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**The Origin of Indian Nationalism: Mazzini's Influence on Savarkar,  
Gandhi, and other Freedom Fighters**

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*A thesis submitted to fulfil the requirements of the Master of Arts (Research) degree  
in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences*



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## A Sincere Note of Thanks and Gratitude

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Any remaining limitations of this thesis are entirely my own.

Sincerely,

Milind K. Oza

## **Statement of Originality**

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

Milind K. Oza

## **Disclosure**

### **Use of Generative AI**

During the preparation of the thesis the author used Chat GPT for the purposes of enhancement of independently researched text. No AI generated research is used for this thesis. The use of this generative AI tool includes paraphrasing, sentence structure, spelling, and grammar. Researched text was uploaded to ensure the correctness of the text in terms of grammar, punctuations, and spelling etc. The author confirms that where text was modified by generative AI, the content was reviewed for possible errors, inaccuracies, and bias. The author takes full responsibility for the submitted thesis and ensures the work is his own and has used generative AI within the parameters of use.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the ideological and intellectual influence of Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian revolutionary nationalist, on Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a central and contested figure in the articulation of Hindutva and militant Indian nationalism. Situating Savarkar within a modernist framework of nationalism, the study analyses how Mazzini's political thought—particularly his conception of freedom as a sacred moral duty—was selectively interpreted, reconfigured, and embedded within Indian anti-colonial discourse. The thesis also situates Savarkar's engagement with Mazzini within a wider spectrum of Indian nationalist responses, encompassing political, spiritual, and ethical reinterpretations.

By tracing Indian intellectual encounters with Mazzini's writings, with particular attention to Savarkar's formative years in London, the study demonstrates that European revolutionary traditions were not merely admired but systematically adapted to local cultural, religious, and political contexts. Drawing comparative parallels with the Italian Risorgimento, the thesis shows how Indian revolutionaries appropriated Mazzinian principles of national unity, sacrifice, and political commitment in their struggle against British colonial rule.

A central focus of the analysis is Savarkar's founding of the Abhinav Bharat Society, modelled in significant respects on Mazzini's Young Italy. The thesis highlights structural and ideological parallels between the two organisations, including their emphasis on secrecy, initiation, discipline, and sacrifice, while also demonstrating key divergences. Whereas Mazzini's nationalism was grounded in a Christian conception of divine obligation, Savarkar reformulated these ideas into a secular, geopolitical ideology of Hindutva aimed at consolidating a unified Hindu nation-state.

The thesis further examines the varied receptions of Mazzini's ideas among other Indian nationalist figures, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, and Lala Lajpat Rai, who engaged with his call for militant self-assertion and political activism. In contrast, Mohandas Gandhi selectively appropriated Mazzini's conception of freedom as a moral duty while rejecting his endorsement of violence, instead advancing non-

violence (*ahimsa*) and truth (*satya*) as the ethical foundations of India's freedom struggle.

Through this comparative and transnational analysis, the thesis demonstrates that Mazzini's influence extended across the ideological spectrum of Indian nationalism, from revolutionary militancy to spiritual reinterpretation and ethical critique. Drawing on archival materials, biographies, and critical scholarship, the study makes an original contribution by systematically positioning Savarkar's political thought within the broader history of modern nationalist movements and by clarifying the distinctive role of Mazzinian ideology in shaping Indian anti-colonial nationalism.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

History demonstrates that behind every revolution, some form of ideology serves as its backbone. Whether it is the Italian Revolution, the comparatively subtle movement that produced the Magna Carta, the violent upheavals of the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the rise of Nazism in Germany, or the revolutionary activities of freedom fighters in India, one often finds recurring themes of *liberty, equality, and fraternity*.

The human yearning for freedom has been omnipresent throughout history, though its articulation has varied across time and context. The same fundamental ideals are often reinterpreted by different thinkers and leaders in response to their local circumstances and different forms of oppression. Sometimes these connections cross boundaries and even continents in surprising and unexpected ways. This thesis will draw connections between the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini and Indian independence leaders like V. D. Savarkar, M. K. Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh. Now largely forgotten, the influence of Mazzini on the formation of political thought in India was profound. Even today, and even without knowing it, many of India's political thinkers are unwittingly influenced by the intellectual legacy of Giuseppe Mazzini's ideology.

In the contemporary societies we look at the world through the prism of the so-called information age which enables us to adopt the new ideas based on the instant information about the happenings in various corners of the world. But it is interesting to note that even in the past centuries, the spread of information, however slow, influenced the events that changed the course of history. Whether we look at the Bolsheviks revolution in Russia, or the Irish liberation movement, they all seem to have acknowledged the influence of another revolution in Europe, the Italian revolution, and the ideology that brought about the revolutionary change in the mindset of the people so affected by the need for a change in the status quo. Here the specific reference is to

the ideology propagated by the writings of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872). Surprisingly, in the zeal of articulating on various freedom movements, contribution of great Italian ideologue Giuseppe Mazzini in inspiring and influencing various such struggles through articulation of his ideology about freedom and republic is often overlooked.

The term nationalism is frequently interpreted through the lens of dominant political ideologies and, at times, is even conflated with fascism, as exemplified by Mussolini's regime in Italy during the Second World War. However, such an interpretation is overly convenient and reductive. While it is true that some fascist movements have incorporated nationalist elements, it does not follow that all forms of nationalism are inherently fascist. Nationalism is a broad and diverse ideological category that cannot be collapsed into a single political expression. Thus, it would be of relevance here to have a brief overview of the concept of nationalism as the following text looks at the nationalism-oriented ideology Mazzini propagated.

### **1.1. Giuseppe Mazzini in historical context**

Giuseppe Mazzini is considered and revered as one of the most influential political and revolutionary ideologues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His insightful vision blended strong patriotism with spiritual conviction which ultimately inspired him to regenerate the Italian spirit and unifying identity through the movement that is known globally by the name Risorgimento. This was the movement that had Italian unification and liberation as its very heart. With the revolutionary mindset that Mazzini was endowed with, he started a secret revolutionary society called Young Italy (Giovine Italy) in 1831, with the fundamental purpose to unite Italy in one united, liberated (free), republican nation. Mazzini's ideology steeped into nationalism gave an orderly shape to the Italian nationalism and over time spread across Europe and countries like India, inspiring the freedom fighters and independence seeking activist to fight against the occupying and colonial rulers.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the current landmass of Italy was a collection of different kingdoms (small and large) and city-states. Well-known amongst them were Kingdom of Sardinia, Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled Lombardy-Venetia, Papal (city) state of present-day Vatican, and Bourbon Kingdom of Sicily. The occupying power, Austro-Hungarian empire, further reinforced the fragmented divide in Italy by placing conservative monarchies and thus placing itself in dominant occupation of Italy. The occupying power - Austro-Hungarian empire – used its power and dominance to suppress and crush the emerging nationalist movement through their control and oppressive rule.

It was the response to this oppression and brutal rule that invoked nationalist ideology championed by Giuseppe Mazzini, who appeared with a firm belief in fighting for freedom as a God ordained duty, which he regenerated as unifying (identity for Italians) and morality-oriented revolutionary and liberation ideology to fight for his country's unity and freedom. This was important in light of the fact that the earlier secret societies like Carbonari had failed in their attempt to challenge the oppressive rule of Austro-Hungarian empire, because it lacked the cohesiveness (unity) of efforts, and a morality based clarity, the one Mazzini was to provide through his vision of Unified Italian identity, and the idea of God ordained duty to fight for freedom.<sup>1</sup>

Mazzini hailed from a middle-class family in Genoa. He chose law as profession but then he was drawn to literary and political arena. He was earlier involved with the Carbonari (movement) and could understand and clearly see the shortcomings of the movement and the efforts by Carbonari to fight for freedom. Mazzini's clarity of thoughts and vision enabled him to see the lack of essential elements and bring about the revised and renewed as well as open and morally principled movement. It was with these understanding of the required organization qualities, Mazzini formed the Young Italy society in 1831 while in exile in France. Young Italy was a secret political organization that aimed at establishing a unifying identity for all Italians, based on the

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<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, *Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, Vol. 1, *Critical and Literary*, Smith, Elder & Co., London 1890, 128-132.

similar ideology of French Revolution centred around the idea of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

One could summarize the fundamental beliefs of the Young Italy organization as:

1. Italy must be free (from foreign occupiers) and united
2. Youth must be educated in civic virtues and national duty
3. The form of Government must be republican (eliminate monarchy)
4. Political actions must be based on moral principles

The motto for the movement was “Dio e Popolo” (God and the People). Mazzini was a strong believer in nationalism as a God ordained duty, and that every citizen, and by extension the nation, was tasked with the divine mission for progress of humanity. He dreamed of Italy as a republic that would be a torch bearer of democratization of Europe.

Mazzini strongly felt that the Austro-Hungarian empire’s occupation of rich northern region of Lombardy and Venetia was an insult to Italians and their sovereignty.<sup>2</sup>

Mazzini firmly believed that: “...real virtuous people would never need insurrection; for it could never be enslaved.”<sup>3</sup> Mazzini further emphasised that there needs to be a national identity and a sense of belonging to the land a person resides on: “...Finally, it is in vain to expect insurrection as the result of a popular virtue and education which is impossible where there exists neither fatherland nor nation nor any means of popular education other than Austrian (the occupying power of Italy).”<sup>4</sup> The above quote goes to reinforce the earlier four points mentioned as fundamental beliefs of the Young Italy organization. As a result of such emotions the freedom-oriented thinking of Mazzini led to various uprising in 1830s and 1840s by the Mazzini’s Young Italy organization against the Austro-Hungarian empire’s occupation of Italian soil. Some notable Italian

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<sup>2</sup> Mazzini, *Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, Vol. 2, *Critical and Literary*, 202.

<sup>3</sup> Mazzini, *Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, Vol. 1, *Critical and Literary*, 285

<sup>4</sup> Mazzini, *Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, Vol. 1, *Critical and Literary*, 285

uprisings included the Savoy expedition, coordinated revolutionary efforts with Swiss and French radicals, and insurrections in central Italy.

Whereas most of the uprisings failed and were brutally suppressed by the authorities as they were not well planned, well-coordinated, and ill-timed. But the benefits the Italians freedom movement got from it were not insignificant. These failures and suppression by the authorities sprouted the seeds of nationalism and political consciousness in Italian youth and middle class.

But all these failures started changing with the revolutionary waves that started spreading in 1848 which greatly encouraged Mazzini as he saw political opportunity in it. As the historical events are documented just as Pope Pius IX fled Rome, Mazzini entered the city and, along with some of his close confidants, established the Roman Republic. He then embarked on introducing new practices and reforms such as land redistribution, universal male suffrage, freedom of the press, and the abolition of capital punishment.

However, as the history goes this hubris lasted only a few months. The Roman Republic was soon crushed by French forces sent by Napoleon III. Nevertheless, the episode reaffirmed credibility in Mazzini's vision, demonstrating that his ideas were not merely theoretical but actionable. It also revealed that his revolutionary principles were firmly rooted in democratic ideals—unlike those of many other leaders of his time.

Another hero of Italian unification with a military background was Garibaldi, who considered himself a disciple of Mazzini. Although Mazzini's dream of a unified republican Italy did not materialize immediately, it was the articulation of his ideology—along with its moral imperatives and philosophical foundations—that inspired the movement known as the *Risorgimento*. And while the unification of Italy was achieved in 1861 under the monarchy of Victor Emmanuel II, through the political strategies of Count Cavour, it was Mazzini who provided the fundamental ideological framework for the movement. Despite this, Mazzini remained opposed to a monarchical Italy and continued to advocate for a republican form of government until his death in 1872.

Mazzini's ideological influence on the political upheavals in Poland, Hungary, Ireland, and, to some extent, in Germany and Switzerland, is clear in his support for their struggles for liberation and democratic (republican) reforms. As Mazzini had exhorted the freedom fighter all over Europe to rise against the occupying powers to seek freedom, and at the same time warning the occupiers: "The day will come when Europe will give a like answer to your blind ferocity. You may kill men; you cannot kill a great idea. Our idea is immortal...like a diamond it brightens with every blow."<sup>5</sup>

Mazzini then rightfully predicts that the brute force and rage of the occupying power will eventually be exhausted and will be overcome by the power of the subjugated people. And the memory of the occupying powers, their names and resistance to the progress of the nations ordained and directed by God will be submerged beneath the wave of the future [that is about to come and free Europe].<sup>6</sup>

Mazzini was a staunch believer in liberty and freedom for all, and this belief formed one of the cornerstones of his ideology. In his book *The Duties of Man* he specifically argues for liberty saying:

"Without liberty you cannot fulfill any of your duties. Therefore, have you a right to liberty, and a duty to wrest it at all risks from whatsoever power shall seek to withhold or deny it...without liberty there is no true morality...without liberty there is no true society..."<sup>7</sup>

Mazzini regarded the struggle in Poland as a significant factor and catalyst in the pan-European liberation movement aimed at establishing republican, principle-based democratic governments. Following a failed uprising, he declared unconditional support for the Polish nationalists while they were in exile. As a further demonstration of his unwavering commitment, Mazzini founded the Young Europe organization in 1834 as a pan-European platform for revolutionary activities, modelled after his Young Italy movement. He also established the Young Poland organization, founded on similar

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<sup>5</sup> Mazzini, *Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, Vol. 3, *Critical and Literary*, 316

<sup>6</sup> Mazzini, *Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, Vol. 3, *Critical and Literary*, 316

<sup>7</sup> Mazzini, *Duties of Man*, 129.

ideological principles to launch structured and coordinated resistance against the oppressive regimes.

It is widely attributed to Mazzini as expressing his own belief that Poland's struggle for liberation is necessary and will rejuvenate the quest for Europe's moral regeneration. Mazzini is often quoted as having said, "Poland will rise again, and when she does, she will not rise for herself alone but for Europe and for humanity," although this quote is not clearly attested in the literature.

In Hungary, the winds of liberty were blowing full steam during 1848–49 against the Habsburg monarchy—the same revolution which was ultimately crushed in a brutal manner by the Habsburgs with the help of the Czarist army. This struggle for liberation was led by Lajos Kossuth, who was the Governor-President of the provisional revolutionary government and then left Hungary, fleeing into exile. Mazzini was not directly involved in the said uprising; however, he saw in that revolution a parallel to his own struggle in Italy for liberty and republicanism. As historians describe, Mazzini communicated with the leaders of the Hungarian uprising and praised their efforts. In the opinion of Mazzini's ideology Hungary's cause like Italy's was not merely political but moral; it was a struggle of good against evil, freedom against tyranny

In support of the Irish nationalists' fight against the British, which Mazzini considered morally just and necessary for the liberty of Europe, he corresponded with Irish nationalist leaders like Thomas Davis and Charles Gavan Duffy, providing them with inspiration and ideological support. Mazzini was also instrumental in the creation of the Young Ireland movement in the 1840s. The British historian Denis Mack Smith cites Mazzini's criticism of British rule over Ireland, quoting Mazzini as saying that:

“...Irish were being treated as colonial dependants of the United Kingdom, and he argued that Protestant ascendancy could not survive unless some form of local self-government could be devised to help the [native Irish] Catholic majority.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994), 23.

In the Prussian kingdom, when the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848 was held to further the cause of unified Germany on democratic idea, Mazzini found himself supporting the resolution but had serious reservations that the effect of unified Germany under a monarch would severely restrict republican ideals. This was further elaborated by Maurizio Isabella, who maintains that:

“Mazzini welcomed the awakening of German national consciousness but insisted that unity must be achieved through people, not princes”.<sup>9</sup>

In a very clear example for the rest of Europe to follow, Mazzini had great admiration for the federal republic model of Switzerland. As history shows, Mazzini often sought refuge in Switzerland from the hostilities of rulers in Italy, and at times, those of France. In one famous (but poorly sourced) quotation, it is claimed that Mazzini said that:

“Switzerland stands as the beacon of liberty and federalism in a monarchic Europe.”

The Italian historian Maurizio Isabella explicitly ties Mazzini’s advocacy of nationality to a faith in democracy:

“...unlike the exiled Carbonari Mazzini believed that, without democracy [in Europe], the recognition of the principle of nationality would not suffice. For Mazzini it was democracy that would eventually bring peace and establish, a well-ordered system of international relations. Monarchies, even if constitutional, would always be tempted to return to ‘old system’ and to undermine any bid to establish peace.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 215.

<sup>10</sup> Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era*, 105.

As various historical texts describe the French Revolution (1789–1799) was a historical event that inspired many nations and people, however, Mazzini must have had mixed experiences and feelings regarding France<sup>11</sup>. Based on his thinking and articulations he would have hoped that the Second French Revolution (also known as the July Revolution) would lead France to support international revolution. However, with the defeat of Napoleon, France reverted to the monarchy of Louis-Philippe rather than embracing a republican form of government and leading the republican transformation of Europe. It was obvious that Mazzini was disappointed as he had viewed France as the revolutionary heart of Europe but to his dismay now it had turned back to monarchy.

Among other nations, Mazzini had his own vision for the Balkans and propagated the idea of a federation of free Balkan states once liberated from the Ottoman Empire (the Balkans were liberated later, in 1912–13). Mazzini firmly believed that such liberation would play a vital role in bringing about a new awakening in Europe.

Mazzini acted as a catalyst and source of inspiration for European liberation movements by providing moral, ideological, and organizational support, as well as insight through his articulation, communication, and networks. Through the establishment of the Young Europe organization, he not only offered guidance and structural support but also instilled nationalistic, republican, moral and humanitarian principles to be followed in pursuit of change—whether through revolution or the formation of a republican government. Thus, his contributions and legacy are not confined to the Italian Risorgimento but extend to 19th-century European nationalism.

And as such, Mazzini’s ideology spread throughout Europe and eventually to the colonized world at large. His advocacy of internationalism was rooted in nationalism, and he argued that a peaceful and cooperative global order requires free and liberated nations. He strongly supported liberation movements worldwide and was well connected with democratic uprisings across Europe.

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<sup>11</sup> Mazzini, *Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, Vol. 3, *Critical and Literary*, 65-68

## 1.2 Mazzini's influence in India

Mazzini's influence was not limited to 19th-century Europe. His ideas reverberated far beyond Italy, shaping anti-colonial struggles in other parts of the world. One of the most significant of these was the Indian movement for independence, where several leading figures drew inspiration from his thought. Mahatma Gandhi, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak were among those who engaged with Mazzini's writings and adapted them to the Indian context.

The political scientist M.F.N. Giglioli elaborates: "Mazzini's legacy in the Subcontinent did not rest upon a hegemonic interpretation: Young India, for instance, was also the name of a newspaper Gandhi edited. Savarkar's figure, however, is important here because Gandhi's direct engagement with Mazzini first took shape in the context of an exchange with Savarkar over the role of violence in the Indian independence struggle."<sup>12</sup> Here Giglioli highlights the diverse ways in which Mazzini's ideas could have been permeated, appropriated and debated within the broader nationalist discourses.

Giglioli further articulates: "Mazzini's moral prestige grounded in his non-materialist convictions, however, made for a particularly authoritative endorsement of revolutionary violence in India."<sup>13</sup> In here Giglioli exhibits the paradox of Mazzini's reception in India: while his commitment to moral idealism appealed across the ideological spectrum, his authority also lent legitimacy to more militant strands of nationalism, which was articulated most prominently in the thoughts and actions of Savarkar.

However, such revolutionary aspects of Mazzini did not sit well with the thinking and approach of Gandhi. As Giglioli puts it: "In order to oppose such a reading, Gandhi's chief theoretical work, *Hind Swaraj*, devotes its 15th chapter to a defence of the spiritual aspect of Mazzini's thought. The bellicose elements of Mazzini's doctrine are attributed (albeit in a philologically dubious fashion) to Garibaldi, and as a

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<sup>12</sup> M.F.N. Giglioli, "The self as Legitimate Target: Self-sacrifice and Self-determination in Mazzini and Gandhi," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 18, no. 1 (2017): 23–41.

<sup>13</sup> Giglioli, *Politics Religion & Ideology*, Vol 18, no 1, 89-106.

consequence Gandhi devises a new Mazzinianism, essentially shorn of its revolutionary aspects. In this way, Gandhi could claim to identify with the core of Mazzini's teachings."<sup>14</sup>

In the same article Giglioli summarizes the connection between Mazzini and the Indian freedom movement, particularly Mohandas Gandhi, through their shared commitment to a moral and ethical approach to politics—despite both being confronted with the temptation of violence. Whereas Mazzini advocated violence for a just cause, Gandhi vehemently opposed it. To quote Giglioli: “Mazzini was widely believed to have condoned terrorist aggressions, while encouraging insurrectional acts with little or no hope of success. Gandhi, for his part, was accused of irresponsible naïveté and utopianism for his inability to grapple with absolute evil [of colonial slavery].”<sup>15</sup>

And this is where the two great leaders of the respective freedom struggles (Italy and India) differed. However, Giglioli further qualifies and mentions commonality between the two saying that: “the evocation of self-sacrifice is seen to lie at the problematic centre of both Mazzinian and Gandhi tactics, as a response to the issue of providing normative justification for forcible collective action against an unjust legal order.”<sup>16</sup>

Gandhi, a religious (but a secular) person, was also not averse to politics. He has been quoted by various sources saying, that Gandhi did not hold any distinction between religion and politics. In his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth* Gandhi states, “...my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion mean”.<sup>17</sup> This resonates very well with what Mazzini has stated in his writings.

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<sup>14</sup> Giglioli, *Politics Religion & Ideology*, Vol 18, no 1, 89-106

<sup>15</sup> Giglioli, *Politics Religion & Ideology*, Vol 18, no 1, 89-106

<sup>16</sup> Giglioli, *Politics Religion & Ideology*, Vol 18, no 1, 89-106

<sup>17</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), 615.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920) is often regarded as the “Father of Indian Unrest.” In the context of Indian nationalism, he was one of the earliest and most prominent advocates of revolutionary nationalism. Tilak was an ardent admirer of Mazzini, drawn to his revolutionary ideals and nationalistic fervour—particularly the ideology that emphasized duty over rights and upheld morality in politics.

