

Conceptualising The Hindudom And The Threatening 'Other': Savitri Devi Mukherjee As A Hindu Nationalist In Late Colonial Bengal

Koushiki Dasgupta

Savitri Devi Mukherjee's 'A Warning to the Hindus' (1939) was published as a part of her Hindu nationalist project in India under the patronage of the Hindu Mission at Calcutta. This less highlighted and unexplored work could be used to understand an obscure variety of Hindu nationalism which proposed to create one Hindudom on the basis of an Aryan-Hindu connection in the past. The entire argument was placed on an enigma of 'danger' and 'threat' from the 'other' religions and opened up a unique space of community-consciousness in a communally charged situation. The myth of an Aryan-Hindu race might have its own connotations in the ideological terrain, Savitri Devi's notion of Hindu nationalism and her own convictions on Hindu sangathan had developed severe contradictions in the realm of Hindu politics which she had not realised properly in a given context. Her own ideological obsession with a Nazi-Aryan dominance didn't fit well with the idea of Hindudom, what she believed, would have arrived from the Savarkarian notion of Hindutva.

Keywords: Hindu, Hindudom, Nationalism, Bengal, Politics, Sangathan

Introduction:

Born as Maximiani Portez in 1905 at Lyons, France, Savitri Devi Mukherjee¹ travelled to India in 1932 in search of the roots of Aryan paganism. Savitri Devi, an erudite scholar of Philosophy learned Hindi and Sanskrit and took a vigorous study of the Vedas and the Upanishads. All her knowledge on these ancient texts was devoted for the cause of exploring the greatness and true sources of the Aryan race dispersed over the West and the East. Portez got married to a pro-Nazi Bengali nationalist named Asit Krishna Mukherjee in 1940. While staying at Calcutta she started giving lectures on the greatness of Hindu religion and culture and became involved with the activities of the Hindu Mission, a nationalist organization working for the cause of the Hindus in Bengal.² In 1939 she published '*A Warning to the Hindus*',³ a book which attempted to alert Hindus to the possible threat of isolation and extinction due to its numerical decline before the growing Muslims. Savitri Devi's love for the Hindu religion was very much influenced by her obsession with the history and heritage of the Aryan race. Being a great admirer of National Socialism in the 1920s, Savitri Devi expressed her great admiration for the similarities between Hindu religion and Nordic racial ideology including the polar origin of the Aryans, cycle of the ages and the incarnation of Lord Vishnu in Adolf Hitler. The Third Reich according to her was 'the only land of the West, the stronghold of regenerate Aryandom'. (Nicholas Goofrick Clarke: 1998:4) Her devotion for the Hindu-Nordicist ideology of the Aryan race and her lifelong loyalty to the Nazi cause created immense controversies throughout her career in India and Europe, however, her powerful ideas of anti-

Semitism and Aryan paganism as a global religion earned her respect and reputation among a section of the Indians those who believed in the strength of the Nazi regime being the sole opponent of British imperialism all over the world. Savitri Devi's aversion to the Jews and the Judaic origin of Christianity led her beyond Greece and Europe in search of an Aryan myth in Vedic India.⁴ During her stay in India, she involved herself into the ongoing debates over a possible extinction of the Hindus—a recurrent theme of Hindu nationalist discourse in early 20th century. The book '*A Warning to the Hindus*' aroused much political contentions in Bengal when almost all shades of Hindu political consciousness reached at a point of stagnation. This book was published in 1939, two years ahead of the first election of 1937. The formation of the Krisak-Praja Party-Muslim League coalition ministry in fact turned down all political speculations hitherto being entertained by the Hindu political circle in Bengal. The origin of this book could be traced back to the ideas of V.D. Savarkar, a leader who had never appeared to be a popular choice in Bengal, even Hindu consciousness in Bengal didn't acquire a well defined character for long. It was only after the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1935 and the election of 1937 that a visible section of the Bengali Hindus arrived at a point of self defence when they found that their political, economic and cultural ethics and values were getting jeopardised by sectarian elements. A few socio-spiritual organizations like the Bharat Sevashram Sangha or the Hindu Mission now took a more self-protective and militant stance for the sake of Hindu interests and came under the spell of the Hindu Mahasabha which was denied an official entry in Bengal for a long period of time. Savitri Devi's '*A Warning to the Hindus*' was a product of this period. This book must be viewed in relation to the previous literature used as a wakeup call for the 'slumbering' Hindus, however, its approach and presentation was unique and exclusive in nature. In this present paper an attempt has been made to understand how the notion of Hindu nationalism was visualised by a pro Nazi activist in changed circumstances when almost all the communal and sectarian forces were on full swing in Bengal. The time when Savitri Devi was becoming more active on the ideological front, it provided the crux of the Hindu tragedy. The self restrained approach of Hindutva which fitted well with the nineteenth century universal spirit of Hindu nationalism seemed to get lost into the vortex of political paranoia after 1937 and the situation itself appeared to be an alarming for those who didn't read the wall soon. In this paper a thorough study has been made on the conceptions and misconceptions put forward by the book keeping the situational compulsions in mind. It would be interesting to see to what extent this publication was proved to be special in the series of 'warning literatures'⁵ written for the Hindus in a Muslim majority province. In the first part of the paper a background survey has been done to focus how one consolidated notion of Hindu identity was constructed ideologically to conceptualise the notions of 'threat' and 'danger' among the Bengali Hindus. The second part of the paper deals with the ideas of Savitri Devi both as a Hindu nationalist and as a pro-Nazi ideologue who tried to justify the long lost arguments of Aryan/Hindu supremacy in a communally charged province.

