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The All India Hindu Mahasabha and the End of British Rule in India, 1939-1947

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Source: *Social Scientist*, Jul. - Aug., 1999, Vol. 27, No. 7/8 (Jul. - Aug., 1999), pp. 48-74

Published by: Social Scientist

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/3518013>

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*The All India Hindu Mahasabha and the End of  
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The Second World War fundamentally reshaped the relations between the British colonial state in India and the indigenous political parties, especially the so-called 'minor' organisations. This aspect, despite being an important facet of the 'process' of decolonisation, has been largely ignored in the existing historiography.<sup>2</sup> Unlike earlier analyses, which have concentrated on 'high-level' political negotiations between the Congress, Muslim League and the Raj, this paper focuses on the relationship of the Hindu Mahasabha, during the conflict and the period immediately after it, with the colonial authorities. It also attempts to evaluate the party's role in the political isolation of the Government of India between 1944 and 1947.

'HINDU NATIONALISM': A SURVEY OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY

There has been a spate of studies dealing with the growth and development of 'Hindu Nationalism' and 'Hindu Communalism' in the Indian sub-continent over last decade.<sup>3</sup> Rosalind O'Hanlon has pointed out, for instance, how research dealing with some of the wider aspects of social and political changes in the colonial context has advanced our understanding about the notions of 'communalism'.<sup>4</sup> A particular favourite amongst historians, current interest in the topic has to a large degree, been fuelled by recurring instances of riots between the Hindus and Muslims in post-independence India, as well as the political fallout of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992. Therefore, investigations into the 'communalist' nature of Indian politics has continued to be an important area of research, and studies have sought to examine

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*Social Scientist*, Vol. 27, Nos. 7- 8, July - August 1999

varied questions: why certain parties propounded the banner of 'Hindutva', why many have found this rather exclusionist ideology attractive, the differences between the social make-up of the parties at various levels of society, and, not least, the impact of this in fashioning political stances in selected localities.<sup>5</sup> For example, Christophe Jaffrelot's work has focused on key issues affecting and promoting the scope of Hindu nationalist parties like the Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, Jan Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party,<sup>6</sup> in which he has investigated the creation of an overtly Hindu identity through a variety of agencies.<sup>7</sup>

However, existing works on the Hindu Mahasabha have ignored its role in the ministerial period of 1937-39 and the wartime years.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, most of these studies have tended to concentrate primarily on the party's formative years and its activities in Northern India, where the Mahasabha's first local branch was established.<sup>9</sup> The resultant emphasis on the growth of the organisational network of the party in the Punjab and parts of the United Provinces in the 1920s has lent a distinct North Indian flavour to the historiography dealing with it. Moreover, it has caused colonial Western India, chiefly those parts of the Bombay Presidency and the Marathi speaking areas of Central Provinces, where the Mahasabha carved out a powerful base among upper caste Hindus, to be almost completely ignored. This article hopes to correct this oversight. In addition, Jaffrelot's characterisation of the 'Hindu Sabha movement' as a result of the internalisation of foreign literature and ideologies by Hindu leaders is questioned, and the significance of political factors at the local level in shaping Mahasabha policies and political decisions will be underlined.

This approach will also allow us to query the findings of yet another influential work: *Bengal Divided* by Joya Chatterji. Her generalisation that the Mahasabha had agreed to assist the British war-effort in order to be 'on the right side of the Raj' is a mite simplistic in the light of the conceptual frameworks utilised in a recent article dealing with nationalist politics during the Pacific war.<sup>10</sup> The tendency to depict the party as a 'communalist' and/or 'opportunist' body has caused Chatterji to neglect some of the other important issues: the attitude of the party rank and file to the Mahasabha Working Committee's wartime decisions. Moreover, the assumption that a 'grouping' of 'communal minded Hindus' in the Bengal Congress and the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha could dictate a national-level decision to endorse partition is very problematic,<sup>11</sup> especially as it

does not reflect attitudes prevalent in the party's branches elsewhere in the country, especially the Bombay Presidency and Central Provinces (Marathi), where the division of the country was vehemently opposed by the *Maharashtra Prantik Hindu Sabha*.<sup>12</sup>

The other common assertion made by historians about the Hindu Mahasabha is that it had close links with the Congress. But, these works have tended to describe the Mahasabha as a pressure group within the Indian National Congress. For example, Richard Gordon states that:

In its first phase, before 1922, the Hindu Mahasabha was not an all India organisation in any real sense, either in the extent of its organisation or in the scope of its activities. It was, at most, an inter-provincial organisation linking Hindu movements in the U.P. and the Punjab. As its conferences were held in conjunction with the annual Congress, it attracted casual platform support from other provinces...<sup>13</sup>

His arguments about the Mahasabha being an 'amorphous and stragglng group' within the Congress have continued to dominate later works: it is simply assumed that the Mahasabha could never shake off its linkages with the Congress and emerge as an independent political party. This article questions this view and tries to show that while this generalisation holds true for the period until 1938, that is before the accession of Savarkar as the President of the Mahasabha, the party was able to carve out a niche for itself in the Indian political arena during the Second World War.

#### TRENDS WITHIN THE HINDU MAHASABHA, 1938-42

The appointment of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar as the President of the Hindu Mahasabha marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of the organisation. Indeed, many have suggested that the accession of Savarkar to the presidency of the party instilled it with a 'new vigour and fresh hope'.<sup>14</sup> Savarkar's decision to transform the organisation into a political party had important repercussions on the party, affecting its interactions with the other political organisations and the colonial authorities.

