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Revisiting the Assassination of the Mahatma*

On January 30, 1948, in a little over six months after the tragedy of the Partition, another tragedy visited the fledgling state.¹ If Partition could largely be ascribed to Muslim communalism, aided by colonialism, then Hindu communalism bears the responsibility for the assassination of the “greatest living Hindu”. In Nehru’s words:²

Communalism resulted not only in the division of the country, which inflicted a deep wound in the heart of the people which will take a long time to heal if it ever heals but also assassination of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhiji’s assassination was a premeditated act. In November 1947, Karyanand Sharma, the CPI kisan leader from Bihar, had warned that the demand for a Hindu Raj “was very bad and behind it there was a conspiracy to murder Gandhiji and Panditji.”³ Gandhi himself understood the true nature of the abortive attempt that was made on his life on January 20, 1948. When a co-worker wondered if the bomb blast was accidental, he replied: “The fool; Don’t you see, there is a terrible and widespread conspiracy behind it?”⁴

In his Presidential Address to the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937, Savarkar, the creator of the concept of Hindutva, the first to

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propound the two-nation theory, and the organiser of the conspiracy to murder the Mahatma, declared: 'India cannot be assumed today to be an unitarian and homogenous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main, Hindus and Muslims, in India.' He refers to 'centuries of a cultural, religious and national antagonism between the Hindus and the Moslems'. The title of the section in which the above statements are made is: 'As it is there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India.' India is not a nation but it is the name of the state in which these two nations⁵.

On August 15, 1947, two nation-states were born. One of them, Pakistan, could be said to conform to Savarkar's definition of nation, but the one to which he belonged, India, was stubbornly refusing to fall in line. The biggest obstacle, it seemed, was the Mahatma himself. He had to be removed. With him alive, neither Hindu rashtra nor Akhand Bharat could become a reality.

There is consensus that it was an extreme wing of the Hindu Mahasabha led by Savarkar that was behind Gandhiji's murder.⁶ In January 1948, when Gandhiji was assassinated, Savarkar was arrested as the mastermind behind the conspiracy. He was eventually exonerated in the Gandhi Murder Trial for lack of evidence to corroborate the testimony of the approver, a technical point of criminal law. Sardar Patel, being a fine criminal lawyer, was personally convinced of Savarkar's guilt, otherwise he would not have agreed to put him up for trial. He told Jawaharlal Nehru in unambiguous terms:⁷

It was a fanatical wing of the Hindu Mahasabha directly under Savarkar that [hatched] the conspiracy and saw it through.

When the Commission of Inquiry set up in 1965 under Justice Jiwan Lal Kapoor, a former judge of the Supreme Court of India, gave its report, it came to the following conclusion:⁸

All these facts taken together were destructive of any theory other than the conspiracy to murder by Savarkar and his group.

The Kapur Commission had access to a lot of evidence which was not available to the trial judge. Two of Savarkar's close associates, A P Kasar and G V Damle, who had not testified at the trial, spoke up before the Kapur Commission, now that Savarkar was dead, and corroborated the approver's statements. If they had testified at the trial, Savarkar would have been proven guilty.⁹ In any case, as the political guru of Godse and Apte, whose acquittal was only on technical legal grounds, he stood indicted in the eyes of the public as politically and individually responsible and morally culpable for the act.

Nathuram Godse made out at his trial that only he and Apte were involved in the conspiracy, that the Hindu Mahasabha, let alone the RSS, had nothing to do with it. This was patently false. Godse had everything to do with the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha. As for the link with Savarkar, Apte and Godse were acolytes of Savarkar. Savarkar financed their newspaper *Agrani*, later named *Hindu Rashtra*.¹⁰ They travelled with him on his political tours. Godse was the chief organiser and Apte the secretary of the Savarkarite outfit, the Hind Rashtra Dal, set up in Poona in 1942 as a volunteer organisation to carry out the secret activities of the Mahasabha.¹¹ They were the executors and he the inspiring genius and mastermind behind the conspiracy to murder Gandhiji.