Hindu Identity in Making

The growing popularity of the word 'Hinduism' in late nineteenth century might be taken as a linguistic extravaganza of the English educated elites⁶ who started using this word on a pan Indian

scale, however, the inherent ambiguities of the word 'Hindu' itself was yet to dispersed off.⁷ It was not clear yet whether the word Hindu should be treated as a territory or simply as a religion. The new nationalist aspirations from late nineteenth century also faced the same trajectories of being territorial and religious since the emergence of Indian nationalism was destined to meet the rising tides of pan Indian Hinduism in late nineteenth century. This Hinduism emerged as a coherent religion comprising a vast body of myths, rituals and rites but tied up with a vague sense of identity. Several attempts were made to answer the questions, who is a Hindu', what should be taken as Hinduism and very naturally the term 'Hindu dharma' was appearing to be the ideal reference point instead of the term 'religion'. Right from Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda or Sri Aurobindo to V.D Savarkar, the quest for a distinct Hindu identity was always in fashion, the spirit of reformism, radicalism or revivalism often constituted the core on which the ideal of Hindutva⁸ had developed. However, in all its forms the Hindu identity as understood in last two centuries, the historical discourses of colonialism and modernism were addressed in times, not simply as a link between the past and the present but as a resonance to the study of Hindu politics in India. The arguments also offered a wider framework of addressing the other religions but sometimes with a vague understanding on their doctrinal values vis-a-vis their historical presence in India. The basic problem with the idea of clarifying a Hindu identity was, however, with the claim made by a group of scholars⁹ that prior to the British there was no Hinduism as such. The entire concept of being Hindu was constituted by the Orientalists and the missionaries only in nineteenth century¹⁰, even though the religion itself existed many centuries earlier. Infact the spirit of heterogeneity present in Hinduism was taken to be inappropriate for identifying one single religion or community and both ethno-geographical and religious-textual meaning were reinforced in the word 'Hindu' upto a certain point of time. However, nineteenth century must be viewed as part of that intellectual evolutions which concluded that construction of a Hindu identity was necessary for not simply because of the Hindus themselves but also for 'othering' the other religions like Islam and Christianity. As far as a conscious religious identity is concerned, nineteenth century construction and representation of Hinduism could be understood in the light of one particular Hindu identity with frequent references from the hoary past. The entire narrative, infact incorporated a form of nationalism which resulted in the *suddhi* and *sangathan* movements at the turn of the century and infused a kind of historical inquiry in the long lost tradition for the 'original' civilisation. The result was the discovery of a Vedic golden past, an allegory/myth which provided the basic arguments of Hindu nationalism in India.¹¹ The growth of new Hinduism or what it is called 'resurgent Hinduism', developed in the light of the newly acquired ideas of rationality and justice, should be treated more than a response to the cultural challenges of the West. It was not simply a politically conscious project rather a deep sense of liberalism was interpreted to bring about a change in the intellectual world as well. This sort of change was visible in the development of a universal Hinduism with the spirit of humanism and liberalism. The best example of this kind of endeavour was the Brahmo Samaj movement of early nineteenth century, which tried to reinterpret Hinduism with Upanisadic rationalism¹² and launched several reform agendas according to the aspirations of the educated middle class. Gradually the task of nation building was taken to a work dedicated to the service of the living Gods with an aim

to find out one common base of Hinduism. This unique collective spirit of Hinduism evolved as an instrument to counter Christian proselytism as well as to spread the lesson of '*Yata Mat Tata Path*' (As many ideas as many paths).¹³ However, the urge for assimilating all sections of the Hindus under a common fold of universal Hinduism must be viewed with cautions since no serious steps were taken for the annihilation of caste and removal of untouchability, rather a general stereotype of Aryan origin of the Hindus was referred frequently.¹⁴ It must be mentioned here that in no way this revivalism/resurgence was an awareness of majority-hood. It was not political or syndicated.¹⁵ No doubt the trends of Hindu resurgent movement was conditioned by colonialism and it was developed as a reformed version of different traditional practises and believes, it basically was an effort to revive the basic tenets of the religion on virtue of self respect, not at the cost of taking hold on the 'others' but claiming its superiority over the 'others'. Fundamentalism might have an inclination to project its views on others but it's not necessary that revivalism would follow the same at least when Hindu revivalist movements were less of being fundamental but more self critical. It had produced a new brand of 'Hindu modernity' parallel to 'westernised modernity' and created the ideological basis of a Hindu nationalist identity. The idea of a Hindu nationalist identity would have created one autonomous space for accommodating the spirits of modernism, universalism and nationalism for a certain period of time; it lost its independence within the dialectic of Indian nationalism and communalism within the first two decades of twentieth century.¹⁶ Simultaneously the sense of 'otherness' present in the idea of Hindu nationalism gradually took a shift from its previous connotations to a more strategic instrumental narrative. Now the 'other' came to be symbolised as a competitor not simply in terms of difference but in terms of representation in the public domain. In an era of representative politics and in face of the Muslim claim of 'protection' and 'weightage', the incorporation of separate electorate (1909 Morley-Minto Act) perfectly called upon a constituency of Hindus within a discursive framework which proposed numerical representation as a rightful form of political appearance. Years later, when Savitri Devi was writing '*A Warning to the Hindus*', the narratives of a self critical, self inspirational ideology of Hindu nationalism disappeared within the premises of a politically codified notion of sectarianism. It continued to be a middle class ideology; however, its earlier version of cultural regeneration began to get fading away into the whirlpools of communalism.¹⁷