Although there is no clear evidence about the circumstances surrounding the nomination of Savarkar, his selection was a considered move.<sup>15</sup> According to one source, his nomination resulted from the support of a faction that was in favour of turning the Sabha into a political party.<sup>16</sup> Before Savarkar, the organisation remained largely a North Indian venture, run by two dominant groups within the

organisation.<sup>17</sup> Disagreements about how to deal with the 'Muslim threat' arising from the Communal Award of 1932, and the debates between the reformers and the Sanathanists (orthodox) over the issues of elimination of caste restrictions, lack of funds had prevented the organisation from establishing a popular base among the Hindus.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's accession as the President was widely regarded as a blessing for the Sabha. Born into an Maharashtrian Brahmin family, at a village near Nasik, Savarkar represented a tradition of revolutionary nationalism.<sup>18</sup> His revolutionary background, activities in secret societies in India and London, a long spell of incarceration at the Andaman cellular jail, and political internment in Ratnagiri had enhanced his reputation of a great patriot and nationalist, and won him the respect of many Maharashtrians. His activities also made him quite notorious in official circles.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, his presidency immediately raised the prestige of the Mahasabha and won over the support of many new supporters. Maharashtra now became the organisational hub of the Sabha, even though the head office continued to be in New Delhi.<sup>20</sup> Savarkar's, and his personal efforts, accession also led to the setting up of new party branches in many localities of the Bombay Presidency and the Central Provinces.<sup>21</sup>

Savarkar's efforts for the party were assisted by the efforts of prominent activists like Dr. B. S. Moonje and L. B. Bhopatkar. They, and others like Bhai Parmanand, Chandragupta Vedalankar, Ganpat Rai and Indra Prakash, supported his decision to develop the Sabha as a political rival of the Congress. Nonetheless, the overall party programme continued to be based on Savarkar's own writings and ideas: here his concept of 'Hindu Nationalism' and 'Hindutva' dominated. In his definition about the aims and goals of the organisation he said that:

The Mahasabha is not in the main a Hindu-Dharma Sabha but is pre-eminently a Hindu Rashtra Sabha and is a pan-Hindu organisation shaping the destiny of the Hindu Nation in all its social, political and cultural aspects.<sup>22</sup>

This political ideology provided the party with a political identity that was markedly different from the Congress's professed aims of secularism and its ideas of constitutional advance.

SAVARKAR, ALL INDIA HINDU MAHASABHA AND THE CONGRESS,  
1938-42

The Congress's tactics in its victory in the elections of 1937

had provided the context of growing animosity between itself and the Sabha. The Congress success in garnering the Hindu vote had made many Sabhaites jittery, not least as they had seen - and represented themselves as the primary - if not sole - representatives of 'Hindu interests'. A remark by Savarkar at a public meeting at Nagpur in 1938 reflected this. He accused the Congress of following a policy of appeasement towards the Muslims and declared that, 'Witness the Congress attitude with regard to the Shahid Ganj affair, Delhi temple struggle, the Nizam and Bhopal questions. But is not such anti-national pro-Moslem attitude also an act of communalism?'<sup>23</sup> He went on to add that:

Let no Hindu Sangathanist pay a single farthing or lend a single member or register a single vote for the Congress ticket. We know by experience that even a staunch Hindu has to act against Hindu interests as soon as he is tainted by a Congress ticket under the Congress discipline and for the selfish fear that he would lose his job.... It is worst on the part of a Congressite who got himself elected on Hindu votes, it is downright treachery!<sup>24</sup>

Speeches apart, Savarkar ensured the party's active participation in the State's People's movement-led *satyagraha* [civil disobedience struggle] in the princely state of Hyderabad to protest struggle 'against the unjust [economic] treatment meted out to the Hindus'.<sup>25</sup> Ian Copland has pointed out how the Mahasabha's involvement in the *satyagraha* caused it to clash with the Congress yet again.<sup>26</sup> The Hyderabad branch of the Congress remained very active in the movement, and organised meetings at Sholapur, Pandharpur and Dhulia, where its members encouraged the forming of Hyderabad Hindu Satyagraha Mandals, Congress Satyagraha Camps, and Hyderabad Satyagraha Shibir.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Congress socialists were also reportedly active.<sup>28</sup> While many of them objected to the 'communal' nature of the Satyagraha, they nevertheless remained in the forefront of the formation of a separate Hyderabad State Subjects Satyagraha Committee.<sup>29</sup> In a reference to this, Copland has argued, convincingly, that like the Congress, 'the Mahasabha had its eyes on Hyderabad's generous allocation of 19 seats in the federal legislature, which were certain to be filled by Muslims if the Nizam had his way'.<sup>30</sup>

Savarkar consistently encouraged such attempts to distinguish the Sabha's programme from stated Congress policies, especially Gandhi's non-cooperation and its non-violent elements. The outbreak of the Second World War provided just such an opportunity. A

Working Committee meeting held on 10 September 1939, it was, albeit not unanimously, decided that the Provincial and District branches of the Sabha would take up the task of forming *Hindu Sainikikaran Mandals* [Hindu Military Associations].<sup>31</sup>

This was followed by the presentation, by Savarkar, of a new slogan. At the Madura annual session of the party (held in 1940), he argued the importance of his idea of 'Militarising' Hinduism.<sup>32</sup> This involved encouraged young Hindu men, through his new slogan, to join the various branches of the British Indian armed forces en masse. The reasoning for this was presented thus:

...the task of defending India from any military attack is of common concern to the British Government as well as to Indians and as latter are not in a position to carry out that responsibility unaided, there is ample room for cooperation between India and England.<sup>33</sup>

Walter Anderson has pointed out that the programme was also motivated 'by a belief that the Hindus had to prepare for the eventual struggle for power between Hindus and Muslims when the British finally vacated India'.<sup>34</sup> However, an important point that has thus far been ignored is that while this slogan can be traced to his revolutionary background, it was also seen by the Mahasabha Working Committee as a way of attracting the goodwill of a beleaguered government. This will be investigated in the next section.