For Tilak, Mazzini represented the living embodiment of what he termed a “Karma Yogi”—an individual whose actions are guided by spirituality and a divinely ordained sense of duty. It is believed that Tilak’s revival of the Ganapati festival was, in part, inspired by Mazzini’s use of religion to foster national unity—a strategy that proved pivotal in the Italian revolution. Drawing from similar ideological and spiritual logic, Tilak encouraged Indians to reconnect with their cultural roots and awaken their sense of *Dharma* (religious or moral duty). As renowned Indian scholar A.R. Desai notes that Indian leaders [such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak] were deeply influenced by Mazzini’s life and ideas, viewing him as a model for national liberation.<sup>18</sup>

Desai, while discussing role of Tilak and others in his book *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, observes: “The educated Indians [leaders] were also extensively studying the European history, including the history of French Revolution, the American War of Independence, the national revolutionary struggles of the Italian people against the Austrian domination...they were reading works of Thomas Paine, Mazzini.....building a new political outlook and increasingly gravitating on the one hand to the school of new nationalist thoughts and on the other to conspiratorial terrorism.”<sup>19</sup>

The new generation of leaders in the Indian freedom movement were Western-educated and exposed to the European struggles for independence, particularly the ways in which European nations succeeded in freeing themselves from the oppressive rule of dominant empires. They were further influenced by thinkers such as Mazzini, whose ideology found familiar and fertile ground in India to develop and resonate further.

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<sup>18</sup> A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1948), 335.

<sup>19</sup> A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1948), 335.

R. K. Dasgupta, in his article titled *Mazzini and Indian Nationalism*, quotes Aurobindo Ghosh's words from Ramchandra Palit's *Life of Aurobindo Ghose*, which succinctly capture Mazzini's influence on Indian patriots: "Nationalism in India today is the sweet harmony between new ideals of Mazzini and the old ideal of Sannyasa."<sup>20</sup>

In the same article, Dasgupta observes: "Among the Indian revolutionaries, Aurobindo Ghose was particularly inspired by the ideas of Mazzini."<sup>21</sup>

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) was a very prominent spiritualist and intellectual Indian nationalist. While attending school for higher studies in England, he had come across the writings of Mazzini which profoundly impressed and influenced his thoughts. In synchronicity with the teachings of Mazzini ideology, Aurobindo often articulated in his messages and publications the need for spiritual and moral awakening along with political actions aimed at achieving freedom from British. As mentioned by Peter Heehs in his book *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*: "Aurobindo's political philosophy in the early 1900s owed much to Mazzini's belief in national mission and moral revolution."<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the India's struggle for freedom a few notable individuals have expressed the opinions and observations about the influence of Mazzini on India's freedom fighters. Peter Heehs quotes one such observation of Sister Nivedita (1867-1911), a prominent Irish convert to Hindu faith and a disciple of Vedic scholar Swami Vivekanand: "...in a letter she spoke of Aurobindo as the "Bengali Mazzini", echoing a comparison between him and the Italian revolutionary politician and philosopher."<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile the British Hindu convert, and famous Indian independence leader Annie Besant is quoted as having described Aurobindo as "... a man of the type of Mazzini with the difference that he [Aurobindo Ghose] is fanatical which Mazzini was not. Although

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in R. K. Dasgupta, "Mazzini and Indian Nationalism," *East and West* 7, no. 1 (April 1956): 67.

<sup>21</sup> R. K. Dasgupta, "Mazzini and Indian Nationalism," *East and West* 7, no. 1 (April 1956): 67.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 75-78.

<sup>23</sup> Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 191.

entirely unselfish and with no personal axe to grind. Aurobindo was dangerous because he would use any method which would upset British rule.”<sup>24</sup>

It may be noted that Mazzini’s ideology gave way to a healthy debate on him and apparent in one such instance where Annie Besant’s criticism of Ghosh and her remarks were opposed as: “unjust, improper, and uncalled for”, and pointing out that Mazzini also had been called a fanatic because “he did not shrink from employing all the weapons of conspiracy including even assassination”.<sup>25</sup>

But all these comparisons pale when compared to Mazzini’s influence on the Indian revolutionary and Hindu ideologue V.D. Savarkar. Of all the Indian freedom fighters and nationalists, Savarkar stands out as the most devoted disciple of Mazzini’s ideology and Savarkar has himself repeatedly acknowledged the same in his books *Inside the Enemy Camp* and *Mazzini Charitra*.

### **1.3 Mazzini and Savarkar**

On July 20, 1910, a 27-year-old Indian law student in London was thrust into the spotlight by a front-page article in *The Times* of London. The article reported his daring escape from police custody aboard the steamship *SS Morea*, while it was anchored at the Port of Marseilles in France. He had been charged with treason and the abetment of the murder of British officials.

Who was this young man? What compelled him to violate the very law he had travelled to Britain to study? And who influenced him to take such a radical course of action? His name was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) — an Indian revolutionary nationalist who held an unwavering belief that armed struggle was the only viable path to liberate India from British colonial rule. He would go on to become one of the most prominent and controversial figures associated with right-wing Hindu nationalism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 192.

<sup>25</sup> Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 192.

<sup>26</sup> Janaki Bakhle, *Savarkar and the Making of Hindutva* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), 1.

Savarkar was one of the most influential Indian political thinkers of the twentieth century. As the regenerator of the concept of *Hindutva*—a notion of civilizational “Hinduness” defined by a shared sacred geography and common racial identity rather than by confessional orthodoxy—he played a foundational role in shaping the ideological framework of Hindu nationalism.<sup>27</sup>

Mazzini, through his movement *Young Italy*, played a pivotal role in mobilizing revolutionary nationalism, which significantly contributed to the unification of Italy and its liberation from the domination of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Similarly, Savarkar was a proponent of modern-day *Hindutva* in 20<sup>th</sup> century, that espoused the concept of a national identity, unity, and seeking freedom from foreign power. Both, Mazzini and Savarkar, were revolutionary thinkers and ideologues in their own rights, and in their own time, who left a lasting impression as well as regenerated a school of thought with similar approach to national identity and unity. In fairness, we must mention that neither claimed to be generator of the ideologies but expressly mentioned their thoughts as “regenerative” of national unity and identity.

Mazzini’s influence on Savarkar is evident in the book translated into Hindi by Savarkar in 1906, titled *Mazzini Charitra*. This was Savarkar’s attempt at clandestinely educate and exhort his countrymen to the follow the revolutionary ideology of Mazzini to gain freedom from British rule. It would help to understand the meaning of the title of the book *Mazzini Charitra*, which translates to (reverential) description of Mazzini. In twenty-six-page preface of this work, Savarkar elaborates on his personal views while quoting Mazzini, highlighting the ideological resonance between the two thinkers:

“No no, Nations never die. God is the Savior of the oppressed. God created humans to breathe in freedom. If you have determination, then (you may)

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<sup>27</sup> Vikram Visana, “Savarkar Before Hindutva: Sovereignty, Republicanism, and Populism in India, c. 1900–1920,” *Modern Asian Studies*, published online by Cambridge University Press, Nov. 2020, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-intellectual-history/article/abs/savarkar-before-hindutva-sovereignty-republicanism-and-populism-in-india-c19001920/90DC611F3F01B05C2FE4ECC61BECDC73>

presume that the Nation has become free. What can be a more motivating national slogan than the one above? Once a man decides that he is a devotee (worshipper) of independence, native land (freedom), and humanity, then he has to fight for independence, freedom, and humanity, incessantly throughout his life. My Italy has population of 20 million. If these 20 million people have resolved (to be free), can the 75,000 soldiers of the foreigners oppress (rule) them? 20 million and their helper (saviour) the God Almighty. In such a situation Italy can decimate the foreign rulers (of Italy) in a blink of an eye.”<sup>28</sup>

In the same book Savarkar further elaborates:

“The above statement is made by great revolutionary Joseph Mazzini born in Italy on 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1805, who through his supreme devotion [and dedication] for the mother land [of Italy] rejuvenated/regenerated freedom struggle of Italy. This is a book about such a dedicated paramount devotee of the nation – a fierce nationalist [in this case the nation of Italy] presented/written by the great revolutionary and freedom fighter of India, Vinayak Savarkar, is a life story (of Joseph Mazzini). In this biography there is a compilation of some of the political articles written by such a great nationalist [Joseph Mazzini]. These articles (written by Mazzini) reinvigorated 20 million people of Italy. These articles [by Mazzini] toppled the seats of imperial powers in Europe. These articles [by Mazzini] liberated Italy. These articles reinforce the strength to liberate and make independent any colonized nation. Essence [of writings] of Mazzini is not just applicable to Italy, [in fact] Italy has become instrumental [in bringing it to fore for the other nations]. The important truths of political science have been unveiled by this great soul for the entire humanity. This sweet dish laced with nectar of freedom has gone to the direction of all oppressed.”<sup>29</sup>

Savarkar drew significant inspiration from Mazzini’s writings, which played a key role in shaping and crystallizing his views on *Hindutva* and the Hindu identity.

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<sup>28</sup> V.D. Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2021), 8.

<sup>29</sup> V.D. Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 8.

Mazzini's ideology offered a logical and morally justified framework for articulating a unified Hindu identity. Drawing from this, Savarkar encouraged his followers to adopt a cohesive national consciousness that could serve as a powerful force in asserting India's right to independence from British colonial rule.

In aligning with Mazzini's principles, Savarkar emphasized the imperative of liberation from foreign domination. Furthermore, paralleling the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, both Mazzini and Savarkar upheld the belief that the struggle for freedom constitutes a divinely ordained duty incumbent upon every human being. It may therefore be asserted, with credible justification, that Mazzini had a profound influence on Savarkar's ideological development, particularly on his conceptualization of Hindutva.

Savarkar envisioned and actively advocated for the concept of a *Hindutva* based *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu Nation). His purpose for articulating and propagating the ideology of *Hindutva* was to unite the entire Indian subcontinent under a shared and common Hindu identity. This identity, as defined by Savarkar, was rooted not in religious orthodoxy but in a common culture and heritage—bound by shared ancestry ["common blood"], emotional attachment to the nation as an ancestral land, and reverence for the Indian subcontinent as a sacred or holy land.

Savarkar professed and propagated the Hindutva ideology as geo-political ideology which desired to unite people living in the whole of Indian subcontinent under the umbrella of Hindutva and be given a "Hindu" identity that was based on common culture and heritage, bound by common blood, love for the nation as an ancestral land, and considered the Subcontinent as their holy land.

Savarkar, through his thoughtful and insightful writings further clarifies the term and concept in his book "The Essentials of Hindutva":

"An American may become citizen of India. He would certainly be entitled, if bona fide, to be treated as Bharatiya [*citizen of country India which is also known as Bharat*] or Hindi [*citizen of India which is also known as Hindustan*], a countryman

and a fellow citizen of ours. But, as long as, in addition to our country, he has not adopted our culture and our history, inherited our blood and has come to look upon our land not only as the land of his love but even of his worship, he cannot get himself incorporated into the Hindu fold. For although the first requisite of Hindutva is that he be a citizen of Hindusthan either by himself or through his forefathers, yet it is not the only requisite qualification of it, as the term Hindu has come to mean much more than its geographical significance”.<sup>30</sup>

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar’s *Hindutva* ideology was significantly influenced by the writings of the 19th-century Italian thinker Giuseppe Mazzini. Mazzini advocated for a unified Italian national identity and sought to achieve this unity through his *Young Italy* movement, which aimed to liberate Italy from Austro-Hungarian control. Savarkar drew inspiration from Mazzini’s ideas and recognized a parallel between Mazzini’s vision of a unified Italian identity and republican nationhood and his own conceptualization of *Hindutva*—a cohesive Hindu identity—and the aspiration for a Hindu nation.

While there are various arguments on both sides for Hindutva and against, there have been many articulations to bring about clarity in meaning and intention of the Hindutva ideology as propagated by Savarkar.

Savarkar in his book *Essentials of Hindutva* provides readers with a simple geographical picture of the domain of Hindus and Hindutva. That domain refers to South Asian (Indian) subcontinent. And then further integrates it into a complete definition of Hindu and Hindutva. His attempts were to provide a national identity and bring unity to its constituents. A contemporary theorist of Hindutva, Aravind Neelakandan, further elaborates on Savarkar’s concept of Hindutva in geographical terms as:

”...from the Sapta Sindhu [Sapta means Seven – of which five rivers forming major tributaries to Sindhu [Indus] river, with origins in Himalaya mountains to the North of Indian subcontinent, Sindhu the longest and biggest one being forming North-

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<sup>30</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, (India: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1923), 84.

Northwest boundaries of the subcontinent – Sindhu, Sutlej, Jhelum, Ravi, Chinab, and Ganga & Yamuna flowing the other way to plains of North and Northeast India] of Vedic lore to Seven Chakras of the Hindu flag.”<sup>31</sup>

Neelakandan further talks about the universality of Hindutva approach to national identity, and its non-expansionist nature, and says:

“Hindutva has been one of the most unique concepts of nationhood in the history of human species. Unlike the expansionist mono cultural dominance pursued by Christianity, Islam, Western Colonialism, and Marxism, Hindutva does not seek global empire but instead seeks a global family of nations, cultures, and spiritual disciplines - without one imposing itself on others. This non-expansionist universality through the complete realization of National individuality is the unique nature of Hindutva”<sup>32</sup>.

While Italy and India were two nations far apart in various ways such as faith, demographics, and geography, there was one common thread that tied them together. Both were fragmented, divided, exploited, and brutally controlled by their colonial occupiers. Like Mazzini’s nationalism advocating unity and republic, and the ideology that united Italian under one common national identity and a cause that espoused moral and God ordained duty to fight for and gain freedom from Austro-Hungarian empire, Savarkar’s Hindutva ideology adopted it to suit India’s social, ethnic, and religious fabric to bring all Indians under one common unifying national identity to form a strong cohesive force to fight the British rule to gain freedom and frustrate British strategy of divide and rule.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

In the Indian context, Mazzini’s ideology—which emphasized a unified national identity, politics grounded in moral principles, and self-sacrificing patriotic duty—found a

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<sup>31</sup> Aravindan Neelakandan, *Hindutva: Origin Evolution and Future*, (Noida: BlueOne Ink LLP, 2023), 32.

<sup>32</sup> Neelakandan, *Hindutva: Origin Evolution and Future*, 32.

culturally resonant foundation. The Indian freedom struggle from 1857 onward was not merely a political movement but also an intensely spiritual (Aurobindo Ghosh) and cultural (Tilak) endeavour.

In Mazzini's ideology, Indian freedom fighters found a compelling justification for adopting revolutionary methods and armed resistance against British occupation. His thoughts provided the ideological framework that Indian revolutionaries had been seeking—one that enabled them to confront colonial rule on moral, ethical, and civilizational grounds. In Mazzini's writings, they recognized a philosophical foundation upon which to base their struggle for the freedom of the motherland, that is, India.

Thus, Savarkar was not alone in being influenced by Mazzini's ideology. There were other actors who were prominent in the movement for India's independence. These individuals not only demanded freedom from the yoke of British colonizers, exploiters, and occupiers, but also worked tirelessly to awaken Indians to their cultural identity, instil a sense of pride and unity, and initiate social reform. Their efforts aimed to bring the ideas of national identity and pride into mainstream consciousness and practice. Among the most influential were Bengali and Marathi social reformers and intellectual leaders, who drew inspiration from original Vedic philosophy and the inherent teachings of Vedic scriptures.

Aurobindo Ghosh, Mohandas Gandhi, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak were among the Indian ideologues whose political philosophies exhibited similarities to that of Mazzini. In espousing Mazzini's views, they all insisted on claiming freedom from colonial masters. Furthermore, they believed in fighting for a just cause (freedom), and—drawing a parallel with the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*—Mazzini and Savarkar held that: “to fight for freedom is a God Ordained duty of every human.”

These independence leaders had read and were indeed influenced by Mazzini's writings. Who can forget the slogan made popular by Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Lokmanya Tilak), who declared, “Freedom is my birth right, and I shall have it”? This powerful

declaration ignited the resolve of millions of Indians to pursue freedom from British colonial rule.

It is interesting to note that Gandhi admired Mazzini, albeit in a selective manner. While Mazzini, in addition to advocating a political order grounded in religion, spirituality, and morality, also justified the use of violence, conspiracies, and revolutionary underground secret societies in the struggle for liberation from foreign oppression, Gandhi firmly rejected such methods. As a devoted proponent of *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence), Gandhi opposed the use of revolutionary violence to achieve independence. Nevertheless, like Mazzini, he strongly advocated for a political system rooted in religious principles, morality, and spiritual values, and similarly regarded the struggle for national freedom as a divinely ordained duty.

Not only were the aforementioned individuals thought leaders in modern Indian history, but they also played significant roles in the struggle for India's independence from British colonial rule. Moreover, they were instrumental in re-establishing a cultural identity rooted in shared heritage and were tireless advocates for Indian unity as a nation. While they may not have explicitly endorsed the ideology of *Hindutva*, they were nevertheless indirect supporters and contributors to the idea of national or racial unity—where “racial” refers, as Savarkar articulated, to the Hindu race—promoted by the *Hindutva* school of thought. Often, their interpretations of such unity leaned toward a more restrained and non-aggressive approach.

In the chapters that follow, I will further elaborate on Mazzini's ideology, its relevance to the regeneration of *Hindutva* by Savarkar, and how that ideology evolved into a mainstream political narrative within a major political party in India. Additionally, we will examine Mazzini's influence on Indian political thought and explore the parallel ideological currents that emerged in India during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This analysis will also identify the key proponents of these ideologies and highlight the conceptual parallels with Mazzini's thought.

## Chapter 2: Nationalism: Theories, Thoughts, Articulations, and Mazzini

To better understand the concept of nationalism and how that relates to the ideology propagated by Mazzini, it is essential to examine how nationalism is defined and the various forms in which it has historically manifested. Nationalism, understood as the belief that humanity is naturally divided into distinct nations entitled to political self-expression, is interpreted differently by scholars. The idea of nationalism is not modern; its conceptual roots can be traced back to ancient societies, although its academic classifications typically refer to distinct historical periods and intellectual developments. Scholars generally identify three major classifications of nationalism: primordial, ethno-symbolist, and modernist.

- **Primordial nationalism** views national identity as natural, ancient, and deeply embedded in kinship, culture, and territory.
- **Ethno-symbolist nationalism** emphasizes the role of historical memories, myths, symbols, and shared cultural traditions in shaping a national community.
- **Modernist nationalism**, by contrast, argues that nationalism is a product of modernity—emerging alongside industrialization, political centralization, mass literacy, and the rise of the modern state.

Historically, nationalism as a form of collective identity has existed since ancient times. However, nationalism as a political or geopolitical ideology emerged more distinctly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its rise was particularly evident during the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789, both of which advanced the idea of popular sovereignty. The Industrial Revolution further contributed to this development by creating the need for standardized systems of education and communication, which in turn promoted the formation of common identities. Movements for unification—such as those in Germany and Italy—and independence struggles across Central and South America, Asia, and Africa subsequently positioned nationalism as a driving force behind the creation of new states, decolonization, and major global political transformations.

For the current topic of discussion we shall be focusing on the Modernist Nationalism of Savarkar later in the thesis. There are pros and cons for that brand of nationalism being articulated in the modern academic discourse. However, it should suffice here to highlight the concept and arguments around the same, while the focus remains on Mazzini and Savarkar with respect to Indian nationalism.

Modernism represents the dominant academic view in nationalism studies. Modernist scholars—including Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm—argue that nations and nationalism are fundamentally modern phenomena, emerging primarily in the 18th–20th centuries due to industrialization, bureaucratic states, print capitalism, and mass education.

## **2.1 Modernist Theories of Nationalism: Key Features**

Modernist theories of nationalism argue that nations and national identities are fundamentally products of modernity rather than ancient or primordial formations. According to this perspective, nations did not exist in their contemporary form prior to the modern era; instead, they emerged through profound structural transformations associated with industrialization, bureaucratic governance, and mass politics (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990). National identity, therefore, is understood as a socially and politically constructed phenomenon rather than an inherited or natural one.

A central claim of modernist nationalism is the decisive role of the modern state in producing and institutionalizing national identity. States actively cultivate national consciousness through mechanisms such as mass education systems, standardized languages, military conscription, censuses, and cartographic practices, all of which contribute to the normalization of a shared national framework (Anderson 1983; Scott 1998). Benedict Anderson famously conceptualized nations as “imagined communities,” emphasizing that members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow nationals, yet still perceive themselves as part of a shared collective.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983. 40-52.

Taken together, modernist theories explain how and why national identities can be rapidly formed, disseminated, and institutionalized. They clarify why nationalism became a powerful global force only in the last few centuries and how elites, governments, and institutions play a central role in shaping the nation. This framework has proven particularly useful in analyzing anti-colonial movements, processes of postcolonial nation-building, the evolution of national identities, and the distinction between civic and ethnic forms of nationalism.<sup>34</sup>

## **2.2 Positive Dimensions of Nationalism**

Despite its contested nature, nationalism has historically exhibited several positive dimensions. It has often served as a unifying force case in point Mazzini and Italian Nationalism, fostering cohesion among diverse populations by providing a shared sense of belonging and collective purpose as in the Hindutva ideology of Savarkar. Nationalism has also been closely linked to movements for self-governance, playing a crucial role in mobilizing populations against imperial and colonial rule during struggles for independence.

Furthermore, nationalist movements have frequently contributed to cultural preservation by reviving, standardizing, and protecting endangered languages, traditions, and historical narratives. In many contexts, nationalism has also encouraged democratic participation by motivating citizens to engage more actively in political processes and national decision-making, thereby strengthening civic involvement and political accountability.

## **2.3 Critiques and Limitations of Modernist Nationalism**

At the same time, modernist theories of nationalism have attracted significant criticism. Critics argue that modernism underestimates the importance of long-term cultural continuity and historical memory, reducing national identity to a purely recent and instrumental construction (Smith 1986). Others contend that modernist accounts

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<sup>34</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. 6-7,9.

portray identity as overly artificial or engineered, failing to adequately capture the deep emotional attachments and affective power that nationalism often generates among populations.

Additionally, modernist explanations do not fully account for the persistence and intensity of nationalist sentiment, which frequently exceeds what might be expected from rational political or economic considerations alone. More broadly, nationalism itself has been criticized for fostering exclusion, intolerance, and xenophobia, and for contributing to conflict, war, authoritarianism, and the erosion of global cooperation. These darker dimensions underscore the ambivalent and potentially destructive consequences of nationalist ideology when mobilized in exclusionary or aggressive forms.