Explaining the Hindudom:

In a communally charged environment, Savitri Devi started working with the Hindu Mission in Calcutta, a centre for Hindu nationalist campaigning. Under the guidance of Swami Satyananda, Savitri Devi started lecturing on the synthesis of Nazism and a Hindu-Aryan identity. Long back in Athens, Savitri Devi might have been influenced by the memory of the famous German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann. This man was instrumental in popularising the Aryan symbol of Swastika to the European minds¹⁸ as well as his speculations on the connections between the Homeric myths and the Aryan tradition in India received much attention. The finding of the swastika symbol in Athens motivated Savitri Devi a lot to come to India in search of Europe's pagan past. Prior to that she got attracted to the National Socialist movement in Germany and after reading the German

edition of the *Mein Kampf* she found in Hitler a true philosopher who carries the ancient legacy of the Aryan tradition in the contemporary world.¹⁹ In reference to the *Main Kampf*, Savitri Devi developed her own Aryan-Nazi religion which corresponded between Hitlerism and Hinduism as supposed joint heir of ancient Aryan wisdom.²⁰ In Swami Satyananda of the Hindu Mission, Savitri Devi discovered a passionate sympathizer of that spirit. Referring to her conversation with Satyananda, Savitri Devi recalled:-

‘Satyananda Swami was the founder and head of the Hindu Mission, for which I worked for years, fighting Communism, fighting any religion of equality and specially Christian missionaries, in the name of Hindu tradition. Satyananda used to say “Adolf Hitler is the reincarnation of the God Vishnu.....” I told him “I am not a disciple of any Indian; I’m a disciple of Adolf Hitler.” He said, “good...good. Adolf Hitler, he’s as much as a Hindu as any of our Hindus.” It was extremely and surprising and refreshing to hear that in 1936. And he said it during the war too. In Kubila, he gave a speech in ’42. He openly said, “What we need here in India as everywhere in the world is National Socialism.” He openly said so. And I said to him, “Satyananda Swami, you’ll get trouble with the British police”. He said, “I couldn’t care less if I did. I told them the truth.”²¹

It was revealed later that Savitri Devi’s autobiographical narratives were full of contradictions and problems. Her conversation with Swami Satyananda might have had some points of justifications what she had used to highlight her obsession for Hitler. As a result, her own understanding of Hindu nationalism became restricted to those ideals which she found more suitable to her Nazi-Aryan philosophy. It was none other than V.D. Savarkar whose ideas of Hindutva left a deep impression on Savitri Devi. She believed that Savarkar had a soft corner for the Nazi regime and there are similarities in the ways Hitler and Savarkar both were managing the question of the Jews and the Muslims respectively.²² G.D. Savarkar, the brother of V.D. Savarkar who introduced Savitri Devi’s book ‘*A Warning to the Hindus*’ to the readers and believed that this work would ‘make the Hindus realise where they stand, and what dangers are threatening their very existence as a nation; it will put them on the right turn of national thinking. And this new attitude, if whole-heartedly adopted throughout the length and breadth of this country, will raise them, and help them to assert their national existence which the world shall not be able to ignore.’²³ The recurrent use of the terms like ‘dangers’ and ‘threat’ kept multiple possibilities alive, however, the whole narrative should be looked at either as a continuation or as a departure from the previous works produced on the very particular subject. One must be careful to the fact that Savitri Devi’s book was published as a part of the Hindu mission project in Bengal and the book itself addressed the Bengali Hindus being the most vulnerable of the entire Hindu nation in India.

Other than eulogizing the glorious Aryan past of the Hindus, Savitri Devi’s ‘*A Warning to the Hindus*’ dealt with a few basic themes. Divided into seven chapters it contemplated the idea of a Hindu nation in terms of ‘change’, ‘defence’ and ‘resistance’. In the first three chapters she discussed the basic attributes of the Hindus in comparison to their Aryan ancestors; in rest of the chapters she prescribed a few remedies to deal with the ominous forces around and asked the Hindus to get

ready for resistance.²⁴ The idea of a demographic decline was juxtaposed with the idea of Hindu self-defence in face of growing communalism. Savitri Devi in fact brought Savarkarian nationhood back in discussion when she attempted to resolve the binaries of territorial nation and religious nation in terms of Indian nationalism. Addressing the 'others', Savitri Devi declared,

'.....we do not hate our Indian brothers, Mohammadans, Christians, or whatever they may be; we have no grudge against them. The only thing we hate is anti-national religious fanaticism, from wherever it may come.....we urge those Indians who believe in so-called world-religions to put India above them. We call them back to our common national culture and civilisation, for the sake of the Nation. If they love the Nation, let them come and join us. They are welcome.'²⁵

One can trace here an essence of assimilation what perhaps could best be described as tactical as the politics of addressing the 'otherness' of the 'others'. In a Muslim majority province like Bengal an important task before the nationalist scheme of the Hindus was to address this question from different dimensions... Some of them took the project of assimilating the 'others' within the larger contours of the nation; a few of them urged for accommodating, if not assimilating, the otherness of the others into the nation-space. The proponents of the first model in fact responded quickly to the question of numerical representation in late colonial time especially when the discourse of 'difference' was taking an ugly turn. A section of the Bengali Hindus, for instance, tried to follow the trends of accommodative nationalisms with greatest enthusiasm. It is pertinent to ask whether the brand of Hindu nationalism what Savitri Devi was trying to project through Hindu Mission did actually have any real relevance in Bengal? Did the Bengali Hindus ever imbibe the spirits of an Aryan-Hindudom, as envisaged by Savitri Devi in her book? It would be highly sceptical to come to an conclusion to these issues since there had never been any category of 'Bengali Hindu nationalism' as such. However, across the emerging debates on Hindu communalism in India, one can still identify a spirit of liberalism existing in Bengal; even though Bengali Hindus found the issues of accommodating the 'otherness' of the 'others' into the broader spectrum of a nation really difficult, especially when they were pushed at a point of keeping their own liberal position on the idea of 'difference' intact. The idea of 'difference' didn't necessarily mean to be a conflict between the nation and the anti nation; rather it could be a meeting point which rendered multiple potentials of being and becoming a nation in the true sense of the term.

