



Vivan Sundaram, *Figure from History*

## A subaltern fascism?

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This is an examination of certain aspects of the history of the Hindu Mahasabha and the political career of its sometime leader, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.<sup>1</sup> By the time he came to head the Mahasabha in 1937 it had been in existence for two decades, but his leadership transformed it into a significant political force with an agenda directly opposed to the Congress and the Muslim League and to the national movement for independence. A former revolutionary terrorist, Savarkar had been incarcerated in the Andamans Cellular Jail after being sentenced in December 1910 to transportation for life and forfeiture of property for masterminding the conspiracy to assassinate A.M.T Jackson ICS, Collector of Nasik in Bombay Presidency in December 1909 and conveying the revolver employed for that purpose. In prison he became persuaded that the enemy was not the British but the Muslims and accordingly won increasing privileges. Released from imprisonment to detention, he asked for and was paid a pension, and was permitted to conduct anti-Muslim propaganda. Released from detention by the provincial Congress Government, he headed the Mahasabha from 1937 to 1942, when it set out a programme to arm Hindus against Muslims by recruiting them to the Indian army, promoting military education, influencing the administration of the princely

states including their armies, gaining access to weaponry from their state forces to harass Muslims, obtaining arms licenses from sympathetic Congress ministers, attempting to set up a munitions factory at Gwalior in the expectation of support of the Darbars and the Birla industrial group, and exploring contacts with European fascists. None of this was discouraged by the British, who at the very same time suppressed anti-Nazi propaganda by left and liberal organisations. Despite its earlier praise for Mussolini and Hitler the Mahasabha hailed the proclamation of the new state of Israel in 1948 and promised it support. I shall argue that the Mahasabha pioneered what might be termed a *subaltern fascism*.<sup>2</sup>

Savarkar's exemplary conduct in jail won him favour.<sup>3</sup> When World War One began, he protested his desire to serve the war effort and asked for amnesty:

The siding of Turkey with Germany as against England, roused all my suspicions about Pan-Islamism and I scented in that move a future danger to India. I...feared that in this grim struggle between two mighty powers the Muslims in India might find their devil's opportunity to invite the Muslim hordes from the North to ravage India and to conquer it.

To combat this he proposed a new British union with her imperial subjects where, from Ireland to India,

an empire would emerge from the process, which can no longer be the British Empire. Until it assumed any other suitable name, it might well be called "The Aryan Empire".<sup>4</sup>

Savarkar's petition of 30 March 1920 claims that since he was 'without danger to the State', he should be granted a reprieve; for, far from espousing

the militant school of the Bukanin (sic) type...I do not contribute even to the peaceful and philosophical anarchism of a Kropotkin or a Tolstoy.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, he promised that his release would be

a new birth and would touch my heart, sensitive and submissive to kindness, so deeply as to render me personally attached and politically useful in future.<sup>6</sup>

George Lloyd, Governor of Bombay, later Lord Lloyd, an influential British imperialist who later administered Egypt, and a supporter of fascist movements in his subsequent political career, was persuaded not by Savarkar's grand designs but by the use to which he could be put as a former revolutionary. Accordingly, the Government periodically reviewed his loyalty. Only its assurance ensured each improvement in his living conditions and successive reductions in his sentence.

To disarm any suspicion that may yet linger in the Government Quarters, the petitioner begs to solemnly pledge his word of honour that he shall cease to take any part in politics whatever.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Savarkar is said to have renounced all

methods of violence resorted to in days gone by and I feel myself duty bound to uphold law and a constitution to the best of my powers and am willing to make the reform a success in so far as I may be allowed to do so in future.<sup>8</sup>

### **A new politics**

He was released on 4th January 1924. He then published the lessons of his experience in the Andamans, which were that through his struggles he had managed to overcome every humiliation inflicted by the Muslim staff and prisoners, and persuaded the prison management to appoint him to run the key operations of the prison and subordinate the Muslims to him, thus creating 'Hindu rule'.

CHAPTER X Miniature Hindu Raj. When I stepped into the Andamans there was in it, in prison and outside, what one may rightly call, Pathan Raj. Dressed in brief authority, the Pathan dominated the scene. It was overthrown, as I have described in this story, by the time that my stay in the prison had come nearly to an end. The Pathan Raj was gone and Hindu Raj had taken its place...The capital of that Raj was the oil-depot of the prison and as I have already mentioned before, I was its foreman and therefore the monarch of that Raj...The oil-depot being the main source of income for the Silver Jail, the man in charge of it was a person of great importance... every one connected with the oil-depot from top to bottom was a Mussalman, and mostly a Pathan...The wildest, the

intensely selfish, the most cunning and the most wicked person in the prison was often chosen for the job. During my seven to eight years of prison-life, an array of such men had adorned the seat. Now, in my ninth year, the seat had come to me. All the Mussulman tindals, petty officers and warders who had still remained in that jail, were full of fear that I was appointed to that office. The demi-god presiding over the oil-depot could only be propitiated by offerings in gold and silver. If the prisoner desired not to be ground down in the oil-mill of that place, they had perforce to propitiate its deity...Every single tindal began to approach me from now onwards with bated breath and in whispering humbleness.<sup>9</sup>

Now this seems a singular preoccupation: the warders and supposedly favoured Muslim prisoners in that remote jail may indeed have been oppressors but they were also poor men facing unattractive conditions. To triumph over them may seem like a strange achievement to record. It is stranger still that it has been so widely commended, for this is legend even for many on the Left. Savarkar had written a history of 1857 where he had spoken favourably of *jihad* against the British, and Hindu-Muslim unity against a common oppressor. That very Government still ran India at the time *Mazi janmathep* was published in 1927. Thereafter, as leader of the Abhinav Bharat Society he had led a terrorist conspiracy. Earlier he had a grand world-view, visualising Indian independence in the context of anarchist struggles and of the *Risorgimento*. Now all this is reduced to tyranny over a Pathan watchman at an oil-mill in Port Blair!

I think we can see the same world-view in his subsequent career, as he came to see mastery over Muslims in India as the single important political question, one that justified perpetuating British rule and postponing Independence. Indeed Savarkar was so transformed by his incarceration that he renounced entirely his earlier, more secular nationalism where he had approvingly employed the term *jihad* to describe how Indian Muslims took up arms against the East India Company. By blending these two phases of Savarkar's evolution, his earlier nationalism and the later culture of hatred of Muslims, the Savarkar scholar Bakhle, among others, has obscured the extent of the change that took place in Savarkar's

thinking whilst at Port Blair.<sup>10</sup> She speaks of Savarkar's arrest by the police of an 'independent India he had fought for all his life'.<sup>11</sup> Yet he fought for independent India until he was incarcerated, but not, as the record shows, thereafter.

Savarkar concerned himself now especially with what he claimed was the most ancient subordination of India, namely its invasion and subsequent rule by Muslim sovereigns. This demanded the abandoning of unmanly attributes and a return to ancient warrior virtues celebrated in the Vedas. It also demanded dealing with the threat of the Muslim presence in India as the perpetual enemy within, the *outsider inside*.<sup>12</sup> These ideas were promptly adopted in India: his Mahasabha colleague B.S. Moonje was to describe the so-called Muslim threat from the North as follows:

[It is] on this sector [the middle sector of the N.W. Frontier, KS] that whatever skill and manliness which we may possess have to be concentrated...Here lie... the famous passes...which have provided safe passages to enemy forces in invading India throughout its long history.<sup>13</sup>

### **Anti-caste movement to build a Hindu community**

Moonje echoed Savarkar in seeing the basis of Hindu weakness in the caste system. Accordingly, the solution was to attack the caste system in order to build a larger Hindu community to fight Islam:

Hindus generally...are known throughout the world, as meek, mild and docile people who, in their conception of spirituality and refinement, would prefer, if the Afghans were to invade India, to conquer them by love.