Despite the shared criticisms, modernism – which is at the core of Savarkar’s nationalism - remains the most influential academic framework today due to its strong empirical foundation and explanatory power.

To further understand the modernist nationalism, one may look at the Italian revolution inspired by Giuseppe Mazzini. Giuseppe Mazzini was an Italian nationalist, a writer, and a person with revolutionary thinking who was the architect of unification of Italy, and its successful bid to gain freedom from the occupying powers. His revolutionary ideology and influence on the Italian people enabled Italy to free itself from the occupation of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Mazzini is well known for regenerating the ideas and concept of nationalism, the God ordained divine duty to fight for freedom, the unified Italian identity, and democratic republicanism. Mazzini’s influence transcended Italy and occupied Europe (occupied by other European empires), reaching the colonized nations struggling for freedom from foreign occupiers – especially India. Indian independence movement leaders such as Savarkar, Tilak, Gandhi, Ghosh et al. were greatly impressed and influenced by Mazzini’s thoughts, ideals, and philosophy. They often referred to him in their message to their fellow Indians in order to inspire them to join the Indian freedom struggle.

#### **2.4 Mazzini’s role in the theories of nationhood**

Before we elaborate on what Indian freedom movement leaders said about him, it will be appropriate, as a first step, to understand who Mazzini was and what caused him to be of such great appeal for influencing and in a very general sense awakening sense of freedom in colonized India. Mazzini, who was born in Genoa, Italy in year 1805, rose as a powerful voice and inspirer in regeneration of Italian identity and unification movement. Mazzini was a deeply religious man. His fundamental belief was centred on the principle that, "...the sole origin of every Right, is in a Duty fulfilled."<sup>35</sup> For him, duty always preceded any claim to rights.

Mazzini's thought was deeply influenced by the moral and ideological formation provided by his Christian (Catholic) faith. It was this faith that inspired him to fight for the emancipation of his beloved country from the oppressive yoke of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. To Mazzini, slavery in any form was contrary to Christian teaching and to the will of God. He firmly believed that God intended humanity to be free and opposed any form of slavery. He emphasised on this belief by again stressing the necessity of common faith for genuine liberty. In the same spirit, he cited the Christian Apostle, affirming: "Wheresoever is the spirit of God, there is liberty,"<sup>36</sup> and adding that "the religion he preached decreed the abolition of slavery."<sup>37</sup>

He declared, "The source of your Duties is in God. The definition of your duties is found in His Law."<sup>38</sup> By extension, Mazzini argued that it was a man's God-ordained duty to fight for freedom. He also emphasized the importance of religion-infused sacred nationalism, noting that, "All the political reforms achieved in countries either irreligious or indifferent to religion, have lasted as long as interest allowed, no longer."<sup>39</sup>

Mazzini's ideology was based on religion infused nationalism and not a secular one. To those who doubted the existence of God, Mazzini simply responded, "God exists,

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph Mazzini, *Duties of Man*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1862, xiii.

<sup>36</sup> Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*, 42.

<sup>37</sup> Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*, 42.

<sup>38</sup> Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*, 39.

because we exist.”<sup>40</sup> He advocated a common faith as the foundation of an orderly society, shaped by his Catholic upbringing. As he explained, “Universal suffrage in a country governed by a common faith, is the expression of the national will, but in a country deprived of a common belief, what can it be but the mere expression of the interests of those numerically the stronger, to the oppression of all the rest?”<sup>41</sup>

Mazzini insisted that religion was indispensable for true leadership: “Without God you may compel but not persuade; you may become tyrants in your turn: you cannot be Educators or Apostles.”<sup>42</sup>

Mazzini embarked on his quest for freedom through the ideal of unity and republicanism, connecting it with the conviction of a God-ordained moral duty. Similarly, George Washington and his compatriots fought against the British under the banner of liberty, giving rise to the enduring slogan “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Famously inscribed inside the dome of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington DC is a quote from Thomas Jefferson famous declaration, “...I have sworn upon the altar of Almighty God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”<sup>43</sup>

Mazzini propagated the idea of a republic and unified Italy founded on democratic principles. Whereas Mazzini’s approach was not considered that of a pragmatic politician in the prevailing context, he was seen as an idealist and thinker whose political activism was based on spiritual and moral belief and convictions. For Mazzini his nationalistic zeal to fight for freedom was the God ordained duty of every Italian. He believed that every citizen owed duty to their nation just as the nations owed a moral duty to humanity.

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<sup>40</sup> Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*, 48.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, D.C.: Issued under the auspices of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association of the United States, 1904), 175.

Mazzini articulated emphatically in favour of duty over rights, “Sole origin of every right is duty fulfilled”<sup>44</sup>, exhorting his fellow Italians to live for others, and to work for the collective good of society over self-interest, and treat their homeland as their spiritual home. In the same book, *Duties of Man*, in the first chapter Addressed to Working Men, he specifically emphasizes on Duties over Rights, and Self-Sacrifices over Conquest, and virtues of Moral Improvements and of Education, rather than Material Well-Being. These positions would later find resonance in many of the classic works of Indian independence movement. In some ways, they continue to influence Indian political thought down to the present day.

Mazzini’s political ideology countered monarchy and liberal utilitarianism in favour of (moral) republicanism. Interestingly, the preface of the English edition of the same book – surprisingly the name of the translator was withheld by the publisher - describes the Mazzini and his writings as:

“...the Religious Faith which is the basis of the morality taught in the following pages, is, at the same time, the explanation of the character and career of their Author, both as a Politician and as a man.”<sup>45</sup>

The preface further clarifies the contradiction in the then prevailing impression of Mazzini versus the real Mazzini as:

“...this Revolutionist known to the Translator as the supporter of every legitimate authority; this Anarchist, as essentially a man of Order; and this most zealous opponent of the established religion of his country as the most enlightened and devout Religious Thinker of the present day.”<sup>46</sup>

Mazzini’s belief in freedom and liberty based on the republic form of government finds validation in commentary by various writers on the subject. Lucy Riall in her book *The*

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<sup>44</sup> Mazzini, *Duties of Man*, xiii.

<sup>45</sup> Mazzini, *Duties of Man*, vi.

<sup>46</sup> Mazzini, *Duties of Man*, vi.

*Italian Risorgimento: State, Society and National Unification* comments on Mazzini's strong belief in the Republican form of Government:

“...Only a Republic – the democratic expression of popular action – represented and guaranteed the liberty, equality and fraternity of all its citizens.”<sup>47</sup>

Mazzini was not always successful in his efforts and attempts at bringing the change he desired to free Italy, but his ideas had global acceptance and resonated well with the global events, especially with the rise of liberal and anti-colonial resistance to occupation of land by foreign powers during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the writings of Mazzini became staple reading for the freedom fighters and proponents in countries like India.

## **2.5 Mazzini in the Developing (Third) World**

Mazzini's ideological influence was not confined to a small circle of academic theorists or restricted to Italy and Europe, but had a global following. While this thesis focuses primarily on Mazzini's impact on the Indian independence movement, his influence was by no means limited to India. At a time when the world was polarized between the First World, dominated by capitalist ideology, and the Second World, shaped by communist ideology, the Global South was seeking to move away from these geopolitical binaries and to develop an alternative framework. This gave rise to the idea of the Third World, of which India, along with several African nations, became a part. In this broader context, examining references to Mazzini's influence in these geographical areas may also be of interest.

In fact, the great African revival – if we may call it so - fighting against the colonial oppressors also relied on Mazzini's ideology as an inspiration. It is documented that around 1947, Anton Lembede, a South African activist and the first President of African

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<sup>47</sup> Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society and National Unification* (London: Rutledge, 1994) 67.

National Congress Youth League, and proponent of the African Nationalism

“...explicitly appealed to the inspiring words of Giuseppe Mazzini.”<sup>48</sup>

It was not just South Africa, but also other African leaders followed the ideological leanings of Mazzini. Former President of Ghana, Hon. Kwame Nkrumah said in his autobiography: “...[I] had read – among other things – the works of Marx and Mazzini, which did much to influence me in my revolutionary ideas and activities.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, other African anti-colonial movement leaders, and the founders of Negritude<sup>50</sup> movement [ a Black Consciousness movement across Africa and its diaspora, that disavowed colonialism, racism, and Eurocentrism], like Leopold Sedar Senghor who was President of Senegal, Leon Damas of French Guyana, and Aime Cesaire of Martinique, were all influenced by Mazzini’s nationalism. In terms similar to Mazzini, Cesaire had stated: “...’National Idea’ is the only reality on which it will henceforth be possible to build the future...”<sup>51</sup>

So, it should be noted that Mazzini was not just focused on Europe alone. In fact, he had a very real idea for the whole world. In the words of Mazzini: “The ruling principle of international law will no longer be to secure weakness of others, but the amelioration of all through the work of all: the progress of each for the benefit of the others.”<sup>52</sup> Mazzini’s ideology was firmly rooted in the principles of duty over rights, nationalism, and the moral foundation of politics. These same values inspired generations of revolutionary freedom fighters and intellectuals far beyond Europe. His ideological discourses served as a harbinger of the socio-political changes that continued to shape the modern world order—now well recognized in the forms of liberalism, anti-colonial nationalism, and democratic socialism.

Similar to Mazzini’s ideology, collective identity as a nation was prevalent in various freedom struggle. In both Nkrumah’s and Senghor’s African socialism, for example,

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<sup>48</sup> Messina, A., “Giuseppe Mazzini and revolution in the Third world: Transnational echoes of Mazzini’s emancipatory nationalism.” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol 30(2), 414-434.

<sup>49</sup> Messina, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol 30(2), 414-434

<sup>50</sup> Messina, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol 30(2), 414-434

<sup>51</sup> Messina, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol 30(2), 414-434

<sup>52</sup> Mazzini, *Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, Vol. 3, *Critical and Literary*, 14.

revolutionary faith was placed in the ‘people’ rather than the ‘class’, and the people in turn found its highest expression in the collective entity of the nation.<sup>53</sup>

Though there have been conflicting views on the Mazzini’s ideology and its conflict to some nationalists in Fascist era. “In the Fascist era, philosopher Giovanni Gentile took on the task of giving an ideology to Fascism and to this end pointed to Mazzini as its greatest prophet. From Mazzini he took up his religiosity, pedagogical vocation and voluntaristic idea of nationhood, which placed him in direct contrast to the nationalists.”<sup>54</sup>

As proclaimed by E. Diodato, “It appears to be widely recognized that ‘Mazzini’s theoretical program had an extraordinary appeal for generations of progressive [Modernist] nationalist leaders. He inspired patriotic and anti-colonial movements not only in Europe, but also in Latin America, the Middle East, India and even China.”<sup>55</sup>

In an article titled ‘*Looking Forward to the Past: Nahda, Revolution, and the Early Ba’th in Iraq*’, O. Bashkin says, “In 1947 Michel Aflaq, together with Salah al-Din al-Bitar, formed the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party. Both were teachers and both had read the works of Mazzini. The motto of the party, which fused socialism and pan-Arab nationalism, was ‘One Arab Nation with an Eternal Mission.’”<sup>56</sup>

In an online research article “Giuseppe Mazzini and revolutions in the Third World: transnational echoes of Mazzini’s emancipatory nationalism”, in the *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Antonio Messina, an Italian Academician and a Political Scientist, articulates that to comprehend the movements of 20<sup>th</sup> Century one must focus on the thoughts of Mazzini as it was Mazzini who shaped the ideological framework behind the revolutionary struggles of that period. Mazzini’s thoughts helped model the various political systems based on the ideological foundation that attempted to bring together

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<sup>53</sup> A.J.Gregor, *African Socialism, Socialism and Fascism: An Appraisal*, *The Review of Politics*, 29, no. 3 (1967), 326-327, 337.

<sup>54</sup> Gregor, ‘Giovanni Gentile and the thought of Giuseppe Mazzini’, in Hervé A. Cavallera (Ed.) *Eventi e Studi. Scritti in onore di Hervé A. Cavallera*, vol. 2 (Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2017), 51–73.

<sup>55</sup> E. Diodato, ‘Mazzini and Gramsci on international politics: an Italian approach?’, *International Politics*, 56, no. 1 (2019), 662.

<sup>56</sup> O. Bashkin, Brenda Deen Schildgen, Gang Zhou and Sander L. Gilman (Eds.), *Other Renaissances: A New Approach to World Literature* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 62–63.

class [social hierarchical] and nation. Messina further argues that this was evident in the freedom struggles of the Third World against the colonial powers. These freedom movements exhibited the idea of self-determination of people, collaboration between classes, emotional appeals to people and the ethics of sacrifice and work, which are all fundamental to Mazzini's ideology.<sup>57</sup>

The historian Janaki Bakhle argues that, "In writing an intellectual and social history of Hindu political fundamentalism, one can begin with the premise that there was an international circuitry of exchange demonstrated by recognizable similarities between Italian nationalism of the Mazzinian variety and the development of the ideas of extremist nationalists in India."<sup>58</sup>

In the same paper Bakhle further clarifies her opinion by adding that, "... in order to move forward we would need to tackle the standard understanding of Indian extremism as one that was merely fed by Mazzini. Newer iterations of the argument attribute some agency to the individual readers and translators and in place of the first the argument would now read like this: Savarkar read Mazzini and translated his ideas into a Marathi (native, local) idiom but the influence of Mazzini could not be underestimated in the development of revolutionary nationalism."<sup>59</sup>

However, there was no single, authoritative interpretation of Mazzini or a unified adherence to his ideas. Different schools of thought understood Mazzini in divergent ways, selectively emphasizing aspects of his intellectual and political legacy. As Fabrizio De Donno demonstrates in his essay (Chapter 19), radical and revolutionary Indian nationalists who demanded immediate independence reimagined Mazzini—particularly after 1905—as a revolutionary advocate of righteous political violence.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Antonio Messina, Giuseppe Mazzini and revolutions in the Third World: transnational echoes of Mazzini's emancipatory nationalism, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 30, 2025 – Issue 2, 414-434.

<sup>58</sup> Bakhle, *Putting Global Intellectual History in its Place*, Italian Academy for Advanced Studies, <https://italianacademy.columbia.edu>

<sup>59</sup> Bakhle, *Putting Global Intellectual History in its Place*, Italian Academy for Advanced Studies, <https://italianacademy.columbia.edu>

<sup>60</sup> Bayly C. A. & Biagini E. F., *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 19.

In contrast, Mohandas K. Gandhi rejected this reading, insisting that Mazzini should be understood primarily as a proponent of non-violence and moral self-transformation through *soul-force*. Nevertheless, the image of a revolutionary Mazzini ultimately emerged as the dominant representation across both right- and left-wing strands of Indian nationalism.<sup>61</sup>

When Mazzini's thought began to be discussed in China during the 1890s, he was paired with the Marx of 1848 who had only recently been translated into East Asian languages.<sup>62</sup>

By contrast, in India during the early twentieth century—as in Italy itself and among Serbian activists—Mazzini appeared to continue what has been described as his “drift to the right.” Yet his image was never entirely malleable. He was certainly no ally of the “Grand Turk”; however, the historical Mazzini cannot plausibly be recast as a partisan of a unified Christian Europe, despite attempts by sections of the Italian right to do so. Similarly, Indian nationalists discovered that there were clear limits to the extent to which Mazzini’s thought and legacy could be adapted to their own ideological and political contexts..<sup>63</sup>

In the recent controversy surrounding school textbooks in India, several right-wing websites have criticised what they perceive as an overemphasis on foreign cosmopolitan figures such as Giuseppe Mazzini, especially when contrasted with indigenous warrior leaders like the seventeenth-century Hindu insurgent Shivaji.<sup>64</sup>

Comments on Mazzini often attributed to renowned author and academician Janaki Bakhle mention that Mazzini’s ideas travelled to India stripped of their Italian specificity and reappeared as a moral language of politics that could be turned against colonial rule.

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<sup>61</sup> Bayly & Biagini, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, 19.

<sup>62</sup> Bayly & Biagini, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Bayly & Biagini, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Bayly & Biagini, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, 19.

This diffusion and subsequent appropriation of the image and ideas of Giuseppe Mazzini thus constitute a paradigmatic example of cultural and ideological globalisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>65</sup>

## 2.6 Contrasts, Conflicts, and Criticism of Mazzini's Nationalism:

While we consider various opinions and articulations in the prevailing academic spectrum from Far-left liberal leaning thinking to the Far-Right fundamentalists viewpoints, one thing stands out as a fact in all such articulations, that Giuseppe Mazzini remains one of the most controversial and complex figures in the study of nationalism. He has been praised as the father of the League of Nations by Lloyd George, hailed as the “apostle” of the 1848 revolutions, accused of being a radical and conspirator, condemned to death by his political rivals, and seen as the ultimate figure of “romantic nationalism”.<sup>66</sup>

To further validate such interpretation, and at time digressing from the main topic of Mazzini's contribution to nationalism, two ends of political ideological spectrum often accuse each other of bending and shaping Mazzini's ideology to suit their own pursuits and imposition of assumed validity of their thoughts. Based on the writings of some well-known personalities it is observed that, far-right political propaganda frequently co-opted and praised Mazzini. Such propaganda have in fact seeped into academic discussions and studies.

For instance, Davison criticizes Heyd by saying that, while reading Gökalp, “Heyd believed he was interpreting Mussolini”.<sup>67</sup> We might as well read this remark as “Heyd believed he was interpreting *Mazzini*,” since there was not much difference between the two names in Italian Fascist propaganda between the 1920s and the 1940s.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Bayly & Biagini, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Anderson, Benedict, *Mapping the Nation*, (edited by Gopal Balakrishnan, London), 1996, 1–16.

<sup>67</sup> Davison, Andrew, Secularization and Modernization in Turkey: The Ideas of Ziya Gökalp, *Economy and Society* 24(2), 189-224

<sup>68</sup> Moss, M. E., *Mussolini's Fascist Philosopher: Giovanni Gentile Reconsidered*, Oxford, 2004, 57-61.

He is further described in the mainstream International Relations literature as “the archetype of the crusading *liberal interventionist*” or a forerunner of “liberal Wilsonianism,” and his internationalism has been interpreted as a kind of “messianic interventionism” heralding “neoconservative” ideology.<sup>69</sup>

However, in views of Ongur and Kolasi, it suffices to state that, “the far right deliberately misrepresent their accounts of nationalism according to essentialist, racist, ethnicist, political, religious, and/or extremist themes. This Romanticist misrepresentation certainly is not only necessary for the far right to use Mazzini’s and Gökalp’s strong rhetoric and historical popularity but also provides evidence of their lack of intellectual reproduction.”<sup>70</sup>

And while this essay elaborates on Mazzini’s ideology and its impact and interpretation while at the same time admiration for its influence and motivation on various freedom struggle, some do not hold the same view of Mazzini. Case in point is the article titled *A Study in Italian Nationalism: Giuseppe Mazzini* by C. R. Badger – a lecturer in Tutorial Class Department at Adelaide University. Badger states that “Mazzini’s is certainly not one of the great names in European thought or European history”.<sup>71</sup> Badger further fortifies his statement saying, “It is difficult to formulate from his voluminous writings a definite theory to which we may attach his name; it is equally difficult to assign to him a precise effect in the movement for Italian liberation and independence, to which he gave his life.”<sup>72</sup> This despite the fact that there is plethora of evidence suggesting otherwise, but academic opinion must be noted and thus the mention here.

Furthering his own argument showing the contradiction in how Mazzini is being “perceived”, Badger bemoans that , “...it is his (Mazzini’s) hard fate to have been acclaimed by the Liberals in his own day...and to be claimed as intellectual father in our

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<sup>69</sup> Riley, Dylan J., and Desai, Manali. 2007. “The Passive Revolutionary Route to the Modern World: Italy and India in Comparative Perspective.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49(4): 815–847.

<sup>70</sup> Ongur, Hakan Ovunc & Kolasi, Klevis, *The Still Enlightened “Late-Comers”: A Comparison between the Proto-Modernist Nationalisms of Giuseppe Mazzini and Ziya Gökalp*, Cambridge University Press, 25 April 2022.

<sup>71</sup> Badger, C. R., *A Study in Italian Nationalism. Giuseppe Mazzini*, *Australian Quarterly*, Vol 8, No. 31 (Sept 1936) 70-80.

<sup>72</sup> Badger, *Australian Quarterly*, Vol 8, No. 31, 70-80.

day by numerous progenies of Fascists, however much we feel that Mazzini would have resented the honour.”<sup>73</sup>

In elaborating on the conflict and confusion on Mazzini’s ideology and impact, Badger makes distinction within the legacy of Mazzini stating that, “[Mazzini] was persecuted and exiled through a long life in defence of Liberty; in our day his name gives authority to a system of government which denies Liberty in the name of the Nation. He lived to find himself classed with the reactionaries and monarchists, whom he hated; to see those whom he had taught to work for social betterment in the parties of his opponents....Nor are these contradictions and contrasts accidental; they are rooted in the thought and personality of the man.”<sup>74</sup>

And in yet brutal criticism of Mazzini’s legacy, Badger writes, “He [Mazzini] was unable to assist in the final stages of the work of making a United Italy because of the gap in thought which separated him from Cavour; he could not make Italy of his own dream for himself because his followers did not fully accept the implications of his thought; and when these were made clear to them, they rebelled and left him.”<sup>75</sup>

And in final stroke of the attempt to dethrone Mazzini’s legacy Badger adds that, “Without his modern progeny and the noise that their youthful strivings make in the modern world, Mazzini’s name would only belong to Italian Risorgimento, his work would be as dead as that of that of Balbo or Gioberti, deserving only the pious tribute of a page or two in a learned work, a monograph by a specialist or a handful of footnotes.”<sup>76</sup>

The above opinion of C. R. Badger (circa 1936) have been countered by what happened in countries like India, Ghana, and Senegal, where the leaders of their respective and successful freedom struggle were greatly influenced by Mazzini’s ideology and the fact

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<sup>73</sup> Badger, Australian Quarterly, Vol 8, No. 31, 70-80.

<sup>74</sup> Badger, Australian Quarterly, Vol 8, No. 31, 70-80.