#### NEGOTIATING A WARTIME TRUCE: THE BRITISH COLONIAL STATE AND THE MAHASABHA, 1937-1942

The provincial fortnightly reports of the last quarter of 1939, which coincided with the outbreak of war, increasingly mentioned the Sabha's activities in Maharashtra and other regions. Some commented on the party's increasing popularity amongst 'Hindus', as well as the proliferation of many new branches. The Bombay Presidency police abstracts presented a more nuanced, and cautious, estimate. Reporting about the first half of 1940, they announced an increase in party membership, albeit amongst a section of urban, upper-class Hindus.<sup>35</sup>

The Hindu Mahasabha had begun to receive extensive attention during the Hyderabad movement,<sup>36</sup> and the Director of Intelligence declared, in a reference to the party, in one of his weekly reports, that:

With the problem of communal relations occupying as it so does a prominent position in public mind, it is not surprising to find that, whatever the form in which it finds ultimate expression, opinion has

its roots in bias for or against Congress-predominantly Hindu in composition...<sup>37</sup>

But the onset of the war marked a change in the official perceptions towards the Mahasabha. The party's policy of encouraging the militarisation of Hinduism, and communications from local officials that reported an increase in party-membership, encouraged the Government of India to embark on negotiations with the Sabha.<sup>38</sup>

The Congress's considered decision to oppose co-operation in the war effort, and the League's ambiguous stance towards the conflict, had created a political impasse. In such a situation, the colonial authorities had become increasingly amenable to working with 'those whom they could find and not with whom they wanted to work'.<sup>39</sup> Co-operation with the Mahasabha at this stage, therefore, began to be considered a not unattractive option, not least due to Savarkar's offer to cooperate with the British war effort.<sup>40</sup> The basis of this decision was also a part of the Government's overall strategy: a strategy which aimed to create a counter-weight to the 'nationalist' propaganda carried by the Congress.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, the wisdom of the decision to forge a closer working relationship with the Mahasabha would not go unquestioned. Many in the colonial administration remained aware of the political risks involved in favouring the party at a time when the Muslim League was being allowed increasing space to spread its political ideology. Linlithgow, the Viceroy, seemed wary of Savarkar for this reason. At a meeting between Jinnah and Reginald Coupland, of Oxford University Press, the former referred to the growing official interest in the Mahasabha thus:

...the Muslims were mortally afraid that the British would fall into...[a] trap because... "the attitude of another brother" [Savarkar] who represented himself before the British public as more reasonable than the "Congress brother," was more subtle and more dangerous.<sup>42</sup>

The Mahasabha's show of defiance against the official ban imposed on their annual session of 1941, slated to be held at Bhagalpur, as it clashed with the celebrations of the Muslim festival of Id, contributed to official anxiety about the party. Large number of Hindus were sent to Bhagalpur to defy the orders, and quite a few *Jathas* were sent from different provinces. One District Magistrate reported that:

there can be little doubt that the excitement caused by the widely announced intention of an organised All India political party to defy a

Government order gave an extremely dangerous opportunity to the inflammable material that exists in Bhagalpur, and the elaborate police arrangements that were made served no less to discourage a communal outbreak than to nullify the defiance of the ban.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, *Prabhat Pheris* were organised and meetings were held in some parts of Bombay Presidency during which the pro-League attitude of the Government of India was publicised. These demonstrations put considerable pressures on the disciplinary forces of the state, and were unnaturally considered unwelcome in a period of increased administrative stress.<sup>44</sup>

However, by August 1942 a further change in the Government of India's attitude towards the Mahasabha was in evidence. This shift had been conditioned by the growing official sensitivity about the effects of the Congress's increasing aggressiveness on the Mahasabha rank and file. Until the launching of the 'Quit India' movement, Savarkar had been able to rally his party activists in support of his extreme anti-Congress pronouncements. After August 1942, this anti-Congress front began to crumble. These trends were reflected in the party members' reactions to Savarkar's description of the Congress satyagraha as nothing but a 'ridiculous jail seeking programme'. The call to boycott the Congress programme was ignored and Sabha members - provincial leaders as well as local activists - participated in the upsurge that followed the arrest of Gandhi and other Working Committee Members. Significantly, the events of 1942 caused an alliance between the local Congress and Mahasabha in the Central Provinces to be formed, *in opposition to Savarkar's wishes*. This was justified by one prominent participant - S. R. Date, the General Secretary of the Maharashtra Hindu Mahasabha, known in the Sabha circles as Mamarao Date - thus:

At that time ... I was supporting the movement for Non-Co-operation and Quit India on one hand we were supporting the recruitment on the other. That we were carrying on a dual role by supporting the freedom movement on one side and by supporting the (recruitment ) movement.<sup>45</sup>

These trends were reported by colonial officials with some alarm. The Governor of the Central Provinces noted the participation of Mahasabhaites in the 'Quit India' movement with much trepidation.<sup>46</sup>

And as result, colonial officials, both at central and provincial levels of the colonial administration, kept a close watch on the activities of the party. In addition to the routine reports, the

