

This short story is fictionalized from the anecdote given by Mrs. Shailaja Raje in *Mi Pahilele Savarkar* (The Savarkar I saw,) Veer Gaurav Samiti Publication, Pune; page 114. It illustrates very well the misconception that Savarkar was a Muslim-hater.

Savarkar is for All

Thirteen-year old Shailaja Raje flopped across her bed, a pillow hugged to her chest. Her lips drooped dejectedly; her middle finger twisted the corner of the pillow-case over and over. She was not happy.

Her mother peeped into the room, paused, and then came in to sit beside her on the bed. Shailaja did not move. “Aga Shailu,” her mother said gently, stroking her head. “What is it?”

With a start Shailaja came out of her reverie and hastily straightened up. “Aai, it’s nothing; just one of those things,” she said, her eyes apparently focused on the great task of creasing the pillow-case.

“Hmm!” Her mother eyed her silently for a bit. “Tell me, Shailu, is it Sharifa? Have you quarreled with her?”

Shailaja looked up with a gasp. “Aai, what makes you say that?”

“Shailuga, I am your mother, aren’t I? I see more than you think. Besides, I met Sharifa in the market a little while ago and she seemed to think you are avoiding her.”

“Yes. Yes, I am avoiding her actually, Aai!”

“But *why*, Shailu? She is such a sweet girl. What can she have done?”

“It isn’t anything she has done, Aai! It is because she is a Muslim!” Shailaja cried.

“Shailaja, what are you saying!” Her mother looked at her disbelievingly. “Sharifa is your dear friend. So what if she is Muslim? Why does it bother you now?”

Shailaja looked reproachfully at her mother. “Aai, you ask me that, when you know how very much Tatyrao Savarkar inspires me?—” she jumped off the bed. Passion shone from her eyes “—he is fighting for the rights of the Hindus. He is fighting for Hindutva. He has sacrificed so much for us—”

“Aga . . . Shailu, *aga* . . .” her mother interrupted.

“—and I can’t sacrifice *one* friendship for him?”

“But . . . but what need is there to do so?”

“I want to follow Tatyrao. I am now friends with Prabhat and welcome in his home, too. Naturally, I cannot be friends with a *Muslim*. That will be betraying him.”

“Shailu, before you can follow Savarkar, you need to understand him and what he is saying first!” her mother said, shaking her head.

“Oh, I do. I do understand him, Aai.” Shailaja stuck out her lower lip obstinately.

Well her mother knew that look. Perhaps it would be better to let go of the topic for now. This teenage was a difficult time for the poor dears; they thought they knew it all but didn’t!

“Well, Shailu, you aren’t going to heed anything I say now, so I’ll say nothing. But Sharifa is going to stop by any moment. She asked me if she could.”

“Oh no no . . . ! Aai, tell her I’m . . . I’m . . . sleeping.”

“Most certainly not! If you have decided not to be her friend, it is only right that you tell her so.”

“But what can I say . . . ?”

Just then the bell rang.

“Oh oh oh!” muttered Shailaja as her mother went to open the door.

The next moment Sharifa walked into the room. An awkward silence hung in the room. Shailaja couldn’t think of a thing to say.

Red in face, Sharifa broke the silence. “Shailu, I am sorry to intrude. But your mother did say I could come.”

“Yes . . . er . . . she told me.”

Another silence descended in the room.

“Shailu, is it something I have done . . . ? Did I hurt you . . . ?”

Oooh, how very awkward this was! “No, Sharifa, I don’t know what you are talking about,” said Shailaja, drumming up a light laugh and avoiding Sharifa’s eyes.

“You don’t even want to talk about it?”

“I am just tired, that’s all. Why did you come?” *Oh, how very rude she sounded,* thought Shailaja, *but what was one to do?*

Sharifa flushed up to the roots of her hair. “I won’t take up much of your time, Shailu,” she said curtly. “But it is something rather important. Sheikh *bhaijaan* is home on leave from the army.”

“Oh, your brother is home!”

“Will you take him to Mr. Savarkar?—*bhaijaan* really, really wants to meet him!” blurted Sharifa, all in a rush.

“*Hutt!* No way! Meet Mr. Savarkar, indeed!”

Tears sprang to Sharifa’s eyes. “You’re so mean, Shailu! Why can’t *bhaijaan* meet him?”

“He is a Muslim, that’s why! I most certainly will not commit this blasphemy.”

“That’s a terrible thing to say! And I thought you were my friend!” sobbed Sharifa. “Anyway, you don’t own Mr. Savarkar—you don’t, you don’t!” She ran to the door and turned back. “I hate you, I hate you, I hate you! My *bhaijaan* will find a way. So there!”

Sharifa stormed out the house. Shailaja threw herself on the bed and cried her heart out in the pillow.

A few days later, Sharifa accosted Shailaja on the street corner. Triumph gleamed from her eyes. “So, *bhaijaan* cannot meet Mr. Savarkar, is that it?” she cried to a speechless Shailaja. “I’ll have you know, he got someone else to take him there. Mr. Savarkar gave him many, many moments of his precious time *and* a guru-mantra—of patriotism—as well! So what do you say now?”

Mouth agape, Shailaja said nothing.

“Savarkar is for *all* patriotic Indians—even us Muslims. So there!”

Shailaja rushed home and threw herself on her bed again—but not to cry. No, she had some thinking to do. Her mother was right, as always! To follow Savarkar one had to understand him first. Oh how had she misunderstood him so? She had a long way to go in understanding him. But she was going to do it, yes she was!

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This very same Sheikh joined the Indian National Army and gave up his life for the freedom of India.

- Anurupa Cinar