

This story is fictionalized from an incident from Swatantryaveer Savarkaranchya Sahavasat, Part II, by Atmaram Ganpatrao Salvi; Janata Sahkari Printing Press, Ratnagiri; page 25. I have used Mahapaur/Mayor in this story since neither the actual word nor the details were mentioned by Mr. Salvi. I have taken the liberty of using a nickname for Mr. Salvi. The incident took place when Savarkar was in Ratnagiri. I am making an assumption that it had a mayor then and that Savarkar had coined this word by that year.

One Anna fine!

“Moroba, *arre* Moroba!” Atmya called out to his friend rushing down the road. “Wait for me!”

“Come on, come on”—right hand beckoning impatiently—“we’ll be late!”

“No, Moroba, we’ll make it on time. Tatyrao was delayed at the *Mahapaur*’s (Mayor’s) office this afternoon. I’m sure we’ll make it just as he steps out in the garden.”

“Well, Atmya, let’s hurry anyway. I want to know what happened at the *Mahapaur*’s office today. He is sure to tell us and I don’t want to miss one word of it!”

Young Moreshwar Damle and Atmaram Salvi were on their way to see Savarkar. They often did so. A great man Savarkar undoubtedly was, but he was not above spending time with youngsters like them. Ever since he had come here in Ratnagiri in 1924, they had been inspired by him. How lucky they were to have him in their midst!

“Oh I do hope all went well. Tatyrao wants to involve the government to ensure ex-untouchable children get the education that is theirs by right. Caste Hindus cannot refuse them entry into schools.”

“Tatyrao will most certainly get his way, don’t worry!”

“Yes, he will, at that. He is an irresistible force! *Arre* Moroba, did you trip up and use any non-Marathi words while speaking today?”

“No I didn’t, Atmya,” Moroba said proudly. “I saved my money today!”

“Me too! I have had to dole out so many one anna’s lately—it won’t do.” Savarkar was very particular about purity of language. He always corrected anyone using words of a foreign language, knowingly or unknowingly, while talking to him. The young men were keen on following Savarkar. In fact, they had come up with a scheme. For every misspoken word, the perpetrator would have to pay up a fine of one anna and very often have to treat the group to tea in the Akhil Hindu Restaurant.

“Oh look, Atmya, I see Shriram and Madhavrao in Tatyrao’s garden. Let’s run.”

“Okay, race you!”

Both ran the last few yards. At the gate they took a deep breath and opened the gate with decorum. The four friends greeted each other warmly.

“Hey, anyone needs to cough up the anna?” Madhavrao looked at Moroba and Atmya interestedly.

“Not me!” they replied in chorus.

“*Tchha!* I was really looking forward to a cup of tea!”

“Madhavrao, today you’ll have to buy it for yourself—” Moroba pointed “—oh there’s Tatyrao!”

Savarkar was coming down the verandah steps dressed in pristine white, as usual, with the black cap firmly in place and sunlight glinting off the golden rods of his glasses.

“Namaskar, Everyone!” Savarkar sounded as cordial as ever, but there was a faint air of distraction about him. It gave the four young men pause.

“Tatyrao,” said Moroba worriedly, “is everything all right?”

“Yes, Moreshwar. There’s no problem at all”

Everyone heaved a collective sigh of relief. Savarkar indicated they start walking. “Let us stroll on that side,” he said. “New roses have bloomed there.”

They all wanted to know about the meeting with the Mayor, but no one put in a question. After a minute or two of pensive silence, Savarkar said, “You know, today’s meeting was not at all disappointing. I am sure the Mayor will be quite. . .” Savarkar’s voice trailed off. The four young men had come to a full stop, mouth agape.

“What is it?” Savarkar asked, surprised.

“Tatyrao!” Moroba cried, somewhat scandalized. “You used an English word—Mayor instead of *Mahapaur!*”

“*Arre*, so I did!” Savarkar exclaimed, laughing. “Hoist with my own petard, I am.”

Everyone joined in. Now that their astonishment had disappeared, the one anna fine began to dance before their eyes. But no one was willing to put it in words. Great men should be excused, perhaps?

But Savarkar was already digging in his pocket, “Here you are,” he said, fishing out an anna. “Here is my fine.”

“No . . . no, Tatyrao,” they said in one voice. “We can’t collect from you!”

“Oh yes, you can. There are no special privileges for anyone, me included.”

They all gazed at Savarkar in silent admiration. Yes, there was certainly no one like Savarkar. Would a man who left his safe haven and knowingly walked into the British lion’s den in 1910—that he should, as the leader, be no different from any other revolutionary—cavil at paying a measly fine? Certainly not!

“Well, young men,” Savarkar continued, “are you going to stand and stare at me, or shall we make tracks to the restaurant for a cup of tea?”

“Tea!” cried Madhavrao. “Most certainly, tea it is! I am thirsting for a cup.”

Shriram thwacked him on the back. “You got your wish, one way or another, Madhavrao.”

Everyone laughed again.