Moonje cites a Rao Bahadur C.V. Vaidya in support of this argument to claim that

The result of the Caste System is that, in India, about 10% of the population is fit and disposed to fight; while the remaining 90% by nature and heredity, is...therefore, ready to accept the rule of any Nation.<sup>14</sup>

The anti-caste movement was to become a part of the Mahasabha agenda. On 9th April 1932, whilst interned at Ratnagiri, Savarkar

spoke at a Mahar meeting of the Patit Pawan Mandir:

the image of Patit Pawan which is standing before you will not be polluted if you touch it...Your brethren are trying to enter the Temple at Nasik, and there they are getting *lathi* blows...Have a manly spirit. A boy of your caste will now recite the Gaitri Mantras in Sanscrit...<sup>15</sup>

### **Fascism and its choice of weapons**

For Savarkar, Moonje and other Mahasabha leaders the corollary to this was control of the state with its monopoly over violence. This would have to be done by *collaborating* with the dominant power in India and abroad, in other words, with Great Britain, to secure the sort of alliance that would help them prevail over the enemy at home, the Muslims in India.

Now Christophe Jaffrelot has identified difficulties in describing the Mahasabha-Sangh as fascist in the true sense, and therefore prefers to call them anti-liberal, totalitarian, and a specifically Indian variant of fascism, inviting the view that this might in an important sense be distinct from ‘true fascism’.<sup>16</sup> Jaffrelot says:

...elements suggest that the RSS should be regarded as ‘an Indian version of fascism’. As far as the formative years of the RSS are concerned, this expression is especially relevant if it implies that while the RSS belongs, with European fascism, to a general category of anti-liberal movements, it also represents a specifically Indian phenomenon which is not simply a reproduction of European fascism. (p. 51)

One feature he finds significant is that the RSS is committed to a *long-term* and organic change in the institutions of society by patient transformation— a trajectory quite different from the manner in which fascists have come to power elsewhere, by means of a coup or through the ballot box. According to him,

An important difference between this totalitarianism and fascism in its various forms or Nazism is that the Indian version chose to work patiently on society over a long period rather than seizing power and constraining society from ‘above’ ...The RSS, by contrast, is not a putschist organisation and Golwalkar considered that Hitler’s capture of the state was a mistake...it is true that it concentrates on long-term programmes rather than on the immediate capture of the state.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, I would argue that the RSS should actually be seen in the context of its alliance with the other constituents of the Sangh Parivar – the Hindu Mahasabha, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal. Perhaps Jaffrelot has given the RSS an autonomy it does not deserve, considering it in isolation from the other components of the Sangh Parivar. We shall see that the Mahasabha attempted to gain power by arriving at an arrangement with the Raj, so the commitment of the Sangh to patient long-term methods does not exclude other strategies; indeed several were deployed simultaneously. The extreme reverence for the state typical of Savarkar's Mahasabha was part of its strategy for a succession to the Raj as well as a classically fascist trait. It wanted to cooperate with the Raj in order to succeed it in office, which signified a considerable respect for the British Indian state and the various institutions it controlled. This also explains why the use of terror by Muslim fundamentalist groups or by gangsters has little to do with fascism, since they do not concern themselves with the state.

Secondly, the Mahasabha and RSS used their connections with sympathetic Congressmen and with the Durbars of friendly Hindu Princely States to gain access to weaponry and to other means of violence, so that they were able to intimidate, harass, and kill Muslims at the time of Partition, to drive them out of India, in order to change the demography of many regions. Their *Kristallnacht* would set the tone for many Muslim communities all over India and would play a part in changing culture as surely as the message conveyed by Hindu calendar art in a police station anywhere in India. This violence was an important *political* aim. Since they took it seriously, we should do likewise.

I suggest we *not* treat with excessive reverence the idea of a single classical fascism, with all other movements described as no more than inspired by it. In a recent paper Paul Arpaia argues that fascism is a response to the threat of democracy but not a coherent philosophy.<sup>18</sup> I also suggest that in subject peoples such as those of India under colonialism, not only was there a response to the chal-

lenge of Western power and the modern world, one that re-imagined the past and current religion, for instance both Hinduism and Islam,<sup>19</sup> but also, crucially, the threat of democracy that was posed by the mass mobilisations against colonial rule; the prospect of mass Muslim enfranchisement in the Punjab and Bengal was one that the Hindu Mahasabha recoiled from, thus embarking on a singular path which, as Jaffrelot correctly says, was anti-liberal. But this by itself is an *inadequate* description, and Jaffrelot's discussion of stigmatisation and emulation of the other is tantamount to no more than Japan's emulation of the West after July 1853.<sup>20</sup> The striking feature of the Mahasabha-RSS response was to see the supposed threat from the Muslim world in pathological terms. Only that can explain the ferocity of the recent pogroms in Gujarat in 2002, or the earlier ones in Bombay in 1992–93.

This anti-democratic strategy led it naturally to explore both collaboration with the Raj and emulation of the European fascists. At first sight, it seems curious that an aspirational fascist party should have been willing to cede the monopoly of force to an overseas imperial power rather than challenging it. But this is because it set out to court the prevailing coercive power in order to ensure an *authoritarian succession*. Without even control of the State, the Mahasabha's identified path to power was built on the expectation of power-sharing in a junior capacity, with the goal being reward for its service.

To return to Savarkar, on his release from imprisonment he was supported at government expense by the payment of a pension that he periodically requested be increased. Savarkar's pension was periodically reviewed as is evident in this letter from the Collector of Ratnagiri to the Home Department, Bombay.

On 3rd January 1933, I personally informed Savarkar that his conditions would continue...He considered that the Rs. 60/- allowance was insufficient since he could be earning at least Rs. 600/- per month, but he looked forward to taking up Government Service when his conditions would be withdrawn as that fact would be proof in itself that Government had gained faith having tried him in the fire.<sup>21</sup>

Savarkar's activities were monitored, and he showed no sign of nationalism or any anti-British activity. When the District Magistrate told Savarkar his detention was being extended, his reaction was to plead his loyalty. He then got an item put into a local paper saying that he should be let off because he was no threat.

Savarkar has been strictly observing the conditions imposed upon him for the last 8 or 10 years...There is peace and order in Maharashtra. It is not full of revolutionaries like Bengal. Mr. Savarkar is also devoted to activities that are harmless, to the upliftment of the untouchables.<sup>22</sup>

Though detained, his campaign against Muslim interests was given free rein. Supporting the right of Hindus to take out processions in front of mosques and play loud music at the time of prayer, he went on to promote this elsewhere in the Bombay Presidency and then all over India.<sup>23</sup> For example, advising the Hindu Mahasabha in Gharaunda in Punjab which claimed to face 'a case of the same type instituted here by the Mohammedans', he claimed that the Court in Ratnagiri had held that

music is stopped in some places either by compromise or by courtesy; neither of these can be established a customary right...The reasons alleged are plausible but they are not sufficient ground to interfere with the inherent right of the Defts to use a public highway so long as they do so peaceably...*nuisance such as above yields no cause of action.*<sup>24</sup>

Such activities contributed to anti-Muslim mobilisation in India. But they did not win elections at the outset for the Mahasabha as a political party. Those to the provincial assemblies in 1937 under the new Government of India Act did not show it to be a force of great consequence.

## Collaboration

But the declaration of hostilities provided the Mahasabha an opportunity to declare loyalty to the Crown and attempt to gain access to arms.<sup>25</sup> Hindus, according to Savarkar as President of the Mahasabha, should employ the War as an opportunity to seek high office under the Crown:

The Hindu members must stick to their positions on the Defence bodies and the Councils...to capture as much political and military power as could possibly be done.<sup>26</sup>

They expected to get posts on the Viceroy's Executive Council and the War Advisory Council.<sup>27</sup> The Hindus, the Mahasabha leader B.S. Moonje said, are aware of the fact that 'there is no other ally other than Britain for them'.<sup>28</sup>

As Moonje explained in his plan for the Hindu Military Academy at Nasik, security for India lay in the Royal Navy:

India being within the British Empire, possessing a Navy which no nation in the world at present can dare challenge, we may dismiss the question of our Naval defence for the present.<sup>29</sup>

Moonje quoted approvingly Sir Denys Bray, who, on retiring from the Government of India as Foreign Secretary, said that India still needed 'the generous and adventurous youths of England in her service'.<sup>30</sup> In this very spirit, Savarkar thanked the Viceroy

for the ship-yard, the Aeroplane factories, the increased output of up-to-date ammunitions, the increase in the recruitment in the Military, Naval and Aerial to which Indians are allowed without any distinction of religion or caste, etc. (sic).<sup>31</sup>