<sup>75</sup> Badger, Australian Quarterly, Vol 8, No. 31, 70-80.

<sup>76</sup> Badger, Australian Quarterly, Vol 8, No. 31, 70-80.

that they followed Mazzini's ideology which incidentally dates after the publication of C.R. Badger's article.

## **2.7 Conclusion:**

In final analysis, notwithstanding the perceived contrasts and criticisms, and based on Mazzini's global influence and acceptance (as highlighted earlier and in the following chapters) one may surmise that Mazzini's influence is widespread across the political and intellectual spectrum, it is not immune to convenient and biased interpretation in order to claim legitimacy for the interpreter's respective cause. In either case, Mazzini still succeeded in prevailing throughout the historical archives as the torch bearer of the ideology that so profoundly gave meaning and importance to the idea of nationalism, freedom, sovereignty, republic, unity, common national identity, and the God ordained duty of man to be free.

### **Chapter 3: Mazzini's influence on Indian revolutionary thoughts before Savarkar**

Mazzini's ideology proved particularly relevant to the Indian struggle for independence, given the British colonial administration's reliance on the "divide and rule" policy to maintain control over the subcontinent and its people. While Indian revolutionaries and ideologues developed diverse strands of thought, many of them—whether wholly or in part—resonated with Mazzini's ideas of unity, liberty, revolution, secret societies, divine and moral duty, and even, to some extent, the justification of violence in overthrowing oppressive foreign rule. Mahatma Gandhi accepted the moral imperative of the freedom struggle, while Aurobindo Ghosh advocated insurgency against British occupation. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, as shown in Chapter 2, was an ardent follower of Mazzini.

While this study focuses in particular on Savarkar and Mazzini, it is important to recognize that before Savarkar emerged as a key figure in Indian nationalism, several thought leaders and freedom-seeking ideologues had already laid the foundations for independence movements in British-occupied India. Their work began a few decades after the First War of Indian Independence in 1857. Savarkar was not the only nationalist striving for India's freedom; rather, he drew inspiration from these earlier pioneers, modifying and adapting their ideas to fit his own vision.

Among the most influential figures were Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh, Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi, who shared a commitment to independence, nationalism, unity, and God ordained moral duty—principles that significantly shaped Savarkar's thinking. Indeed, Mazzini's influence had already reached Indian nationalists before Savarkar explicitly championed his ideas. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a nationalist, a journalist, and an educator who strongly supported the use of secret societies and revolutionary activities to achieve independence. Similarly, Aurobindo Ghosh was a Bengali revolutionary who had significant influence of Mazzinian ideology in his thinking and articulation, however, later on in life Ghosh turned to eastern spiritualism.

Early Indian nationalists were primarily concerned with securing independence from British rule. Yet, as in Mazzini's case, their struggle went beyond political liberation; it also embodied a deeper motivation: the reawakening of Indians to their cultural identity, spiritual heritage, and affiliation with *Sanatan Dharma* (Eternal Dharma), often referred to as Hinduism. *Sanatan Dharma* denotes the spiritual, cultural, and religious practices sustained for centuries by Hindus. The British colonizers, employing a "divide and rule" strategy, sought to fracture Indian society along religious lines. A striking example was the partition of Bengal in year 1905 into East Bengal (with a Muslim majority) and West Bengal (with a Hindu majority). This move reinforced Hindu anxieties and intensified calls for the revival of Hinduism (also known as *Sanatan Dharma*) as both a cultural and national identity in resistance to the growing influence of Islam and Christianity.

As the movement for independence gathered momentum, a new generation of leaders emerged across India's vast social, cultural, and spiritual landscape. Many were highly educated, with some trained in Western institutions, and were profoundly influenced by European ideologues such as Giuseppe Mazzini, while remaining deeply rooted in their own cultural and historical heritage. They articulated their visions through literature and public discourse, emphasizing religious and cultural unity as a means of fortifying resistance to colonial power.

Though the struggle for India's freedom was a pan India movement, Bengali nationalists like Aurobindo Ghosh were especially vocal, having directly confronted the British rulers' attempt to partition Bengal along religious lines. Meanwhile, in Maharashtra, nationalist sentiment drew inspiration from the legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the Maratha warrior-king who resisted Mughal domination and sought to re-establish Hindu sovereignty. Tilak was particularly influential in Maharashtra, and his iconic slogan, "Freedom is my birthright, and I shall have it," continues to resonate in nationalist discourse. Another influential figure was Mohandas Gandhi, who was partly in harmony with Mazzini's thinking.

As will be seen in the following discussion, these leaders played a pivotal role in shaping the ideological landscape of Indian nationalism. Their philosophies

emphasized the revival of Hindu identity through the ancient cultural and spiritual framework of *Sanatan Dharma*. They interpreted British colonial policies as deliberate attempts to marginalize Hindu society and thus saw the reawakening of Hindu self-awareness and unity as essential. This unity resonating with Mazzini's ideology of "Unified Italian identity", in turn, was envisioned as a powerful force capable of overthrowing British rule and achieving independence.

This ideological groundwork later contributed to Savarkar's formulation of *Hindutva*, which extended beyond the revival of Hindu religious identity to become a broader geopolitical doctrine advocating for a unified Indian subcontinent.

### **3.1 Mazzini and Tilak**

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), formally known as Keshav Gangadhar Tilak, was a Marathi Hindu Chitpavan Brahmin, like Savarkar. Born on July 23, 1856—just a year before the First War of Indian Independence of year 1857—Tilak was an Indian nationalist, journalist, educator, and an independence activist. He was one of the three leaders of the well-known nationalist triumvirate *Lal-Bal-Pal*, which included Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal.

Tilak inspired the common people and youths to uncompromising struggle against the foreign rulers when other local organizations failed to do so. Mazzini's nationalist teachings and methods of struggle were applied to Tilak's political activities. On the pattern reminiscent to Mazzini's Young Italy organization Tilak used "Yuvashakti" [meaning strength of youth or youth power] as the main force of his terrorist [the correct word should be revolutionary] movement, citing example of Mazzini's young forces.<sup>77</sup>

Tilak neither opposed nor was immune to adoption of Western school of thoughts in his thinking and articulations. In fact, during a trial in 1908 he had relied on the definition of nationality as pronounced by John Mills, and during 1919-20 he had accepted the

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<sup>77</sup> Hazra, Sanchita, "Lokmanya Tilak: The Motivator of the Youth Class", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Education Research*, 2021, Vol 10, Issue 6(8), 22.

conceptual idea of self-determination as propagated by Wilson.<sup>78</sup> What is of interest is that renowned journals and academicians have also mentioned the western influence of liberty and freedom in Tilak's articulations. In the *Journal of Innovative Technologies and Innovative Research*, it is stated: "...Tilak's philosophy of nationalism was a synthesis of the Vedantic ideal of the spirit as self-contained freedom and the western conceptions of Mazzini...".<sup>79</sup>

"The Western ideas of national liberation and self-determination had a profound effect on Tilak's nationalist thinking. His nationalism was a harmonious combination of the theoretical ideals of spiritual freedom and paralleled the Western ideas of Mazzini, Burke, Mill, and Wilson. Tilak's political thinking and methods combined with Mazzini's nationalist ideas and fighting spirit. Following Mazzini's Youth (Young Italy) he wanted to use India's youth as a main force in his extremist activities. Mazzini's nationalist teachings and methods of struggle were applied to Tilak's political activities. Tilak advocated use of secret weapons factories, arms imports, secret societies, armed insurrections as needed – all these methods should be used in the anti-British struggle."<sup>80</sup>

One of the fundamental beliefs of Mazzini's Young Italy organization (as quoted in Chapter 1) was that the youth must be educated in civic virtues and national duty. The same thinking found its resonance with Tilak who firmly believed that the education of India's youth was key to achieving independence. This conviction of Tilak is firmly reinforced by Jog in his book *Builders of Modern India* where he articulates Tilak's words as:

"We were men with our brains in a fever heat with the thoughts of the degraded condition of our country, and after long cogitation, we had formed the opinion that the salvation of our motherland was to be found in education alone."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> N. Prashantha, "Revisiting Tilak's Nationalism and Swaraj," *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)* 5, no. 8 August 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Prashantha, *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* 5, no. 8 August 2018.

<sup>80</sup> Hazra, "Lokmanya Tilak: The Motivator of the Youth Class", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Education Research*, 2021, Vol 10, Issue 6(8), 23.

<sup>81</sup> Jog, *Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak – Builders of Modern India*, 7.

Tilak and his contemporaries' goal was to provide high quality education to India's youth. Tilak's earlier success in providing education through good school led them to set up Deccan Education Society in 1884 that focused on a new system of education that imparted and inculcated in young Indians nationalist ideas through better articulation and emphasis on Indian culture.<sup>82</sup>

In resonance with – even if by sheer coincidence – one of Mazzini's mandates for Young Italy which stated that Youth must be educated in civic virtues and national duty, “the [Deccan Education] Society established the well-known Fergusson College in Pune, India in 1885 for post-secondary studies, under the auspices of the Deccan Education Society founded by Tilak and co-sympathisers.”<sup>83</sup> In 1890, Tilak parted from Deccan Education Society for more openly political work.<sup>84</sup> Tilak began a mass movement towards independence by an emphasis on a religious and cultural revival.<sup>85</sup>

It is interesting to note that Savarkar was an alumnus of Fergusson College, a key institution in the nationalist movement. It was here that he founded his first secret society, Abhinav Bharat Society, dedicated to revolutionary action against British rule. The Deccan Education Society became a breeding ground for nationalist and independence-minded young men and women. This environment fostered awareness of colonial oppression and encouraged resistance.

Tilak had greatly influenced Savarkar. Tilak was impressed by this young student [Savarkar] and helped him obtain the Shivaji Scholarship in London for his law studies in 1906. He [Savarkar] protested against the Bengal partition of 1905 and led bonfires of foreign clothes [as a form of protest against partition of Bengal] in India with other students in Tilak's presence.<sup>86</sup> This encouragement from Tilak was reminiscent of boycott executed by Mazzini and his followers of foreign made articles in Italy.

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<sup>82</sup> D. D. Karve, (1961), "The Deccan Education Society", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 20 (2): 205–212.

<sup>83</sup> Jog, *Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak – Builders of Modern India*, 12.

<sup>84</sup> Ramachandra Guha, (2011), *Makers of Modern India*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 112.

<sup>85</sup> Michael Edwardes, *A History of India*, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York. 1961, 322.

<sup>86</sup> Rawat, Sudeep Singh, "Veer Savarkar Jayanti 2024: Facts about his life, death, and top quotes", *Business Standard*, May 28, 2024, [https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/veer-savarkar-jayanti-2024-facts-about-his-life-death-and-top-quotes-124052800474\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/veer-savarkar-jayanti-2024-facts-about-his-life-death-and-top-quotes-124052800474_1.html)

Tilak earned both fame and notoriety through various titles. The British occupiers labelled him "The Father of the Indian Unrest," while Indians conferred upon him the title "Lokmanya," meaning "accepted (and believed) by the people as their leader." Through his fiery speeches and writings, Tilak instilled a strong and radicalized sense of national consciousness, urging the masses to rise and fight for freedom from British colonial rule. This is evident in his popular slogan, originally in Marathi:

"Swaraj maazaa janmasiddha haq aahet, aani mi te ghenar" (स्वराज माझा जन्मसिद्ध हक्क आहे आणि मी ते घेणार) Translation: "Freedom is my birthright, and I shall have it."

Like Mazzini, one of Tilak's key objectives was to raise Hindu national consciousness and foster unity among Indians. Tilak pursued this goal through social, cultural, and religious movements. In doing so, he paralleled Mazzini's emphasis on duty, spirituality, morality (as part of God-ordained religious duty), and freedom.

Mazzini was also a staunch believer in God. His simple argument in that regard was expressed in his statement that "God is because we exist." Indeed, Mazzini's ideology was predicated on the concept of God-ordained duty; religion and God were central to his thought. Similarly, Tilak was a firm believer in God and religion, and he viewed religious festivals and celebrations as powerful means of uniting different sections of society under one umbrella. His "masterstroke" was the revival and popularization of the Ganesh Chaturthi festival (the birthday celebration of the Hindu God Ganesh, also called Ganapati) as a public event. To this day, it remains a major unifying celebration, particularly in Maharashtra.

Tilak believed that bringing Hindus together under a shared cultural framework would strengthen India's independence movement. In this way, the idea of Hindu unity as a basis for national identity and cohesiveness—parallel to Mazzini's vision of Italian identity—was already taking shape before Savarkar's rise. Tilak's groundwork, modelled in part on Mazzini, laid the ideological foundation upon which Savarkar would later build in his articulation of Hindutva.

The Ganapati festival was frankly conceived in a spirit of protest as much against the anti-Hindu activities of some Muslims as the partial attitude adopted towards them by the Government. It quickly caught public fancy and proved a useful agency for social consolidation and political awakening.<sup>87</sup>

Tilak used his publication, *Kesari*, to popularize the Ganesh festival as a nationalistic movement. As quoted by Jog, Tilak justified the politicization of religious events, arguing that:

“Religious thoughts and devotion may be possible even in solitude, yet demonstration and éclat are essential to the awakening of masses. Through this nationalist appeal, the worship of Ganapati spread from the family circle to the public square.”<sup>88</sup>

Tilak was unapologetic in his use of religious festivals as a means of political awakening.<sup>89</sup> Alarms about Tilak’s intentions and activities were raised by various organizations and observers. One such observer was Sir Valentine Chirol, who discussed this in his book *Indian Unrest*, where he mentions:

“These festivals gave occasion for theatrical performances and religious songs, in which the legends of Hindu mythology were skilfully exploited to stir up hatred for the foreigner-and mlechh, the term employed for foreigner, applied equally to Europeans and to Mahomedans [Muslims]- as well as to tumultuous processions only too well calculated to provoke affrays with Mahomedans and with the police which, in turn, led to judicial proceedings that served as a fresh excuse for noisy protests and inflammatory pleadings. With the Ganapati celebrations the area of Tilak’s propaganda was widely increased.”<sup>90</sup>

In ideological parallelism Tilak’s thinking resonated with the ideology of Mazzini in its manifestation, which focused on freedom as well as unity. As on the surface, the

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<sup>87</sup> Jog, *Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak – Builders of Modern India*, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Jog, *Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak – Builders of Modern India*, 40.

<sup>89</sup> Jog, *Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak – Builders of Modern India*, 41.

<sup>90</sup> Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1910, 44.

Ganesh festivals appeared to be religious celebrations. However, beneath this religious veneer lay the nascent idea of reawakening Hindu **unity** and galvanizing the Indian populace into a unified demographic. The goal was to create a powerful force against British occupiers and liberate India from British **rule**.

Like Mazzini, Tilak believed that the spiritual nation must be created before the political nation could be born. He had a strong conviction – being himself a Hindu high caste Chitpavan Brahmin – in Hindu values and traditions, and thus he was in support of social reformers in terms of bringing the Hindu society to its core values and ethos. Like them [social reformers] he also stood for the regeneration of Hindu society, [and] he deeply cherished its religious tenets, philosophical traditions and moral values.<sup>91</sup>

However, due to his political ideology and freedom-oriented thinking, he believed that social reforms should occur gradually and with consent rather than through compulsion. Tilak thus in many ways reflected Mazzinian view of nationalism and revolution.

Mirroring the Italian revolution, one lesser-known catalyst in inspiring resistance against British rule was an act of public defiance planned by Savarkar with Tilak's support—the burning of British-made clothes. When Savarkar approached Tilak with the proposal, Tilak welcomed the idea but advised that the bonfire should contain a cartload of foreign clothes to create a significant impact.<sup>92</sup>

Such actions, encouraged by Tilak, culminated in a grassroots boycott of foreign goods across India. As mentioned earlier, this strategy closely paralleled the Italian revolutionary movement, where Mazzini had similarly advocated the rejection of foreign-manufactured products sold to Italians. The practice was later adopted by Mohandas Gandhi as a key instrument of nonviolent resistance against the British rule.

Thus, the ideology professed by Tilak and his radical contemporaries like Aurobindo Ghosh through condoning revolutionary actions, believing and preaching spiritual

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<sup>91</sup> Jog, *Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak – Builders of Modern India*, 21.

<sup>92</sup> Sampath, Vikram, *Savarkar- Echoes from the forgotten Past*, 75.

awakening, and insisting on moral and religious duty to fight for freedom, aligned closely with Mazzini's ideology. It is they who in turn inspired and encouraged Savarkar. In parallel to Mazzini's direct influence, this local nationalist support further reinforced Savarkar's commitment to Hindutva as a unifying national identity and as means to achieve independence, mirroring Mazzini's efforts to free Italy from Austro-Hungarian rule.

### **3.2 Mazzini and Lala Lajpat Rai**

Another early revolutionary whose thinking was much more directly influenced by Mazzini was Lala Lajpat Rai. Lala Lajpat Rai (1865–1928) was a prominent lawyer at the Lahore High Court in Punjab, British India, as well as an Indian politician, revolutionary freedom fighter, and prolific writer. He was one of the three nationalist leaders who formed the influential trio popularly known as *Lal-Bal-Pal*. He died from severe injuries inflicted by British police during a brutal lathi charge while leading a protest against the Simon Commission, which had been sent to determine the future of India's self-rule but did not include a single Indian representative.

Lala Lajpat Rai was often addressed by the honorific *Lala Ji*. His revolutionary outlook and forceful articulation frequently made him a target of the British colonial authorities in India. A nationalist in his own right, Lala Ji exerted great influence on young men, and through his speeches and writings he inspired in them a strong nationalistic spirit and awakened a patriotic zeal for freedom from British rule.

An avid student of European freedom fighters and nationalists, he authored numerous articles on such figures, later publishing them in a volume entitled *Great Men of the World*. This book incidentally talked about and honoured two Italian revolutionaries Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi along with three Indian freedom fighter and ideologue namely, the Maratha Warrior King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Swami Dayanand Saraswati (the founder of the Arya Samaj), and The Supreme Godhead Lord Shri Krishna. Interestingly, the first essay in this series was devoted to Giuseppe Mazzini. Although the work ostensibly presented Mazzini, it clearly and distinctly reflected Lala Ji's deep admiration for Mazzini and his own conformity with Mazzini's

ideology. The following paragraphs present selected extracts and interpretations of Lala Ji's reflections on Mazzinian thought.

Lala Ji's admiration and almost disciple-like dedication to Mazzinian ideology were eloquently expressed in his writings. His introduction of Mazzini begins with the highest praise, describing the quality of a great soul, a "Mahatma," [whereas globally word Mahatma is linked to Mohandas Gandhi, it is actually a combination of two Sanskrit words, Maha meaning Great, and Atma meaning the Soul] among the vast mass of humanity: "...in this vast mass of humanity there are some rare individuals that stand out."<sup>93</sup> Lala Ji further articulates his admiration for Mazzini's dedication, self-sacrifice, and commitment to the cause of humanity and its freedom from oppressors as: "...their intellectual attainments and acumen, extraordinary courage, sense of dedication, frugal habits, and other qualities of head and heart they stand apart from others and are held in high esteem akin to the messiahs....the foundation they lay down hold good for perpetuity....hold of these great souls lasts over the people for eternity. A vast majority of people are ready to shed their blood for them."<sup>94</sup>

Immensely impressed by the intellect of Mazzini and his ideological fervour, Lala Ji observed: "he places his mission before his countrymen loud and clear...no travail he suffers for his country, is too great for him. Every hardship disappears before his dauntless courage, and as if waking up from a bad dream, his country falls into step with him and in the end it gains freedom."<sup>95</sup>

Lala Ji regarded Mazzini as a figure of lofty character whose speeches and writings conveyed conviction in his ideology and inspired confidence among his followers. In his boundless admiration for Mazzini, Lala Ji wrote: "Mazzini, was worthy of the highest esteem and his name will be remembered as long as Italy exists on the map of the world."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Lala Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2003, 283.

<sup>94</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 283.

<sup>95</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 284.

<sup>96</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 285.

Lala Ji explicitly exhorted his countrymen to study the lives of the revolutionary ideologue Mazzini and his protégé Garibaldi, urging them to draw inspiration from their ideological actions: “...to enable us to overcome our own shortcomings and aberrations.”<sup>97</sup>

According to Lala Ji, the influence of Mazzini did not stem from lofty social position, aristocratic status, or lineage. In fact, Mazzini came from a very ordinary family background. His impact arose from his intellectual power, his fearless ideological convictions in the God-ordained moral duty to fight for the freedom of his country and fellow citizens, and his burning desire to unite and liberate Italy. These convictions led him to embark on a historic mission—fraught with dangers and perils—that resulted in his being relentlessly pursued by the enemies of his beloved motherland.

Mazzini was also the mentor to Garibaldi; an Italian patriot and soldier trained in the real-life theatres of war in South America between 1836 and 1848. While Garibaldi ultimately accomplished the goal of the struggle initiated by Mazzini, according to Lala Ji: “...there is no doubt that Garibaldi would not have been able to give the movement a touch of finesse without Mazzini’s political guidance.”<sup>98</sup>

Lala Ji’s observations about the fractured nature of the Italian populace, and the divisions so evident under Austro-Hungarian rule that Mazzini sought to overcome in order to unify the Italians and create a formidable force against the occupiers, were comparable to the divisions the British were fostering in India through their deliberate policy of separating Hindus and Muslims. A glaring example of this was the partition of Bengal. In what was widely perceived as a nefarious strategy of “divide and rule” aimed at weakening nationalist forces, the British administration divided Bengal into two parts along strictly religious lines: East Bengal, with a Muslim majority, and West Bengal, with a Hindu majority. By some analyses, this marked the starting point of a process that ultimately culminated in the partition of India into the Muslim-majority nation of West and East Pakistan and a Hindu-majority (though constitutionally secular) India.

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<sup>97</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 286.

<sup>98</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 286.

To Lala Ji, the oppression and humiliation faced by Italians was no different from what was happening in India under British rule. The same was true of the heinous sacrilege committed in the name of religion and of the iniquities that so deformed the mindset of the people that slavery to foreign rulers became deeply engrained in their psyche, reducing them to cowardice. However, this changed due to the “...might of one man’s [Mazzini] pen and the other man’s [Garibaldi] sword.”<sup>99</sup> Lala Ji draws his readers’ attention to the fact that, in his own time, Italians were able to witness a free and unified Italy. The slavery of earlier times had disappeared due to the sacrifices of thousands of Italians who fought for freedom and gave up their lives for the cause.