Godse's links with the RSS were also confirmed by his brother. The RSS, however, in its usual duplicitous manner, has insisted that he was not associated with them. The senior BJP leader, LK Advani said in an interview in 1993: "Nathuram Godse was a bitter critic of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. His charge was that the RSS had made Hindus impotent. We have had nothing to do with Godse. The Congress is in the habit of reviving this allegation against us when it finds nothing else."¹² His brother and fellow conspirator, Gopal Godse, countered Advani's assertion vehemently and insisted that Nathuram had never left the RSS but had said so in his statement at the trial in order to shield Golwalkar and the RSS.¹³

Q. Were you a part of the RSS?

A. All the brothers were in the RSS. Nathuram, Dattatreya, myself

and Govind. You can say we grew up in the RSS rather than in our homes. It was like a family to us.

Q. Nathuram stayed in the RSS? He did not leave it?

A. Nathuram had become a *boudhik karyavah* (intellectual worker) in the RSS. He said in his statement that he left the RSS. He said it because Golwalkar and RSS were in a lot of trouble after the murder of Gandhi. But he did not leave the RSS.

Q. Advani has recently said that Nathuram had nothing to do with RSS.

A. I have countered him saying it is cowardice to say that. You can say that RSS did not pass a resolution, saying that, 'go and assassinate Gandhi'. *But you do not disown him* [Nathuram]. The Hindu Mahasabha did not disown him. In 1944 Nathuram started doing Hindu Mahasabha work when he had been a *boudhik karyavah* in the RSS.

As pointed out by D R Goyal, who has spent a life-time studying and combating the RSS, it is revealing that the prayer he recited before going to the gallows was the new Sanskrit RSS prayer, which replaced the old Hindi Marathi prayer in 1940. If he was no longer in the RSS, as he claimed, then how did he know the new prayer and why did he recite it at such a critical point in his life, on the threshold of its end?¹⁴

The RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha were at pains to show that they had nothing to do with each other, or with the conspirators behind Gandhiji's murder, indeed with politics altogether. It is well known that the separate existence of the two organisations meant only a division of labour towards the same end. RSS and Hindu Mahasabha members worked together, the former building the ideological bases, the latter being the formal political party. This overlap between the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha is clear from the report of the Kapur Commission. When the DIG, CID, Bombay and the Commissioner, Police, Bombay, were asked by the Home Secretary on August 8, 1947 to prepare lists of RSS and Hindu Mahasabha workers, the Poona police sent in a list of Mahasabha leaders of Poona; it did not prepare a separate list

for the RSS. This suggests the difficulty of differentiating between the two. The Kapur Commission further notes that “there is evidence to show that many RSS members were members of the Hindu Mahasabha.”¹⁵ Morarji Desai deposed before the Jivan Lal Kapur Commission that “at that time Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS were working together.”¹⁶ R K Khadilkar, Purshottamdas Trikamdas and N S Gurtu, all witnesses from Bombay, in their testimony before the Commission referred to the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha together.¹⁷

A report on the activities of the RSS, dated September 17, 1947 stated:¹⁸

most of its prominent organizers and workers are either members of the Hindu Mahasabha or sponsors of the Hindu Mahasabha ideology. ...Because it was associated with Hindu Mahasabha its policy was considerably influenced by the Sabha ideology.

Recent research confirms this close relationship between RSS and Hindu Mahasabha, exploding the myth fostered by both the organisations that they have nothing to do with each other:¹⁹

According to the commonly accepted opinion – supported by the organizations of militant Hinduism – the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha have never been particularly close, and, during Savarkar’s presidentship, they severed their links. Reality, however, seems to be different. In fact, the available documentation shows not only that such a split never happened, but that the two organisations always had close connections. We should not forget that Hedgewar had been secretary to the Hindu Mahasabha from 1926 to 1931 [note 13 of Casolari’s text]. The RSS seems to have provided support to the Hindu Mahasabha, as shown by the fact that groups of RSS militants used to gather at the public meetings organised to celebrate Savarkar’s release [note 14 of Casolari’s text]

Intelligence reports also testify to the nexus between the RSS and Mahasabha. For example, the Intelligence Bureau’s Note on the RSS dated May 18, 1942 said:²⁰

The policy of the Sangh is influenced to a considerable extent by its association with the Hindu Mahasabha. Exactly how closely the Sangh is connected with the Hindu Mahasabha is not known, as no public reference to its association is ever made by the leaders of either organization. That it is close, however, is clear from the respect with which Hindu Mahasabha leaders such as V D Savarkar and B S Moonje are treated by the Sangh and the authority with which they make public pronouncements regarding the Sangh.