But participation in the War became increasingly unpopular and the Congress campaign gathered force. The Mahasabha Conference that took place in Madura (later Madurai) over Christmas 1940 apprehended that the Congress strategy was succeeding. So it decided to emulate it, announcing it would start a disobedience campaign, if by 31 March 1941 the British Government had not made a satisfactory response to the demand for Dominion Status for India within a year of the end of the War.<sup>32</sup> Intelligence reports recorded that from the very outset there was no seriousness in this threat:

no decision has yet been taken in regard to the manner in which "direct action" is to be launched, if launched at all.<sup>33</sup>

Soon even sympathetic audiences did not take these claims of the Mahasabha seriously. Savarkar proposed at a public meeting that should Japan forestall England in promising independence to India, 'she was likely to succeed in capturing the imagination of the Indian people', but this 'was greeted by the audience with derisive laughter.'<sup>34</sup>

The Mahasabha's strategy was to acquire influence in the British Government of India in the expectation that this could be consolidated in the future, for, as the Intelligence Bureau noted, 'what weighs with him (Savarkar) most at present is the importance of conserving Mahasabha influence in places of authority'.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, the Mahasabha backed out of the threat to launch any "movement".<sup>36</sup> The Committee meeting Savarkar chaired at Calcutta on 14 and 15 June 1941, held a 'patently artificial discussion' on the Madura resolution and postponed direct action indefinitely.<sup>37</sup>

A reorganisation proposed by Ashutosh Lahiri, General Secretary, sought the "broad-basing" of the Mahasabha. A programme 'which is exclusively dependent on the will and requirements of our foreign masters' lacked credibility. But that failed. Savarkar's objective remained what it had always been, namely, 'the establishment of Hindu domination'. To this end, he worked toward 'the strengthening of the Mahasabha hold on positions of administrative authority as and when favourable opportunities present themselves.' The former armed revolutionary terrorist now abhorred all confrontation with the Empire. 'In private discussions, the President made it clear that neither armed revolution nor "direct action" of the Congress variety was possible or likely to yield the best results.'<sup>38</sup>

Hindu Mahasabha policies seemed 'brazenly opportunist' to the British Director of the Intelligence Bureau.<sup>39</sup> At the height of the "Quit India" movement, in Punjab, "The *Hindu Mahasabha* has, at least for the time being, retired from the political arena".<sup>40</sup> Government informers provided it with an account of Savarkar's

speech at a closed door Mahasabha meeting where Savarkar spoke of the need for a ‘Hindu Army’:

it is understood that he said that independence could only be attained by resorting to arms, and Hindus should, therefore, cooperate with the British. .. If the army were Indianised Government would grant more concessions to India. He concluded with an appeal to Hindus to join the army, secure Commissions in it and develop martial spirit.<sup>41</sup>

The Intelligence Bureau noted the same theme prevailed in another Mahasabha meeting presided over by Madan Mohan Malaviya, Congress and Mahasabha leader, at a closed door meeting on 1 July 1941. This was ‘attended by a number of Hindu Mahasabha leaders including Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Dr B.S. Moonje and Sir J.P. Srivastava...decisions were in favour of wholesale militarization of Hindus by enlistment in the army’.<sup>42</sup>

These policies of collaboration bore no great dividend. The Mahasabha and RSS had no mass base at the time of the transfer of power, so the British did not see any reason to reward them for their support of the War. The real significance of this Mahasabha strategy is, I suggest, that it should be seen as a precursor of the more recent eagerness to serve Western interests in South Asia.

### **The Military School and access to weaponry**

During Savarkar’s Presidency, his associate B.S. Moonje, who had travelled to Italy to meet Mussolini, worked on the Mahasabha project of a military academy with considerable British official support.<sup>43</sup> The Home Department and Defence Department noted in September 1935 that the “Central Hindu Military Education Society”, registered in Bombay Province, was intended for “Hindus” only, to provide for their “Military rejuvenation”. Prominent Mahasabha members such as Sardar Chandroji Rao Angre (who effectively ran the Gwalior Darbar), M.S. Aney and Keshav Rao Hedgewar, were Members of this Society, and Dr. B.S. Moonje of Nagpur its General Secretary. Two prominent donors were the Maharaja of Gwalior who gave Rs. 100,000 as announced in the

*Times of India* of 28 March 1938, and Motilal Manekchand, also known as Pratap Seth, who gave the same amount, when the Society had set its target of raising Rs 300,000. Commander-in-Chief (Sir Philip) Chetwode sponsored it in November 1935.<sup>44</sup> So did the Viceroy Lord Willingdon in March 1936. Willingdon's successor (Lord) Linlithgow wrote on the 10th July 1936 to express his support for 'your public spirited enterprise'.

Moonje met the Defence Secretary Sir Richard Tottenham to ask for 'permission to start a miniature range for .22 rifles'.<sup>45</sup> Applying for a firearms licence from A. P. LeMesurier, District Magistrate of Nasik, Moonje pointed out:

a provincial Rifle Association was established by me in Nagpur C.P. seven years ago. It has got 5 or 6 branches in the districts of the Province of C.P. and Berar. ...Licence under rule 32 of the Rules under the Arms Act for ordinary and miniature Rifles has been granted to the Association; so that the branches need not apply for separate Licences.<sup>46</sup>

Tottenham endorsed this and LeMesurier recommended accordingly to the Home Department of the Government. The Bhonsla Military School was licensed under rule 32 of the Indian Arms Rules 1924, 'for target practice valid for such area as Government may prescribe'.<sup>47</sup> A letter from "HR" of the Home Department, Government of Bombay, to G.A. Shillidy, Deputy Inspector General of Police CID at Poona, stated:

I know little of the objects of the School except that it is said to be anti-Muhammadan rather than anti-Government.<sup>48</sup>

Dr. Kurtakoti Shankaracharya said, whilst opening the school on the 21 June 1937, that India

was mainly for Hindus even if the people of other religions lived in India. Some would rather have any rule in India than that of the British but he was content to have the British until India could defend herself.<sup>49</sup>

The *Times of India* reported that Moonje said:

Britain has defended India for the last 150 years, now it is India's duty to relieve Britain of the arduous work, and to help defend the Empire.<sup>50</sup>

Moonje wrote to Dr Jayakar that the Commander in Chief's permission to give training employing rifles with live ammunition was historic, for

In the 150 years (sic) history of British India, this is the first instance where permission for Target practice by actual Rifles has been granted to an Indian School.<sup>51</sup>

Moonje's proposal for the Bhosala Military Academy was informed by his concern to create a fascist personality from the clay of Indian manhood. Addressing the question 'Why should we establish a military school?', he answered:

This training is meant for qualifying and fitting our boys for *the game of killing masses of men...*The same thought is repeated...by Signor Mussolini, the Maker of the Modern Italy...Germany has gone into the matter most scientifically...Revenge is one of the fundamental manly qualities of a person...we Hindus were taught on the battlefield of Panipat on one side and Plassey on the other.<sup>52</sup> (italics mine)

The Congress Chief Minister of the Central Provinces and Berar in 1937 was the Mahasabha sympathiser N.B. Khare. As soon as he came to office he set about the creation of a precedent by licensing Hindu schools to train students in marksmanship. Years later he answered the question as to what were his most important policies as Prime Minister of CP and Berar:

I...gave permission for military training; I initiated a policy of starting rifle clubs attached to colleges and high schools.<sup>53</sup>

Savarkar wrote Khare on 1 July 1938 to note how gratifying it was that

your government has assured the people that high schools in your province and I think presumably the colleges too will have no difficulty in future (in securing) govt. permission to introduce military training and shooting with real and up-to-date Rifles.<sup>54</sup>

and urged that he further this policy by setting up a military college in CP Berar.

