

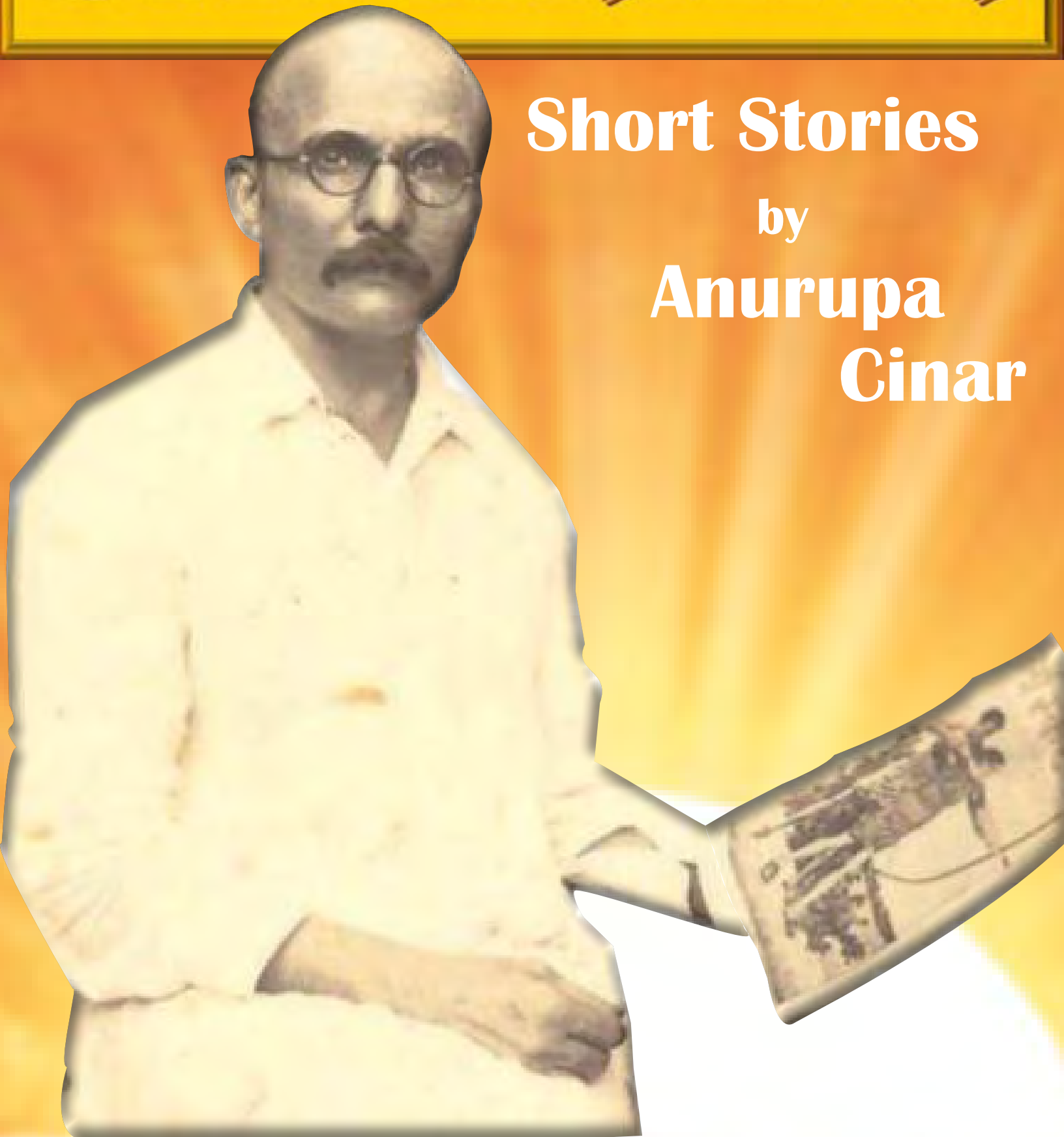
# SAVARKAR

**Short Stories**

by

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# Savarkar Short Stories

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## Savarkar Short Stories

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 Tatyarao 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 Tatyarao. 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 . . . ?”



# Savarkar Short Stories

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 . . . ?”

*Ooooh, 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 of 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!