A good example of the duplicitous behaviour of the communalists is Savarkar's conduct during the Gandhi murder trial. He was so keen to give the impression that he had nothing to do with the conspiracy that he refused to even talk to Nathuram Godse and the other accused in public in the court as well as in private in the jail. P L Inamdar, the defence lawyer for Parchure and Gopal Godse, has recorded in his memoirs that:²¹

During the whole of the trial, I never saw Savarkar turning his head towards even Nathuram, who used to sit by him, in fact, next to him, much less speak with him....Savarkar sat there sphinx-like in silence, completely ignoring his co-accused in the dock, in an unerringly disciplined manner....

During the various talks I had with Nathuram he told me that he was deeply hurt by this – Tatyarao's [Savarkar's] calculated demonstrative non-association with him either in court or in Red Fort Jail during all the days of the Red Fort Trial. How Nathuram yearned for a touch of Tatyarao's hand, a word of sympathy, or at least a look of compassion in the secluded confines of the cells. Nathuram referred to his hurt feelings in this regard even during my last meeting with him at the Simla High Court.

Inamdar also bears quoting on how Savarkar put on a great act in the court regarding his admiration for the Mahatma:

Savarkar had prepared a written statement in defence of his case...and he read out the statement in the Court with all the gimmicks of an orator bemoaning his fate of being charged with the murder of Mahatmaji by the independent

Indian Government, when he had admired and eulogised the personality of the Mahatmaji so sincerely and so often. Savarkar actually wiped his cheeks in court while reading this part of his oration.

Given that Savarkar's trenchant criticism of Gandhiji was well known, especially after he became the President of the Hindu Mahasabha, it is quite remarkable that he should have made such a hypocritical attempt to pass himself off as Gandhiji's admirer. But then this is not surprising given his earlier history of apologies, undertakings and assurances of good behaviour.²² Within three weeks of his arrest in connection with Gandhiji's murder, he made a representation to the Police Commissioner from Arthur Road Prison expressing his "willingness to give an undertaking to the Government that ... [he would] refrain from taking part in any communal or political public activity for any period the Government may require in case I am released on that condition."²³

Nehru was not taken in by the RSS protests of innocence. He said:²⁴

These people have the blood of Mahatma Gandhi on their hands and pious disclaimers and dissociation now have no meaning.

He was clear:²⁵

It was one of the votaries of this demand for Hindu Rashtra who killed the greatest living Hindu.

About the Hindu Mahasabha's disclaimer, Patel wrote to Shyama Prasad Mookerjee on May 6, 1948:²⁶

...we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that an appreciable number of the members of the Mahasabha gloated over the tragedy and distributed sweets. On this matter, reliable reports have come to us from all parts of the country. Further, militant communalism, which was preached until only a few months ago by many spokesmen of the Mahasabha, including men like Mahant Digbijoy Nath, Professor Ram Singh and Deshpande, could not but be regarded as a

danger to public security. The same would apply to the RSS, with the additional danger inherent in an organization run in secret on military or semi-military lines.

The Chief Minister of Bombay, B G Kher, explained the political situation in Maharashtra to Patel:²⁷

The atmosphere of hatred against the Congress and Mahatma sought to be created by the Hindu Mahasabha culminated in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi at the hands of a few Maharashtrians.

THE BUILD UP TO THE ASSASSINATION

While the actual conspiracy may have been hatched by a small group directly under Savarkar's control, in the ultimate analysis it was the atmosphere of hatred and bitterness in the strife torn days of 1947 that made such a heinous crime possible. Hostility towards the Congress, towards Gandhiji, had been promoted over the years but now there was a significantly qualitative and noticeable escalation in the language of vituperation.

There is no doubt that the communalised atmosphere created by the riots, migrations and massacres that accompanied partition was extremely conducive for the growth of Hindu communalism. Strident anti-Muslim propaganda, instigation and organisation of riots, demand for a Hindu state and a call to overthrow the government and hang the national leaders reached a climax in January 1948 just before the assassination of Gandhi.²⁸

The Hindu Mahasabha did not celebrate the coming of independence and declared August 15, 1947 as a day of mourning. It refused to accept the national flag, upholding the *bhagwa jhanda* as the only flag worthy of veneration. The Congress, as the ruling party, was repeatedly pressurised to declare the state a Hindu *rashtra*. The very raising of such a demand was an indicator of the strength of Hindu communal forces by this time. The resolution passed by the All India Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha at its meeting on June 7 and 8, 1947 ran:²⁹

The Committee considers it its duty to warn the Hindus and unless they are more careful and vigilant in future and take immediate and effective steps to build up a real and powerful Hindu state, not only will their interests under the new proposed arrangements be unsafe but also they may lose even what is left to them of India.

