

Savarkar's Phoney Followers

Subhash Gatade

[Politics is a game of the impossible. The Sangh Parivar, which never enjoyed a smooth relationship with Vinayak Damodar Savarkar when alive, now wants us to believe that it is the true and the only heir to his legacy. It is a different matter that even Savarkar's diehard followers do not seem amused with all their ropetricks.

The manner in which RSS-BJP handled the issue of memorial for Savarkar in faraway France indicates once again the floundering of their strategy.]

Gopinath Munde, senior leader of BJP, was in for a great shock the other day when he realised that his move to corner the ruling dispensation at the centre on the issue of Savarkar memorial had boomranged on himself and the party as well. In fact he had discussed the issue with his close associates and had informed senior leaders of the party about his plans. He had expected that by raising an emotive issue around 'Swatantrya-veer' Savarkar on the eve of elections to the Maharashtra assembly, he would be able to score a point vis-a-vis the Congress-NCP coalition.

Many newspapers had duly covered his demand when he raised it during zero hour in Lok Sabha and had also mentioned how the concerned minister 'searched for answer'.

..Gopinath Munde, BJP general secretary who hails from Savarkar's home state Maharashtra, raised the issue during zero hour and demanded "a clear government response" to the proposal for setting up a Savarkar memorial at the Marseilles in France. It said that 100 years ago on this day, Savarkar had jumped off a British ship and escaped to French coast while he was being brought to India after being arrested in London for his involvement in the freedom struggle. Savarkar swam ashore but was arrested in Marseilles.

Munde said the Mayor of Marseilles had agreed to provide land for the memorial and had sought consent of the Indian government, but the government had not responded so far. Leader of the opposition L K Advani asked the government to make its position clear, "if not today, then later."..

(Come Clean on Savarkar Memorial, BJP tells govt: Express News Service, July 9, 2009)

But alas in his hurry to put the ruling dispensation on the mat, Mr Munde, the ex-deputy CM of Maharashtra had forgot to note a very small detail of the correspondence between the Mayor of Marseilles and the government of India. As revealed by 'Swatantryaveer Savarkar Seva Kendra' Jean Claude, Mayor of Marseilles did send a letter to the Prime Minister expressing his willingness to address concerns of Savarkar's followers, but it had reached the Prime Minister's Office exactly 11 years back (8th July 1998). It was the period when Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a Sangh volunteer from his school days, happened to be Prime Minister of the Republic. Neither Mr Vajpayee nor the Prime Minister's Office deemed it necessary to even look into the matter and they forwarded the said letter to the Ministry for External Affairs to deliberate on the matter. Any layperson can understand that it was a political decision which was the privy of the Vajpayee-Advani duo and was not a matter to be decided by one of their juniors. Looking at the dithering on this matter at the top itself, the bureaucrats in the External Affairs ministry also decided to play it safe and as expected the said file gathered dust in the Ministry all these years. *(Ulta Pad Gaya Savarkar Smarak Par Bhajapa ka Daon, Bhaskar, 9 July, 2009)*

With their zeal to claim Savarkar's legacy which has become very much evident in recent times, one expected that the Sangh-BJP leadership would not have let the matter remain in limbo for these many years. One still remembers the hullaballo they created when Savarkar's quotations from Port Blair's Cellular Jail were unceremoniously removed a few years back. It needs reporting that Mr Gopinath Munde had decided to take out a 'Savarkar Yatra' then to supposedly avenge the alleged insult to the 'freedom fighter'.

Interestingly when some journalists posed a question before Ms Sushma Swaraj about this serious gaffe on part of the BJP itself when in power, and why it sat on the proposal for six long years, she had no words to answer and preferred to evade the question itself. She excused herself by saying that she does not have any information regarding this and she merely wanted to bring attention of the house towards this matter as suggested by Savarkar Seva Kendra. (*Bhaskar*, 9 July, 2009)

One does not know how Mr Munde plans to exhibit his and his party's love for Mr Savarkar in his birth centenary year now as his plan stands backfired.

However, whatever exercises Sangh-BJP people have taken up to claim Savarkar's legacy, Savarkar's old followers including his own family members have always entertained serious doubts about all such attempts. Few years back when the issue of removal of Savarkar's quotations from Cellular Jail had reached headlines, Mr Vikram Savarkar, Savarkar's own nephew (Savarkar nephew hits out at BJP, August 30, 2004, *Express*) had accused the senior leaders of the party for 'keeping mum despite noticing the removal of his uncle's quotations from Port Blair's Cellular Jail'. According to him Ram Kapse, the then Lt governor of Andaman and Nicobar and former MP Ram Naik (both BJP workers) "...did not utter a word when the plaque was removed". The report further says that, "he is not surprised at BJP's lack of interest in Savarkar. We know very well that the BJP and RSS did not appreciate his (Savarkar's) philosophy.