The idea of a demographic decline was first brought before public attention in a series of articles published in the Bengali in 1990 by Colonel U.N. Mukherjee. Later a pamphlet was published on the subject called, *Hindus—A Dying Race*.²⁶ Afterwards, the communal common sense of a dying Hindu emerged as one of the recurrent themes in Hindu political discourse and the so-called panic of being outnumbered by the increasing Muslims remained constructive in mobilising a distinct Hindu electorate.²⁷ The twin anxieties of a growing Muslim and a dying Hindu gained its essential legitimacy at the political circle, even the Arya Samaj's efforts of *suddhi* and *sangathan*²⁸ appeared to be creating a polemic of consensus in Bengal. Approaches leading to the Bengali Hindus becoming ambivalent to these movements created a kind of bitterness also for the rise and growth of a Hindu Mahasabha branch in Bengal. Bengal didn't have a vibrant Hindu Mahasabha

instead a marginal one till the mid 1930s. In 1939, Savitri Devi addressed the issue of *sangathan* in terms of a situational adjustment with the age-old caste practises in order to resist the coming 'danger'. The proposed Hindudom, she thought, would be the permanent solution of all these problems. At the first place she asked some valid questions,

'To what extent must caste prejudices be sacrificed, to save Hindudom?' will many say. Does the sacrifice of caste prejudices mean merely to get rid of Untouchability, and open the temples to all Hindus? Does it mean that high caste Hindus should take water from every Hindu? Does it mean that they should also take rice? Does it mean that inter-caste marriages should be allowed? Where is the limit? (if there be any limit to such concessions)'

Her answers were quite fascinating,

'There is no answer to these questions, *in detail*. Means of defence have to be in proportion with the danger to face; so everything depends upon the danger. It is certain that in Midnapur district (West Bengal) where Mohammadans are only six percent, the problem facing the Hindus is not as tragic as in Bogra district, for instance where the Mohammadans are more than ninety percent. The Midnapur Hindus can afford to wait, uninjured, another fifty years. The Bogra Hindus cannot; nor can those of Pabna, nor of Rangpur, nor of Dacca, nor of Noakhali, nor of Comilla, nor of Chittagong etc., in one word, all those of North and East Bengal, from Jalpaiguri, down to the Bay of Bengal, and to the frontiers of Burma and Assam; nor can the Hindus of Assam, where, along with Mohammadan propaganda, a well carried on and lavishly financed Christian missionary effort is continuing for the last few decades, throughout the hill tracts; nor can the Hindus of any part of India, where a strong, conscious, casteless society has grown or is growing to existence, by the side of caste-ridden Hindudom. Whether caste-ridden or sect-ridden, or compartmented in any other way, *never and nowhere*, in history, has a divided society stood competition with an undivided one'.²⁹

The plea of a strong Hindu *sangathan* might have received wider attention in the nerve centres of the Arya Samaj in north and north-western India, its appeal was limited in Bengal. Savitri Devi borrowed the idea of a casteless Hindu society from the Hindu Mahasabha; it took long time to bring at least a section of the Bengali Hindus into the fold of Mahasabha politics. At the initial years, the Hindu Sabhas repeatedly infused the themes of 'dying Hindu' and abduction of Hindu women by the Muslim goons into Hindu political discourse. Series of 'warning literatures' were produced to mobilize the educated Hindus along with a couple of alarming reports by a few Hindu organizations. The wide circulated pamphlets like '*Bangla Hindu Jatir Khoy o Pratikar*' (The decay of Hindu Society and its remedy) by Tangail Hindu Samaj, Saileshnath Sharma Bisi's '*Hindu Samajer Bartaman Samasya*' (The present problems of the Hindu Society), Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar's '*Bangiya Hindu Jati ki Dhangshanmukh*' (*Is the Bengali Hindus are on the way of destruction?*), Motilal Roy's '*Hindu Jagaran*' (*Hindu Awakening*)³⁰, the reports of the Women Protection League (1935-37) and many more had stressed on the necessity of masculine vigour and strength to save the Hindus—a physically and numerically degenerated race. Savitri Devi also maintained a greater emphasis on the issue of Hindus lacking physical culture—necessary for taking a legitimate action against Hindu women abduction.