After independence, Hindu communal groups moved from trying to influence the Congress to direct provocation of “organised” communal “violence”³⁰. As discussed above, Delhi was an important centre of their operations. They were behind the riots of September 1947. Nehru wrote to Patel:³¹

As far as I can make out, we have had to face a very definite and well-organised attempt of certain Sikh and Hindu fascist elements to overturn the Government, or at least to break up its present character. It has been something much more than a communal disturbance. Many of these people have been brutal and callous in the extreme. They have functioned as pure terrorists. They could only do so, of course, with success in a favourable atmosphere as far as public opinion was concerned. They had that atmosphere. These gangs have not been broken up yet although something has been done to them, and they are still capable of great mischief.

Hindu Mahasabha workers publicly charged the national leaders with betraying the interests of the Hindus. They threatened that Nehru, Patel and Azad would be hanged and Gandhi Murdabad (Death to Gandhi) become a common slogan at Mahasabha meetings. Delhi Police Abstract of Intelligence dated December 18, 1947 reported an annual rally of the RSS attended by 50,000 volunteers, where Golwalkar described the attitude of the government as “unIndian and Satanic”. At a meeting of 2,500 workers on December 8, 1947, Golwalkar said:³²

The Sangh would finish Pakistan and if anybody stood in their way they will finish him also. “No matter, whether it would be Nehru Government, or any other Government.” India, he said, was no place for them to live. They [the RSS], he said, had means whereby their *opponents could be immediately silenced*.

At a meeting in Delhi on January 27, 1948 Mahant Digvijaynath, the Mahasabha leader, exhorted the gathering to turn out Mahatma Gandhi and other anti Hindu elements to Pakistan³³. Godse's paper *Agrani* wrote:³⁴

Does the Sultan blinded with power consider the blood of the Hindu people as not worth a pie, so that this Bania who is a traitor to his community (meaning Mahatma Gandhi) should despite the flowing of several rivers of it, devise fresh means of satisfying the blood thirst of these monstrous aggressors.

It went on to advise him to commit suicide if he wished to retain any self respect; if not, he should bid goodbye for ever to Indian politics.

The *Hindu Rashtra* of July 9, 1947 exhorted:³⁵

The motherland was vivisected, the vultures tore pieces of flesh (from her), the chastity of Hindu (lit. Arya) women was violated on the open streets, everything was lost and the big guns of the Congress eunuchs watching the rape committed on their own wives have begun to growl at you. How long can one bear this? And if this suffering is going to be a matter of habit, what greater agony can there be in transportation for life?

Transportation for life generally being the punishment for murder this was as clear a public exhortation to murder as could be.

The last straw for the communalists as far as Gandhiji was concerned was his support to Pakistan's demand for immediate payment of Rs 55 crores owed to them by the Indian Government as compensation for Pakistan's share of immovable assets in Indian territory. The Indian Government was hesitating since it was engaged in an armed conflict with Pakistan in Kashmir and this money could be used against India. Gandhiji went on a fast on January 13, 1948 to press home his point that commitments must be honoured. The Indian Government paid up, but this immediately gave the Hindu communalists the ammunition they needed to strike. The cry of appeasement of Muslims became even

louder. There was one attempt on Gandhiji's life by Madan Lal Pahwa on January 20, followed by Nathuram Godse's successful strike on January 30.

Godse explained his action thus:³⁶

The accumulating provocation of years culminating in his last pro Muslim fast, at last, goaded me to the conclusion that the existence of Gandhiji should be brought to an end immediately. When the top rank leaders of the Congress with the consent of Gandhiji divided and tore the country – which we consider as a deity of worship – my mind became full with the thoughts of direful anger. I felt that the Indian politics in the absence of Gandhiji would surely be practical, able to retaliate, and would be powerful with armed forces. I have resorted to the action I did purely for the benefit of the humanity. I do say that my shots were fired at the person whose policy and action had brought rack (sic) and ruin and destruction to lacs of Hindus.

