

## **The Anecdote:**

***Savarkar Smruti (Memories of Savarkar)* by Moreshwar Damle, Lakshmi Process Studio, Kolhapur, 1982; pages 9-10.**

### **“To the Mahar caste, the Chambhars are just like Brahmans**

At the time, a Chambhar caste family lived in Shirgaon. In the days that Tatya resided with us, they had a Satyanarayan Puja at their home. Tatya and our family were also invited along with many others. To attend a Satyanarayan Puja in the house of a Chambhar and accept the *tirth-prasad* was a social solecism of great magnitude in those days. But since Tatya set off to attend the puja that night, naturally, we had to follow suit.

We were welcomed there with great honor and respect. First thing Savarkar asked was if the Mahar brethren had been invited there or not. Immediately, upon hearing the “no,” Savarkar said, “In that case, I too am unable to accept your invitation. You rejoiced that Vishnupant and his family and I, though Brahmin, came to your home, and that is good too. But just as we Brahmans consider you inferior to us, you too consider our Mahar brethren as inferior. We are your Brahmans, and you are the Brahmin’s of the Mahar.”

As a result of this scolding, an immediate invitation was posted to some Mahar families. Four-five Mahars even came to the puja. Only after that did the puja proceedings commence. Tatya even gave a small speech. He stressed and elaborated on the fact that all Hindus are born equal.”

## **The incident that follows this anecdote:**

### **Savvy Savarkar**

The Satyanarayan Puja was concluded. The Chambhar family members were distributing *tirth-prasad* to all fellow caste guests. The priest was given the responsibility of giving it to Savarkar and the Damle family, as they were of the superior Brahmin caste. That didn’t at all go down

well with Savarkar. “What’s this? We would like to get tirth-prasad from family members too! In fact, I insist upon it.”

Unthinkable to ignore Savarkar’s words! Immediately the family members handed out tirth-prasad to them. Savarkar quickly drank the tirth and put the Prasad in his mouth. Vishnupant, traditionally bent, was certainly not going to put any food touched by one of inferior caste in his mouth. He held his tirth-laden hand a few inches from one eye and then other; and folded the Prasad leaf-bowl into a packet.

The boys were in a fix. If they were to partake of the tirth-prasad the wrath of their father was sure to crash upon their heads. And yet if they didn’t Savarkar would be most displeased. Surreptitiously they eyed each other. *What to do? What to do?* They queried silently. Savarkar was quick to spot their dilemma.

“*Arre* you boys, what are you waiting for?” he asked. “Go ahead eat the tirth-prasad. Your father’s case is different. He has been brought up in the old ways. He can be allowed to avoid eating it. But you youngsters must certainly follow the new customs—not a trace of untouchability, birth-based inequality, or inferiority-superiority must be in your hearts and minds. Isn’t that so, Vishnupant?”

Impossible for Vishnupant to do anything but acquiesce! The boys were very relieved to come out of this unscathed.

But Savarkar was not done yet. “One more thing,” he added, wagging his pointer finger, “no one will change their clothes or take a cleansing bath when we get home. Mind you well!”

Even Vishnupant didn’t dare take a bath after this admonishment.

- Anurupa Cinar