‘..... Hindus, in all parts of India where they are a numerical minority, *cannot survive unless they become, rapidly, a wholesale military race* comparable to what the Sikhs were in Panjab.....the very ideas of *danger* and of *resistance* are welcomed by youth.’³¹

It was an open call to the Hindu youth to get ready for any circumstances and to make the Hindus aware of the enemy. The aim of those who are trying, here and there, to organise batches of Hindu young men on military lines is, no doubt, to prepare a well-trained Hindu militia, ready to fight in case of need for defence. But it is still more to bring, through that undivided, national minded, self-relying, sturdy militia, *a new life and a new mentality throughout Hindudom*; to awaken the Hindus to resistance;..... *They will make the whole Hindu civil population a permanent militia*. For unless *that* is achieved, there is no hope for the Hindus, wherever they are a minority.³²

The efforts to make militancy a supra political sphere indeed espoused to generate a litigious space of Hindu nationalism in Bengal. The proposed Hindudom, according to Savitri Devi would create a widespread military outlook—a necessity for national defence...’If only the Hindus, wherever a minority, would become a minority of soldiers’. In Savitri Devi’s imagination this sort of sectarianism actually made the idea of Hindu nationhood a viable one. It was preoccupied with the comparative framework of relationship with an ‘other’ The Hindu nationhood, she believed could not do without fear and desire of the ‘other’ and ultimately. ‘*A Warning to the Hindu’s* left the reader with a symbolic suggestion; the organization of Hindudom which would be free from the competition between two societies and two histories. The moment religious fanaticism would disappear, the ‘others’ would re-join the Hindu fold in numbers. If such Hindus rebuild Greater India there would be nothing astonishing even if, through them, the dream of the resurrection of Aryan Pagandom in the West also becomes a reality.

The specific analysis of this proposed Hindudom didn’t exercise a popular appeal in Bengal. The idea was vague since there was no ready reference to relate the word ‘dom’ with any existing systems. The word *Hindu Rastra* was frequently emphasised in the Hindu nationalist discourse, while V.D Savarkar’s³³ and Savitri Devi’s random use of the term ‘Hindudom’ generally explained the global community of those who adhere to the Hindu faith and the collective body of the Hindus throughout the world and throughout history. This collectiveness or the sense of homogeneity built around the alternative imaginings of nation building tapped up multiple anxieties produced by an antagonistic ‘other’. In the writings of Savitri Devi, this ‘other’ had been evolved as a cultural/religious threat to the emergence of Aryanism in the West and that is the reason she had often juxtaposed the idea of Hindudom to Aryandom in a given situation. She might have suffered from the enigma of her own world view lacking the paradox of conceptional varieties, even in Bengal she received a very few takers. The moment she appropriated the idea of Hinduism in the light of Aryan Paganism, she perhaps missed out the actual context of what differentiates a race from a nation. In the same manner, the projection of Muslims and Christians as threatening ‘others’ didn’t give any structural connotation for the *sangathan* movement which was indeed remained a rootless orchid in Bengal. Savitri Devi’s fascination for the spiritual East and her construction of the Aran

myth was also contested within the ideological mosaic of Indian nationalism. Infact the early Orientalists in India privileged India with an antiquity comparable to the classical West,³⁴ and on virtue of this classical glory, once crafted by the Aryans—the distinct kin brothers of the Europeans, the colonial masters claimed a kind of authoritarian legitimacy to rescue India from the state of degeneration³⁵. Savitri Devi in her work refrained from taking a vocal anti British stand, rather explained nationalism in terms of exploring the spirit of being the product of the soil. If certain varieties of Hindu nationalism were conceived as an upper-caste strategy to unify Indian society against the threatening ‘others’, (Islam and Christianity), then Savitri Devi herself cultivated a kind of contradiction between her own racist and anti egalitarian convictions and the egalitarian programmes of the Hindu mission. Referring to the Brahmins, Savitri Devi categorically mentioned that,

‘.....the Indian Brahmins, not merely the oldest, but still the finest aristocracy of our earth.....If India be compared to a vast lotus-pond, the Brahmins as a whole, still today, are its most beautiful, its purest lotuses. The defence of Hindudom means *their* defence. That, we entirely maintain..... society will be cent percent Mohammadan.....if the flow of conversion of Islam is not immediately stopped, and a contrary current of reconversion to Hinduism, not immediately started..... And this is not possible without an enormous amount of sacrifice on the part of the high-caste Hindus.....sacrifice caste prejudices at once and live....’³⁶

In her imaginations, the Brahmins or the upper-caste Indians were the true upholder of an Aryan vision and the proposed Hindudom would be crafted by the Brahmins for the sake of their own existence. Now, these ideas hardly had any match with the Hindu Mission as far as its caste position was concerned. To the Hindu Mission, Hinduism was a value system; to Savitri Devi it was an instrument and means of going back to the glories of the Aryan race. Belgian Indologist Keonraad Elst mentioned that, Swami Satyananda, the leader of the Hindu Mission asked Savitri Devi to keep her personal opinions to herself³⁷ since Satyananda’s own understanding of the caste question was different. Satyananda’s perceptions of Hindu nationalism were not motivated by any upper-caste sentiment; rather he was the person who organised a unique Dalit temple entry movement at the time of Munshigunj Satyagraha in Bengal in 1929.³⁸ In spite of having administrative atrocities, Swami Satyananda projected this movement not simply in terms of a Brahmin-non-Brahmin fight, but simply a fragment of what constituted the spirit and essence of the Indian national movement. Satyananda’s programmes of satyagraha had shown one of the most important varieties of Hindu nationalism which contributed greatly for social regeneration in Bengal. Following the footsteps of the Swami, Savitri Devi went on a tour of the tribal villages during 1937-39 just to prevent these ‘Hindus’ converting into other religions. However, in later years, she confessed in her memoirs that she had taken all the reconversion programmes an exercise to give the most backward degenerate aboriginals a (false) Hindu consciousness. In her autobiography too she expressed that a nation could only be composed of racially similar individuals, not of racially distinct communities She infact admitted that the caste-ridden, ‘racially distinct aboriginals were unfit for making a nation. Having admitted that, Savitri Devi infact produced one of the most hyped imaginings of Hindu nationalism

being evolving as a hegemonic-racial construct in late colonial Bengal.