On 21 September 1938 Savarkar circulated a copy of Khare's arms licence which laid down the terms under which such a licence could be issued to schools and colleges 'even under the present Arms Act'. He urged that other Hindu schools and colleges apply to their provincial governments citing this case, claiming that it would be very easy for all students to join such a 'rifle class as it requires no hard conditions nor does demand much time'. Khare's grant of this license to the Craddock High School at Wardha not far from Gandhi's ashram and close to the provincial capital of Nagpur on 29 July 1938 stated:

The Government of the Central Provinces and Berar has approved of the grant to the Head Master, Craddock High school, Wardha, of Licence in form under rule 32 of the Indian Arms Rules 1924 for starting a shooting club to give selected public not below the age of 14, and teachers of the Craddock High School, Wardha target practice on the following terms: The Grant of the Licence will cover the following arms ammunition – 6 Miniature rifles of 22 bore. Ammunition: – 1500 cartridges.<sup>55</sup>

On its own the military school does not appear very significant; yet it is a part of a larger strategy of cultivating the military and infiltrating it that has long been a priority of the Mahasabha and its related and successor organisations. Two related features are worth bearing in mind. First, even as the Mahasabha recruited for the war effort and sought to gain access to the means of violence, it was regarded as no real threat by the British, which is why the activities of its related organisations were also tolerated. Secondly, as India moved towards Independence and in the decades thereafter, senior army officers have entertained the possibility of a more political role.

### **Provinces, Darbars, state forces, the arms factory, and pogroms**

The Darbars or courts of the Hindu Princely States<sup>56</sup> were an important Mahasabha-RSS concern, because they controlled State Forces or armies which were, of course, nothing in relation to the

Indian Army but an important weapon against local Muslim populations. Moreover, important personalities circulated between various Princely Courts and important Provinces, frequently in high office, and quite openly associated with Hindu paramilitary forces that organised mass killings. Yet this did not seem to the British to be an issue for concern, at least not sufficiently so to provoke action.<sup>57</sup> The Report of the Resident to the Gwalior Court noted:

86. Activities of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh have been reported on a fairly wide scale...One Lieutenant Phadke, a retired military officer of the State is said to have been arranging for arms and giving training to volunteers...The Gwalior UTC is reported to have been provided with 80 rifles, and one Prabhu Dayal Lavania has been appointed its commander.<sup>58</sup>

In keeping with this tolerance of the Mahasabha, claims by Muslims of discrimination by Gwalior State were treated very lightly by the Resident and the Political Department when protests were held in Lucknow about this. Presumably such protests could not be held publicly in Gwalior itself.<sup>59</sup>

A meeting of the UP Muslim League was held at Lucknow on the 15th of April to voice a protest against the alleged anti-Muslim policy of the Darbar.<sup>60</sup>

But these protests were ignored. E.W.R. Lumby, a Political Officer, wrote that 'the separate reports by the Resident on this question, which were recently submitted, indicate that the Muslim grievances have been grossly exaggerated'.<sup>61</sup>

The Political Department echoed the Resident's lack of concern about Muslim grievances. A note in the margin added:

We had much experience in Bombay of this exaggerated talk of 'grievances'. They generally boiled down to very little. HH of Gwalior has often told me that less than 1 per cent of his Muslim subjects feel this way and I believe him.<sup>62</sup>

Yet M.A. Sreenivasan, the newly appointed Vice-President of the Council, recorded his early impression:

The communal hatred and violence... spread to the State and its capital, fuelled by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Seva Sangh (sic), active and powerful organizations whose anti-Muslim and anti-Gandhi stand had won them considerable popularity and influence in the Maharashtra belt...hundreds of Muslims were stripped naked, identified, killed and thrown out of the trains that traversed Gwalior state. There were days when twenty or thirty Muslim bodies were collected by the State police alongside the railway line...It was no longer a secret in New Delhi and elsewhere that the Maharaja had a soft corner for the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS.<sup>63</sup>

Moonje moved to Gwalior for a period at Independence to lobby for a state-supported munitions factory managed by the Birlas to manufacture arms for Hindus at war with Muslims. Writing to M. A. Sreenivasan, Moonje said:

I hope you have not allowed to pass out of your mind what I have put before you in my personal interview as regards the manufacture of fire-arms by private and state agencies in your state. I have personally seen Mr. Mandelia's workshop. Besides he is himself personally willing to undertake the work. He only requires little encouragement and connivance if not actual authority from you. I have also written to Mr. G.D. Birla in the matter.<sup>64</sup>

On the same day he wrote to the Maharaja in similar terms, and followed all this up with another letter to Sreenivasan on 2 September 1947:

you yourself will be thoroughly reconciled to the idea that Moslems engaged in Police and Military service are now a danger to the Hindus besides being fifth columnists.<sup>65</sup>

Given the dangers Moonje claimed existed, he saw this as an opportunity to

bring to your notice that my friend, Mr. Ghanshyam Das Birla writes to me in his letter of 24th August from New Delhi. He says, "Thanks for your letter. We are going to build up a very big workshop in Gwalior, and if so desired by the Government, there will be no difficulty in producing arms. The matter depends entirely on Government". This clinches the matter. It is now for you to decide whether to give your encouragement to Mr. Mandelia to begin producing arms. In Nizam Hyderabad arms are being manufactured, why should Gwalior lag behind ...If you be favour-

ably inclined to the proposal regarding the manufacture of Fire-arms I may meet you and Mr. Mandelia the Manager of the Birla Cotton Mills together for further discussions.<sup>66</sup>

Sreenivasan wrote back to him sharply about the Mahasabha agitations in Gwalior but added:

I have already taken action in regard to the proposal to depute Mr Kavadey to work in the BSA [Birmingham Small Arms] Factory. You may rest assured I shall keep the subject prominently in my mind.<sup>67</sup>

Yet, since Sreenivasan recorded his sharp disapproval of the Mahasabha in Gwalior and attempted to check its influence, he may not have given this proposal any support. On 2 September 1947 Moonje repeated these claims in identical terms to the Maharaja as well.

At Accession (of the Princely States to the Union of India) and at Independence in 1947 the same N.B. Khare who had earlier been Premier of CP Berar was now Prime Minister of Alwar (and informally advisor to the ruler of Bharatpur as well). A large Muslim minority primarily of the Meo community lived in these two states. Khare organized a pogrom by these two state armies that is estimated to have led to the killing of 82,000 Muslims in the course of a few days, possibly with the complicity of the Home Minister in Delhi, Vallabhbhai Patel.<sup>68</sup>

But Moonje was damn pleased with what I did to the Muslims of Alwar.... He called me to Nasik and embraced me...More than anything else, what I did in Alwar and the way I broke the back of Muslims there pleased Dr Moonje immensely. I was in Delhi as a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1947. Moonje was also in Delhi in December. So he gave me a good party, a huge party, an At Home. When I went there, Moonje caught hold of me and embraced me saying, "Doctor, All of us are very pleased with what you have done in Alwar, whatever we have done to each other let us forget."<sup>69</sup>

Moonje, evidently on cordial terms with Vallabhbhai Patel, wrote to him about riots in Ahmedabad, replying to Patel's letter of 9 July:

This state of things clearly proves the necessity of taking a more realistic view of the situation and of making arrangements immediately to train Hindus in the art of stabbing as well.<sup>70</sup>

Patel became Home Minister in the Interim Government a few months later. Moonje reminded him that when they last met with G.D. Birla on 17 June, Patel had promised to visit his military school, the purpose of which he explained was to prepare for civil war: 'If we must go through Civil Wars, let us go through it and be done with it'.

Khare's actions in Central Provinces and Berar as a Mahasabha-sympathetic Congressman bear some similarity to those of another Mahasabha-friendly Premier, Pandit Gobind Ballabh Pant of the United Provinces, recorded in his Home Secretary Rajeshwar Dayal's memoir.<sup>71</sup> B.B.L. Jaitley, a senior police officer, submitted documentary proof that the RSS leader Golwalkar had personally organised a large pogrom of Muslims in the western districts of UP:

blueprints of great accuracy and professionalism of every town and village in that vast area, prominently marking out the Muslim localities and habitations. There were also detailed instructions regarding access to the various locations.

Both Jaitley and Dayal demanded that Golwalkar be immediately arrested. But Pant procrastinated, organised a long Cabinet meeting to discuss the matter, sent a questionnaire to Golwalkar, who was tipped off that he would be arrested and thereupon fled.<sup>72</sup>

### **Changing masters?**

By 1943, the policy of support for the British which Savarkar canvassed was tempered by the thought that the Japanese might win the War. Accordingly, in Bengal, the Mahasabha leader Shyama Prasad Mookerjee wanted British permission for a 'Bengal National Army'.<sup>73</sup>

[T]he Mahasabha Minister, S. P. Mookerjee, has been increasingly insistent in his demand for a Bengal National Army.