It is another matter that in fact the effect of Gandhiji's murder was the opposite. It horrified those who had sympathized with the Hindu communal way of thinking. A close associate of Gandhiji wrote:³⁷

For months the Muslim minority throughout India was safe from molestation. The RSS, by destroying the Mahatma, had given the country the shock it needed. Those who had been angrily criticising him now saw the tragic consequences of their own short sighted anger. They knew that he had been right.

THREAT TO NATURE OF THE INDIAN STATE

Gandhiji's assassination left Nehru in no doubt that the votaries of Hindu rashtra were planning a seizure of power, no less: "it would appear that a deliberate *coup d'état* was planned involving the *killing of several persons* and the promotion of general disorder to enable the particular group concerned (RSS) to *seize power*. The conspiracy appears to have been a fairly widespread one, spreading to some of the states."³⁸

The government communiqué dated February 4, 1948 declaring the RSS unlawful stated:³⁹

It has been found that in several parts of the country individual members of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh have indulged in acts of violence involving arson, robbery, dacoity and murder and have collected illicit arms and ammunition. They have been found circulating leaflets exhorting people to resort to terrorist methods, to collect fire arms, to create disaffection against the government and suborn the police and the military.

Gandhiji had refused to be taken in by Golwalkar's attempts in 1947-48 to convince him that they were for protecting Hinduism, not for killing Muslims.⁴⁰ When a Gandhian worker present at the meeting praised the good work done by the RSS in the refugee camp at Wah in NWFP, Gandhiji remarked, "But don't forget even so had Hitler's Nazis and the Fascists under Mussolini."⁴¹

Patel pointed this out to Shyama Prasad Mookerjee,⁴²

The activities of the RSS constituted a clear threat to the existence of Government and the state.

Nehru already realized this. His fortnightly letter to the chief ministers, dated December 7, 1947, elaborated the nature of the danger posed by the RSS:⁴³

The RSS is an organisation which is in the nature of a private army and which is definitely proceeding on the strictest Nazi lines.

Nehru drew special attention of the CMs "to the necessity of developing intelligence services" to fight communalists who were acquiring a fascist character. "There are at present many dangerous tendencies and trends in the country which may broadly be called fascist. They are not only Muslim but also Hindu and Sikh. We should know all about this. The trouble in Delhi was largely due to lack of information in time."⁴⁴

He treated the threat from the RSS so seriously that he addressed a special letter to the Chief Ministers on December 7, 1947 in which

he minced no words:⁴⁵

We have a great deal of evidence to show that the RSS is an organization which is in the nature of a private army and which is definitely proceeding on strictest Nazi lines, even following the technique of organisation. The Nazi party brought Germany to ruin and I have little doubt that if these tendencies are allowed to spread and increase in India, they would do enormous injury to India.

He expressed his dismay that the malady had affected some of his own comrades: "Unfortunately, a number of Congressmen, without thinking, are attracted to this development of fascist and Nazi modes of thought and practice."⁴⁶

He warned that we should not be taken in by the claims that the RSS is not a political organization: "It is openly stated by their leaders that the RSS is not a political body but there can be no doubt that their policy and programme are political, intensely communal and based on violent activities."⁴⁷

It was this conviction that enabled him, with the full support of Sardar Patel, to ban the RSS and put 25,000 of its activists behind bars. He defended the ban in his letter to the chief ministers, wondering aloud whether they should have been much firmer earlier on. "Perhaps we have been too lenient in dealing with these ...elements.... There can be no half measures." "I am and have been a believer in civil liberty and the democratic process, but it is absurd to talk of democracy when the very basis of it is challenged by terrorist activities; it is equally absurd to for civil liberty to be granted to those who wish to seize power by murder and violence.... We are compelled to take action to restrict certain liberties of groups and individuals in order that the people generally should not be deprived of all liberty."⁴⁸

He further said: "there is a strong opinion in the country, with which I sympathise, that no political organisation or rather no organisation confined to a particular religious group and aiming at political ends; should be allowed to function....I do not want, of course, to suppress any legitimate political activity.