Conclusion:

'*A Warning to the Hindus*' must not be viewed as a milestone in the history of Hindu nationalist literature in India. Legitimizing the ever puzzling notion of a Hindu-Aryan racial nomenclature failed to attract a larger section of the Hindus, while the theme of a possible danger from the antagonistic 'others' emerged out to be a fallacy of predictions which in reality absorbed the personal fantasies of the author. Trapped within the dilemmas of political uncertainties in a communally charged situation, Savitri Devi herself lost into her own convictions of how to address a Hindu, if simply as an Indian or as an Aryan? The utopia of Hindudom didn't bring her many supporters among the educated Bengali Hindus who almost took a cold attitude to this half-hearted idea of a given land where the society, would be subjected to some predetermined cultural notions. In the history of 'warning literatures' in Bengal, Savitri Devi appeared to be the most aggressive voice who had claimed to carry the legacy of Savarkarian Hindutva in Bengal but lost into the jugglery of ideological ambitions—one corresponding to her private world and the other to her political world. However, this lesser known scholar or be specific, an obscure activist opened up an exclusive chapter of esoteric Hindu nationalism in India, which must be taken as a point of entry into the world of ideological manoeuvres in the coming decades.

Notes and References:

1. Born as French with Greek-English origin, Savitri Devi was a great admirer of National Socialism in the 1920s. She was impressed by glories of the Aryan race and discussed the similarities between Hindu religion and Nordic racial ideology including the polar origin of the Aryans, the cycle of the ages and the incarnation of Lord Vishnu in Adolf Hitler. The Third Reich, according to her was the 'holy land of the West, the stronghold of regenerate *Aryandom*.
2. Swami Satyananda Saraswati founded the Hindu Mission in 1925 at Calcutta. All through its career the Hindu Mission worked for the *suddhi* and *sangathan* programme in Bengal for the purpose of Hindu solidarity and preventing conversion to Christianity and Islam. The sources on the Hindu Mission are limited and scattered. No detailed study has been found on the activities of the Mission. The journal 'Hindu Mission' (*Saradiya* Number) used as a valuable source other than the references in news paper clippings and reports published elsewhere.
3. *A Warning to the Hindus* was first published by Brahmachari Bijoy Krishna of the Hindu Mission in Calcutta in 1939 with a foreword by G. D. Savarkar. It was translated in six Indian languages, including Bengali, Hindi, and Marathi.
4. Clarke: *Hitler's Priestess*, p. 24.
5. This term is coined by me to showcase the similarities between the range of literatures written for the sake of the Hindu interests against the Muslim 'other'.
6. The word 'Hinduism' became common in English only in the second half of nineteenth century, and mostly by British writers. One important publication was Alexander Duff's popular book, *India and India Missions: Sketches of the Gigantic System of Hinduism both in Theory and Practice*, 1839. M. Monier-Williams' introductory text, *Hinduism* (first published in 1877) also discussed the issue in detail.

7. Decades later V.D Savarkar felt the necessity of addressing the question. In 1923, *Essentials Of Hindutva* was published and this pamphlet received new connotations when it was reprinted in 1928 with the title *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* , Bombay 1969.
8. In Oxford English Dictionary the definition of Hindutva has been given an ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life. See, *Hindutva*, Oxford English Dictionary, 2011. In a judgement of 1955, the Supreme Court of India ruled that ‘Ordinarily, Hindutva is understood as a way of life or a state of mind and is not to be equated with or understood as religious Hindu fundamentalism ... it is a fallacy and an error of law to proceed on the assumption ... that the use of words Hindutva or Hinduism per se depicts an attitude hostile to all persons practising any religion other than the Hindu religion ... It may well be that these words are used in a speech to promote secularism or to emphasise the way of life of the Indian people and the Indian culture or ethos, or to criticise the policy of any political party as discriminatory or intolerant.’ Referred in ‘Hindutva is a secular way of life’, Ram Jethmalani, *The Sunday Guardian*, 5 March, 2015.
9. In the book, ‘*The Meaning and End of Religion*’, (1962) W.C Smith first proposed the very core of this idea that, “Hinduism refers not to an entity; it is a name that the west has given to a prodigiously variegated series of facts. It is a notion in men’s minds...and a notion that cannot but be inadequate .To use this term in all is inescapably a gross oversimplification A few of these scholars who followed more or less similar arguments are, J.Fuller, Christopher, (*The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); John Stratton Hawley.(‘Naming Hinduism,’ *Wilson Quarterly*, summer, 1991 pp. 20- 34); Gerald Larson, (*India’s Agony over Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press,1995);, Heinrich Von. Stietencron (“Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term.” in Sontheimer and Kulke, Eds, *Hinduism Reconsidered*. Delhi, p. 11,1989)
11. Jaffrelot: *Hindu Nationalism*, pp. 517-524.
12. Mitter: ‘*Rammohun Roy and the New Language of Monotheism*, p. 181.
13. This message of nineteenth century mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa puts emphasis on the usefulness of all religious beliefs and advice not to consider one’s own path as the only true path. This idea in fact challenged the concept of conversion which believes in the effectiveness of only one religious path. Ramakrishna also asked to worship the God in human being and showed the true solution of eradicating caste/class prejudices through the ideal of universal humanism. For details on the concept see, Gupta, *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, p. 41.
14. One of the strong proponents of this theory, Swami Dayananda envisioned that these Aryas would have migrated from Tibet towards the *Aryavarttha*. It was the homeland of the Vedic civilisation, around the Ganga basin. From this territory the Aryas would have dominated the whole world till the war of the Mahabharata. These Aryas , according to Dayananda were elect people to whom the Veda had been revealed by the God and they used to speak in the sacred Sanskrit—perhaps the s ‘mother of all languages’. For details see, Jordens: *Dayananda Sarasvati*, p. 116.
15. Many Indian and western social scientists have discussed Hindu revivalism in India as something politically motivated or religiously intentional. While talking on the Hindu communal trends in twentieth century they often put nineteenth century Hindu resurgence as something similar with the ‘syndicated Hinduism’ (a term used by Prof Romila Thapar to narrate the RSS-BJP brand of Hindutva in twentieth century , see, Romila Thapar, *Syndacated Moksa*,pp.14-22. It would be a complete misinterpretation if nineteenth century Hindu resurgence is judged from the prisms of fundamentalism as in case of Prof Ashis Nandy who used flat descriptions while discussing fundamentalism and revivalism. For him the westernised/ semi-modernised native or the ‘zealot’ internalised the western ideals to modernise his

