

During the Ratnagiri stretch of his internment, Savarkar lived with the Damle family in Shirgaon, near Ratnagiri city, for some time. They were simple, traditional folk and happily shared what little they had with Savarkar. He too was a very considerate guest. But under no circumstance did he blindly follow any traditional dictates. This led to some entertaining moments in the household, particularly for the kids.

This story is fictionalized from an anecdote of Moreshwar Damle from the book *Savarkar Smruti* (Memories of Savarkar); Lakshmi Process Studio, Kolhapur, 1982; page 7.

Practice vs Practical

It was winter time and the evenings got rather chilly. This was a particularly cold night.

“Brrr, Moroba,” said Gajanan, rubbing his hands together. “I just can’t seem to get warm today.”

“Arre Gajanana, never mind that. C’mon remove your shirt!”

“What if I leave my shirt on today? Baba won’t object—not when it’s so-o-o-o cold?” he said pleadingly.

“You had better not. Baba will most certainly object!”

Mr. Vishnupant Damle, head of the household, was a stickler for following traditions, no matter what. And sitting shirtless for the evening meal was a tradition of the menfolk, cold or not cold. Gajanan would have to sit shivering while eating his evening meal.

Suddenly, a thought struck Gajanan. “Arre, Moroba, will Tatyarao be forced to remove his shirt, too?”

“Ye-e-e-ss. I suppose he has to, too.”

“Ohhhh . . . Tatyarao won’t do it! It is so unpractical.”

Moroba’s eyes gleamed. “It might be fun to see how Baba and Tatyarao deal together over this. Hurry up, Gajanana! Let’s go.”

The boys sat down in their spot; their skin was goose-fleshed and teeth clenched to control the chattering. Their father walked in. He had removed his shirt, per tradition, but had draped the *uparna* (stole customarily worn by men) around his shoulders. Savarkar followed almost immediately—wearing a shirt! The boys stole a quick glance at each other.

Vishnupant looked in surprise at Savarkar’s shirt. He cleared his throat significantly. Savarkar was perfectly at ease, seemingly unaware of anything amiss. Vishnupant pursed his lips and pondered for a minute. Savarkar was a guest, and an important one at that . . . hmm . . . but traditions were the most important thing of all.

“Tatya, what, are you going to eat your meal wearing a shirt?” he asked, his tone a masterpiece of gentle chiding-cum-incredulity.

“Why not? You too are wearing something, aren’t you, Vishnupant?”

“Oh, this?” Vishnupant plucked at his uparna and gave an indulgent laugh. “This is only an uparna; quite an acceptable garment to drape by traditions.”

“Mine is also an uparna!” Savarkar claimed promptly, with aplomb. “Only I got the tailor to stitch some style and shape to it, that’s all.”

Vishnupant’s mouth fell open at this unanswerable statement. The boys had to bite down even harder on their lips to muffle their giggles.

- Anurupa Cinar