The Mahasabha further entertained the prospect of switching sides.<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, Mookerjee proposed that ‘until one or the other of the opposing parties in the present war established unquestionable superiority’ the Mahasabha must ‘contrive to sit on the fence and watch the results’. They should prepare themselves in the meantime, he said, to ‘take as much advantage of the last results, when the war ends’.

Mookerjee explained to Lord Linlithgow, Viceroy, that Indians might well welcome Japanese rule in India as they had welcomed the Battle of Plassey:<sup>75</sup>

Indeed a blind pursuit of a repressive policy may well create an atmosphere in India which will make us look upon the enemy as a virtual liberator from the hands of the oppressors, a state of feeling with which Indians hailed your ancestors under different surroundings in this very country about 200 years ago, when they gradually changed from their role of traders to that of masters of Indian affairs.<sup>76</sup>

It would seem then that this threat might signify no more than the possibility of exchanging allegiance from one master to another. This view was still openly expressed by Mahasabha leaders well after the War had ended, on the very eve of Independence, when B.S. Moonje issued a press statement with the rhetorical flourish:

How can we admire and pay respect to the Congress which instead of showing the imperial mentality, as the British were doing, to rule over India democratically with a firm hand in justice and fairness both to Hindus and Moslems... (sic).<sup>77</sup>

### **The Parivar, fascism and the Government of India**

The Mahasabha’s public praise for Mussolini and Hitler invited no displeasure from the British Government of India. This was in part due to the ambivalence that Britain herself maintained about fascism until well into the War, with important colonial civil servants sometimes expressing similar views. The less important reason was that the Mahasabha as a loyal ally was permitted a measure of

indulgence not afforded the Congress or the Communists. Consequently, Savarkar's admiration for the Axis Powers was not seen as a threat to the Government of India. As intelligence recorded, he 'dwelt at length on Jawaharlal's activities which it is said alienated the sympathies of foreign nations like Italy, Germany and Japan'.<sup>78</sup>

He had already propounded in 1938 that what Hitler was then doing to the Jews had its justification in the simple fact that they were not part of the German nation, seeing there an analogy to the position of the Muslims in India.

Several communities may live in one country for thousands of years but this does not help in forming a nation...In Germany the movement of the Germans is the national movement but that of the Jews is a communal one.<sup>79</sup>

He elaborated on this the following year at Poona in his lecture to some 400 students at the Law College on 31 July, well after *Kristallnacht*. According to one report of this, he said:

Nationality did not depend so much on a common geographical area as on unity of thought, religion, language and culture. For this reason the Germans and Jews could not be regarded as one nation. In the same way India was a nation of Hindus as they were in the majority.<sup>80</sup>

The RSS's evident militarism made the Government consider banning it in 1942, but it decided against doing so.<sup>81</sup> In the course of discussions, the Deputy Commissioner, Buldana, had thus described its activities in his area:

the Sangh does not want to come into conflict with Government...The Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh has, however, no plan to either fight Government or even to oppose it.

Special Branch reports on the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha in 1942 had already noted that in January B.S. Moonje and other prominent leaders advised Hindus to defend India not just from external aggression but also the 'internal rapacity of the Muslims'. One Dr. P.G. Sahasrabudhe had addressed the volun-

teers on three occasions, on one of which, on 21 May 1942, he drew attention to the value of propaganda,

quoting Russia and Germany as examples, and again extolled the virtues of the Leader principle, citing Mussolini's success.<sup>82</sup>

The Fourth Security Conference held at Nagpur on 8–9 March 1943 reconsidered the question of a ban:

Item: 7 – ...in its organisation and behaviour Fascist tendencies are obvious... So far the Sangh has not provoked authority, indeed the impression clings that it has been careful to avoid conflict...The organisation of the Sangh is based on Fascist principles, the elective and committee systems being absent...The leaders of the Sangh (sometimes called organizers) are entitled “Chalāk” (the exact Hindi equivalent of the word Fuehrer).<sup>83</sup>

The Conference noted that the RSS derived some support in places from well-wishers in the Indian National Congress:

the Sangh is in places supported by Congressmen and at many places, especially in Marathi-speaking districts, by more moderate and pro-Government elements, like Rao Bahadur Khare of Amraoti and Mr. Kane of Yeotmal.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, none of this seemed sufficient grounds for taking any action. In 1942 the Quit India movement had demonstrated an extraordinary level of mass mobilisation against British rule, much of it spontaneous or connected with underground organisations.<sup>85</sup> By contrast, the RSS, drilling ceaselessly, and the Mahasabha, constituted no threat to British rule in India but constituted a threat only to the Muslims.

Even though India was not free in 1939, Savarkar saw as a significant achievement of decades of struggle that some (Hindus) could now bear arms even under British rule.

The progress I see after 30 or 36 years is not disappointing...We have achieved some rights. The rifle clubs have been opened in places like Poona where the recital of Vande Mataram song was penalised...There has been so much progress that real rifles are being carried on shoulders in places like Poona and Nasik.<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, the Hindu Right has always nourished ambitions of reaching out to the armed forces. Some Army commanders on their part have long considered freeing themselves from democratically elected governments and building relationships with Britain and the United States. In such scenarios there is no declared military political party, but only a formation that prizes itself on being anti-political.

Shortly before Independence, Viceroy Mountbatten's Chief of Staff cabled him that Major-General Cariappa, the senior Indian staff officer in the Army had come to see him to advocate that the Indian army might take over from the British:

Cariappa came to see me yesterday and volunteered the amazing suggestion that Indian Army with either Nehru or Jinnah as Commander-in-Chief should take over power when we left in June 1948.<sup>87</sup>

Ismay recorded that he at once told him that his proposal

was not only wholly impracticable but highly dangerous, that throughout history the rule of an Army had always proved tyrannical and incompetent and that Army must always be servants and not masters. I added that Indian Army by remaining united and refusing to take sides could wield a tremendous influence for good in disturbed days that lie ahead but that they must always be subservient to civil power. I concluded by begging him to put idea right out of his mind and never to mention it again even in [the] strictest secrecy.<sup>88</sup>

### **Anti-Fascist mobilisation in India**

Yet it is significant that even as fascist militias were not discouraged by the British Government of India, it was accepted nevertheless that anti-fascism signified a threat to public order. Anti-fascist activity in India was discouraged even after the War began by a police force which was concerned that no insulting references to Adolf Hitler be made anywhere in the Indian press. On 9 October 1939, T.K. Menon wrote to the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch (C.I.D.), Head of Police Station Bombay, enclosing copies of a poster he had published in his capacity as

(Please Read in all Public Places)

# WANTED! Dead or Alive! WANTED! REWARD Rs. 50,000 ADOLPH HITLER for MURDER



alias Adolph Shuckgruber  
alias Der Fuehrer  
alias Adolph Shickgruber

**Description:**  
Born in Braunau, Austria, April 20, 1889, height, 5 feet 9 inches weight, 170 pounds, build, athletic, hair, black; lack of hair falls over one side of forehead; possible nearsightedness, Charles Chaplin eyes.

**Habits:**  
Loves parades, gun-sweeping, marches like a dandy while addressing lectures; playing marbles, arsons, but not kidnapping or his children.  
Glasses as he crosses, which he wears badly, but is really ANTI-GLASSES. Formerly well-dressed and neat dresser.



habitually refers to himself as "John the Baptist", "Fuehrer Meiner" and sometimes even as God.

**Warnings:**

It is dangerous to mention "democracy", "positivism" and "truth" in his presence.

**References:**

Brown, Books, also psychopathic, admitted "Fuehrer Wall". Lives in Germany. Besides, Adolf Hitler, American Police record several arrests, and for political activity. Has been a bar in Berlin and is very jeapous when he sees "Red Hairs".

**Private Life:**

While in America married a Jewish girl, but she shocked him, since then anti-semitic. Once tried to commit suicide due to depression in his party. Why shot at by Fritz Schlicher when General Schickgruber was murdered, but escaped with a wound on the head. A confirmed woman-hater. Fondness for women who appear only to cook food and perform housework.