Mahasabha's activities were now reported in detailed and regular commentaries. However, bureaucratic reactions to the party often differed markedly. Whereas the officials in Delhi seemed unsure about the exact strength of the Mahasabha and often doubted its capability to make a difference to the war-effort, reports from the provinces remained divided about the issue. While Lumley, then Governor of Bombay, in consultations with Linlithgow, revealed his disdain for the Mahasabha and suggested that the Viceroy not bother meeting up with Savarkar,<sup>47</sup> reports from the localities of Bombay and the Central Provinces painted a very different picture.<sup>48</sup> Reports from district officials were premised on the Mahasabha's political stances within the localities, which often had a lot in common with the local Congress programme. Therefore, attempt to win over Mahasabhaites in the localities was often seen as a definite means of weakening local Congress organisations. Linlithgow, it seems, was attracted by such possibilities. As a result, he ignored Lumley's recommendations completely, and set up a meeting with Savarkar in order to build up a working wartime relationship with the party.<sup>49</sup> Savarkar's call for the militarisation of Hindus in Maharashtra<sup>50</sup> was especially attractive to the Viceroy, who believed that this ideological stance could assist the mobilisation of at least Maharashtrian recruits<sup>51</sup> into the armed forces.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, from the very outset the Government of India's negotiations with the Hindu Mahasabha hinged on a single point programme: an attempt to isolate, if not weaken, the Congress organisation. In this context, even a settlement between the Mahasabha and the Muslim League seemed attractive to some officials, and in one report the Director of Intelligence wrote that:

What may amount to no more than kite flying is the appearance in the Press of a report that there is a move on foot to bring together Jinnah and V. D. Savarkar, through the good offices of Dr. Ambedkar, in order to explore the possibility of a communal settlement independently of the Congress. While the proposal is of considerable interest, the influence of the Mahasabha as a political body is as yet of too little account to give rise to any reasonable hope of such an attempt being immediately fruitful.<sup>53</sup>

However, as the war progressed the Government of India became increasingly dissatisfied with the Mahasabha's stance towards the war. In Bombay and the Central Provinces, the Mahasabha links with the RSS was causing some concern,<sup>54</sup> not least after the riots in Chimur.<sup>55</sup> More significantly, the appointment of a new President in

S.P. Mookerjee, whose stated goal was to transform the Mahasabha into some kind of a mass movement, worried the authorities as well. At one level, this development was, not incorrectly, considered favourable to the Government's position. Wavell predicted that the constant battle between the faction favouring the British and the group favouring the Congress would reduce the probability of the Mahasabha launching a major anti-British offensive. At another level, though, the Mahasabha's unmitigated hostility towards the deliberations between the Congress and League, especially after the failure of Gandhi-Jinnah talks, alerted the colonial administrators to the communal threat posed by some of the more intransigent local factions of the party. Reports from the governors' secretariat of the Central Provinces and Bombay continually highlighted these concerns between 1945 and 1947.

#### A POLITICAL WATERSHED?: THE TENURE OF S.P. MOOKHERJEE, 1942-45

Savarkar expressed his desire to resign from the Presidentship of the Mahasabha after the annual session of 1942, ostensibly on account of ill health. Many, however, believed that the real reason informing his 'retirement' was his inability to rally the party around his decisions: a fact indicative of the decreasing influence of the Savarkarian faction on party policies and programmes. Upon his resignation, Savarkar declared, in a letter to L. B. Bhopatkar, that he desired that Dr. Syamaprasad Mookherjee succeed him.<sup>56</sup> This was a surprising development as Mookherjee had in the past been quite critical of Savarkar's decisions, not least the aggressive stance adopted against the Congress.

Mookherjee first came into contact with the Hindu Mahasabhaites when Savarkar presided over the provincial session at Khulna in Bengal in 1938, and noted in his diary how Savarkar's ideals and his belief in the need to improve the conditions of the Bengali Hindus had affected him.<sup>57</sup> However, Mookherjee was equally concerned about defending his political hold in Bengal. Moreover, in a province with a Muslim majority, he could not afford to antagonise the Congress, a powerful organisation with a predominantly Hindu leadership.<sup>58</sup> Thus, with the aid of a carefully balanced political platform, Mookherjee's tenure reflected a tendency to enlist the support of a greater cross-section of society. For instance, his speeches became a subject of wide speculation, criticism and debate. His carefully worded speeches earned him a favourable reaction from certain quarters of the nationalist press, which described them as

'dignified and dispassionate'.<sup>59</sup> Some newspapers even called his speeches a step forward in 'national interest'.<sup>60</sup> His address delivered at the Bilaspur session in 1944, received a special mention in the press. In it, Mookherjee had emphasised the need to attract the labour and kisan [peasant] groups to the Mahasabha fold. This was characterised as a 'considerable and appreciable improvement upon the Presidential address of the Sabha for the last several years.'<sup>61</sup>

The difference in the approaches of Savarkar and Mookherjee had been visible in almost every decision and activity adopted by the Mahasabha ever since 1941. But Mookherjee's success in creating new patterns of working relations within the party, and his interactions with the Congress and the Muslim League highlighted the extreme seriousness of the ideological divergences amongst different factions of the party. This also exposed the disagreements between Savarkar and Mookherjee; a fact highlighted by the discussions during the meetings of the Mahasabha Working Committee, as well as the private correspondence between the two. Nevertheless, Mookherjee was able to survive the opposition from the Savarkarian faction and develop his politically pragmatic policies, albeit with the support of influential landed magnates like Mehr Chand Khanna of Punjab and Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth of Kotra. The first evidence of his success in involving the party in endeavours not endorsed by Savarkar was the 'Non-Party Leaders Conference',<sup>62</sup> which was convened by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru towards the middle of March 1941.<sup>63</sup> Savarkar made it quite clear that the involvement of Mahasabhaites in any nationalist agitation was purely in an 'individual capacity' and not as a representative of the organisation.<sup>64</sup> Mookherjee also held talks with Gandhi just prior to the launching of the 'Quit India' movement, and 'discussed' the political situation with him.<sup>65</sup>