But the combination of political activity with a religious group is a dangerous one as we know from experience." He was even willing to countenance curbs on the press, which was especially difficult for someone who had fought for civil liberties all his life. To quote: An "irresponsible **press**.... that spread(s) hatred, communal bitterness and the cult of violence....must be ended. Some of our processes to deal with such papers are slow. They have to be speeded up."⁴⁹

In fact, in the period following Gandhiji's assassination, Jawaharlal Nehru was relentless in his condemnation of the RSS. He repeatedly warned the Chief Ministers that they must not let down their guard. He used the strongest possible words to characterize them, and alerted them to their duplicitous nature. For example, in August 1948, he warns that despite the ban, "reports have come to us from many parts of India that the activities of the RSS are again growing. The RSS method is often to speak softly but their whole ideology and activity is different and opposed to the ideology that has governed us for so long. We cannot, therefore, so long as we are the Government tolerate the encouragement and spread of this wrong ideology. I hope that the provincial governments are wide awake in this respect and will not permit the spread of *communal doctrines in whatever shape*." He also alerted them to the new forms assumed by the organisation: "RSS are now functioning in various guises, even as civil liberty unions or *Jana Adhikar Sabhas*."⁵⁰

It is important to note that Nehru had no hesitation in calling the RSS double-faced. After Gandhiji's murder, he wrote in his fortnightly letter; "We must remember that the people opposed to us are thoroughly unscrupulous. They will say one thing and do another. I have had messages of condolence from some persons of note who are believed to be associated in this conspiracy."⁵¹ A year later, he again repeated, "It must be remembered that the RSS has always said something and done something else. They have called themselves a social organization and yet they have functioned actively and violently on the political plane."⁵²

Nehru was also fully aware of the RSS method of penetrating the

government services, and he knew that this was very dangerous. "It is fairly well known that attempts have been made, and these have met with some success in having cells of these conspirators in all manner of governmental places, services, etc. We shall have to purge these and purify our administration and services."⁵³ He also urged the chief ministers to ensure that "...government or government officers, whether in the centre or in the provinces, should have no dealings with the Hindu Mahasabha as such or any other body that is obviously communal, whatever garb it may wear".⁵⁴

Such was the first Prime Minister's conviction about the gravity of the danger posed by communal forces that it is difficult to locate a single fortnightly letter to the chief ministers that he wrote during the first two and a half years of independence in which he did not highlight the issue and urge continuous vigilance and action.⁵⁵ In addition, he also wrote special letters on the subject. I give below some extracts from these to illustrate the point:

On February 17, 1948:⁵⁶

I trust that you will not slacken your attempts to root out communalism in all its aspects. Owing to the strength of public opinion against communalism, many of these communal bodies decided to lie low but they are still there and we cannot afford to forget about them.

On May 2, 1948:⁵⁷

Reports from many sources have reached me that the communal atmosphere is again becoming tense, and that particularly the people who belong to the RSS...are becoming vocal and demonstrative again.... Many of the RSS men who had been arrested previously, detained in prison for sometime and then subsequently released, are again taking part in these activities in spite of assurances they might have given.

On May 2, 1948:⁵⁸

The real risk which has to be guarded against, is the possibility of communal trouble in various parts of India as

a result of developments in Hyderabad.... It is extremely important that no opportunity be given to the people of the RSS and their like to organise themselves and function in their own way. ... let your government keep a watchful eye on these communal elements and take steps again against such individuals as may be considered dangerous. We must not be caught napping and we cannot afford to be complacent.

Three days later, on May 5, 1948:⁵⁹

We have noticed recently a recrudescence of communal movements. The old RSS is raising its head again in various forms...I trust that your province will not permit this development. I would also like to draw your special attention to the resolution in regard to communal organisations passed by the Constituent Assembly. We have stated that we will not recognise or encourage in any way any communal organisation which has political ends. I hope that your government will follow this policy.

Fifteen days later, on May 20, 1948:⁶⁰

I have drawn your attention previously to the recrudescence of the communal spirit in some parts of India. The RSS is again raising its head, and in East Punjab, there are various elements which seem to be heading for trouble. It is unsafe and unwise for us to allow these tendencies to grow strong again.... The next few months may well be difficult ones and we can afford to take no risks.

