in ideas. I didn't tell him that in America people are apt to consider political ideas dull and he apparently doesn't suspect it. When he talked over his plans he seemed to see a great American political audience with a voracious appetite for Indian politics.

His voice would become like a phonograph record and he would go on and on, braiding and unbraiding a tired looking handkerchief while he carried on about the Hindu Mahasabha.

I suppose he's a little of a fanatic to our taste. **But he has a certain power of personality and is definitely a figure of some importance on the Indian political scene today**, particularly now that many of the leading Hindus are detained along with the Mahatma.

To savarkar it must be rather odd to be almost the only one not detained.

As a consequence of his terrorist activities, he was sentenced to 50 years in all. The first 14 he served in solitary confinement on the Andaman Islands, when the "old war," as he called it, broke out, and one thing led to another and he was transferred to the mainland. He spent another 14 years interned in a village and six years ago was set free.

How he managed it I don't know, but despite all that confinement he was enough in tune with the spirit of the times to get into the political whirl and come to the top of a strong minority party which exerts a considerable influence today. He's a real story. I forgot to mention that his terrorist party was active in California 40 years ago, trying to line up the Sikhs in Central California.

I got him on the subject of Gandhi and the fast. As is everyone, he was respectful to the Mahatma, but he wasn't respectful to the so called weapon of the fast. I judge he thinks fasters—always excepting Gandhi, who is in a special category even to his political opponents—be fed through the nose with milk. At least he used that expression several times.

"If a fast is so effective," he asked, "why doesn't Churchill fast against Hitler? What would Hitler say?"

I couldn't think for the moment what Hitler would say. But Mr. Savarkar is sure it would be something rude.

Then we fell to talking about America's interest in India. As an old terrorist who did 14 years solitary confinement, he did not gush the usual sentimentality that America should offer some influence because her heart is pure. I am tired, as a matter of fact, of Indians who want us to help them because our heart is pure.

"The world is run by self-interest, not the Bible," he said. "What is your self-interest in India?"

He offered that our self-interest was as a fighting base, now and in the future. He foresees a long fighting future of 50 years before we get the world settled and thinks we would be smart to have a little Indian good will.

"Why not oblige India?" he asked. "You will need her someday."

And That's it!

Toodle-oo!

Anurupa