Lala Ji further exhorted his fellow Indians to look to Italy: “...to see the higher reaches of patriotism in its full splendour....to study the lives of these two men which can also have a salutary effect on our own lives and whose sheer emulation by us can overcome our own shortcomings and aberrations.”<sup>100</sup> Here, Lala Ji specifically asks his countrymen to study Mazzini and adopt his revolutionary methods and ideology to achieve freedom from oppressive British rule.

In a direct message of unity to his fellow Indians, Lala Ji emphasized that India lives under the suzerainty of a European nation which rules with impunity and exploits the country to the hilt. With intrepid confidence, the rulers control everything that belongs to India and take away whatever they desire. Nobody dares to defy them. Why do such distant nations succeed in ruling over far-flung lands? It is, Lala Ji explains, because they have produced sons like Mazzini. Every citizen of the European powers collectively carries the burden of national progress and actively promotes the interests of his country.<sup>101</sup> Indians, he argues, must adopt such superior traits and unite as one nation.

Articulating the core message and principle of the Mazzinian school of thought, Lala Ji expounds: “...foreign rule, howsoever good, is not a blessing, for it is innately wrong for one country to rule over another country.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 285.

<sup>100</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 286.

<sup>101</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 288.

<sup>102</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 289.

The moral imperative and divine duty to fight for freedom is further emphasized by Lala Ji through his writings on Mazzini, which convey a subliminal message to his fellow Indians to awaken and embrace the quest for freedom as a just and moral cause, aligned with the universal principles of Mazzinian doctrine. The following quote from Lala Ji's book on Mazzini illustrates this point:

“...the rule of a foreign power, howsoever good, efficient and benevolent, is undesirable and tantamount to one man putting the yoke of slavery on the neck of another man. One nation has no right to impose its will upon another nation through brute force. If a subjugated nation fails to rebel against such aggrandizement, it only shows that its long-term slavery has impaired its sense of self-respect and blunted its power to understand the reality and realize the truth. By this criterion, foreign rule howsoever good cannot take the place of self-rule. Connivance in or acceptance of foreign rule is a sign of human degradation.”<sup>103</sup>

In the annals of India's struggle for independence from British rule, Lala Ji is often depicted as a prominent freedom fighter associated with the Gandhian and Nehruvian ideology of peace and nonviolence. While it is true that he worked alongside Gandhi and Nehru, it must also be acknowledged that Lala Ji was a staunch proponent of Mazzinian thought and held Giuseppe Mazzini in profound reverence. This is evident in his book *Great Men of the World*, where he articulates his understanding of and admiration for five great figures, beginning with Mazzini.

### **3.3 Mazzini and Aurobindo Ghosh**

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, (1872-1950) an Indian ideologue and a freedom fighter before turning to spiritualism, was a yogi, seer, philosopher, poet, and Indian nationalist who propounded a philosophy of divine life on earth through spiritual evolution delved deeply into Vedanta and the mysticism of Vedic philosophy. He was an ardent supporter of India's freedom from British rule. While he firmly believed in awakening Hindu identity, [his comparison to Mazzini has been detailed in previous chapter

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<sup>103</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 289.

already] his efforts also aimed at using that awakening to ignite the fire of the desire for freedom in the hearts and minds of the Indian populace.<sup>104</sup>

Aurobindo, like Savarkar, was profoundly impressed by the ideology of Mazzini. Ample references to Mazzini can be found in Aurobindo's pre-spiritual phase—when he was more a revolutionary than the spiritual thinker he later became. In his publication *Karmayogin*, prior to 1910, Aurobindo discussed Mazzini extensively, offering his own reflections on Mazzini's role and significance. While Aurobindo also admired Cavour, he placed Mazzini in a higher position: "...Mazzini and Cavour were the most essential to Italian regeneration. Of the two, Mazzini was undoubtedly greater."<sup>105</sup>

The comparison, however, did not end there. Aurobindo observed, "Cavour was a great statesman and organizer, Mazzini the prophet and creator."<sup>106</sup> The extent to which these two figures inspired the young revolutionary Ghosh is evident throughout the pages of *Karmayogin*. Aurobindo's admiration for Mazzini remained consistent, as he analyzed and contrasted him with Cavour in a highly nuanced manner. For Aurobindo, Mazzini was a creative genius who gave shape to great and eternal ideas capable of appealing to the masses globally, whereas Cavour was more pragmatic, addressing the immediate needs and circumstances of Italy. To Aurobindo, Cavour represented a powerful intellect, while Mazzini embodied a great soul. Importantly, he acknowledged that both were essential to each other's success, and ultimately to Italy's national regeneration. In Aurobindo's words: "Cavour belongs to Italy, Mazzini to all humanity."<sup>107</sup>

Aurobindo's reflections on the dynamics between Mazzini and Cavour are particularly revealing. According to him, "Mazzini hated Cavour as a dishonest and an intellectual without any imagination, whereas Cavour scorned Mazzini a fanatic and dangerous

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<sup>104</sup> Britannica, Aurobindo Ghose, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sri-Aurobindo>.

<sup>105</sup> Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9 (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1909), 183.

<sup>106</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9, 183.

<sup>107</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9, 183.

firebrand.”<sup>108</sup> The two leading figures of Italian nationalism, despite their shared devotion to Italy, never seemed to fully understand each other.

For Aurobindo, however, Mazzini stood out as an idealist with a burning passion to liberate Italy from foreign domination. In full resonance of his own thoughts with that of Mazzini, he frequently invoked Mazzini’s example to inspire Indian readers of *Karmayogin*, drawing parallels between Italy’s condition and that of India under British rule. As Aurobindo noted comparing India to Italy, “Mazzini found Italy, corrupt, demoralised, treacherous, immoral, selfish, wholly divided and incapable of union.”<sup>109</sup>

It was Mazzini’s ideology and efforts, Aurobindo emphasized, that gave the Italian masses the necessary spiritual and moral strength to rise above selfish and materialistic concerns in pursuit of freedom. Mazzini recognized that brute force alone was insufficient without a foundation of moral and spiritual energy. This spiritual strength not only shaped Italy’s future but also provided the very material for its realization. Even Cavour, Aurobindo suggested, drew upon the inspiration of the Mazzinian gospel and the movement of *Young Italy* that Mazzini had created. In Aurobindo’s words: “it was not Cavour who saved Italy, it was the force of resurgent Italy working through Cavour.”<sup>110</sup>

Ultimately, in his direct reflections on the Italian Revolution, Aurobindo suggested that India’s circumstances might not permit the same revolutionary strategies employed in Italy. Nevertheless, the principles and psychological foundations necessary for India’s national regeneration and awakening were, in his view, identical to those which had inspired Italy. As he wrote: “The freedom we seek in India may be different in its circumstances from Italian freedom, the means to be used are certainly different, but the principle is the same.”<sup>111</sup>

At the same time, Aurobindo believed that Mazzini had not fully succeeded in realizing the resurgent Italy imbued with the moral and spiritual depth he envisioned. This

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<sup>108</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9, 183.

<sup>109</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9, 183.

<sup>110</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9, 186.

<sup>111</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9, 188.

assessment is reinforced when Aurobindo expressed hope for India: "...it is our hope that as the work has begun [for the freedom of India], so it will continue in the spirit of Nationalism and not only the political circumstances of India be changed but her deeper disease be cured and by a full evocation of her immense stores of moral and spiritual strength that be accomplished for India which Mazzini could not accomplish for Italy, to place her in the head and forefront of the new world whose birth-throes are now beginning to convulse the Earth."<sup>112</sup>

Similar to Mazzini, Aurobindo did not see religion and politics as separate entities but rather as the two most powerful expressions of a nation's identity. He emphasized their interconnectedness:

"Religion and politics, the two most effective and vital expressions of the nation's self having been nationalised, the rest [Indian Nationalism] will follow in due course. The needs of our religious and political life are now vital and real forces, and it is these needs which will reconstruct our society, recreate and remould our industrial and commercial life and found a new and victorious art, literature, science and philosophy which will be not European but [of a free and sovereign state that is] Indian."<sup>113</sup>

Like Mazzini, Aurobindo was a nationalist in his thinking, but his ideas were also deeply influenced by the spiritual and social teachings of *Sanatan Dharma* (Hindu faith). As such, he was an early proponent of Hindutva-based nationalism. His ideology combined the struggle for freedom with Hindu spirituality, which was reflected in his speeches and writings.

His nationalistic tendencies, similar to Mazzini, were clearly articulated in a speech on May 28, 1907:

"We have to fill the minds of our boys from childhood with the idea of the country, and present them with that idea at every turn and make their whole

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<sup>112</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 38, 464.

<sup>113</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909*.

young life a lesson in the practice of virtues which afterwards go to make the patriot and citizen.....for without such a discipline nationalism, patriotism, regeneration are mere words and ideas which can never become part of the very soul of the nation and never therefore a great realised fact. Mere academical teaching of patriotism is of no avail”.<sup>114</sup>

Although Aurobindo later turned to spiritualism, in his earlier years, his thoughts resonated with Mazzini in their revolutionary ideology. In earlier chapter I have mentioned how Aurobindo was called Mazzini of India due to his revolutionary thinking. That is further amplified and supported through the forceful writings by Aurobindo Ghosh. In *Karmayogin*, Aurobindo wrote:

“...Aggression is necessary for self-preservation and when a force ceases to conquer, it ceases to live—that which remains stationary and stands merely on the defensive, that which retires into and keeps within its own kot or base ... is doomed to defeat, diminution and final elimination.”<sup>115</sup>

Further encouraging and justifying aggression in religion, Aurobindo stated:

“Hinduism has always been pliable and aggressive... Whenever it has stood on the defensive, it has contracted within narrower limits and shown temporary signs of decay.”<sup>116</sup>

Aurobindo professed that the way to nationalistic awakening was through the national awakening in religion. Aurobindo argued that:

“Once the soul of the nation was awake in religion, it was only a matter of time and opportunity for it to throw itself on all spiritual and intellectual activities in the national existence and take possession of them.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *India's Rebirth*, P. 22

<sup>115</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909*.

<sup>116</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909*.

<sup>117</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909*.

One example of manifestation of such awakening was the reaction of Indian revolutionaries to the Partition of Bengal by the British in year 1905, which divided Bengal into a Hindu-majority West Bengal and a Muslim-majority East Bengal. Aurobindo viewed this as the first step toward the partition of India in year 1947, which created Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority East and West Pakistan:

“The outburst of anti-European feeling which followed on the Partition gave the required opportunity [for national awakening and unity].”<sup>118</sup>

Taking inspiration from the *Bhagavad Gita*, Aurobindo argued that even negative emotions like anger and vengeance could be tools for a greater divine purpose:

“Anger, vindictiveness and antipathy are not in themselves laudable feelings, but God uses them for His purposes and brings good out of evil.”<sup>119</sup>

In his writings in *Karmayogin*, Aurobindo carefully avoided using the word "freedom", likely to evade the wrath of the British colonial authorities. Instead, he articulated his belief in the inevitability of India's political transformation:

“...everything which is now happening in politics, is helping to prepare for its true and potent expression. The future is now assured.”<sup>120</sup>

In a very pragmatic and well thought out manner Aurobindo rationalized his advocacy for change, stressing that change should be purposeful and not simply for the sake of change:

“We will sacrifice no ancient form to an unreasoning love of change; we will keep none which the national spirit desires to replace by one that is a still better and truer expression of the undying soul of the nation.”<sup>121</sup>

In examining Sri Aurobindo’s remarkable transformation from a revolutionary nationalist to a spiritual guru, an interesting observation can be drawn with Vinayak

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<sup>118</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909.*

<sup>119</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909.*

<sup>120</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909.*

<sup>121</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909.*

Damodar Savarkar. Initially, Savarkar's approach aligned with Aurobindo's, as both men believed in radical resistance against British rule.

However, a significant turning point in Aurobindo's life—his incarceration by the British—led to a philosophical transformation leading to embracing spiritualism. This is where the paths of Savarkar and Aurobindo sharply diverged, Aurobindo channelled his nationalism into spiritual awakening, while Savarkar continued his pursuit of political independence through revolutionary means.

However, at the heart of it all, Aurobindo's spiritual leanings and strong Indian identity argued that the conquest of freedom in India should arise from India's own sentiments, aspirations, and spiritual traditions, rather than by adopting European methods, for otherwise it would fail. Aurobindo strongly believed in the superiority of the spirituality of East and the appropriateness of adhering to Eastern spiritual and religious values to attain freedom.

He elaborated: "...not in the strength of a raw unnormalized European enthusiasm shall we conquer. Indians, it is the spirituality of India, the sadhana [prayer to divine] of India, Tapasya [meaning austerity, penance, self-discipline, or intense spiritual practice], jnanam [meaning knowledge], shakti [power or strength] that must make us free and great. And these great things of East are ill-rendered by their inferior English equivalents, discipline, philosophy, strength...It is the East that must conquer in India's uprising."<sup>122</sup> Aurobindo further emphasized that :“movements of last century failed because they were purely intellectual but did not have enlightened heart behind them.”<sup>123</sup>

From 1902 to 1910 Aurobindo partook in the struggle to free India from the British Raj (rule). As a result of his political activities, he was imprisoned in 1908. In a form of sheer coincidence, just as Mazzini would escape to France and Switzerland to shelter from persecution by Austro Hungarian empire, two years later in 1910 Aurobindo fled British India and found refuge in the French colony of Pondichéry (Puducherry) in

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<sup>122</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 38, 464.

<sup>123</sup> Ghosh, *Karmayogin, Political Writings and Speeches*, vol. 38, 464.

southeastern India, where he devoted himself for the rest of his life to the development of his “integral” yoga, which was characterized by its holistic approach and its aim of a fulfilled and spiritually transformed life on earth.<sup>124</sup>

As if resonating with Mazzini’s idea of *resorgimento*, Aurobindo strongly believed in the awakening of the soul of the nation, though more in spiritual sense, and associated freedom of expression:

“...It is when the soul awakens that a nation is really alive, and the life will then manifest itself in all the manifold forms of activity in which man seeks to express the strength and the delight of the expansive spirit within.”<sup>125</sup>

Like Savarkar, Aurobindo strongly believed in the importance of a unique national identity as the defining feature of a nation and its people. He often reminded Indians to avoid imitating Europeans in their struggle for freedom, insisting instead that true success would come only if the movement was rooted in the spirituality and faith inherent to the nation and unique to its soil.

In attempts to awaken the soul of the nation [India], Aurobindo cautioned the nation against dangers to the vitality of any national movement that came from adopting and imitating foreign identity or characters:

“...If it is imitative, imported, artificial, then, whatever temporary success it may have, the nation is moving towards self-sterilisation and death...”<sup>126</sup>

Like Mazzini, Aurobindo’s idea behind the above articulation was to regenerate the independent Indian nationalist ideology, and in his case it was with a strong belief in its success if based on its own unique character, culture, and historical background:

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<sup>124</sup> Britannica, Aurobindo Ghose, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sri-Aurobindo>.

<sup>125</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909*.

<sup>126</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909*.

“...If, on the other hand, the peculiar individuality of a race stamps itself on the movement in its every part and seizes on every new development as a means of self-expression, then the nation wakes, lives and grows and whatever the revolutions and changes of political, social or intellectual forms and institutions, it is assured of its survival and aggrandisement.”<sup>127</sup>

This awakening, as referred to by Sri Aurobindo and in synchronicity with Mazzinian school of thoughts, served as the springboard for the nationalist movement:

“...when the awakening was complete a section of the nationalist movement turned in imagination to a reconstruction of the recent pre-British past in all its details.”<sup>128</sup>

The driving force behind Aurobindo’s quest to reawaken national identity and power of unity was in parallel to and aligned to that of Mazzini’s ideas, and was best expressed in his own words:

“For what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti [Power], composed of Shaktis of all the millions of units [its people] that make up a nation...

...The Shakti [power] we call India, is a living Shakti of its three hundred million people, but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of Tamas [darkness], the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons...

... We have to create strength where it did not exist before; we have to change our natures and become new men with new heart and be born again...these having the fire of (Goddess) Bhawani in their hearts and brains, will go forth and carry the flame to every nook and cranny of our land.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909.*

<sup>128</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *Karmayogin Volume 8, No. 2, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909.*

<sup>129</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *India’s Rebirth: Out of the Ruins of the West*, Institut De Recherches Evolutives – Paris, 1997, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 15.

These words were part of a letter Sri Aurobindo wrote to his wife, Mrinalini Devi, explaining his quest for India's freedom. This letter was later confiscated by the British and used as evidence in the Alipore Bomb Case, leading to his arrest and incarceration.

If we analyse the context of this letter, the message was clear: the united strength of three hundred million Indians was the power that could overthrow British rule. This unity—formed through religious (invoking the Goddess of Power, Bhawani), cultural, and social identity—merged into one embodiment of being Indian. This articulation of unity amongst Indians is a clear reflection of Mazzinian school of thoughts.

### **3.4 Mazzini and Gandhi**

There are different opinions that prevail in the contemporary context about Mazzini's influence on India's great freedom fighter and proponent of non-violence, Mohandas "Mahatma" Gandhi (1869-1948), and Gandhi's struggle for India's freedom from British rule. Even though Gandhi's approach in part was similar to Mazzini when it comes to believing that it is a moral duty of a man to fight for freedom, Gandhi vehemently disagreed with Mazzini when it came to use of violence to achieve freedom. Thus, Gandhi was very clear in going to separate path – path of truth and non-violence - in his struggle for India's freedom. That chosen path of Gandhi was in direct contradiction to the path of Mazzini's ideology.

As Sean Scalmer mentions in his book *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest*: "The Mahatma was sometimes compared with leaders of nationalist movements among them Mazzini, ... Satyagrah (insist on truth) was evoked as a close companion of such familiar acts as the boycott, the general strike, and non-cooperation movements of Hungary, or Ireland..."<sup>130</sup>.

According to the Gandhi biographer Athalye, however, it is: "remarkable that Gandhi's life discovers no more trace of Mazzini's influence than that of Swami Vivekananda or Ramatirth. This shows that Gandhi was not an impressionable copyist but a very thorough and careful reader, not to be swayed by any or every opinion. While he would

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<sup>130</sup> Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 91.

rush headlong in following a gospel that appealed to him, he was as unmoveable as a rock when some uncongenial message was brought to him. That is why Mazzini's great example and precept never led him to even intellectually accept the cult of violence".<sup>131</sup>

While reflecting on Gandhi's assessment of Italian revolution and efficacy of Mazzini and Garibaldi's movement, Gandhi made some profound and some (may be) disputable observations. Gandhi mentions that Mazzini was a great and good man, Garibaldi was a great warrior. Gandhi had admiration for both; and truly felt that much could be learned from their lives, however, Gandhi could see distinct difference between Mazzini and Garibaldi. According to Gandhi, Mazzini's vision of Italy had not come about as popularly believed. Gandhi argued that Mazzini has shown in his writings on the duty of man that every man must learn how to rule himself, but unfortunately that had not been realised in Italy. To Gandhi's mind, Garibaldi did not subscribe to that view. Garibaldi gave, and every Italian took arms only to ensure that Italy was free from Austrian control.

The question posed on that by Gandhi was a bit different. Gandhi questioned the result of the actions and ideology of Mazzini and Garibaldi. Gandhi pointedly criticises Mazzini and Garibaldi in his book *Hind Swaraj* stating: "If you believe that because Italians rule Italy the Italian nation is happy, you are groping in the darkness. Mazzini has shown conclusively that Italy did not become free."<sup>132</sup>

Gandhi further elaborates that according to Mazzini's contemporaries like Emanuel, Cavour, and Garibaldi, Italy meant the King of Italy and his henchmen, which was not the unified Italian vision of Mazzini, because for Mazzini it was the whole of the Italian people. Thus, in that sense, according to Gandhi: "The Italy of Mazzini still remains in a state of slavery."<sup>133</sup>

Gandhi was of firm opinion that getting the self-rule as in Mazzini's Italian idea was not enough for India. It would only mean that the Indians will replace British with Indian

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<sup>131</sup> D.V. Athalye, *The life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Swadeshi Publishing Company, Poona, 1923, 145.

<sup>132</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan Publications, Ahmedabad, 2000, 58.

<sup>133</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan Publications, Ahmedabad, 2000, 58.

Princes, who were not benevolent to Indian masses, and will inflict more pain on Indian people and India will not be any more better off than under the British rule.<sup>134</sup>

Gandhi repeatedly asserted that the Indians should not take up arms against the British rule for various reasons. Gandhi believed that if India did not have financial resources and time to arm itself, and Gandhi was not ready for blood shed or sacrificing the lives of his countrymen. But fundamentally, Gandhi was totally against any form of violence and assassinations, he considered violence an act of sin against the spiritual and divine teachings and principles. When suggested that only a few assassinations will take place Gandhi retorted: "...that is to say, you want to make holy land of India unholy."<sup>135</sup>

Gandhi personally believed that rather than taking life of others, "what we need to do is to sacrifice ourselves."<sup>136</sup>

Gandhi's strong opposition to violence is abundantly clear and well documented in the same book where he questions: "whom do you suppose to free by assassination? The millions of India do not desire it. Those who are intoxicated by the wretched modern civilization think these things."<sup>137</sup>

In final analysis Gandhi believed that: "...those who will rise to power by murder will certainly not make the nation happy."<sup>138</sup> Besides that, truth and non-violence were the hallmarks of Gandhi's philosophy, and it also resonated with Gandhi's Indian spiritualism.

As may be seen, even though Gandhi admired certain qualities of Mazzini and believed in the concept of "God Ordained Duty to be Free", he was not going to subscribe to Mazzini's call to armed uprising. And that is where Gandhi and Mazzini were poles apart on their approach to gain freedom from the occupying foreign powers. Interesting

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<sup>134</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan Publications, Ahmedabad, 2000, 59.

<sup>135</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan Publications, Ahmedabad, 2000, 60.

<sup>136</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan Publications, Ahmedabad, 2000, 60.

<sup>137</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan Publications, Ahmedabad, 2000, 60.