own culture and religion..... ‘if such a zealot is Muslim or Sikh we call him fundamentalist, if he is a Hindu we call him revivalist’. It seems that for him both fundamentalism and revivalism are interchangeable connotations and could be applied in every concerned moment! See, Nandy: *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopian Essays in the Politics of Awareness*, p.14.

16. Zavos: *Searching for Hindu Nationalism in Modern Indian History*, pp.2269-2276.
17. Jaffrelot: *op.cit.*
18. According to Nicholas Goofrick Clarke, ‘At the Hissarlik site of Troy, Schliemann had also found hundreds of objects ranging from pottery fragments and terra-cotta whorls to ornaments bearing the sign of the swastika. He immediately recognized this symbol from similar signs on pots found near Ko“nigswalde on the River Oder in Germany and speculated that the swastika was a “significant religious symbol of our remote ancestors,” which linked the ancient Teutons, the Homeric Greeks, and Vedic India. The extraordinary publicity surrounding Schliemann’s finds at Troy guaranteed a wide European audience for his speculations about an ancient Aryan symbol bridging the mythological and religious traditions of East and West’. See, Clarke: *Hitler’s Priestess*, pp.23-24.
19. It is indeed tempting to speculate that Schliemann’s Aryan swastikas were an important motivating factor, specifically present in Athens that led her to think about the Aryan tradition in India. What is certain, in any case, is that Portez’s pursuit of the Aryan myth in late 1931 led her beyond Greece and Europe to the cradle of the Indo-European race in Vedic India.
20. For a detailed study of Savitri Devi’s Nazi-Aryan philosophy the book by Konraad Elst could be consulted. Since the researches on Savitri Devi are limited Keonraad’s book might have received much attention from the readers, it also generated immense controversies and debates. In this book the author has given much importance to Savitri Devi as the true proponent of Nazi-Hindu connections in India. Elst, *Saffron Swastika*, pp. 534-600.
Also see Savitri Devi, *Hitleism and the Hindu World*, pp.18-20.
21. ‘Hitlerism and the Hindu World’, *op.cit.*
22. On controversy with Nehru, Savarkar declared, ‘Who are we to dictate to Germany, Japan or Russia or Italy to choose a particular form of policy of government simply because we woo it out of academical attraction? Surely Hitler knows better than Pandit Nehru does what suits Germany best. The very fact that Germany or Italy has so wonderfully recovered and grown so powerful as never before at the touch of Nazi or Fascist magical wand is enough to prove that those political “isms” were the most congenial tonics their health demanded’. See, Savarkar papers, microfilm, and rn 1 part 2, March 1937-May 1938, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, (NMML), New Delhi.
23. G. D. Savarkar translated this book in Marathi language, Savitri Devi, *A Warning to the Hindus*, pp.11-12.
24. The chapters are i).Indian Nationalism and Hindu Consciousness ii) The Human Value of Hinduism: Free Scientific Thought Applied To Religious Matters iii) The Human Value of Hinduism: Indian Paganism, The Last Living Expression of Aryan Beauty iv) The Defence of Hindudom: A Danger Signal v) Social Reforms vi) A Change of Mentality Among The Hindus: The Development of Nationalism vii) A Change of Mentality Among The Hindus Preparation For Resistance. ‘*A Warning to the Hindus*’ *op.cit.*p.8.
25. ‘*A Warning to the Hindus*’, *op.cit.*p.14.
26. Constitutional reforms, census reports and the development of separatist politics imparted sense of unity among a section of the Hindus the book inquired the causes of discrepancy in the rate of growth of the Hindus and Muslims. A deep concern had been paid for the future of the Hindu race threatened by the proselytizing ventures of the other religious communities. U.N Mukherjee, *Hindus- A Dying*