..The report further says that (Vikram-author) Savarkar insists BJP's sudden love for the legend is an eyewash. It is an effort to woo voters for the Assembly elections in Maharashtra."

Incidentally the callousness with which the 'Parivar' itself views this claims of legacy was not lost on the common people then itself when they noticed that when on the one hand the BJP-Shivsena members were making a noise about the plaque removal incident inside the parliament the spokesperson of the RSS Mr Ram Madhav was releasing a letter to the press purportedly written by Sardar Patel which while 'absolving RSS from the charges of assassination of Gandhi' had clearly stated that Mr Savarkar was involved in the conspiracy to kill Gandhi.

Even a cursory glance at the trajectory of Hindu Mahasabha under the leadership of Savarkar or the way in which RSS unfolded itself during those days makes it quite clear that the differences in priorities between the two organisations was already visible from the day Savarkar was elected president of the Hindu Mahasabha after his release from jail (1937). In a sympathetic study of RSS "The Brotherhood in Saffron, The RSS and The Hindu Revivalism," the authors Andersen and Damle clearly explain (Page 40, Vistaar, 1986, Delhi) that in fact Savarkar's emphasis was on turning Mahasabha into a political party in opposition to the Congress when Hedgewars had already decided to insulate RSS from any active politics and

concentrate on 'cultural work'. Hedgewar and later Golwalkar also neither wanted to be associated with a formation whose confrontational activities would place the RSS in direct opposition to the Congress. According to him there were apprehensions regarding each other's role in the Hindu Unification Movement. The souring of relations between the two organisations is visible in an angry letter issued by Savarkar's office in 1940 advising that

"..When there is such a serious conflict at a particular locality between any of the branches of the Sangh RSS and the Hindu Sabhaites that actual preaching is carried out against the Hindu Mahasabha ..., then the Hindu Sabhaites should better leave the Sangh ...and start their own Hindu Sabha volunteer corps. (Letter from V D Savarkar to S L Mishra, 3 March 1943, Savarkar files, Bombay)"

In fact the earlier Hindu Mahasabha leaders prior to Mr Savarkar were expecting that RSS would work as a 'youth organisation' of the 'parent body'. But that plan did not materialise and then Hindu Mahasabha under Savarkar's leadership was forced to form Ram Sena in its place. Savarkar's increasing frustration with RSS's docile nature and its activities was evident in the famous statement he made in the early forties unleashing his attack on RSS without munching any words :

"The epitah for the RSS volunteer will be that he was born, he joined the RSS and died without accomplishing anything." —V D Savarkar (Quoted in D V Kelkar, "The RSS" *Economic Weekly*, 4 Feb 1950 : 132, Page 36)

It is now history how in 1942 when the Britishers were engaged in the World War II and the Congress's call for 'Quit India' reverbated throughout India, thousands of people engaged in government jobs including police and military left their jobs to protest continuation of British regime. It is interesting that the mass upsurge of the Indian people once again could not compel both these organisations to chart a unified path. Of course there was one commonality and it was their refusal to join the anti-colonial mass upsurge. And thus while the RSS preferred to keep itself aloof from the 'Quit India Movement' and concentrate on its 'cultural' agenda, Savarkar went one step further. At that time he preferred to tour India asking Hindu youth to join the military with a call 'Militarise the Hindus, Hinduise the nation'.

The advent of independence also could not bring about any qualitative improvement in the relationships between Savarkar and the rest of RSS led by Golwalkar. In fact the killing of Mahatma as part of a deep conspiracy hatched by the forces of Hindutva and the consequent government crackdown on RSS as well as Hindu Mahasabha and the longwinding court proceedings further soured the relations between the two. RSS's vainglorious attempts to save itself from the aftermath, Golwalkar's petitions to Sardar Patel for lifting the ban on RSS coupled with its inaction as far as the court case against Savarkar and his other comrades was concerned proved to be the last straw.

The fifties saw the RSS's attempts to build a mass political party of its own in the form of Jan Sangh with a senior ex-Hindu Mahasabha leader Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in its leading position. It was a time when both the Jan Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha contested for the same political space in an ambience which was not conducive for either of them. It was clear to even a layperson that the RSS as well as Jan Sangh were maintaining a distance from Savarkar. In fact Savarkar died a lonely man abhorred by the very people who once called him the pioneer theoretician of the project of Hindu Rashtra. It

seems really ironic that these are the very people who are today engaged in an exercise to show that they are the real heirs to his legacy. □□□