\* \* \*

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

“I read it [Koran] in the original with a Mohamedan friend who always told me that its beauty and spirit could only be felt by its study in the tongue it was delivered. I read the scripture page by page with him, washing my hands and feet and sitting apart and with my mind concentrated on the text”

- *My Transportation for Life*



# Savarkar Short Stories

This is my aunt, Mrs. Nirmala Vaidya's, story. I loved it when she told it to me and I was sorry I could not include it in my novel.

## Savarkarian Subtlety

Savarkar had just returned to Bombay after his meeting with Sir Stafford Cripps. Great things were expected from Cripps, even a solution for the deadlock in the Indian political situation. What had Savarkar and Cripps said to each other? That was the burning question. Everyone around Savarkar had a great curiosity to know the answer. Eighteen-year-old Nirmala was no exception. She had been counting the days, minutes, seconds until Savarkar got back. She had to know the answer to that question—she just had to know it! And now.

But how? Approaching Savarkar directly was impossible. She, like everyone else, was in great awe of him. He never raised his voice, was always soft-spoken, and didn't ever express his anger if he felt it. But his intellect, his magnetic personality, his repartee set him apart. It would be quite an impertinence to ask such a question to him.

Nirmala was not one to give up easily! There was only one person who could perhaps get away with it: Prabhat, her dear friend and Savarkar's daughter. He doted on her, everyone knew that. She hotfooted it to Prabhat's side.

"Psst, Prabhat!" Nirmala whispered urgently.

"Nirmala! Why are you whispering?" exclaimed Prabhat, looking up from her reading. "What's going on . . . ?" She had noticed Nirmala's air of barely contained excitement.

"Ooh, Prabhat! You must, must, must do me a favor!" said Nirmala grabbing Prabhat's arm and dragging her towards the door.

"I will, Nirmala, I will," laughed Prabhat, allowing herself to be pulled. "But what do I have to do?"

"Nothing much! Just ask Tatyia what he and Sir Cripps talked about."

"What!" Prabhat came to a screeching halt, and now the dragging started in the opposite direction. "Are you crazy? Never! I cannot do such a thing."

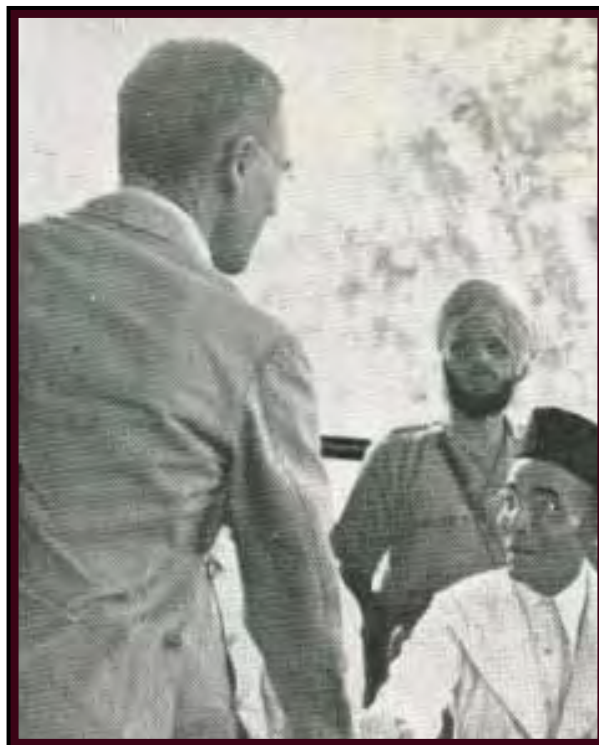
"Yes, you can," coaxed Nirmala. "Does he not love you a lot?"

"Ye-e-e-s, but . . . but . . ."

"Don't you want to know what happened between them?"

"To tell the truth, Nirmala, I re-e-e-ally want to know. But it never occurred to me to ask!"

"Well, now it has. This is our opportunity.





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He is by himself right now. The coast is clear.”

“Well...maybe...”Prabhata allowed herself to be drawn towards Savarkar’s room. “He won’t be upset, I hope.”

“Well, if he is a bit, it’s okay. He won’t scold, I’m sure!”

“But his eyes, Nirmala! That look . . . ! I shall sink through the floor if he looks at me like that.”

“Be brave, Prabhat! You are Savarkar’s daughter.”