The scale of participation by Mahasabha activists in the 'Quit India' movement of August 1942 made it impossible for the Savarkarian faction to deny the existence of pro-Congress sympathies within the organisation. Indeed, Mookherjee and his group decided to adopt a very pragmatic line, in which support for the imprisoned Congress leadership would be regularly paraded. However, care was taken to ensure that such support did not erode the Sable's separate political identity, since any merger with the Congress would almost certainly have caused the party to be ignored by the government of India. Mookherjee's clever - and careful - balancing act is highlighted through a variety of factors. He remained willing to highlight his political differences with the Congress in particular spheres, and

substituted the 'Quit India' slogan with a catch phrase of his own making: "Settle with India".<sup>66</sup> Savarkar, in contrast, remained critical of such a stance, and advised Sabha members not to give up their posts in the Viceroy's Executive Council under any circumstances. In September 1942, he made a statement from Bombay instructing party activists 'who happened to be members of municipalities, local bodies, legislatures or those serving in the army, navy airforce or working in the ammunition factories to stick to their posts and continue to perform their regular duties'.<sup>67</sup>

Nonetheless, Mookherjee persisted with his attempts to forge links with the Congress, and insisted that the Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee pass a resolution in the immediate aftermath of the 'Quit India' upsurge. The committee, which had seven members, and included even Savarkar, (the other members were Dr. Moonje, V. G. Deshpande, M. C. Khanna, M. D. Seth and S. P. Mookherjee),<sup>68</sup> declared that 'important political groups' or parties should form a united front, 'which w[ould] force the British Government to yield and come to terms with India'.<sup>69</sup> In addition, letters advertising this resolution were sent to the leaders of various political organisations, including the Depressed Classes, Muslim League, Sikhs and Indian Christians, and their support for the demand was invited.<sup>70</sup> Mookherjee was quite successful in that his efforts aroused the interest of many liberals and 'also some Hindu minded Congress leaders'.<sup>71</sup> In fact, the Mahasabha's stance ensured an invitation for Mookherjee and Savarkar to take part in the meeting Standing Committee of the Non Parties Conference, organised by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru in November 1942.<sup>72</sup> While Mookherjee attended, it is not certain whether Savarkar accepted the invitation. However, he took the notable step of releasing a statement that appealed to all 'patriotic parties to join hands with Dr. Syamaprasad Mookherjee';<sup>73</sup> perhaps in recognition of the latter's complete control over the party Working Committee.<sup>74</sup> Although Mookherjee's activities did not radically improve his political stature at the national level, it had the effect of strengthening his influence within the Mahasabha. Between 1942 and 1943, Mookherjee seemed clearly to have the support of most factions of the party, especially those led by members from the Punjab and the United Provinces who had been unhappy with Savarkar's leadership. His preponderance within the party was revealed yet again when Savarkar, at Mookherjee's prodding, released 'a national appeal to Mahatma Gandhi himself to break the fast'.<sup>75</sup>

However, the differences between Savarkar and Mookherjee

would soon be brought into the open yet again. This was occasioned by the revelation that the latter had been conducting secret negotiations with Jinnah.<sup>76</sup> The two had met once in 1942, during Mookherjee's efforts to forge an united front of all political parties.<sup>77</sup> The talks were reported to have been carried out through the offices of Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth (General Secretary of the Mahasabha), to whom Jinnah had allegedly proposed certain terms for the settlement of the political deadlock in India. Savarkar disapproved of this, and he even attacked Mookherjee's and Seth's overtures towards the Congress during the Kanpur session of the Mahasabha in 1944.<sup>78</sup>

But Mookherjee's policies did not produce the desired effect, and the Government of India refused to give it the importance the party felt entitled to. Thus, the Mahasabha was excluded from the talks held at Simla in June 1945, a failure which Mookherjee explained thus:

In spite of all that has been said in favour of the Mahasabha, I knew where its weakness lay. Even though the logic behind our statements was irrefutable, we had failed to keep our struggle in line with our convictions. The people of this country, especially Hindus, wanted an organisation that could call upon its workers to sacrifice everything... It is true that the Hindu Mahasabha displayed a lot of courage and a spirit of sacrifice during the Hyderabad and our Bhagalpur session, but despite my efforts, the Sabha was not able to launch an all India movement. Even though my proposal was accepted in the open session of the Sabha, problems, always rose when it came to implementing it.<sup>79</sup>

The Viceroy even refused the Hindu Mahasabha committee's application requesting to hold a meeting with Gandhiji and the other Congress leaders in detention.<sup>80</sup> The shifting official attitudes towards the Mahasabha is examined in the following sections.

#### RESPONSES OF THE COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION, 1943-1947

Right up to 1943, the difficult war conditions exercised a powerful influence on the Government's perceptions of the political situation. The advances made by Hitler's armies, the Japanese successes in Asia and the socio-economic dislocation in South Asia had combined to inform the Viceroy's decision of retaining the loyalty of parties and interests groups supportive of the British war-effort. In this context, efforts were made by the Government of India to forge a closer working relationship with the Hindu Mahasabha. However, the official stance towards the party underwent a change after the

accession of Mookherjee to the Sabha presidency. Notably, the new president's attempts to convert the party into a mass-based organisation was unpopular in official circles, whose employees became increasingly restive about the similarities in the political stances of Sabha and Congress controlled bodies and organisations.