**Records:**

Responsible for the death of Keth Klumme, leader of Catholic Action in Germany, and Albert Fiedler, leader of Catholic Youth. Responsible for wholesale arsons of hundreds of thousands of factories, stores, and houses of international repute. Closed all Catholic Schools and confiscated their money, and ordered that all Jews should leave children.

Responsible for the death of innumerable Protestant Pastors. Pastor Schneider, leader of German Protestant Church, now in prison.

Responsible for the rape of Czechoslovakia, Austria, East, Rhineland, Poland, Denmark, Finland.

Responsible for the Arab-Jewish civil war in Palestine and other arsons, also responsible for L.R.A. arsons in England.

Responsible for the murder of Dr. Doherty, of Dr. Schenkling and attempted kidnapping of Dr. Baum, Richard Czechoslovakia, of a \$10,000,000 in gold, all furniture, clothing, arms and public equipments, and looted \$10,000,000 per year for "propaganda".

Responsible for the death of nearly 50,000,000 people since 1918. Atoned many of colored people and all religions.

Abolished Five Pines, Five Speech, Trade Unions and crushed the middle class.

Has connections and agents all over the world, including in India and the East.

Last seen in East, Rhineland, Austria, Poland and Prussia. Reading for Romania, Hungary, Baltic States, African Colonies, Italy and the East.

Now trying to establish contact with Communists for destroying democracy and peace.

## INDICTED BY WORLD OPINION FOR MURDER, ARSON, LOOT & KIDNAPPING WITH INTENT TO KILL

He is holding 45 million people in bondage in Germany and many millions in Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Six hundred thousand Jews are held for ransom by him and he demands 100 and quarter billion dollars. Towards one billion dollars as ransom from California.

Pay him no money! Hire no traffic with him and report any of his agents who try to sell you goods or perform political "tricks" - "National Socialism", and "Anti-Semitism".

This information is correct

**THE ANTI-NAZI LEAGUE OF INDIA,**  
MENTO HOUSE - - - - - BOMBAY 2.

Branches throughout India, and allied Societies throughout the World (including Germany.)

Hon. Secretary of 'The Anti-Nazi League in India', which he proposed to distribute in different cities of India:

WANTED Dead or Alive! WANTED! REWARD Rs. 50,000 ADOLPH HITLER For MURDER... THE ANTI-NAZI LEAGUE OF INDIA MINTO HOUSE, Bombay 8 (Branches throughout India, and allied Societies throughout the world including Germany).

In Government's eyes Menon had issued an illegal poster without seeking its prior permission, 'which signified gross insult to the German nation and its Leader'. The Commissioner of Police warned him that 'such offensive propaganda could do no good to anyone' and 'action could be taken under the law'. This was on 22 July 1939, in other words, before the outbreak of hostilities between England and Germany.<sup>89</sup> In the Home Department in New Delhi a senior official, identifiable only by the letter "G", wrote by hand instructions on 17 October 1939 and marked the file to the Viceroy through his Secretary.

This poster is (1) in bad taste (2) an unauthorised news sheet and (3) may be misconstrued in India as an incitement to murder. C (Commissioner Police, KS) may be asked to advise Mr. Menon as at (2) and Chief Presidency Magistrate may be asked not to authorise it. We might also write to *Times of India*.<sup>90</sup>

So, too, the Home Department Bombay, which then wrote to Francis Low, editor of the *Times of India*,<sup>91</sup> that the printed poster proposed to be issued by the Anti-Nazi League of India was an unauthorised news-sheet, because the printer and the place of printing were not mentioned in the publication itself, notwithstanding Menon's admission, and moreover that the Government considered 'the poster to be in bad taste and one that may be misconstrued in this country as an incitement to murder'.

Low wrote back to N.P.A. Smith:

If the *Times Press* has done wrong in publishing the poster, all we can do is to apologise for our mistake and promise not to do it again.<sup>92</sup>

Mr. Menon was called up on 19 October, and thereafter the CID (Special Branch) seized all 5,000 copies of the poster.<sup>93</sup> In February 1940, in response to the British Consul at Damascus' request for copies of those posters to aid the War effort, the Home Department pronounced mutton-headedly that 'when we suppressed publication here it doesn't seem proper to encourage publication elsewhere'.<sup>94</sup>

Yet, all the above is *especially* curious given that at 11.15 GMT on 3 September 1939 Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Great Britain, had announced that "this country is at war with Germany", and the British Empire and Dominions also declared war the same day, the declaration made by Viceroy Linlithgow on behalf of India.

By contrast, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas in the *Bombay Chronicle* of June 1939 shows a far greater alertness than British officialdom in India to the international situation of the time.

The basis for Fascist propaganda in India is provided by the prevailing anti-British temper of the Indian People...some of these very "mountebanks of Asia" are today among the foremost Nazi propagandists in India. Some of them, still exiles living in Europe and, not unnaturally, nursing feelings against the British, are being exploited by the Nazi and Fascist Governments. They seem to forget the words of Hitler: "I as a German prefer much more to see India under British Government than under any other...I must not connect the fate of the German people with these so-called 'oppressed nations' who are clearly of racial inferiority" (*Mein Kampf*, German edition, p. 747). And the credit for this goes to the Socialist Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who, during his two recent terms of office as the President of the Congress, did more than any one else to give the Indian Nationalist movement its correct perspective as a part of the larger world movement...At over a thousand meetings...he [Nehru] repeatedly explained the International situation, dwelt on the danger of Fascism and showed why the Indian Nationalists should beware of letting their movement take a turn for totalitarianism...Hindu communalist organisation[s] have often expressed sympathy with Germany and Japan.

Finally, Abbas warned of the danger that the Palestine issue posed for the Indian understanding of European fascism:

But the cleverest trump card played by the Nazis in India as in other Muslim countries is the Palestine issue. The Muslims of India naturally have strong sympathies for the Arabs and the Nazi agents have cleverly exploited this to create anti-Jewish sentiment which was hitherto not very prominent.

Notwithstanding the Mahasabha's endorsement of Hitler's actions against the Jews during the 1930s and the War, when the new State of Israel was established a letter was received from an Israeli lobbyist in Bombay soliciting information about the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. The letter was received with great enthusiasm,<sup>95</sup> and the reply was prompt:

We look upon Israel as the citadel against the menace of Muslim aggressiveness and Hindu Mahasabha stands for creating an indissoluble tie between Israel and India. Our All India Working Committee is meeting on the 10th and 11th September next and we hope to have a resolution passed demanding immediate recognition of Israel by the Government of India.<sup>96</sup>

### **Final remarks**

As it became clear that the Mahasabha, unlike the Congress and the Muslim League, would not determine future constitutional arrangements for India, it (the Sabha) came to focus on the Hindu lobby in the Congress and the Princely states to be able to gain access to weaponry and state forces, for pogroms in 1946–48 that would change demographics. After Independence, and for decades, they concentrated on building a mass base as a sense of crisis deepened throughout the country. The Mahasabha's successor party the BJP can now play the game of anti-politics allying with authoritarians such as Anna Hazare who claim to be above party politics, and portraying corruption as an inevitable outcome of liberal democracy.

At the same time, in the years after Independence they have gained a great measure of respectability by participating in the common culture of national security that embraces all the major

parliamentary parties, who also accept a variety of coercive acts performed on Indians. The demonisation of different communities in turn, and the insidious culture of national security, have been adopted by *both* the Hindu Right and the Congress, sometimes with the tacit approval of the Communist parties. Just as Congress hoodlums conducted the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi, the army, police and paramilitary organisations have been responsible for atrocities in Punjab and Kashmir, even as the Sangh and the Communists supported them. The attribution of magical powers to communities in order to demonize them is in fact closely related to the worldwide secular religion of “national security”, that demands the coercive extortion of information and massacres in the name of a collective, for both pathologies identify a threat from the outsider within. Today the views of the Mahasabha’s successors on questions of security are often indistinguishable from those of the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India (Marxist).”