They had now arrived outside Savarkar’s door. Both girls stood close, clutching each other’s arms for courage. Prabhat knocked timidly and poked her head in. Nirmala peeked over her shoulder.

“Prabhe, Nirmala, what brings you here?” said Savarkar, surprised to see them.

Prabhat ventured into the room on reluctant feet. With Nirmala’s hand urging her forward from behind, there wasn’t much choice.

“Tatya . . . Tatya . . .”

“Yes, Prabhe? Anything wrong?”

“I . . . we . . .” Prabhat swallowed and then the words tumbled out. “What did you say to Sir Cripps, Tatya?”

Savarkar looked at them for a moment. “I told him, Prabhe, that I have two little girls here whom it is very necessary to consult before we make any decision about our Hindustan!” he said, quite gently.

These gentle words had an electrifying result. With one mind both girls turned about and fled out of the room.

Savarkar’s cable to the editor of *New York Times* in 1942 “Americans in particular, who went to war even with their kith and kin on the question of secession and saved the integrity of their union, cannot fail to appreciate and uphold the Hindu opposition to the vivisection of India. . . .”





# Savarkar Short Stories

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 impractical.”

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





# Savarkar Short Stories

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.

With the intense propaganda, within six months there was a steady sale of swadeshi goods. Observing this, the spontaneous words "Doing is all it takes re! First we must do" came to Taty's lips.."







# Savarkar Short Stories

This story is fictionalized from an anecdote of Moreshwar Damle from the book *Savarkar Smruti (Memories of Savarkar)*; Lakshmi Process Studio, Kolhapur; pages 5-6.

## Patent Patriotism

In 1925 the Government had permitted Savarkar to live at the Damle residence in Shirgaon as there was an outbreak of the plague in Ratnagiri city. The Damle family was very honored and happy to be of service to so great a man, but it was not without its problems!

Savarkar was never one to rest and take it easy. He believed that everyone should do something—be it big or small—for the country. That was patriotism. He certainly considered spreading literacy to be very patriotic. Being Savarkar, he had roped the four Damle teenage boys into teaching the basics of the language to their four illiterate servants every night after dinner. Both, the teachers and their pupils were quite aghast and frequently kicked up a fuss—but were no match for Savarkar’s determination!

This night the servants were particularly tired. They had done a lot of heavy lifting cleaning out and rearranging the sheds. Squinting at the slate and making sense of the squiggles on it was the last thing on their mind. They were all, servants and the boys, gathered in the yard behind the kitchen.

“Moroba, not tonight—no,” said Bhiku. “Tonight I am too, too tired.”

“It won’t do, Bhiku,” Moroba said. “I would much rather sleep myself, but . . .”

“*Arre* baba, what is this life! After all that extra work we did today, you still want to beat some knowledge into our brains?”

“*Tchhe!* You think I don’t have better things to do?”

“Well, then?”

“Let me thi-i-i-ink . . .” said Moroba pensively, scratching his head. “We have to give some excuse to Tatyia!”

“*Arre O,*” cried Khandu, “this is no time to think. Let us just rush off to sleep before he finds us. He won’t wake us up, surely?”

“I’m not so sure he won’t!” said Gajanan. “But good idea! Let’s go.”

And they dashed off. Hardly had they gone a few feet when the boys heard their mother calling out to them. “*Poranno,* Tatyia is looking for you! Where are you?”

“We’ll be right there!” yelled Moroba. He clapped a hand to his forehead. “That’s torn it! C’mon, Khandu, Bhiku, Babu, Mahadev, grab your slates and pencils. We’ll get the books.”

“Oh ho ho-o-o! Rama, Shiva, Govinda *re-e-e-e!*” they chorused sadly.

A few minutes later teachers and pupils were gathered on the front veranda. Savarkar was already there, checking his watch. “You are all late today. Let us not waste any more time.”

The four servants sent an appealing glance at the boys. Narayan, the youngest, braved a last ditch attempt. “Tatyia . . .”

“Yes, Narayan, what is it?”

“Today the servants are very tired . . .”

“And how about you?” asked Savarkar.

“Me too, Tatyia, and . . . and . . .”



## Savarkar Short Stories

“Go on.” Savarkar said calmly.

“Well, we are all fed up of this daily chore! The servants and us, too”

“Hmm!” said Savarkar, taking a quick turn up and down the veranda. “Okay, put your slates aside for a bit and sit down.”