Although some reports regarding the party suggested that the Mahasabha had no local or national support, other considerations forced the authorities to retain an interest in the party. For example, the tendency of the Mahasabha rank and file to sympathise - if not support - the Congress's stance during and after the 'Quit India' movement, bothered colonial administrators. Even Mookherjee's strategies were very often interpreted as nothing more than 'strong' pro-Congress tendencies and the Mahasabha was presented as a prototype of the Congress. In a sense, the official observers were not far off the mark. Between 1943 and 1945, the relation between the Congress and the Mahasabha became so ambiguous that it became sometimes almost impossible to distinguish between the strategies of the two. Mookherjee's sponsorship of a relief campaign during the Bengal famine, and his founding of an English daily newspaper called the *Nationalist*, which criticised the Muslim League-led Bengal Government's policies, only confirmed the Government's doubts about his motives and his declarations of support for the war-effort.

Beginning from 1943, there were considerable debates between the colonial officials on the policy to be formulated towards the party. Different versions on how the Mahasabha would react or the impact the Gandhi-Jinnah talks would have on the party ranks suggested that the Government yet did not consider the Sabha as a spent political force. Wavell, who wrote to the Secretary of State, Leopold Amery, was convinced that the failure of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks was going to be welcomed by the Sabhaites and would lead to a split. 'The breakdown has I think, been a relief to the Mahasabha, Sikhs and to many Congressmen', Wavell declared.<sup>81</sup> But his views were not necessarily shared by the provincial authorities. The Governor of Sind disagreed with the Viceroy, and said that:

I do not agree with the estimate in the official report that this failure of the talks between Gandhi and Jinnah will accentuate the division of Hindu opinion. Rather I should say the extreme Hindu Mahasabhaites are now satisfied that Gandhi is at heart as intransigent as they are, in spite of his willingness to meet with Jinnah. The fact that these conversations were immediately followed by Gandhi's birthday celebrations, with every newspaper full of syndicated insincerity's of

congratulation, has also played its part in bridging the gap between the extreme and moderate Hindu opinion.<sup>82</sup>

Joya Chatterjee has pointed out how after the failure of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks in 1944, 'some frightened Hindu elements of the Congress were reported to be attracted towards the Hindu Mahasabha, particularly, under the new and broader programme outlined by Dr. Mookherjee'.<sup>83</sup>

Wavell's decision to exclude the Mahasabha from further all-party negotiations was influenced, in no small measure, by the trends within the organisation. The appointment of Mookherjee as party president, and his pro-Congress stance made the Viceroy suspicious of the Mahasabha's motives and stance. His apprehensions were exacerbated by the party activists obvious sympathy for many Congress political programmes, and the Mahasabha leadership's frequent inability to curtail their active participation in movements like the 'Quit India' movement. Therefore, Wavell explained the reasons behind his decisions to exclude the Mahasabha by declaring that the 'Mahasabha was a curious body; [as] many of its rank and file seem[ed] to [be] Congressmen, and on big political issues w[ould] follow Gandhi rather than Syamaprasad Mookherjee or Savarkar'.<sup>84</sup>

The exclusion of the Mahasabha from the discussions to be held at Simla in June 1945 marked the breaking point of the party's negotiable relationship with the British. At a meeting on June 23rd and 24th, the Committee passed several resolutions denouncing Wavell's decision to exclude the Sabha.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, it was at this very juncture that the Mahasabha leadership began to make fervent proclamations against the Congress, and attempted to re-assert its overtly Hindu nationalist image.<sup>86</sup> Suddenly, the authorities were surprised to find even Mookherjee echoing Savarkar's anti-Congress proclamations.<sup>87</sup> This volte face in attitude towards the Congress corresponded with another, much less comfortable shift. The Mahasabha suddenly began to direct its criticisms at the British authorities in India. For example, a speech made by Balshastri Hardas at Poona attacked the colonial state thus:

...the present time was favourable for a revolt against the British Government in India, as discontent was widespread among the masses on account of scarcity of foodstuffs and if all political parties made a united attempt the British would have to Quit India... India should therefore be prepared on the lines of the INA to deal a decisive blow to oust the British Government from India.<sup>88</sup>

Not unsurprisingly, statements like these were frowned upon, criticised and declared, by colonial administrators at all levels of the state, to be undesirable since they demoralised the employees of the government services.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, the party's self-conscious assertion of a 'Hindu Nationalist' image worried the Raj, due to its capability to foment serious disorders at the time the administrative edifice was struggling to readjust to the end of the war and the rapidly changing constitutional situation. Official attempts to monitor the activities of the Mahasabha and associations related to it therefore increased. For instance, reports emanating from the offices of the Intelligence Bureau began to comment on, and worry about, a sudden increase in the two volunteer organisations of the Hindu Mahasabha. Anxious reports declared that the membership of the Hindustan National Guards - often also referred to as the Hindu Rashtra Dal - and the Ram Sena [the Army of Ram] had shot up to thirteen thousand activists,<sup>90</sup> and referred to its links with other Hindu volunteer groups which were reported to possess firearms.<sup>91</sup>

Roger Finney, the Central Intelligence Officer, wrote in 1946 that any further delay in granting India independence would worsen the communal situation and pose serious security challenges.<sup>92</sup> Other officials - attached to bodies as diverse as the Department of Information and Broadcasting and the Commander in Chief's office - reiterated these fears.<sup>93</sup> The Commander in Chief, Auchinleck, envisaged the possibility of a religious war between the Hindus and Muslims, during which it would be impossible to rely on the Indian army or police forces.<sup>94</sup> The gradual increase in power of the Savarkarian faction after the war led to the Mahasabha releasing increasing numbers of communal proclamations and anti-Pakistan slogans.<sup>95</sup> This, in turn, caused officials to fear that there would be a rise in conflagrations, in which the private armies would play a prominent part. The Government of India's Intelligence Bureau, like the provincial governments, shared these worries. A report dealing with the United Provinces declared that:

The most striking feature of the communal situation in this province during the last few weeks has been the emergence of orthodox Hinduism as potent factor. The Hindu Mahasabha, which had very little following or political background, as a purely religious body, have come into the open, and are rallying Hindus all over the country to fight Islam. At their meetings speakers have also been critical of the Congress Interim Government- for their failure to protect the Hindus of East Bengal and

for their support to the Muslims. The effect of the call to religion can be seen in Benares, where the circulation of the two local Congress newspapers has greatly diminished, while that of the single orthodox Hindu local daily has much increased. This province faces communal anarchy unless very strong action and immediate action is taken to restrain the activities of volunteer bodies, relief committees.<sup>96</sup>

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper has tried to highlight the British colonial state's attempts to forge links with the Hindu Mahasabha in order to isolate the Congress between 1942 and 1944. However, the official efforts to manipulate the Mahasabha stance floundered as pressures from the party rank and file mounted, and changes in the Working Committee leadership, and a concomitant increase in influence of particular factions, occurred. In the light of this, how is the Hindu Mahasabha's wartime role and its links with the process of decolonisation to be interpreted?

Between 1937 and 1942, during the presidency of Savarkar, the Mahasabha devised policies that were consciously opposed to those enunciated by the Congress Working Committee, especially its principle of secularism. But the accession of a new president in 1942 brought about a marked change in the party's position towards the Congress and the colonial state. However, it must be noted that these shifts in stance were based on careful political considerations. Mookherjee was a clever politician. He realised that the difficult wartime situation presented an opportunity to extract special privileges for his party. At the same time, he was worried about destroying its links with the Congress, which, as every astute politician of the time realised, would inevitably play a significant role in the post-war constitutional deliberations. These calculations are clearly revealed in the sequence of events between 1942 and 1946. For instance, Mookerjee refused to denounce the 'Quit India' movement of August 1942, without criticising the official use of force during the pacification of the uprising.

However, as it became apparent that he - and his party - were being criticised for such a stance and were being accused of collaborating with the Raj, Mookerjee found it expedient suddenly to resign from the coalition ministry in Bengal, declaring that he could no longer bear to witness the injustices being heaped on the people of Bengal by an unjust alien government and, by implication, its Muslim allies. His letter of resignation was a public relations masterpiece: carefully thought out and worded with colourful nationalist platitudes,

it was released for circulation amongst newspapers, political activists and press agencies. A letter exchanged between Mookherjee and Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth of Kotra even suggests that the Mahasabha president was also quite keen to get the letter published in booklet form outside Bengal.<sup>97</sup> The tone of the communication inevitably caused it to become the target of official censors,<sup>98</sup> but even the news of such 'repression' was made skilful use of by Mookherjee's faction, which likened him to someone who had been punished merely for holding nationalist views.<sup>99</sup> The Governor, Herbert, writing to Linlithgow, the Viceroy at the time, presented the issue thus:

Mookherjee's resignation is due to his desire to remain in limelight and maintain the leadership of Hindus. His prestige is waning, for Congress movement is practically dead and even in Midnapore opinion is turning against agitators.... In view of the tone of his letters and his recent attitude, I shall accept his resignation.<sup>100</sup>

But did the Mahasabha's stance and activities contribute to the British decision to depart from India? In the phase between 1943 and 1944, the Mahasabha blunted official attempts to forge an alliance against the Congress at all levels of the administration, albeit for varying reasons. This had the effect of weakening the Government of India's position in a situation of extreme political uncertainty, when the relationship with the state, the Congress and the League were being re-negotiated by the vast majority of the Raj's indigenous allies. Mookherjee's antics, which from 1943 onwards began to manifest itself in a laboured defence of the Congress against the official attempts to underline Gandhi's, Nehru's and Patel's responsibility for the 'Quit India' disturbances, made him and his party unpopular in official circles.<sup>101</sup> It seems that Mookherjee actually thought that such an approach would actually increase the party's influence in India and cause the colonial authorities to accord it more importance. The reverse happened, and as the principal policy makers with the Government of India veered around to the view that the Congress could no longer be isolated, or indeed, be ignored, the Mahasabha was seen to have lost its erstwhile usefulness.

However, the Mahasabha seemed to weaken the colonial administration in yet another distinct way. Savarkar's return to active politics from the end of 1945, resulted in a paradox. If pro-Congress sentiments witnessed during Mookherjee's tenure had affected the Government's attempts to strike an alliance with the Sabhaites, the re-assertion of Savarkar's control over the party machinery became equally problematic. Instead of echoing his earlier pro-British

sentiments, Savarkar now encouraged the promotion of an overtly 'Hindu' agenda that was not only anti-Congress and anti-Muslim League, but also rabidly anti-government. Such an unexpected change in the approach taken by Savarkar revealed that the transition in the Mahasabha's leadership from Savarkar to Mookherjee, and the change in the party's position, had only been a temporary one. Savarkar's return had an immediate effect on the party membership, especially in Maharashtra, where many Mahasabhaites rallied yet again to his renewed faith in his old ideals of revolutionary nationalism. This response can be explained by a disenchantment with Mookherjee tactics, and was articulated in the formation of armed volunteer organisations, in active collaboration with the R.S.S., in accordance with Savarkar's wishes.<sup>102</sup> The Savarkarian faction's honeymoon with the colonial state had now truly ended, and the bitter separation, ironically, brought about a notable reunion amongst all the Sabha factions, as they chafed in remarkable unison against the Raj.