The Hindu Mahasabha, which had dissolved itself after Gandhiji's assassination rather than face a ban, on August 8, 1948, held a meeting of its Working Committee and resolved to resume political activity. The Prime Minister immediately wrote to the Chief Ministers: "You will have noticed that the Hindu Mahasabha intends to embark again into politics. This is an undesirable move and has to be watched carefully." Drawing their attention to the Government of India's advice to the provincial governments on August 11, 1948 to take action against communal organisations engaged in other than *bona fide* religious, cultural, social and

educational activities, he said "government or government officers...should have no dealings with the Hindu Mahasabha as such or any other body that is obviously communal, whatever garb it may wear."⁶¹

In November 1948, he refused the RSS chief, Golwalkar's written request for a meeting and told him that the information available with the Government on the activities of the RSS was at variance with his claims. "It would appear that declared objectives have little to do with the real ones and with the activities carried on ...by people associated with the RSS....The activities, according to our information, are anti-national and often subversive and violent."⁶²

On December 19, 1948, a resolution on the communal question drafted by Nehru was passed at the Jaipur session of the Congress, which called for "an end to the spirit of communalism" and declared its firm resolve not to promote communalism or the misuse of religion as a political weapon".⁶³

When the ban on the RSS was removed in July 1949 after they gave written assurances that they would have nothing to do with politics but would be a cultural organization, Nehru again made his position very clear that while adherence to civil liberties meant that you cannot indefinitely use repressive powers, this did not mean that he believed that that the tiger has changed its spots. To quote:⁶⁴

As you know, the ban on the RSS has been removed.... This does not mean that we are convinced about the *bona fides* of the RSS movement.... Our general relaxation in the field of civil liberties will certainly not mean the slightest relaxation in meeting violence against the individual or the state, wherever it occurs and whatever form it might take.

A few days later, he again warned that they remained a fascist body:⁶⁵

...RSS is again resuming some of its activities.... The whole mentality of the RSS is a fascist mentality. Therefore, their activities have to be very closely watched.

ENDNOTES

- 1 I have relied for this and the next section quite substantially on Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee and Sucheta Mahajan, *RSS, School Text-books and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi; The Hindu Communal Project*, New Delhi, 2007 pp 47-75.
- 2 Coimbatore, public speech, June 3, 1948, SWJN, second series, vol.6, p.25.
- 3 Government of Bihar, Political Department (Special), File No. 113 (V) of 1947, Confidential, Bihar State Archives, Patna, cited in Sucheta m/Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, p315..
- 4 Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi – The Last Phase*, Vol. II, p.750, cited in *Ibid*, 327.
- 5 Savarkar, Presidential Address, All India Hindu Mahasabha Session, Ahmedabad,1937, in V.D.Savarkar, *Hindu Rashra Darshan*, Bombay, 1949, p26.
- 6 Vallabhbhai Patel, Nehru, and the Kapur Commission agree on this.
- 7 *Sardar Patel Correspondence*, 1945-50, (hereafter SPC) ed. by Durga Das, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, Vol VI, p.56.
- 8 *Report of Commission of Inquiry into Conspiracy to Murder Mahatma Gandhi*, (Kapur Commission Report), in 2 volumes, New Delhi, 1970, p.303, para 25.106.
- 9 Given this, it is shocking that Savarkar's portrait has been installed in Parliament during the NDA regime, amidst and despite widespread furor. One would imagine that even if there is a whiff of suspicion about Savarkar this should not happen.
- 10 Kapur Commission Report, p. 68.
- 11 *Ibid*, pp.66-67
- 12 *The Times of India*, November 22, 1993, cited in A.G. Noorani, *Savarkar and Hindutva, The Godse Connection*, New Delhi, 2002, p.138.
- 13 Interview with Gopal Godse by Arvind Rajagopal, *Frontline*, January 28, 1994 cited in Noorani.pp.138-9.
- 14 D R Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, 2000, pp, 202-3
- 15 Jivan Lal Kapur Commission Report, chapter XIX on Communal Hindu Organisations, p.59
- 16 *ibid*, p.54.
- 17 *ibid*, p.55.
- 18 *ibid*, p.61.
- 19 Marzia Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s, Archival Evidence," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 22, 2000v, pp.218-28, cited in Noorani, *Savarkar and Hindutva*, pp.87-8. Her source is National Archives of India, Home Poll Department, August 28, 1942, intelligence report on RSS, dated March 7, 1942 and Maharashtra State Archives, Home Special Department, files 60 D (g) Pt II, 1937, Part III, 1938 and 1009 III 1942. Notes 13 and 14 point out that Hedgewar was influenced by Savarkar's Hindutva and sought his advice when he decided to found his organization. Savarkar appreciated the discipline and work of the RSS after his release, attended the *guru purnima* of the RSS on July 29, 1939 and the officers training camp in March 1943.