<sup>138</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan Publications, Ahmedabad, 2000, 60.

to note that Gandhi was in complete harmony with Mazzini in the belief mentioned in Chapter 1 that “Sole origin of every right is duty fulfilled.”<sup>139</sup>

### 3.5 Conclusion

A careful reading of the writings of prominent Indian freedom fighters and their reflections on Mazzini and his ideology makes it evident that Mazzini exerted a profound influence on their thought and approach to the struggle against British colonial rule.

Incidentally, it is striking that Mazzini, in his own distinctive articulation, closely mirrored the fundamental teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*—namely, the theory of karma and the obligation to fulfill one’s duties (*karma* – here it is to be understood in terms of Sanskrit word for action or act of performing duty) without claiming rights over the results of those actions. This principle resonated deeply with spiritual and revolutionary figures animated by nationalistic fervour. Mazzini’s statement: “Sole origin of every right is duty fulfilled,”<sup>140</sup> repeatedly found echoes in the thoughts and actions of leaders ranging from Tilak and Aurobindo to Gandhi and Savarkar. As the *Bhagavad Gita*—a text that elaborates upon and guides much of Hindu spiritual thought and practice—records, Lord Krishna declared: “Karmanye Ev Adhikaar Aste, Maa Faleshu Kadachan,” कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन, which translates as, “One has the right to perform one’s duties, but not to claim the fruits thereof (which are granted as deemed appropriate by the divine).”

What stands out most clearly is the deep reverence with which these leaders regarded Mazzini. This admiration cut across the ideological spectrum—from staunch advocates of nonviolence to revolutionaries such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, and Lala Lajpat Rai. Tilak’s thoughts, teachings, and expressions mirrored Mazzini and were in parallel to Mazzini’s approach, whereas Savarkar described Mazzini as the *Guru Ramdas* of Italy—a revered sage who had instilled concept of duty to free the motherland from invaders, pride associated with

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<sup>139</sup> Joseph Mazzini, *Duties of Man*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1862, xiii.

<sup>140</sup> Joseph Mazzini, *Duties of Man*, xiii.

being a person of Hindu faith, and prestige in the great Maratha warrior-king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj—while Lala Lajpat Rai hailed Mazzini as a “Mahatma – a Great Soul.” On the other side, Aurobindo was a very spiritual person whose spirituality was comparable to Mazzini’s religious outlook and faith in God Almighty – both believed in God ordained duty to fight for freedom and their ultimate belief in divinity. Their engagement with Mazzini underscores the universal appeal of the quest for national freedom and the high esteem accorded to struggles against foreign domination worldwide.

Equally significant was the shared conviction, whether among radical revolutionaries or leaders committed to nonviolence, that the struggle for freedom was a God-ordained duty. For them, the fight for independence carried not only political significance but also profound moral and spiritual imperatives. They believed it was unjust and morally indefensible for one nation and its people to be subjugated by another. Freedom, in their view, was nonnegotiable; foreign domination remained an injustice, even when rulers were perceived as benevolent or as bringing material progress.

When Tilak declared that the freedom is his birthright and he shall have it, it feels like most striking and uncanny continuation of the earlier statement of by Mazzini which said, “Without liberty you cannot fulfill any of your duties. Therefore, have you a right to liberty, and a duty to wrest it at all risks from whatsoever power shall seek to withhold or deny it...without liberty there is no true morality...without liberty there is no true society...”<sup>141</sup>

Such harmony in thinking and ideological uniformity between the great Italian ideologue Mazzini and India’s freedom fighters is quite obvious and thus the influence of Mazzini on them is difficult to ignore under any circumstances.

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<sup>141</sup> Mazzini, *Duties of Man*, 129.

## Chapter 4. Influence of Mazzini's writings on Savarkar

In year 1906, Savarkar arrived in London to study. He was offered residence at India House, a place at 65 Cromwell Avenue, Highgate, North London. The India House was set up between 1905 and 1910 as student residence by a fellow nationalist Shyamaji Krishnavarma.<sup>142</sup> Whereas Savarkar had strong revolutionary thoughts and ideas for Indian Independence from Britain since his college days in Pune where his activities were loosely based on his brush with Mazzini's writings, it was here at India House in company of various nationalist and revolutionary ideologues that he came across and focused deeper into revolutionary readings and the ideology propagated by Giuseppe Mazzini, the great Italian ideologue who was a Genoese propagandist and revolutionary, and founder of the secret revolutionary society Young Italy (1831). Mazzini championed the movement for Italian unity known as the Risorgimento and led a covert war for the freedom of Italy from Austro Hungarian Empire. It should be noted that within the framework of three different classification mentioned in chapter 1, Savarkar's conception of nationalism can be classified as a form of modernist nationalism, insofar as it is articulated within the context of modern political thought, state formation, and identity construction. Following is Savarkar's journey through the ideology of Mazzini and developing his own brand of nationalism for India.

### 4.1 Savarkar and Mazzini Charitra

Savarkar's ideology and actions were greatly influenced by the writings of Mazzini. Evidence of this is clearly visible in the book *Mazzini Charitra* which is a book by Mazzini titled *Life and Times of Mazzini* that Savarkar translated into Hindi and Marathi, where Savarkar specifically states, "...In the field of statecraft who can be a better dispenser of divine, caring, inspiring and best nationalist ideology other than the great Mazzini."<sup>143</sup> The word "Charitra" in Hindi and Sanskrit language means Character, Reputation, and

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<sup>142</sup> "Shyamaji Krishna Varma," Arya Samaj, Accessed December 03, 2024, [https://www.thearyasamaj.org/shyamjikrishnavarma\\_en](https://www.thearyasamaj.org/shyamjikrishnavarma_en).

<sup>143</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 8.

Behaviour depending on usage of the word and context in which it is used. Here it may be translated as the Character (through which the ideas of Mazzini are expressed).

The key points in the preface of the book point to the inspiration and regeneration of the idea of the nationalist concept of Republic and Unity as proposed and propagated by Mazzini. In 1831 Mazzini had set up a nationalist youth organization called “Young Italy” dedicated to the cause of establishing a united, republican Italian nation,<sup>144</sup> which was similar in its concept to what came later as a secret society founded by Savarkar in India known as the “Abhinav Bharat Society” [Young India Society] organization. Savarkar apparently intended the *Mazzini Charitra* to spread the idea of national unity and identity, on the same line as Mazzini’s idea of Italian identity, to gain freedom from British rule. This is where the struggle for freeing India from British rule started taking a concrete shape and actions for Savarkar.

However, Savarkar was quite concerned about the reaction from the British rulers and their resolve to prosecute any person suggesting rebellion against the British rule of India through his or her actions or writings. As Chaturvedi notes, “...[he] has been careful to write his book in a way which would avoid legal trouble with the British authorities Its purpose was to share the revolutionary potential of Mazzini’s arguments with the Marathi readers.”<sup>145</sup>

In Savarkar’s own words, being aware that writing a book or translating articles containing revolutionary messages will be deemed as criminal act by British, in 1906 Savarkar had said, “I had taken extreme care not to be caught in any law in India. I simply translated Mazzini’s [auto]biography and his thoughts. Nowhere did I preach rebellion against the British rule in India. There was no mention of enslavement of India at all.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> “Young-Italy,” Britannica, Accessed November 18, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Young-Italy>.

<sup>145</sup> Vinayak Chaturvedi, *Hindutva and Violence* (SUNY Press, Albany NY, 2022), 57.

<sup>146</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Shatruchya Shibirata* (Utkarsh Prakashan, 2019), 145.

Interestingly, Savarkar seems to have contradicted himself late in life when he frankly admitted in 1952, “My book was not just worth reading as History, or just a readable work. I wanted to emphasise that people should follow Mazzini’s example. Otherwise, ordinary people would not have got the message. I therefore decided to add a preface to show parallels between India and Italy, add some suggestive lines that the readers would be thrilled and inspired to carry out armed revolution in India also.”<sup>147</sup>

Thus, from the initial writings of Savarkar it could be clearly understood that the Mazzini’s ideological influence is exhibited in Savarkar’s approach and that influence, as we will see, provided justification for Savarkar’s leaning towards an armed revolution that was being crystalized in his thoughts and actions.

As may be realised through reading Savarkar’s expressions while writing his first book *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, Savarkar noted that he was not interested in history only as the narratives of the past. His purpose was to write about historical figures whose political actions reflected revolutionary principles. In its most direct expression, Savarkar wrote (in fact exhorted his fellow countrymen) in the preface of the same book that, “The nation that has no consciousness of its past has no future. Equally true it is that a nation must develop its capacity not only of claiming a past, but also of knowing how to use it for the furtherance of its future”.<sup>148</sup> The book itself was a corrected characterisation of the war of independence that British rulers derisively termed as a “Sepoy Mutiny”. So afraid were the British rulers of the book’s impact on the Indian population that it was banned before it could even be published.

In the 1952 publication of his autobiography *Shatruchya Shibirata* [in English it means “Inside Enemy’s Camp”], Savarkar wrote that, “...After all, I wanted the people of Maharashtra to study and follow the revolutionary part of Mazzini, that was the purpose of my book”<sup>149</sup>.

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<sup>147</sup> Savarkar, *Sharuchya Shibirata*, 140.

<sup>148</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (Publisher not disclosed, 1909), 7.

<sup>149</sup> Chaturvedi, *Hindutva and Violence*, 56.

In a twenty-seven-page preface to *Mazzini Charitra*, Savarkar clearly shows how he is impressed and influenced by Mazzini's writings, and how he [Savarkar] wants to share the same with the readers in the hope of influencing them to rise and fight for India's freedom. Savarkar describes in his own words the contents and message in Mazzini's writings in glowing terms:

“...due to these writings [of Mazzini] the thrones of Europe were overturned. Italy became free by [the inspiration of] these articles. These writings [articles] are filled with the energy to free all of Europe. The essence of Mazzini is not applicable only to Italy. These concepts and ideas, the ultimate truth, of the political science are written by this great soul [Mazzini] for the entire human race. Thirsty [for freedom] birds, to take advantage of this occasion is now in your hands. What else can a writer like me do to contribute. That is why I have selected parts of his writings and compiled them in this translation, but that has also made it difficult to connect all [of Mazzini's] ideas in one compact presentation. That is why I have tried my best to compile the core ideas of this great soul to provide a guiding light to you.”<sup>150</sup>

For Savarkar, Mazzini's writings elaborated on the fundamentals of revolution that would carry a universal appeal and indoctrinate his Marathi readers in India towards the path of armed struggle, and that was the main reason why Savarkar, through selective texts, elaborated and supported an idea of revolution.

While interpreting Mazzini, Savarkar quotes Mazzini as writing that “Statecraft/Politics are the same and as sacred as Religion/Divine duty – if everyone is dedicated to this sacred proposition then the subjugation of every citizen by the occupying power will be completely eliminated. In Statecraft there is religion [sacred God ordained duty] and in the Religion [Sacred God ordained duty] there is Statecraft.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Savarkar, “Mazzini Charitra”, 9.

<sup>151</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 11.

Quoting Mazzini as above, Savarkar exhorts the citizens of Maharashtra [a State in India] saying that “...after listening to the words of Mazzini of Italy, which Maharashtra citizen will not be reminded of the Sage Ramdas [an Indian sage who was inspirational to the great warrior King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj who fiercely fought Mughal invaders]. It would be almost like the Ramdas [an Indian spiritual Guru who had tremendous influence on Maratha King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj – a warrior king who fought against Mughal rulers to establish Hindu kingdom] born in Italy will be called Mazzini and Mazzini born in India will be called Ramdas. As both preached the same fundamental truth that only when Statecraft follows God ordained duty it is pure and sacred.”<sup>152</sup>

Further, Savarkar believed and advocated, just as Mazzini had advocated, that the statecraft/politics is not the art of attacking sovereign nations and exploiting them under the invader’s occupation denying and depriving its citizens of the freedom that is fundamental to their existence but that it is a Divine and God ordained duty, and elaborating on the same he states, “...and if that was not the case, then what is the difference between Statecraft and Hell?”<sup>153</sup> It is this argument by Mazzini that Savarkar interpreted in his book *Mazzini Charitra* that said, “Mazzini freed politics and statecraft from this hell bound assumption.”<sup>154</sup> What Savarkar and Mazzini meant to say is that if the anyone believed that Politics and Statecraft are not the God Ordained duty through which to gain independence, but in fact an art of attacking other nations and make that nation subservient and subjugate them to loss of their freedom, then they are working on an assumption which is nothing but hell bound.

Savarkar’s interpretation of Mazzini further elaborates that: “We are all responsible for each other’s freedom. Making oneself free and lifting one’s own stature [in terms of freedom] but leaving others to let them suffer in the misery and indignity of control by

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<sup>152</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 10.

<sup>154</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 10.

occupiers and letting our brothers be deprived of freedom, is a sinful act against the Devine command.”<sup>155</sup>

For Mazzini, there were people - ones who said the politics has no religion, and others who said that religion has no politics - they both were held on the wrong side by Mazzini. Savarkar quotes Mazzini as saying, “we took Politics and Statecraft to the high echelon of Sacred and Devine duty.”<sup>156</sup>

According to Savarkar, “there is hardly anyone whose philosophy/ideology can match that of Mazzini in terms of the principles and [Divine] holy duty through which Mazzini inspired the revolution to free Italy from the clutches of the control by the Austro-Hungarian empire.”<sup>157</sup> Savarkar took inspiration from this to indoctrinate the Indian youth to launch the freedom struggle.

While commenting on Mazzini, Savarkar expressed his agreement with Mazzini’s views and complimented Mazzini. Savarkar has stated [in his agreement with Mazzini]: “It is difficult to find an example of Nationalist Revolutionaries in Europe’s history similar to “Mahatma” [the great soul] Mazzini, who had the inspiration for revolution based on principles and sacred and Divine duty”.<sup>158</sup>

Savarkar’s writings on Mazzini reflected the universality of the principles of revolution, as it should be noted that Savarkar’s articulation on Mazzini was not only to draw a parallel between the struggles of India and Italy, but also to justify and argue the universality of the principle of revolution. This idea is elaborated upon in the next section.

## **4.2 Italy and India: A Shared Program of Unification**

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<sup>155</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 11.

<sup>157</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 11.

<sup>158</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 11.

In Italy, members of the Austro-Hungarian occupying powers and their leaders—among them Prince Klemens von Metternich—continued to express concerns about the rising tide of nationalism and the growing sense of national identity being fostered among Italians by revolutionaries such as Garibaldi and Mazzini. The prospect of unification, which promised to create a cohesive and united Italian population, posed a grave threat to the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s continued control over Italy and caused significant anxiety among the occupying rulers.

Giuseppe Garibaldi (July 4, 1807–June 2, 1882) was an Italian patriot and soldier of the Risorgimento, a committed republican who, through his conquest of Sicily and Naples with his guerrilla Redshirts, played a decisive role in the achievement of Italian unification. Together, Garibaldi and Mazzini, through their activities and ideas, succeeded in spreading both the desire for freedom and the belief in armed revolution to the masses.

Prince Klemens von Metternich, chancellor to the Austrian state, in April of 1847 wrote to the Count Dietrichstein, the Austrian ambassador in Paris: “The word ‘Italy’ is a geographical expression, a description which is useful shorthand, .... and which is full of dangers for the very existence of the states which make up the peninsula”.<sup>159</sup>

As Metternich believed, “...the political unification of Italy founded on the idea of *Italianità* would spell the end of Italy as a political pawn in the hands of foreign powers by unifying the many states that littered the region...”.<sup>160</sup> Over half a century later a similar ideological influence was taking shape in a land far away. India’s Savarkar, was shaping a unifying geo-political concept called Hindutva to bring together diverse groups with differing social, cultural, and religious following, under one umbrella of a common national identity to become a cohesive force to resist and fight British rule over India. This was to become a great challenge to the survival of British rule over India.

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<sup>159</sup> Giuseppe Gazzola, “Forum Italicum.” *A Journal of Italian Studies* Vol. 47, Issue 2, Stony Brook University, 2013.

<sup>160</sup> Gazzola, *Journal of Italian Studies* Vol 47, Issue 2.

It was Mazzini's idea of bringing a national reawakening through regenerating the Italian national identity (and associated national pride) and indoctrinating the youth of Italy to that idea through his (Mazzini's) founding of the "Young Italy" organization to bring about the freedom for Italy. This was designed to deliver a powerful impact on the lines similar to words attributed to Metternich, which implied that when an entire nation rises to a common unifying identity, it gives rise to the strength and power that occupying powers fear the most. And it is that unified resistance which brings freedom to people so united, as seen in Italy.

Incidentally, similar words were uttered by Winston Churchill when he made his speech at the Constitutional Club, London on March 26, 1931, countering the statements of the then Secretary of State who was addressing India as a "home of strongly coherent united race"<sup>161</sup>, Churchill, who was against that idea, famously said, showing fragmented nature of the Indian subcontinent: "India is an abstraction, represented by handful of politically minded classes who have no means of intercourse with each other except in English language, who have no contact with the masses, who are incapable of giving them the guidance they require.....India is no more a political personality than Europe. India is a geographical term. It is no more a united nation than the equator."<sup>162</sup>

It is quite interesting to observe, that the ominous warning uttered by Metternich proved to be right and the united Italy became a powerful force which the occupying powers of Austro-Hungarian Empire could not control and defeat. And the same could have been true for British control over India.

The idea of being a citizen or native of the land they all could call their native/mother land and the one that gave them a common identity served as a powerful unifying force amongst the Italians. At the same time the mass migration to the new world – America – had started from Italy. And the "poor huddled masses" who thus migrated were called Italians in their new homeland. An identity – a unifying identity at that – that they

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<sup>161</sup> Winston Churchill, "The March of Events, March 26, 1931, Constitutional Club, London", *Speeches of Winston Churchill*, 5011

<sup>162</sup> Winston Churchill, "The March of Events, March 26, 1931, Constitutional Club, London", *Speeches of Winston Churchill*, 5011

were so deprived of and impact of which they had not realised until then, was unexpectedly bestowed upon them in the land that was not even their native place. This added to the cohesiveness of the “Italian” identity and further contributed to the same unifying cause and idea back home in Italy though they were far from their native land.

It was a firm belief of Mazzini that to be free from the yokes of foreign power is a sacred duty of every citizen. Mazzini viewed the Austro-Hungarian Emperor’s rule over Italy and subjugation of Italians under the authoritative rule of Austro-Hungarian Empire as an evil and contrary to the course of natural justice and divine providence. He had said that:

“...Our organization was in a nascent stage, did not have power of money, nor had any weight in public...but my intention was to change the feebleness of minds as well as change the mindset of Italians and awaken them [to the cause of natural justice]. Italy’s consciousness was in a state of shock”<sup>163</sup>

Through study of history and the (prevailing) society, Mazzini concluded that only the dedicated and ethical leadership can guide the masses to the right course and lead people in right direction. And because of such thoughts, he decided to base his activism on two great principles of “Unity & Republic”.<sup>164</sup>

Mazzini emphatically stated that his idea was not a simple outcome of political ambition, or simply to save the people of a nation that was exploited, destroyed, and brutally suppressed. In a more distinct manner Mazzini clearly stated that, “at the very root of my plan is to just let my Italy be independent”.<sup>165</sup>

What Mazzini also wanted was to figure out what right will need to be [established] in entire Europe to bring about a great awakening and unity, and how his thoughts will

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<sup>163</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 46.

<sup>164</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 47.

<sup>165</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 47.

bring the same to Italy. Mazzini had a keen desire to articulate on the same and had mentioned... “if my dear land, my Italian nation becomes independent [in my lifetime] and if I can possibly spend a year in some quiet corner of my rightful nation, I will compile my thoughts on this important subject”.<sup>166</sup>

#### **4.3 Mazzini’s Influence - Idea of Secret Societies**

Whereas Savarkar’s ideology was greatly influenced by Mazzini’s ideology and Mazzini’s formation of “Young Italy” organization, Savarkar had been thinking on the similar lines even earlier when he had formed a similar organization in India in his student days in year 1899. At that time Savarkar along with his brother Ganesh Damodar Savarkar, founded a “social” organization called “Mitra Mela” (in English it may be translated as Friends Club/Society). However, Vinayak Savarkar renamed it as Abhinav Bharat Society (The Young India Society) in 1904, [during India’s struggle for Independence]<sup>167</sup>, while studying at Ferguson College in Pune, India, which was before he went to England for further studies (1906), where he was further indoctrinated into revolutionary ideology at India House (London) resulting in his writings on Mazzini and the Indian War of Independence.

The formation of the Abhinav Bharat Society was further influenced by the ideology of Giuseppe Mazzini reinforcing the indoctrination of revolution and deep conviction in armed revolution as the path to Indian independence. “I had with me an English biography of Mazzini... I gave it to some to read. I had deliberately underlined the passages relating to underground organisation (Young Italy) of Mazzini and his program of action.”<sup>168</sup>

As Savarkar condoned the actions of Chaphekar brothers who were sent to gallows for killing of a British officer Mr. Rand, and in fact claimed that the Chaphekar brothers’

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<sup>166</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 47.

<sup>167</sup> “Digital District Repository Detail Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav,” Ministry of Culture, Government of India, September 07, 2022, <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/district-repository-detail.htm?5751>.

<sup>168</sup> Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp*, 19.

actions inspired him: "...They went to the gallows for that, but taught a lesson to the British who realised that their barbarity would not go unpunished. Chapekar's deed inspired me. We can harm the British at least to the extent of our numbers, whether or not others follow us. But, in most cases, one spark ignites another spark and eventually a fire ensues."<sup>169</sup> Armed revolution and resistance ideology was now turning into concrete steps.

This was later supported and indoctrinated by Savarkar's propagation of the idea of "Hindutva" as the foundation of the process of unifying Indians under one united and cohesive national(istic) identity, drawing parallel with Mazzini inspired and regenerated Italian National Identity and secret society (Young Italy), which led to armed resistance and guerilla warfare that resulted in Italy's freedom from the oppressive Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Based on the idea similar to one professed by Mazzini for armed struggle against occupiers to gain freedom, the Abhinav Bharat Society founded by Savarkar prepared its members in the art of armed revolution. The Abhinav Bharat Society was covertly interested in training its members in the use and procurement of arms as well as materials and knowledge of preparing explosives as tools and weapons of resistance against the British.