Everyone complied with great alacrity. It seemed they were going to escape, and very lightly at that!

“So you are all tired and fed up,” said Savarkar. “Tell me, do you think the patriots locked up in the Cellular Jail had the luxury of saying so?”

Everyone shook their head silently.

“It was their patriotism, their participation in the freedom struggle that brought them to that horrendous fate. Let me tell you the fate of some.” Savarkar gazed into the distance, his face deadpan. “Chatar Singh was kept in a small cage—just like an animal. It was hardly big enough to lie down in and barely three feet high. He lived like that for two years plus.”

Everyone was horrified.

“Ullaskar Dutt lost his mind. He was such a bright cheerful man, so talented. Young Parmanand was whipped bloody with twenty lashes. Bhan Singh was beaten until he vomited blood. There were days when at least one or the other was dying—from untreated sickness, from hunger, from flooded lungs after a

forceful feeding, from being beaten. The days were dark and darker.”

There was a pin drop silence. Only the chirruping of the crickets rang out deafeningly.

“And yet—yet did anyone complain and sit around twiddling their thumbs? No!” Savarkar looked intently at them, one by one. “We spread the love of Hindustan, secretly of course! We even started a learning center; Nalanda University we used to call it. So many convicts learned to read and write, sometimes in two-three languages. . . . They didn’t get fed up. Learning and knowledge are very important.”

There was a restless shuffling of feet.

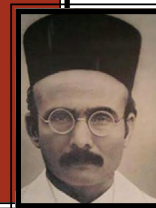
“Even in the inhuman conditions of Andaman we achieved so much; what can we not achieve here? Should we let a little inconvenience come in our way? Can we not exert ourselves a little for our Mother India? Is it really that much of a hardship for you all to give up some time to teach and learn? Is it a chore, and a boring one at that?”

“No, no, Tatya,” they said in one voice, much abashed. “We’ll not complain again, never.”

Teachers and pupils grabbed their books and pencils and got to work. They had never thought of it like that. However had Tatya survived it all—and still remained so full of vigor to work for Hindustan!

“By our teaching we are not only making them learn to spell their rudiments, but we are opening the windows of their soul upon the world . . . so long as we cannot do better work than this, that long we must do this, for that is real national service, however laborious, disappointing, and nerve-racking it may be.”

- *My Transportation for Life*





# Savarkar Short Stories

This is a fictionalized story of Moreswar Damle's account from *Savarkar Smruti (Memories of Savarkar)*; Lakshmi Process Studio, Kolhapur; pages 10-11.

## Considerate and Caring Savarkar

Savarkar had settled well into the Damle household. Generally, he retired to his room after dinner and did some writing for a couple of hours. Unfailingly, at about ten-thirty he strolled in the yard before retiring to bed. More often than not Moreswar accompanied him.

There was lush greenery everywhere. The crickets chirruped; the trees rustled in the gentle breeze; running rain water tinkled over the rocks nearby—peaceful, so very peaceful. Savarkar breathed in deeply, enjoying his stroll. Mingling in this peace of nature were occasional shouts and laughter from the women.

“Arre Moreswar,” asked Savarkar, “what’s going on there?”

“Where, Tatyarao?” Moreswar looked around, puzzled.

“You don’t hear the laughter and shouts?”

“Oh, *that!*” said Moreswar, light dawning upon him. “That’s the womenfolk filling the rainwater from the springs beyond. Can you hear the water tinkling?”—he cupped his ears. Savarkar nodded—“the next couple of months they’ll do that.”

“Oh, it’s hard work!”

“They’re used to it, Tatyarao,” replied Moreswar breezily. “We need a lot of water for the house. Sometimes they are at it till midnight.”

“Hmm.”

Savarkar turned the corner of the house and followed the path to the springs. Lanterns hanging on posts gave dim light. Suddenly he peered in the gloom.

“Arre Moreswar,” he exclaimed, “isn’t that Baya I see ahead?”

Baya was a seventy-year old relative of the Damle’s living with them.

Moreswar peered, too. “Yes, yes it is!” he agreed.

“Good heavens! She is carrying that heavy pot full of water, and at her age!”

“She is used to it, Tatyarao.”

“Moreswar,” commanded Savarkar, “hurry up and take the pot from her!”

“Me . . . ?” cried Moreswar incredulously, pointing to his chest.