- Race*, Second Edition, 1910.
27. Datta: *Carving Blocks*, pp.26-31.
 28. The word *sangathan* is translated as organisation. Swami Shraddhananda helped its promotion by making it an attribute of the Aryan golden age. M.N Malviya also propagated this idea. Savarkar defined it as a movement for a common goal of moulding the Hindu race into a free and mighty Hindu nation. Later the sangathan movement was consolidated in the name of the Hindu Mahasabha. See, Prakash, *Review of the History and Work of the Hindu Mahasabha in Northern India*, p.164.
 29. 'A Warning to the Hindus', *op.cit.* pp.88 -89.
 30. Tangail Hindu Samaj, *Bangla Hindu Jatir Khoy o Pratikar*, Tangail, 1924, National Library, Calcutta (NL hereafter); Saileshnath Sharma Bisi, *Hindu Samajer Bartaman Samasya: Address of the Reception Committee at the Serajgunj Provincial Hindu Mahasammilani*, 1923 (NL); Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, *Bangiya Hindu Jati ki Dhangshanmukh*, Calcutta, 1910 (NL); Motilal Roy, *Hindu Jagaran*, Calcutta, 1926 (NL)
 31. 'A Warning to the Hindus', pp. 133-145.
 32. Ibid.
 33. See, Savarkar, *Hindu Rastra Darshan*, pp. 1-4.
 34. Heehs, *Shades of Orientalism*, pp. 177-180.
 35. Morrison. *Applied Orientalism in British India*, pp. 619-647.
 36. 'A Warning to the Hindus', *op.cit.* pp. 87-88.
 37. Elst: *Return of the Swastika*, p. 119.
 38. An act of intolerance on the part of the conventional custodian of the Kali temple at Munshiganj, (now in Bangladesh) had created severe tensions among the local Namasudras, the so-called untouchables. When a Namasudra was denied of a sip of the holy water with which the feet of the Goddess had been washed and he was jumped out upon by the priests and the others, this act of social embarrassment created deep anger and humiliation which had already been there in the minds of the Namasudras. Under the guidance of Swami Satyananda, a meeting was organised near the temple, under the patronage of the Hindu Mahasabha. It was presided over by Satyananda and it resolved that a mass procession of the Namasudras would make their entry into the Kali temple a reality by force, if needed. The local administration issued an order of injunction in the pretext of keeping peace in the locality; Swami Satyananda approached towards the temple and took a seat at the nat mandir.
O.M. Martin, District Magistrate, Dacca, to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, No.865-C,27 September, 1929, Liberty 18 October, 1929, Home (confidential), Govt. Of Bengal, File no 610-(1-5) of 1929, Calcutta.

References:

- Bisi, Saileshnath, Sharma: *Hindu Samajer Bartaman Samasya: Address of the Reception Committee at the Serajgunj Provincial Hindu Mahasammilani*. Calcutta, National Library, 1923.
- Clarke, Nicholas Goodrick: *Hitler's Priestess: Savitri Devi, The Hindu Aryan Myth and Neo Nazism*. New York, 1998.
- Datta, Pradip Kumar: *Carving Blocks: Communal Ideology in early Twentieth Century Bengal*. New Delhi, 1999.
- Dayananda, Swami: *The Light of Truth (Satyarth Prakash)*. Allahabad, 1981.
- Deuskar, Sakharam Ganesh: *Bangiya Hindu Jati ki Dhangshanmukh*. Calcutta, 1910, National Library, Calcutta,

- Devi, Savitri : *A Warning to the Hindus*. Calcutta, 1939.
- Devi, Savitri: 'Hitleism *National Socialist*,' no.2, (Fall 1980), pp.18-20.
- Elst, Keonraad: *Saffron Swastika: The Notion of Hindu Fascism*. New Delhi, 2001.
- Elst, Keonraad: *Return of the Swastika: Hate and Hysteria versus Hindu Sanity*. New Delhi, 2015, p.119.
- Heehs, Peter: 'Shades of Orientalism. Paradoxes and Problems in Indian Historiography' in *History and Theory*, Middletown (CT), USA: Wesleyan University, 2003, 42, pp.169–195.
- Gupta, Mahendranath: *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Calcutta, 1382. B.S, I, p.42, II pp.15-19, III.
- O.M Martin, District Magistrate, Dacca, to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division , No.865-C,27 September, 1929, Liberty 18 October, 1929, Home (confidential),Govt. Of Bengal, File no 610-(1-5) Of 1929, Calcutta.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe: 'Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building' in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 28, No. 12/13 (Mar. 20-27, 1993), pp. 517-524
- Jethmalani, Ram: 'Hindutva is a secular way of life' in *The Sunday Guardian*, 5 March 2015
- Jorderns, J. T. F: *Dayananda Sarasvati—His Life and Ideas*, Delhi, 1978.
- Mitter, P: 'Rammohun Roy and the New Language of Monotheism' in F Schmidt, ed, *The Inconceivable Polytheism*, Studies in Religious Historiography Vol. 1, No. 1, 1987, New York, p. 181.
- Morrison, A: 'Applied Orientalism in British India and Tsarist Turkestan' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.51, No.3, July 2009, pp.619-647.
- Mukherjee, U.N: *Hindus—A Dying Race*, Calcutta, Second Edition, 1910.
- Nandy, Ashis: *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopian Essays in the Politics of Awareness*, New Delhi, 1993.
- Prakash, Indra : *Review of the History and Work of the Hindu Mahasabha in Northern India 1923-1928*. Brill, Leide, 1975.
- Roy, Motilal Roy: *Hindu Jagaran*. Calcutta, 1926 , National Library, Calcutta.
- Tangail Hindu Samaj, *Bangla Hindu Jatir Khoy o Pratikar* , Tangail, 1924, National Library, Calcutta.
- Thapar, Romila: *Syndacated Moksa*, Seminar 313,1985, pp. 14-22.
- Savarkar Papers, microfilm, rn -1 part 2, March 1937-May 1938, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library,(NMML), New Delhi.
- Savarkar, V.D: *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*. Bombay 1949.
- Savarkar, V.D. *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*. Bombay 1969.
- Zavos, John: 'Searching for Hindu Nationalism in Modern Indian History: Analysis of Some Early Ideological Developments' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 32 (Aug. 7-13, 1999), pp. 2269-2276.