As Savarkar has mentioned in his memoir *Inside the Enemy Camp*, "...we have heard that, in Europe, some cheap but effective instruments like hand-bombs are easily available and their use can be learnt. This is impossible in India. Many such activities are only possible in England. We also want to establish contacts with enemies of England and with their help raise the banner of revolt in India to coincide with war in Europe."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp*, 19.

<sup>170</sup> Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp*, 20.

The members of Abhinav Bharat Society were made to take an oath of secrecy and allegiance to freeing Mother India and part of the oath specifically referred to violent measures against the occupation of India by British. In specific, it said: “I...convinced that without Absolute Political Independence or Swarajya [meaning Self Governance or Freedom] my country can never rise to the exalted position among the nations of the earth which is Her due...and convinced also that Swarajya can never be attained except by the waging of a bloody and relentless war against the Foreigners.”<sup>171</sup>

Above oath was similar in lines with the instruction of secrecy given to the member – initiated and initiators – that, “The instructions and intelligence indispensable as preparatory to action will be secret, both in Italy and abroad...all members of Young Italy will exert themselves to diffuse these principles of insurrection. The association will develop them more fully in its writings and explain from time to time the ideas and organizations which should govern the period of insurrection.”<sup>172</sup>

Savarkar unabashedly called this secret society a revolutionary society as a part of the oath which said, “...And with this object, I join the Abhinav Bharat [Young India], the revolutionary Society of all Hindusthan, and swear that I shall ever be true and faithful to this solemn Oath...”<sup>173</sup>

However, the British government caught up with them and eventually, Savarkar’s leadership role at the Abhinav Bharat Society led to his first arrest in 1910 when he returned from Paris where he had moved for convalescence: “...on my return to London I was arrested and sent to India to face trial.”<sup>174</sup> Eventually his role in establishing the revolutionary organisation resulted in his life imprisonment in the Cellular Jail in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

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<sup>171</sup> Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp*, 20.

<sup>172</sup> Joseph Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini* (Smith Elder & Co., London, 1890), 107-110.

<sup>173</sup> Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp*, 21.

<sup>174</sup> Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp*, 21.

Savarkar may have deliberated on the fact that though India is in similar situation as Italy in terms of being a colony of exploitative British occupation, India did not have one faith – Christianity – but multiple faiths and followings with starkly different languages, customs, practices, and ritualistic followings. Under such diverse demographics as India, one effective way to unite people was to create a unifying identity that they all can identify with and that would give them a feel of fraternity that will unify the entire nation.

As articulated by scholars like Arvind Sharma and Aravindan Neelakandan, Savarkar's Hindutva was a political ideology leaning towards Hindu nationalism. In Savarkar's mind, Hindutva was an inclusive ideology that included everyone who satisfied three basic conditions/characteristics of being called a Hindu, with the word Hindu here being used more in sense of a race rather than a religion.

This Mazzini inspired common identity for all people of Indian subcontinent was designed to create a unifying identity to create a cohesive force to revolt against the foreign occupiers and free the Indian nation, Hindustan, the land of Hindus as defined by Savarkar in his book *Essentials of Hindutva*.

#### **4.4 Savarkar, Mazzini, and the *Bhagavad Gita***

Savarkar, being born in high caste of Chitpavan Hindu Brahmin, was strongly influenced by preachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and saw similarity in Shri Krishna's invocation of fighting the injustice and evil as a religious duty of every man. And, though it may be a mere coincidence, Mazzini, as mentioned earlier, in his writings has invoked the same God ordained duty from his countrymen to fight for the just cause of Italy as a free nation and its Italian identity.

Although there is no direct evidence that Mazzini had read the *Bhagavad Gita*, there are some quotes in Mazzini's writings which are similar to quotes from the great Indian historical and spiritual book the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Bhagavad Gita* contained the preachings of God incarnate Shri Krishna to the warrior friend and disciple Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the beginning of the battle of Mahabharata. Shri Krishna,

upon seeing his friend Arjuna unwilling to fight his fellow men, tells him that to fight for a just cause is his God ordained duty and he should proceed to do so without any hesitation. Mazzini also exhorted his fellow Italian citizens to note that to fight for freedom of the motherland is a God ordained duty of every citizen of Italy.

The most direct example of ones God ordained duty to fight injustice comes from Shri Krishna's utterance in Chapter 4 verses 7 & 8 of the Bhagvad Gita, where Shri Krishna himself claims to have incarnated himself on the earth to fight and destroy evil:

Whenever and wherever, there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion [evil] – at that time I descend Myself. To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants [evil], as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium.<sup>175</sup>

Savarkar, being a diehard Hindu nationalist, believed in the same and advocated resistance to the occupying powers, and if need be, believed in taking up arms against the colonial power. It should be noted that the teachings of *Bhagavad Gita* focus on a person's duty to fight for a just cause, and how that is, in fact, a God ordained duty of every man. The fundamental idea behind the philosophy of Karma in *Bhagavad Gita* which says that you have right to perform your duty without worrying about the rewards, also finds resonance in the expression by Mazzini in his book *The Duties of Man* where he says that the sole origin of Right is in the Duty.

#### **4.5 Mazzini's Ideology - Relevance to Hindutva and Hindu Nationalism**

Early on in his activism for independence of India from British rule, Savarkar felt that mass awakening, and mobilization was the way to fight for freedom. This inspiration or realisation came to Savarkar by observing and reading the documented events of past. Savarkar's thinking was result of an ardent study of the events elsewhere in the world

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<sup>175</sup>"Bhagvad Gita As It Is," Bhaktivedanta Vedabase, Accessed November 11, 2024, <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/4/>.

where European nation like Italy gained its independence from Austro-Hungarian empire through the mass awakening of Italians to their Italian national identity. To Savarkar India needed to regenerate its national identity and pride, to indoctrinate its masses to the concept of unified national identity which through the years of oppressive colonial and invader rules was in shambles. Thus, Savarkar embarked upon his quest to establish a Hindu identity and make that identity a nationalist and nationalism-based identity rather than religious one. Being a devout follower of Mazzini's teachings, he easily picked up the national identity concept from the success that came about for Italy, the awakening to Italian (nationalist) identity enabled the Italians to free their land from the oppressive occupations and rule of Austro-Hungarian Empire over Italy.

For Savarkar, in line with Mazzini's idea of Unity and Republic, it was essential to unite the masses into one common identity to form a cohesive force to fight British in order to achieve his goal of freedom from the British colonial rule. Savarkar's belief dictated that prior to declaring any form of opposition and readiness to fight powers occupying India, the Indians must unite under a common identity like Mazzini's idea of unity under an Italian identity.

With Mazzini's teachings in mind and his (Savarkar's) earlier activities during his college days at Ferguson College in Pune, India, Savarkar proceeded to define and formalise a national identity, uniting one at that, for the group of diverse people living on the Indian subcontinent. Whereas the exact replication of the Mazzini's idea was not possible due to the cultural and social context in the subcontinent with diverse religious followings and customs, there was one common thread he could weave and make a complete fabric – Hindu as a race. Keeping in mind the aforementioned diversity and differences prevailing at the time, Savarkar improvised and embarked on identifying key attributes of being a “Hindu” – a unifying identity that Savarkar proposed - that was a racial and geopolitical identity and termed it as “Hindutva”.

It may be noted that prior to Savarkar's time, his mentors like Tilak had raised issues with respect to denigration of Hindus and preferential treatment to Muslims by the ruling power. And Tilak had specifically made it a point to reawaken the Hindu masses

and assert on their Hindu identity with pride and unity and had organized community religious festivals like Ganesh Mahotsava (mahotsava means large festival). Thus, one may surmise that the idea of Hindu nation was already in the air and earlier leaders had laid groundwork for the same when Savarkar came of age and became active in the freedom movement.

Savarkar, in continuation of earlier efforts by his nationalist mentors like Tilak, came up with three unique Hindutva characteristics that a person must possess to be identified as a “Hindu”. The purpose was to give the people of India a common national identity – Hindu - irrespective of their faith, caste, or creed. Savarkar believed that it was the most effective way to bring unity among the diverse group of people with different religion, and languages following different customs and beliefs. And in that unity, Savarkar saw strength and power to fight the occupying powers.

However, there is a perceived undercurrent here that one of the three qualities Savarkar deemed essential – considering India as their Holyland - worked at excluding Muslims. As the Muslims were not ready to concede to this one particular qualification namely considering India as their Holyland. However, there is ample evidence to show that such an interpretation of Savarkar was grossly misleading. Hindutva and Hinduism by their nature are inclusive but do not force themselves on others.

The negative perception mentioned above is also elaborated upon by Janaki Bakhle, where she says, “...All those who exclusively regarded this space as *Pitrabhumi* (ancestral homeland) and *punyabhumi* (sacred land) constituted the nation. Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains met the qualifications easily, while Muslims were forced to reconsider their extraterritorial holy places.”<sup>176</sup>

Visana comes to a similar conclusion: “...his [Savarkar’s] evolutionism does also reflect the common belief among some Indian rationalists that national self-awakening was a prerequisite for habituating Indians to the sentiments of higher patriotism and collective

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<sup>176</sup> Janaki Bakhle, *Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the Writings of Essentials of Hindutva*, Duke University Press, 2010, 154

[irrespective of faith, caste, or creed] duty that led to a universal world-state. Savarkar even scolded those who adopted an exclusionary [such as when Har Dayal advocated a “Hindu India”] stance in their revolutionary activities.”<sup>177</sup>

Like Mazzini’s idea of uniting Italians under the unifying national identity for Italians, Hindu nationalists like Savarkar defined and articulated Hindu(tva) as rooted in idea of race, nation, and culture<sup>178</sup>, and as such Hindu nationalist ideology was different and, for the nationalists, more inclusive and encompassing than one related to the smaller and limited part of a population spectrum that followed the Hindu faith. What Savarkar and his followers believed in was that the Hindutva refers to a race of people belonging to a certain geographical area, who are deeply rooted to their culture and form a nation and a common national identity.

Crystallisation of the above idea was influence of Mazzini on Savarkar, and it is validated through various quotes from Mazzini’s writings, such as when Mazzini wrote, “A people destined to achieve great things for the welfare of humanity must one day be constituted as a nation...But the history of our people and of our nationality, which is one and the same thing, has yet to be written”<sup>179</sup>. Mazzini proceeded to further articulate, “...and it is important that in any such crises, one great conquest, Unity, should not be lost. It is very important that the idea should take such firm hold of people as become identified with their national life...Unity ever was and is the destiny of Italy”<sup>180</sup>. In the same compilation Mazzini states “...It may be traced as...slow but irresistible and continuous advance of our civilisation from the time when the first germs of Italian Nationality were sown...”<sup>181</sup>

While the apparent connection between Mazzini and Savarkar is beyond dispute, their ideological leanings also reveal striking similarities. Savarkar not only acknowledged this influence in his writings—particularly in works such as *Inside the Enemy Camp* and *Mazzini Charitra*—but also reflected it in his own articulation of a unifying identity for all

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<sup>177</sup> Visana, *Savarkar Before Hindutva*, Cambridge University Press

<sup>178</sup> Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, 84.

<sup>179</sup> Joseph Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini* (Smith Felder & Co., London), 277.

<sup>180</sup> Joseph Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, 284.

<sup>181</sup> Joseph Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, 269.

Indians under the geopolitical concept of Hindutva. This vision closely parallels Mazzini's idea of a united Italian identity (*Italianità*), both in form and in its intended impact: the creation of a common, strong, and cohesive force capable of resisting foreign domination.

Like Mazzini, Savarkar endorsed the belief in a God-ordained moral duty for his countrymen to fight for the freedom of their motherland, including the willingness to take up arms in violent struggle if necessary to fulfill that duty. Both ideologues emphasized strength through unity, and the formal organizations they inspired shared common traits rooted in Unity, Duty, Morality, and the Republican ideal.

#### **4.6 Justification for Armed Revolution**

Savarkar looked at Mazzini's idea of armed struggle as painful but necessary - in terms of violence - to gain freedom. In fact, like Mazzini, Savarkar believed that to fight for freedom is the God ordained duty of every man.

Savarkar's inspiration of armed struggle also had roots in Mazzini's thinking as has been stated by Mazzini: "... insurrection - by means of guerrilla bands - is the true method of warfare for all nations desirous of emancipating themselves from a foreign yoke. This method of warfare supplies the want - inevitable at the commencement of the insurrection - of a regular army. It calls the greatest number of elements into the field and yet may be sustained by the smallest number. It forms the military education of the people and consecrate every foot of the native soil by the memory of some warlike deed."<sup>182</sup>

Reflecting on Mazzini's approach, Savarkar in *Mazzini Charitra* translates Mazzini's thoughts as, "...it is impossible to reach a stage where an enslaved nation can become strong, and capable to jump into a battlefield. First Italy (and Italians) have to change its

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<sup>182</sup> Joseph Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Mazzini*, 109.

mindset and bring about changes in its own body. Italy's mind must be independent and capable, at the same time Italy has to be armed.”<sup>183</sup>

Drawing a parallel from the above, Savarkar exhorted his countrymen to rise to the occasion. Savarkar's approach is shaped by the abovementioned thoughts of Mazzini, and Savarkar acknowledges the same in the preface of the book *Mazzini Charitra*, referring to the above paragraph of Mazzini's writings.

Guerilla Warfare tactics were also mentioned by Savarkar in his book *The Indian War of Independence* [Chapter VII, Secret Organisation, P.61-84, *Indian War of Independence*] where he had gone into details of such tactics. And in line with similar approach, he had organised an organization named “Mitra Mela” – in English it means Friends Society – under the guise of a social club. But behind the facade was another organization, secret society named Abhinav Bharat Society, established in year 1904. This society had network of revolutionaries throughout India and overseas as well. This society trained its members in firearms usage, explosive device manufacturing, and acts of sabotage against British. In the year 1909, Savarkar was arrested for his leadership role in Abhinav Bharat Society and eventually he was sentenced to a life term in the notorious Andaman cellular prison.

In *Inside the Enemy Camp*, Savarkar refers to Mazzini's biography and states: “...I had deliberately underlined the passages relating to underground organization.....During the discussions I had bluntly asked, is it not our duty to start an underground society on the lines of *Young Italy* for liberation of our country?”<sup>184</sup>

As expected, the answer to the earlier question about starting an underground society was affirmative but qualified as: “...what is the use of a few ordinary youngsters like us starting such an organization? Persons [popular leaders] like Lokmanya Tilak, Lala

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<sup>183</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 16

<sup>184</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra* (Prabhat Prakashan, 1906), 8.

Lajpat Rai, and Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda should start that and when they do, we should join them. Until that happens, we should wait.”<sup>185</sup>

But then Savarkar continued: “...a few handful youths? When young Italy was started, who started it? A few unknown youths!! Mazzini had used the same words. He [had] said when we started Young Italy, we were only a handful of unknown youngsters. But time came when we struck terror in hearts of politicians.”<sup>186</sup>

Savarkar further reinforced his argument to start a secret society like Mazzini had started by saying: “...Suppose for the sake of argument, if no such leaders or a Maharaja has so far come forward to start a movement for *Absolute Political Independence of India*. Is it not up to us to make a start? We need to do this precisely because no one is doing it.”<sup>187</sup>

The idea behind the creation of Abhinav Bharat Society was in contrast to the pacifist ideology of Mohandas Gandhi that advocated dialogue and peaceful negotiations and peaceful marches etc., which Savarkar considered as begging, Savarkar was a proponent of forming secret underground revolutionary organizations to conspire against and fight the British occupiers. He was profoundly impressed by how the Italian War of Independence was conducted and how well it resonated with the ideology that was articulated by Giuseppe Mazzini, and its relevance in struggle for India’s independence from the British rule.

Whereas Savarkar was in agreement with Mazzini’s idea of armed revolution against the oppressive occupiers, Savarkar’s major concern was not just arming the nation and its citizens to fight the colonizers, but how to arouse the desire for independence and freedom amongst the millions of his countrymen, as his thoughts on the subject matter were evident in his expression, “... to arm a nation is apparently not an easy task. There

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<sup>185</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp* (Veer Savarkar Prakashan, Mumbai, India, 1993), 18.

<sup>186</sup> Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp*, 18.

<sup>187</sup> Savarkar, *Inside the Enemy Camp*, 18.

may arise a vague desire to be free and independent, but how to enlighten the masses about it.”<sup>188</sup> Savarkar used Abhinav Bharat Society to fulfill this task.

Savarkar agreed with and followed what Mazzini had termed as God ordained duty of mankind, which is to fight for freedom. As may be understood from Savarkar’s writings [actually translating Mazzini’s writings]: “...Though it will be realised that we will achieve nothing by begging and we will have to pray to some divine power, but that power will not show how to make [a nation] strong and arm a nation. Under such circumstances, for a nation to be free from helplessness there is no other option but to form secret societies, when the truth cannot be published, when pious acts are banned, when our own nation becomes a colossal prison, then for us prisoners, there is only one way to come out of prison into the holy and pious environment of freedom, which is to plan a [violent] conspiracy.”<sup>189</sup>

And if there is any doubt left about Savarkar’s revolutionary thinking and his willingness to lean towards armed insurrection against the British rule, Savarkar’s own words assist in dispelling that notion. Savarkar strongly believed in the Devine justification in forming Secret Societies and the power of revolutionary secret societies that could spread the awakening amongst the masses to the idea of freedom and influence masses to fight for the same cause of liberty and independence of a nation. As he quotes Mazzini in *Mazzini Charitra*:

“...When time comes, we will break open the windows of the prison, kick open the doorways, crush things on the chest of the prison guards, and come out to the open and free air of the freedom. These secret societies are sinful where there is no ban on publishing the truth by sinful powerholders. When the ban [on truth and free speech] is imposed through atrocities of the sinners, there the secret societies are pious. No no, this [is] the only way to bring about and attain the truth (freedom). This kind of support of secret societies is always availed by

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<sup>188</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 16.

<sup>189</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 16.

all European nations who have desired to be free from the occupying rulers from outside their country.”<sup>190</sup>

It may be stated with full justification that similar to Mazzini’s Young Italy organization, which brought the Italian youth together and gave them a national identity to fight for a free and unified Italy, Savarkar was inspired to organize one such organization in India. That organization was a secret society named Abhinav Bharat Society, [Young India Society]. Whereas the secret society acted as a home-grown revolutionary organization indoctrinating Indian youth for revolution to achieve India’s independence, it certainly paralleled the key traits of Unity, Duty, Morality, and Republican Ideals, as mandated for Young Italy organization inspired and created by Mazzini.

#### **4.7 Mazzini Savarkar and Freedom**

Mazzini’s commitment, articulation, efforts, and success at uniting Italy under one common national identity that led to Italy’s emancipation from the yokes of foreign powers served as a major catalyst and justification for Savarkar to reaffirm and reinforce his own desire and efforts to fight British occupation of India.

Savarkar’s activities at Ferguson College that included forming of Maitri Mela and the Abhinav Bharat Society, in fact endeared him to those likeminded nationalists like Bal Gangadhar “Lokmanya” Tilak – the great Indian revolutionary who came up with the slogan “Freedom is My Birth Right”, Shyamji Varma, and others, who supported him in his quest for education and fuel his inner fire for freedom from British.

Savarkar’s regenerating and repositioning Hindutva based Hindu Identity ran counter to divide and conquer policy of the erstwhile occupying power in India. The Hindutva identity worked to unite people of India as a race rather than religion and that resulted in bringing together all sub-groups and offshoot religious followings in India, such as Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, and to an extent Bohari and Parsees (Zoroastrians) as well.

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<sup>190</sup> Savarkar, *Mazzini Charitra*, 16.

This showed the formidable power of unity to British occupiers and eventually led to freedom from British. This was further emboldened by the intense anti-colonial rule sentiments and mass reawakening of the Indian populous through the efforts of the Indian leadership like Savarkar, and historical references to the ideas of Mazzini.

It must be noted that though Mazzini was a great influence on Savarkar, Mazzini's ideology was not the only one nor was it the initiator. The struggle for freedom had already started and Savarkar's predecessors like Tilak and Tagore had already laid some groundwork, and long before that the First War of Indian Independence in year 1857 had sown the seeds of the desire for freedom. Some of Savarkar's contemporaries like Aurobindo are discussed in the next chapter, who were also proponents of Hindutva in one or the other form. And while we talk of the Hindutva and freedom for India, one name always springs out – Mohandas Gandhi. Oddly enough, Savarkar was not just at odds with Gandhi, but eventually, he was accused of conspiracy to murder Gandhi but let go free for lack of evidence. Savarkar's Hindutva was at odd with Gandhi's Hindutva as Savarkar's revolutionary ideology did not sit well with Gandhi's insistence of non-violence.

In fact, there was this divide between the approach taken by Savarkar versus the approach taken by Nehru and Gandhi, though they all were working for same cause and goal of freedom from the British. Whereas Nehru Gandhi approach was that of cooperation, negotiations, and non-violence, Savarkar found that approach an exercise in futility and preferred more militant and armed approach that resembled revolt against the occupying British colonial power. There have been wide range of opinions from one extreme to another in how the historians see Savarkar and his approach on one hand and Nehru-Gandhi approach on the other.

While we discuss all other ideas and influences, the greatest contribution from Mazzini to Savarkar's ideology was that of the idea of unified national identity for all its citizens, the very same ideology and approach that united Italy to fight against the slavery of Austro Hungarian Empire, and gain freedom from the clutches and yokes of the foreign rulers, and that very same “unified national identity” idea over here is termed as

Hindutva or Hindu identity – not a religious denominational, but a geo-political identity serving the cause of a strong independent free nation and a united nationhood.

However, it would warrant that I mention here some very strong criticism of Savarkar's nationalism, also known as Hindutva. It is a known fact that Savarkar

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

As history unfolds and continues to accumulate the vast experiences of different geographies across time, one can observe that movements for revolution and liberation often intersect at certain points. They may converge to carry forward common principles and ideas or borrow elements from one another before diverging along different trajectories. Yet, in nearly every case, they remain united by a shared goal: the securing of freedom for the motherland.

It is therefore unsurprising that Giuseppe Mazzini's ideology proved to be an enduring source of inspiration for India's struggle against British colonial rule. Any doubts regarding such influence are dispelled through the writings of prominent Indian nationalists and revolutionaries, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Lala Lajpat Rai. Their admiration for Mazzini was not superficial but reflected a deep engagement with his philosophy of nationalism, sacrifice, and duty.