## Endnotes

- 1 The All India Hindu Mahasabha functioned as a lobby within the Indian National Congress, and subsequently became an independent political party that gave birth to the Jana Sangh, which later changed its name to the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad are closely linked organisations that collectively are often termed the ‘Sangh Parivar’.
- 2 I had originally termed it ‘subordinate fascism’ but Jairus Banaji suggested this felicitous phrase.
- 3 Lt-Col R.M. Dalziel IMS, Inspector General of Prisons, Bombay Presidency, wrote to the Home Secretary: ‘Kindly say if twelve months remission recommended by me should be given. I saw the convict recently in jail; his conduct is good and demeanour correct’, 3 January, 1923, Home Department Special Branch 60 D (d) 1921-3.
- 4 Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, second English edition (Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1984), tr. V. N. Naik, pp. 338–40; orig. *Mazhi*

*Janmathep* (1927).

- 5 Home Department Special file 60D (1919) p. 63: Letter from Vinayak Damodar Savarkar Convict No 32778, Cellular Jail, Port Blair, to the Chief Commissioner of the Andaman.s, 30 March 1920.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 S11 Home Department 60 D (d) 1921–23 19 August 1921. Humble petition of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Convict No. 558, in Ratnagiri District prison addressed to ‘His Excellency the Right Honourable the Governor of Bombay, in Council’. Savarkar’s original sentence of transportation for life had been commuted and he was at this time in Ratnagiri Prison.
- 8 S-145 Home Department No. 724 for Secretary to the Government of Bombay, 4 January 1924, to Director of Information: Extract from the Secretary’s internal note dated 3 January 1924, explaining that ‘Savarkar has already indicated his acceptance of these terms. He has also, though it was explained to him that it was in no way made a condition of his release, submitted the following statement...’
- 9 Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, pp. 494–5. I am indebted to S.P. Shukla for drawing my attention to this passage.
- 10 Janaki Bakhle, ‘Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966) and the Writing of *Essentials of Hindutva*’, *Public Culture*, 22/1 (2010) 149–86; and Bakhle, ‘Savarkar 1883–1966, Sedition and Surveillance: the Rule of Law in a Colonial Situation’, *Social History*, 35/1 (2010) pp. 51–75, 2010.
- 11 Bakhle, ‘Country First?’, p. 185.
- 12 The concern was no longer that ritual purity might be defiled by women at a time of ‘uncleanness’ or by the lower castes as in traditional Hinduism. Rather the concern was with *outsiders concealed within* who might betray the community of Hindus. This pathology is evident in the curious witch-hunt instigated by Savarkar when he wrote to Indra Prakash, the Secretary, on 9 October 1940 that ‘It is reported from several reliable quarters that Moslems are still allowed to enter and even stay on the Mahasabha ground. ... The unchecked presence of Moslems is bound to be standing menace...I had again issued instructions months ago to you as the Hon. Secretary in charge of the Delhi Hindu Mahasabha Head Office that no Moslem should be allowed on the Hindu Mahasabha grounds...But in spite of that the Moslems are allowed to enter the precincts. – You should immediately stop the practice and cease to tolerate it under any excuse whatsoever. Life, property and even the sanctity of the Hindu Mahasabha grounds stand in hourly danger if this practice is allowed to continue’. To this the reply was prompt, on 12 October: ‘It is a great lie that Muslims are still allowed to enter or even stay in the Hindu Mahasabha Bhavan...I am very sorry that Mr. Padam Raj Jain who

thinks himself a respectable man should be instrumental in instigating such lies and worry you for nothing....I also add for your information that even one Muslim teacher who was on the staff of the School has been turned out by the School Board. Another Christian has also left the School’.

- 13 *Moonje Memorandum on Hindu Military Academy*, p. 45, from the Parthasarathi Gupta papers, National Archives of India, New Delhi; hereafter *Moonje Memorandum*.
- 14 *Moonje Memorandum*, pp. 50, 54.
- 15 Weekly Confidential, Ratnagiri, 17th April 1932; Home Special 800 (74) (21) 1932–4.
- 16 C. Jaffrelot, *Les nationalistes hindous: idéologies, implantation et mobilisation des années 1920 aux années 1990* (Paris, 1993); Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York, 1995).
- 17 Jaffrelot, *op.cit.*, pp. 61–2.
- 18 I am grateful to Paul Arpaia for helping me make this argument. See Paul Arpaia, ‘Converging and Diverging Parallels: The Case of the *Gerarca* Luigi Federzoni (1878-1967)’, in Jan Nellis, ed., *Catholicism and Fascism(s) in Europe, 1918–1945* (forthcoming).
- 19 ‘Re-imagined’ in the sense used by Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).
- 20 ‘Such a process implied a defensive stigmatization of these Others, but it also represented a strategic emulation. It redefined Hindu identity in opposition to these ‘threatening Others’ while – under the pretext of drawing inspiration from a so-called Vedic ‘Golden Age’ – assimilating those cultural features of the Others which were regarded as prestigious and efficacious in order to regain self-esteem and resist the Others more effectively’, Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, p. 6.
- 21 Home Special 800 (74) (21) 1932-4, Weekly Confidential – Ratnagiri District – 18th January.
- 22 Weekly Confidential, Ratnagiri District Home Department Special, Bombay Castle, 18th January 1933, 800 (74) (21) 1932-4.
- 23 Savarkar Micro film R No 22 34 Misc. Correspondence 1925-37 In the Court of the First Class Sub Judge Ratnagiri, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Director, Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, New Delhi, Saturday 11

- February 1939, No. 6; Saturday 30th December 1939, No. 48. All references to these reports (henceforth DIB) are from the files contained in the India Office Records, British Library.
- 26 *The Bombay Chronicle*, 28/8/1941.
  - 27 Resolution of the Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha, passed on 21–22 September 1940 and forwarded to the Viceroy.
  - 28 Letter from B.S. Moonje, Nasik 12/13 Sep 1941: L/P&J/8/683 Law and Order Hindu Mahasabha, IOR, BL.
  - 29 *Moonje Memorandum*, p. 43.
  - 30 Bray's farewell address in the Chelmsford Club, New Delhi, on 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec. 1929, quoted by Moonje.
  - 31 Savarkar to Viceroy, 19 August 1940: L/P&J/8/683 Law and Order Hindu Mahasabha, IOR, BL.
  - 32 DIB 4 January 1941 No. 1.
  - 33 DIB 18 January 1941, No. 3. The RSS and the Mahasabha do not find mention among the political parties considered revolutionary or acting against the interests of the Crown, e.g., "Revolutionary activities in India" (L/P&J/12/389), nor in the Reports of the Director of the Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India. The limited references to the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha in the index of L/P&J/12, indicate low surveillance.
  - 34 IOR, L/P&J/12/484 Secret DIB No. 10, Saturday 7th March 1942.
  - 35 IOR, BL: L/P&J/12/485, Saturday 27th February 1943, No. 9.
  - 36 DIB, Simla Saturday 7th June 1941, No. 22.
  - 37 DIB 21st June 1941. No. 24.
  - 38 DIB, New Delhi, Saturday 15th May 1943, No. 20.
  - 39 IB Report, New Delhi, Saturday, 31 July 1943 No. 31.
  - 40 IOR, BL/ P&J/ 5/ 245 Punjab Governor's Reports, 1942 'Confidential Report on the situation in the Punjab for the second half of September 1942...2. Political'.
  - 41 Weekly Confidential Report, District Magistrate Poona, 24th May 1941.
  - 42 DIB, Simla Saturday 5th July 1941 No. 26.
  - 43 The following discussion on military education depends on archival material gathered by the late Parthasarathi Gupta, for which I am entirely indebted to

Narayani Gupta.