- 20 *Towards Freedom, Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1943-44*, Part III, ed. Paratha Sarathi Gupta, Indian Council for Historical Research, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 3047-51 cited in Noorani, p.89-91.
- 21 P L Inamdar, *The Story of the Red Fort Trial, 1948-9*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1979, p.141-3 cited in Noorani, p.107-8.
- 22 Savarkar had repeatedly asked the British for pardon and offered to help the British government when he was in jail in the Andamans.
- 23 Letter dated February 22, 1948 cited in Noorani, pp.146-7.
- 24 February 11, 1948, letter to the Punjab Chief Minister, *SWJN*, 2nd series, Vol. 5, p. 53, cited in Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, p320.
- 25 Speech at New Delhi, February 2, 1948, *SWJN*, Second Series, Vol.5, p44, cited in *Ibid*.
- 26 *SPC*, vol. VI, p.66.
- 27 May 26, 1948, *ibid*, p.77-8.
- 28 See Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, Sage, 2000, chapter 11, and Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee and Sucheta Mahajan, *RSS, School Text-books and the Murder of the Mahatma.*, for a fuller discussion of this issue.
- 29 *All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers*, (hereafter AIHMP, File No.C-162/1947, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, emphasis added, cited in Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, p308.
- 30 On August 19, 1946 in his presidential address to the All India Hindu Mahajati Sannamelan, B S Moonje, the Mahasabha leader, had observed that to counter Jinnah "we will have to organize violence on a scientific basis." *AIHMP*, file C-105/46, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, cited in *Ibid*, p310.
- 31 September 30, 1947, *SWJN*, vol. 4, p.114.
- 32 Kapur Commission Report, chapter XIX, p. 66, emphasis mine.
- 33 *Ibid*, p.57.
- 34 *Agrani*, April 12, 1947, *ibid.*, p. 69.
- 35 *Ibid*, p.71.
- 36 Nathuram Godse in his appeal before the Punjab High Court at Shimla, May 2, 1949, cited in Sucheta Mahajan, 'Gandhi, Swaraj or Hindu Raj? The Making of the Post-independence Polity', in Damodaran and Unnithan-Kumar, eds, *Post Colonial India: History, Politics and Culture*, New Delhi, 2000, pp57-71.
- 37 Horace Alexander, *Gandhi Through Western Eyes*, Philadelphia, 1969, 1984 reprint, p. 175.
- 38 *LCM*, 5 Feb 1948, Vol. 1, p57, emphasis mine.
- 39 Text quoted in Appendix III, D R Goyal, p.251.
- 40 Goyal, p.208.
- 41 Pyarelal, *op. cit.* quotes this, p.440. cited in Goyal, p.208.
- 42 July 18, 1948, *SPC*, vol.6, p.323.
- 43 *Ibid*, p. 461.
- 44 *LCM*, November 2, 1947, Vol. 1, pp. 10-11.
- 45 *LCM*, December 7, 1947, Vol. 1, pp. 33-34. (special letter in addition to the routine fortnightly letters)

- 46 Ibid.
- 47 *LCM*, January 5, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 46.
- 48 *LCM*, February 5, 1948, Vol. 1, p.57, emphasis mine.
- 49 Ibid, pp57-60.
- 50 *LCM*, August 16, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 180.
- 51 *LCM*, February 5, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 57.
- 52 *LCM*, February 3, 1949, Vol. 1, pp. 281-2.
- 53 *LCM*, February 5, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 57.
- 54 *LCM*, August 16, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 184.
- 55 See *LCM*, Vol. 1, 1947-1949
- 56 *LCM*, February 17, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 93.
- 57 *LCM*, May 2, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 114. (Special letter)
- 58 Ibid, pp115-6.
- 59 *LCM*, May 5, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 126.
- 60 *LCM*, May 20, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 132.
- 61 *LCM*, August 16, 1948, Vol 1, pp. 183-4 and notes 20 and 21.
- 62 To M S Golwalkar, November 10, 1948, *SWJN*, Second series, Vol 8, p122.
- 63 Ibid, p136.
- 64 *LCM*, July 20, 1949, Vol. 1, pp. 412-3.
- 65 *LCM*, August 1, 1949, Vol. 1, p. 428