For instance, Tilak's reverence for Mazzini was so profound that he frequently cited Mazzini's writings in his editorials in *Kesari*, and even organized public readings to inspire his followers. In one dramatic episode, Tilak and his colleagues held a symbolic "bonfire of foreign goods," echoing Mazzini's own emphasis on rejecting foreign domination both materially and spiritually. Similarly, Savarkar's *The First War of Indian Independence (1857)* not only made explicit comparisons between India's struggle and the Italian Revolution<sup>191</sup> but also drew parallels between Mazzini and Indian spiritual leaders such as Guru Ramdas. Aurobindo, too, spoke of Mazzini with admiration, noting that the Italian patriot had elevated nationalism into a moral and spiritual duty rather than a mere political project. And Lala Lajpat Rai, in his collected works, explicitly urged Indians to "study the lives of revolutionary ideologue Mazzini and his protégé Garibaldi"<sup>192</sup> in order to learn from their ideological commitment and emulate

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191 V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, Asian Educational Services, 2014, 11,15, 237,492.

192 Lala Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2003), 283.

their sense of sacrifice: “to enable us to overcome our own shortcomings and aberrations.”<sup>193</sup>

Through such writings, it becomes evident that Mazzini’s influence was neither incidental nor exaggerated by later commentators. Instead, his example offered Indian leaders a model of uncompromising devotion to the cause of national liberation, a moral vision of freedom as both a right and a duty, and a method of political mobilization that resonated across cultural boundaries.

The influence of Mazzini was not rooted in aristocratic privilege, wealth, or hereditary prestige. In fact, he came from an ordinary middle-class family in Genoa. What elevated him to a position of extraordinary influence was his intellectual force, his passionate faith in God-ordained duty, and his unflinching conviction that freedom was a sacred right of peoples and nations. Mazzini viewed the struggle for independence not merely as a political necessity but as a moral and spiritual imperative—an obligation toward both one’s country and humanity at large. His vision was connected with religious overtones, emphasizing that the liberation of nations was in harmony with divine providence.

This moral seriousness resonated deeply with Indian leaders who, themselves steeped in spiritual traditions, saw no contradiction between religion and politics. For them, Mazzini’s ideas reinforced the notion that the pursuit of freedom was not simply pragmatic or utilitarian but was in fact a sacred trust, demanded by both conscience and history. His insistence on sacrifice, discipline, and unity offered a framework that was readily adopted by Indians fighting against the colonial state.

Mazzini’s role as mentor to Garibaldi further amplified his influence in India. Garibaldi, an Italian patriot and soldier, was trained in the South American wars of independence (1836–1848) and became one of the central figures in the eventual unification of Italy. His daring military campaigns inspired generations of revolutionaries across the globe. Yet, as Lala Lajpat Rai observed: “there is no doubt that Garibaldi would not have been

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<sup>193</sup> Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 283.

able to give the movement a touch of finesse without Mazzini's political guidance."<sup>194</sup> In Rai's interpretation, Mazzini was the ideologue, the visionary who supplied moral clarity, while Garibaldi translated that vision into practical military action.

This duality—Mazzini as thinker and Garibaldi as man of action—provided a powerful model for Indian nationalists. They recognized that their own struggle, too, required both visionaries and men of decisive action: those who could articulate the principles of swaraj (self-rule) and those who could carry them into the streets, villages, and battlefields of India.

The writings of Indian freedom fighters reveal the depth of their engagement with Mazzini's thought. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, for example, admired Mazzini's unwavering commitment to national liberation and his belief in the moral duty of every citizen to resist foreign domination. Tilak frequently emphasized that "swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it," a sentiment that closely echoes Mazzini's conviction that liberty is an inalienable right granted by God, not a concession bestowed by rulers. Tilak's interpretation of swaraj was not merely political autonomy but an assertion of collective dignity, deeply infused with the moral seriousness that Mazzini himself had embodied.

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, another towering intellectual of the Indian nationalist movement, engaged with Mazzini's works during his formative years in England. He was drawn to Mazzini's synthesis of spirituality and politics, particularly the notion that freedom struggles derive legitimacy from divine sanction. Aurobindo later articulated a vision of India's destiny that closely paralleled Mazzini's Italian mission: both men saw their nations not only as political entities but as spiritual organisms destined to play a role in uplifting humanity.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a revolutionary of a markedly different temperament, also revered Mazzini as a model. While Savarkar was more militant and pragmatic in his revolutionary methods, his intellectual indebtedness to Mazzini was unmistakable. In

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<sup>194</sup> Lala Lajpat Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 286.

his biography of Mazzini, which he composed while incarcerated, Savarkar celebrated him as “the prophet of nationalism”, emphasizing his role in unifying Italy through sacrifice and moral conviction.<sup>195</sup> For Savarkar, Mazzini’s writings validated the idea that violence, when exercised in the service of liberation, could be morally justified—a theme that would become central to Savarkar’s own revolutionary program.

The hallmark of Savarkar’s Hindutva ideology can be traced to Mazzini’s emphasis on unity. Just as Mazzini strove to unite Italians into a cohesive force capable of resisting the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Savarkar sought to develop and propagate the geopolitical ideology of Hindutva to unify Indians into a strong, collective force against British colonial rule. In this sense, Savarkar’s vision for India’s independence paralleled Mazzini’s efforts to secure freedom for Italy.

The admiration for Mazzini thus cut across the ideological spectrum. From Tilak’s constitutional agitation to Aurobindo’s spiritual nationalism, to Savarkar’s militant activism, Mazzini’s influence was a unifying thread. Each leader selectively drew from his thought, adapting it to the Indian context while preserving its essential moral force: the sacred duty of a people to liberate themselves from foreign domination.

Lala Lajpat Rai, too, explicitly acknowledged the formative role of Mazzini in shaping his own nationalist thought. As both a political activist and a prolific writer, Rai urged his countrymen to study the lives of Giuseppe Mazzini and his protégé Giuseppe Garibaldi, not merely for historical knowledge but as sources of moral instruction. He exhorted Indians to draw inspiration from their struggles: “to enable us to overcome our own shortcomings and aberrations.”<sup>196</sup> Rai believed that freedom could not be sustained by passive acceptance of benevolence from rulers; it required discipline, sacrifice, and the cultivation of national virtue, precisely the qualities he saw embodied in Mazzini’s example.

Rai’s interpretation of Mazzini was particularly significant because he stood at the crossroad of moderate constitutional politics and the more radical nationalist stream.

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<sup>195</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Joseph Mazzini: His Life and Writings* (Bombay: Mandali’s, 1907), x–xii.

<sup>196</sup> Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 286.

While personally inclined toward political agitation within legal frameworks, Rai recognized the legitimacy of revolutionary fervour when it was anchored in higher ideals. He praised Garibaldi's military exploits, yet he stressed that such action would not have been possible without Mazzini's philosophical vision and "political guidance."<sup>197</sup> In Rai's estimation, it was Mazzini's intellectual and moral leadership that gave coherence to Italy's fragmented resistance, transforming sporadic insurrections into a movement with spiritual depth.

This admiration reinforced Rai's own conviction that India's struggle had to be rooted in moral seriousness and not simply pragmatic calculation. Nationalism, as he understood it, was a moral duty ordained by God, and foreign domination was inherently unjust, regardless of whether the rulers professed benevolence. Rai's reverence for Mazzini thus mirrored the broader Indian nationalist tendency to elevate the struggle for independence beyond material grievances, framing it instead as a sacred obligation to truth, justice, and collective selfhood.

The influence of Mazzini on Indian freedom fighters was not limited to admiration of his writings or abstract ideals; it also extended to organizational models. Just as Mazzini had established *Young Italy* to instil discipline, secrecy, and dedication among revolutionaries, Indian nationalists sought to replicate similar frameworks. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's formation of *Abhinav Bharat* in 1904 drew direct inspiration from Mazzini's example.<sup>198</sup> Like *Young Italy*, *Abhinav Bharat* emphasized secrecy, oath-bound membership, and a willingness to sacrifice personal comfort for the liberation of the motherland.

Savarkar himself translated Mazzini's writings into Marathi, publishing them under the title *Mazzini Charitra* in 1907, which was circulated widely among students and young revolutionaries. This act was not merely one of translation but also of transference: Savarkar sought to infuse Mazzini's moral and political principles into the bloodstream of Indian nationalist thought. Through his commentary, he drew parallels between

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<sup>197</sup> Rai, *Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, 286.

<sup>198</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 33–35.

Italy's struggle for unity and India's quest for independence, insisting that revolution was not an act of desperation, but a moral duty aligned with Divine will.<sup>199</sup>

The resonance of Mazzini's ideas is evident in the fact that they were embraced across a spectrum of ideologies. While Savarkar used Mazzini to fortify his revolutionary call for armed resistance, others like Bal Gangadhar Tilak found in him a justification for militant self-assertion within the political sphere. Even those inclined toward constitutional methods or non-violent protest recognized Mazzini's role as a symbol of uncompromising devotion to the nation. Thus, Mazzini's legacy in India was not confined to one ideological camp but spanned the entire nationalist spectrum.

The reach of Mazzini's thought in India was not confined to Savarkar alone. Lala Lajpat Rai, a leading figure of the nationalist movement, expressed deep admiration for Mazzini's moral and political ideals. In his writings, Lajpat Rai described Mazzini as a "Mahatma" among men, emphasizing his rare qualities of intellect, sacrifice, and devotion to humanity. He urged his fellow countrymen to study the lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi, arguing that their struggles contained lessons of endurance, courage, and selfless service. For Lajpat Rai, the appeal of Mazzini lay not in abstract rhetoric but in the practical demonstration that ordinary men, animated by a higher moral duty, could challenge empires and transform nations.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh acknowledged Mazzini's influence, particularly in shaping his early revolutionary outlook. Aurobindo admired Mazzini's conviction that national freedom was inseparable from moral regeneration. For Aurobindo, as for Mazzini, liberty was not merely a political demand, but a sacred obligation rooted in Divine law. This blending of the spiritual and political proved influential in shaping the vocabulary of Indian nationalism, which frequently invoked concepts such as *dharma*, *karma*, and sacrifice in the cause of freedom.

It is significant that even leaders who later diverged ideologically shared in this early reverence for Mazzini. The revolutionary radicals, the moderate constitutionalists, and the spiritual nationalists alike drew sustenance from his writings. This universality

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<sup>199</sup> Vikram Sampath, *Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past, 1883–1924* (Gurgaon: Penguin Viking, 2019), 142–145.

underscores the extent to which Mazzini functioned not merely as an Italian patriot but as a global icon of liberation.

At the same time, however, Savarkar adapted Mazzini's principles to India's unique conditions. While Mazzini's struggle was directed against the fragmentation of Italy and foreign domination, Savarkar linked the demand for independence with the affirmation of Hindu identity as the cultural bedrock of the Indian nation. Thus, Mazzini's universalist moral vision was refracted through the prism of India's complex socio-religious realities, producing a distinctive form of nationalist thought.

Aurobindo Ghosh also engaged deeply with Mazzini's writings, though his interpretation emphasized the spiritual dimensions of nationalism more than Savarkar's militant focus. Ghosh admired Mazzini's insistence that political liberation was inseparable from moral regeneration, an idea he adapted to argue that India's freedom required not merely the expulsion of British rule but the revival of India's cultural and spiritual heritage.

In his early political writings, Ghosh explicitly invoked Mazzini as a source of intellectual guidance for Indian revolutionaries. He saw in Mazzini a prophet of democratic idealism, who inspired a generation of Italians to embrace sacrifice and collective struggle as sacred duties. For Ghosh, Mazzini's life demonstrated that true freedom could never be reduced to material progress or political expediency; it had to rest upon higher ethical and spiritual foundations.

While reflecting on the books by authors like Peter Heehs and Ananya Vajpayi, K. Balakrishnan and others, it can be said that, like Savarkar, Ghosh did not imitate Mazzini uncritically. Instead, he extended Mazzini's ideas into the Indian philosophical context. While Mazzini grounded his nationalism in a Christian conception of divine duty, Ghosh interpreted national freedom through the lens of Vedantic philosophy, asserting that the nation was a manifestation of the Divine, and service to the nation was a form of spiritual discipline. In this synthesis, Mazzini's legacy became an important foundation for Ghosh's vision of a spiritually guided Indian nationalism.

Lala Lajpat Rai, often referred to as the “Punjab Kesari” (meaning Lion of Punjab) was perhaps the most direct and vocal Indian admirer of Mazzini. Unlike Ghosh, who spiritualized Mazzini’s thought, Lajpat Rai emphasized the practical, moral, and political lessons to be drawn from the Italian struggle for freedom. In his writings, Lala Ji frequently quoted from Mazzini and presented him as a role model for Indian youth. He urged his countrymen to study the lives of both Mazzini and Garibaldi, not as distant European figures, but as teachers whose sacrifices and ideals were immediately relevant to the Indian situation.

For Lajpat Rai, the appeal of Mazzini lay in his extraordinary courage, intellectual clarity, and capacity for sacrifice. He described Mazzini as a “Mahatma” among men, whose mission for freedom was carried out with a fearlessness that placed duty to country above all else. This sense of moral obligation, according to Lajpat Rai, made Mazzini’s life exemplary for all colonized peoples striving for liberation. His praise of Mazzini’s vision was not merely rhetorical; he genuinely believed that the Italian revolutionary tradition could provide both inspiration and practical guidance for India’s own anti-colonial struggle.

By situating Mazzini alongside Indian figures like Tilak and Ghosh, Lajpat Rai contributed to the construction of a global genealogy of revolution, in which Indian freedom fighters saw themselves as inheritors of a broader legacy of nationalist movements that spanned Europe and Asia.

The legacy of Mazzini’s influence on India was not limited to individual leaders; it became embedded in the intellectual discourse and culture of nationalist politics. There are ample references in Vikram Sampath’s 2019 biography of Savarkar *Echoes from a Forgotten Past* as well as in the book *Mazzini Charitra* by Vinayak Savarkar himself that point to the fact that The Abhinav Bharat Society, founded by Savarkar in 1904, openly modelled itself on Mazzini’s *Young Italy*. The organization’s program called for political education, secret organization, and the cultivation of patriotic virtues, echoing Mazzini’s belief that national liberation was both a moral and political duty.

Similarly, Aurobindo Ghosh, though primarily remembered for his later spiritual philosophy, articulated in his early writings a distinctly Mazzinian vision of freedom as a Divine mission. He stressed that political liberation was not merely a question of expediency, but a sacred duty ordained by God. Here again, the resonance with Mazzini's moralization of politics is evident.

Even those who diverged sharply in tactics from the revolutionary model—such as Gandhi—could not entirely escape the shadow of Mazzini. Gandhi rejected armed struggle, yet acknowledged the transformative moral energy of figures who, like Mazzini, staked their entire lives on truth and duty. Gandhi's insistence on *satyagraha* as a moral struggle bears faint yet perceptible traces of Mazzini's conception of politics as a realm of ethical responsibility.

In addition to above, various scholarships (like that of Anil Seal, C. A. Bayly, and Ananya Vajpeyi) point to a conclusion that, whether through direct emulation or critical divergence, the Mazzinian tradition threaded itself through the spectrum of Indian nationalist thought. It provided a common ideological reference point that allowed revolutionaries, moderates, and spiritual leaders alike to articulate freedom as both a political necessity and a moral imperative.

In the final analysis, after referring to various writings of the prolific writers in this field such as Sampath, Seal, Savarkar and others, one can emphatically say that the history of India's struggle for independence cannot be fully understood without recognizing the profound ideological contribution of Giuseppe Mazzini. His belief in freedom as a divine duty, his insistence on the moralization of politics, and his conviction that national liberation was inseparable from personal sacrifice resonated deeply with Indian freedom fighters across the ideological spectrum.

From Savarkar's militant nationalism to Aurobindo's spiritualized politics, from Lala Lajpat Rai's admiration to Gandhi's critical appropriation, the presence of Mazzini remained unmistakable. Though strategies diverged—violent resistance versus non-violent resistance, revolutionary cells versus mass mobilization—the underlying moral

principle was shared: that subjugation to foreign rule was an affront to both human dignity and Divine justice.

Modern historiography has often privileged Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence as the defining ethos of India's freedom movement, while underplaying the influence of Mazzini and other revolutionary thinkers. Yet, as the writings and actions of Savarkar, Aurobindo, and Rai demonstrate, the revolutionary spirit inspired by Mazzini was no less integral to the struggle. The Indian nationalist movement thus embodied not a single monolithic ideology, but a synthesis of multiple intellectual and ideological influence—spiritual, revolutionary, moral, and political.

In today's India, the debate between Gandhian non-violence and Mazzinian-inspired resistance continues to shape political discourse. But whatever position one adopts in this ongoing debate, the fact remains that Mazzini's vision acted as a serious catalyst for the Indian struggle, equipping its leaders with both a moral justification and a practical model for liberation. India's independence in 1947, therefore, was not merely the triumph of one strategy or one leader, but the culmination of a rich and diverse intellectual heritage in which Giuseppe Mazzini holds a prominent and undeniable place.

However, in fairness, it should also be noted that Savarkar's nationalist ideology is not without criticism and opponents. It is important to note that Savarkar's conception of nationalism—popularly known as *Hindutva*—has been the subject of sustained and significant criticism. Savarkar remains one of the most debated figures in modern Indian political thought. While some view him as a visionary modernist, several scholars and critics have raised concerns regarding his definition of nationhood and its implications.

Savarkar's formulation of *Hindutva* is frequently criticised for its perceived exclusivity and cultural majoritarianism. His definition hinges on three central elements—common blood, culture, and a shared fatherland and holy land. Critics argue that this formulation implicitly excludes communities such as Muslims, who consider Mecca their holy land, and Christians, whose holy sites are located in Jerusalem.

Consequently, Savarkar's nationalism is often labelled as a form of cultural majoritarianism that may undermine India's pluralistic and multi-religious social fabric.

Some scholars further contend that Savarkar's nationalism lacks the attributes of inclusive, civic nationalism. Instead, it is described as ethno-cultural, rooted primarily in historical and cultural unity rather than in political or constitutional principles. This orientation, critics argue, stands in tension with the civic, inclusive nationhood envisioned in the Constitution of India.

Savarkar's writings are also frequently interpreted as suggesting that religious minorities must assimilate into a broader Hindu cultural framework to be considered full members of the nation. This has led to the criticism that Savarkar's nationalism places pressure on minorities to conform to majoritarian cultural norms and does not grant adequate social legitimacy to religious diversity. Some scholars have introduced the concept of "conditional nationalism" in this context, arguing that national loyalty, according to Savarkar's framework, is assessed on the basis of cultural alignment rather than civic belonging.

Critics also point to Savarkar's influence on the ideological trajectory of organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), suggesting that his ideas contributed to communal polarisation during the 1930s and 1940s—a period marked by heightened Hindu–Muslim tensions. In addition, Savarkar's advocacy of militarisation, martial training for youth, and an assertive, aggressive form of nationalism has led some to characterise his vision as overly militaristic and insufficiently attentive to principles of democratic pluralism.

Furthermore, Savarkar is often described as merging religious–cultural identity with political ideology in ways that critics argue are not entirely coherent. Some go further, claiming that modern political movements drawing inspiration from Savarkar frequently employ his writings to justify religious nationalism, exclusivist politics, and the marginalisation of minority communities.

Several notable figures in India's academic, political, and intellectual landscape have expressed concerns regarding Savarkar's conception of nationalism and the divergent meanings it carries.

The former Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru's objections were rooted in the type of nationalism he envisioned for independent India. Nehru's critique of Savarkar emerged from his own commitment to civic nationalism grounded in constitutional democracy, secularism, and pluralism. In Nehru's view, nationalism must transcend cultural or religious identity. Although *The Discovery of India* discusses nationalism extensively and mentions Savarkar only once, it is often noted that Nehru regarded Savarkar's nationhood—based on shared cultural ancestry and sacred geography—as exclusionary toward communities whose holy lands lie outside India. Admittedly, such criticism has typically come from those who disagreed with Savarkar. Supporters of Savarkar, however, argue that Nehru's universalist model was overly idealistic and insufficiently attuned to the social realities of a colonised and fractured India. They further contend that Savarkar sought not only cultural cohesion but also advocated civic equality for all citizens irrespective of religion.

Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy stood in sharp contrast to Savarkar's approach. Gandhi rejected Savarkar's emphasis on militarisation and cultural assimilation, championing instead non-violence, ethical politics, and coexistence, as outlined in *Hind Swaraj*. In response, as articulated by Vikram Sampath in *Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past*, Savarkar's supporters argue that Gandhi's moral universalism underestimated the geopolitical and communal challenges of the era. They further maintain that Savarkar's support for armed struggle against colonial rule has been misunderstood as a blanket endorsement of violence.

Romila Thapar, another influential critic of Savarkar, argues in *Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and Modern Search for a Hindu Identity* that Savarkar deliberately reconstructs an ancient Hindu nation by imposing modern political categories onto pre-modern cultural formations. She contends that Savarkar attempts to unify diverse traditions into a singular "Hindu civilisation." Supporters of Savarkar invoke Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism in *Imagined Communities*, noting

that nationalist ideologies worldwide rely on selective historical memory to forge cohesion. From this perspective, Savarkar's work is framed not as a historical thesis but as a political project aimed at mobilising unity within a colonised society to build collective strength against imperial rule.

The French political scientist and sociologist Christophe Jaffrelot, in *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, interprets Savarkar's ideology as a form of ethnic nationalism. Savarkar's supporters counter that Jaffrelot applies European analytical categories too rigidly. They argue that Savarkar explicitly rejected race-based nationalism and instead drew inspiration from Giuseppe Mazzini's cultural-civic nationalism, as articulated in *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*

In conclusion, Savarkar's nationalism remains deeply contested because it exists at the intersection of cultural identity, political pragmatism, and anti-colonial mobilisation. Critics argue that his model tends toward majoritarianism and historical reductionism, whereas supporters view him as a modernist thinker who emphasised unity, discipline, and cultural continuity. A more balanced assessment requires situating Savarkar within the broader global landscape of nationalist ideologies and objectively evaluating both the strengths and the limitations of his approach.