- 44 The Intelligence Bureau noted that 'Dr. Moonje's proposed Military School... has... recently received the blessing of the retiring Commander-in-Chief in India. The moral and financial value of an appreciation of this nature from such a distinguished soldier cannot be overlooked'. Bombay Presidency Weekly Letter No. 49, 7 December 1935, IOR, BL.
- 45 The meeting took place on the 5th April 1937.
- 46 Home Special 812A 1935 Secret D.O. Ho. S.D. – 3099 Home Department (Spl.), Poona, 15th July 1935
- 47 Home Department, c/o. (Mr. Elwin) 9756 W.I.B. u/o. 5/C.H/36 of April 12, 1938. No. P.O.L. – 962 From A.P. LeMesurier, Esquire, I.C.S., District Magistrate, Nasik to The Secretary to Government, Home Department, Bombay Poona Nasik, 30th August 1937.
- 48 10 July 1935, DO No. SD 3099, replying to Shillidy of the 8th July.
- 49 Home Department Special 812 A 1935–1937: Opening ceremony of the Bhonsala Military School, Nasik, performed on 21/6/1937.
- 50 5 September 1937.
- 51 7 June 1937.
- 52 *Moonje Memorandum*, pp. 1, 13, 15, 18, 29.
- 53 N. B. Khare interview transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, pp. 18–19.
- 54 Savarkar Papers, Nehru Memorial Library, Microfilm First Instalment F No 2, March 1937 to May 1939.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 The Mahasabha's tender feelings for the Hindu princely states were most pronounced in the case of the Kingdom of Nepal: 'The Pathans had, at the moment, only one place to call their own and that was Kabul. But they swear by it at all times, while they eat, drink and sleep. The Hindus have a place which is their own, but very few know of it, and know that the place goes by the name of Nepal' (Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, pp. 354–55).
- 57 IOR, BL, Fortnightly Report of the Gwalior Residency for the fortnight ending 20 November 1944 from A.A. Russell, Resident at Gwalior Camp Bharatpur, 4 December 1944 to LCL Griffin Esq. CIE ICS Secretary to his Excellency the Crown Representative, Political Department Delhi.
- 58 IOR, BL, Pol. 1030/44, A.A. Russell Resident to L.C.L. Griffin Secretary

- to the Crown Representative, New Delhi Fortnightly Report of the Gwalior Residency 4 December 1944 No. 87.
- 59 IOR, BL, Collection 21 Gwalior L/P&S/13/1197 File 5 from H.M. Poulton, Resident at Gwalior, 3 May 1944.
- 60 IOR, BL, F. 3-5 Pol. 1030 44, Poulton Resident 3 May 1944.
- 61 Political Department POL 1030/44 Under Secretary 25.5 Gwalior Residency Report for the second half of April 1944.
- 62 IOR, BL, 1030/44, Resident to Secretary to Crown Representative, New Delhi.
- 63 M.A. Sreenivasan, *Of the Raj, Maharajas and Me* (New Delhi, 1991) pp. 219–21.
- 64 21 August 1947, BS Moonje File No. 66.
- 65 Nehru Memorial Museum Library, BS Moonje Papers File No. 66.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 24 August 1947, 73 B, File No. 66, B.S. Moonje Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
- 68 Shail Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity* (New York, 1997) pp. xiv, 298, and Ian Copland, 'The Further Shores of Partition: Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan, 1947', *Past & Present*, 160 (Aug. 1998), pp. 203–39.
- 69 Moonje transcript, Nehru Memorial Library, pp. 98–99.
- 70 Moonje Papers, Hindu Mahasabha Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, F No. 66, Nasik 12 July 1946.
- 71 Rajeshwar Dayal, *A Life of our Times* (New Delhi, 1998) pp. 93–94: 'the Deputy Inspector-General of Police of the Western Range, a very seasoned and capable officer, B.B.L. Jaitley, arrived at my house in great secrecy. He was accompanied by two of his officers who brought with them two large steel trunks securely locked. When the trunks were opened, they revealed incontrovertible evidence of a...conspiracy to create a communal holocaust throughout the western districts of the province. The trunks were crammed with blueprints of great accuracy and professionalism of every town and village in that vast area, prominently marking out the Muslim localities and habitations. There were also detailed instructions regarding access to the various locations, and other matters which amply revealed their...purpose...I immediately took the police party to the Premier's house. There, in a closed room, Jaitley gave a full report of his discovery...Timely raids conducted on

the premises of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) had brought the massive conspiracy to light. The whole plot had been concerted under the direction and supervision of the Supremo of the organisation himself. Both Jaitley and I pressed for the immediate arrest of the prime accused, Shri Golwalkar, who was still in the area....Pantji could not but accept the evidence of his eyes and ears...But instead of agreeing to the immediate arrest of the ring leader...he asked for the matter to be placed for consideration by the Cabinet at its next meeting...At the Cabinet meeting there was the usual procrastination...The fact that the police had unearthed a conspiracy which would have set the whole province in flames hardly seemed to figure in the discussion. What ultimately emerged was that a letter should be issued to Golwalkar pointing out the contents and nature of the evidence which had been gathered and demanding an explanation thereof...Golwalkar, however had been tipped off and he was nowhere to be found'.

- 72 For a very judicious discussion of such violent preparations for Partition pogroms see pp 232-240 Chatterji, Joya, *Bengal Divided*, Cambridge University Press 1994.
- 73 IOR:/L/PS/5/149 Bengal Governor's Reports 1942 'From J.A. Herbert to HE the Viceroy and Governor General of India, *Confidential GOVERNMENT HOUSE*', Calcutta 22 March 1942.
- 74 IOR: L/P&J/12/485, DIB Reports, 1943, IB Report No. 1 New Delhi, 2 January 1943.
- 75 There is a local Bengal historical context for such references to Plassey that I discovered from *Bengal Divided*, op cit pp 180-187.
- 76 R/3/1/15 Governor Bengal's correspondence with Viceroy 12 August 1942, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee.
- 77 8 August 1947, Moonje Correspondence All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
- 78 Home Special 1938 60D(G), S-65: Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate, Poona, dated 11 August 1936.
- 79 Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate, Poona, dated 21 October 1938.
- 80 Extract from the *Bombay Province Weekly Letter*, No. 20, 30 Sept., 1939.
- 81 822-II Secret Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh Organisation and Development in each District of CP and Berar and the end of the year 1942 (Nagpur, 1943); Buldana District D.O. 174 S dated Buldana, 28 November 1942.
- 82 Home Special 822-11. Numbered Copy No. 63 SECRET Government of the Central Provinces and Berar, Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh Organisation

- and Development in each District of CP and Berar at the end of the year 1942, Nagpur, 1943, p. 83.
- 83 Ibid., p. 63.
- 84 Ibid., p. 65.
- 85 This is evident in official and secret correspondence, e.g., *Confidential* No. S.D. 3305 Home Department (Special) Bombay, 4 September 1942: ‘3. Political *Congress Agitation*.— General Review. Outbreaks of violence and all important illegal activities’.
- 86 Extract from the *Bombay Province Weekly Letter* No. 20, 30 Sept., 1939.
- 87 Lord Ismay, Chief of Staff to the Viceroy to Rear Admiral Viscount Mountbatten of Burma via India Office Telegram, Mountbatten Papers Official Correspondence Files, Armed Forces Indian, Volume One Part One, Private and Personal Secret 10th May 8.44 pm received 11th May 9 a.m., see N. Mansergh and P. Moon, *The Transfer of Power*, vols. X to XII, London, HMSO, 1981–83, p. 755.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 830 (1) pp. 157-158: “Mr T.K. Menon Secretary of the Anti Nazi League of Bombay”, Home Department (Political) Bombay initialed “MSQ”, 17 June 1940.
- 90 830 (1)/123 Secret No. 7253 - F/2014 (b) Home Department (Special) Reg. No. SD 5990 from M.N. Desai for Deputy Commissioner Police, Special Branch, Head Police Office Bombay, 16th October 1939 to K. Johnston Assistant Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, New Delhi.
- 91 830 (1)/131 D.O.S.D. No. 4011 Home Department (Political) Bombay Castle, 18th October 1939.
- 92 S.D. 6031 (19.10.39) to N.P.A. Smith Esq., Home Secretary (War), Home Department Bombay.
- 93 To N.P.A. Smith of the Indian Police the Joint Secretary to the Government of Bombay referred to his Secret D.O. No. S.D. 4011, dated 18<sup>th</sup> October 1939, and the Secretary’s note of 17.10.39, about anti-Nazi activities by T.K. Menon.
- 94 Home Department (Special) 5 February 1940, handwritten note on file 830 (1) 145, initialed ‘G’.
- 95 F. W. Pollack wrote, ‘The Foreign Office, Government of Israel, has requested me to give them a clear idea about the present strength of the All India

Hindu Mahasabha and of the R.S.S....Your letter will be treated as strictly confidential and will be forwarded to Israel by special messenger'. Manuscripts NMMLC-179, *India and Israel* (A Monthly Publication) Bombay, 15th September 1949, c/o Western Printers & Publishers, 23 Hamam Street, Fort.

96 The General Secretary, All India Hindu Mahasabha.

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