“Of course, you! There’s the poor old lady struggling with her heavy load, and here you are whiling away your time strolling—a big, strong boy like you!”

“But . . . but . . . that’s women’s wo—”

A look from Savarkar, and Moreswar’s sputtering came to a halt. The next minute, he was taking the load from Baya ignoring all her “No, no, Moroba” and “No, Bala, I can do it.”

“Moreswar,” Savarkar called out, “make sure you do all her job. If you get tired, call me for help.”

Poor Moreswar, not only did he fill all the pots this night, but he did so on many other nights as well—and most certainly without asking Savarkar to help!





# Savarkar Short Stories

This short story has a preamble of a translation of an anecdote re a puja . There was an interesting incident during the function. It is this incident that is fictionalized into a story. *Savarkar Smruti (Memories of Savarkar)* by Moreshwar Damle, Lakshmi Process Studio, Kolhapur, 1982; pages 9-10.

## Savvy Savarkar

### The Anecdote:

**“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 Brahmins consider you inferior to us, you too consider our Mahar brethren as inferior. We are your Brahmins, 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



# Savarkar Short Stories

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.





## Savarkar Short Stories

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!

“*M*oroba, *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



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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.





# Savarkar Short Stories

This short story is fictionalized from the anecdote of Narayan Damle from the book *Mi Pahilele Savarkar (The Savarkar I Saw)*, Veer Gaurav Samiti, Pune; page 91. This incident takes place in 1924-25 or so.

## Picking Oakum

The sounds of chattering voices and a banging of coconut on the husker filled the peace of the evening. The men-folk of the Damle household and their four male servants were making a new coir rope for the pulley of the well. The servants were extracting the husk; Vishnupant, head of the household, was rolling it; and the boys were plaiting it into a rope.

“Shhh!” admonished Vishupant, “make less noise! Bhiku, don’t bang the coconut so noisily.”

“But, Vishnupant, it is a noisy job, so how . . . ?” said Bhiku, the servant, a little helplessly.

“I don’t know, Bhiku, we must try at any rate,” replied Vishnupant. “Tatya’s room is just around the corner. We don’t want to disturb him, surely?”

“Yes, yes, that’s true.”

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, an intrepid, charismatic freedom fighter of India, had just been released from fourteen horrendous years of hard labor in jail and as a condition of that release, confined to the Ratnagiri District. He was the house-guest of the Damle family in Shirgaon at this time. In the evenings it was his practice to write in the quiet of his room.

“Baba,” said Moreshwar, Vishnupant’s oldest son, “he is such a great personality, so-o-o-o learned.”

“Baba,” piped in Narayan, the youngest, his eyes opened wide in wonder, “and he is a *barrister*, too!” He said the word with great awe. “Remember, Barrister Jinnah? He charged us ₹500 just for ten-minutes of

representation in court. But boy was he effective! These barristers are so special!”

“Yes, Tatya is certainly that!” said Vishnupant, admiringly. “And he has suffered a lot—unimaginable horrors—in the jails.” He shook his head. “We must ensure he has peace he—” Vishnupant stopped mid-sentence.

“Tatya!” he exclaimed.

Savarkar was in their midst.

“Tatya!” cried Vishnupant again, making as if to get up. “I hope we didn’t disturb you.”

“Oh, don’t get up, Vishnupant,” said Savarkar with a smile. “Do carry on with your work. I just felt like







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some company.”

“We-e-e-ll, if you say so, Tatyā,” Vishnupant replied and started rolling the coir again, though a little consciously.

Everyone, having stopped short at Savarkar’s entry, now resumed their work. But no one chattered! They were in awe of Savarkar.

Savarkar watched interestedly as they worked. “Arre, Vishnupant!” he exclaimed “How slowly you are rolling the coir!”

“Tatyā, it is not an easy job, you know,” Vishnupant

was quick to reply. “It takes considerable skill!”

“Oh, is that so? Well then, watch me!” With that Savarkar quickly squatted next to Vishnupant and swiftly and expertly rolled out a long string of coir.

Everyone gaped.

“This is what we did in the jails, y’know—picking oakum,” Savarkar explained matter of factly.

Good heavens, a scholar and a barrister willingly doing this humble hard labor—and that with such skill. Amazing! Their admiration and respect for Savarkar increased tenfold. Here was a great man, indeed!