An examination of the historically contemporary official communications dealing with the party in the period between August 1946 and August 1947 revealed that in a situation where official nervousness about the Raj's reduced power and influence was growing by the week, especially in relation to the possibility of a violent upsurge in which the British might be trapped or become the target, the Mahasabha's increasing aggressiveness was unwelcome. The capability of these Hindu organisations to foment trouble might have been over-estimated by colonial administrators, but the fact remains that their calculations about whether to hold on to empire were deeply influenced by their understanding of the strength of the Raj. By 1947, there seemed to be a widespread agreement amongst officials - both British and Indian - about its weakness, as well as the might of its nationalist foes. The activities of the Mahasabha and the R.S.S. figured prominently in their pessimistic analyses of their crumbling authority.

#### NOTES

1. We are grateful to Drs. Gordon Johnson, Jim Masselos, Bruce Graham, Norbert Peabody, Subho Basu and David Taylor for their assistance in sharpening some of the ideas presented here. This paper is a part of a larger research project that has been funded by generous awards made by the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust, Pembroke College (Cambridge) and the Charles Wallace India Trust.
2. Exceptions to this trend are two articles dealing with the Communist Party of India and official policies of wartime censorship during the Second World War respectively. The first offers a revisionist analysis of the wartime 'co-operation' between the C.P.I. and the British colonial state. See, S.

- Bhattacharya, 'The Colonial State and the Communist Party of India, 1942-45: A Reappraisal'. *South Asia Research*, Vol.15, No.1, Spring 1995. The second provides insights into the activism of political parties at the different levels of the colonial administration, and the official efforts to counter such political opposition. See S. Bhattacharya,, 'Wartime Policies of State Censorship and the Civilian Population: Eastern India, 1939-45. *South Asia Research*, Vol 17, No 2. Autumn 1997.
3. Majid Siddiqi and Gyanendra Pandey have raised many important questions about the nature of nationalist mobilisation in the localities. They have both referred to the use, the effectiveness and the results of religious idioms during the Congress Civil Disobedience movements, and thereby engendered useful debates about 'Hindu Nationalism' and communalism' within the colonial context. See, M. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: United Provinces, 1918-1922* (New Delhi, 1978), and G. Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34* (Delhi, 1973).
  4. See, for instance, Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Historical Approaches to Communalism: Perspectives from Western India' in P. Robb (ed.), *Society and Ideology: Essays in South Asian History* (Delhi, 1994), pp 247-266. Over the years several scholars have undertaken research in a wide variety of disciplines. For a detailed account which throws light on the development of communalism and tensions between the Hindus and Muslims of India, See S. Freitag (ed.), *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley, 1989); P. Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism* (Delhi, 1996), G. Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, 1990); S. Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947* (Delhi, 1991); B. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics* (Cambridge, 1990), and J. Chatterji, *Bengal Divided* (Cambridge, 1995).
  5. See, C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (Delhi, 1996).
  6. For an exploration of some of the themes which Jaffrelot discusses in his articles see 'The Genesis and Development of Hindu Nationalism in the Punjab: From the Arya Samaj to the Hindu Sabha (1875-1910)' *Indo British Review* Vol 21,(1) pp 3-40, and 'Foreign Influences in the Making of Hindu Nationalism with Special Reference to Racism' in CNRS-CERI.
  7. Jaffrelot has examined a wide range of issues: the promotion of *Shuddhi* and *Sanghatan*, the role played by rich, landed, Hindu leaders who controlled and funded the local Sabhas and the influence of foreign literature in the ideological construction and writings of 'Hindu Nationalism. He also argues that the ideological content of 'Hindu Nationalism' is more or less a 'invention of a tradition which can be described as a strategy of 'stigmatisation and emulation' borne out of a perceived threat to the Hindu community and therefore poses a potential danger to the secularist foundations of independent India. C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*.
  8. The Congress had emerged successful in the Provincial Assembly elections of 1937 winning 711 out of 1585 seats; with a complete majority in the five provinces of U.P., C.P., Madras, Bihar, and Orissa. Ministries were elected in 11 provinces. The ministries were in power until the outbreak of the war. (1937-39).
  9. *Home Department, Political Part A, Proceedings Nos 29-31, 50-53, National*

- Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter N.A.I.)*. For the origins of the Mahasabha movement see I. Prakash, *A Review of the History and Work of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Sanghatan Movement* (New Delhi, 1938).
10. See, S. Bhattacharya, 'The Colonial State and the Communist Party of India'.
  11. For conflicting views on the second partition of Bengal, see J. Chatterji, *Bengal Divided* and P. Chatterji, 'The Second Partition of Bengal' in *The Present History of West Bengal* (Delhi, 1997).
  12. V. G. Deshpande, Dr. B. S. Moonje, V. D. Savarkar and L. B. Bhopatkar of the Maharashtra Prantik Hindu Mahasabha were against partition. Letter from V. G. Deshpande to V. D. Savarkar, May 21, 1947. File C 15, All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers (hereafter A.I.H.M.P.), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter N.M.M.L.), New Delhi. S. R. Date, *Maharashtra Hindu Sabheycha Karyacha Itihas*, (Marathi), (Poona, 1975)
  13. R. Gordon, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926' *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, 2 (1975), pp. 145-203.
  14. Anil Kumar Mishra, *Hindu Mahasabha: Ek Adhyayan, 1906-1947* (Delhi, 1988), pp.162-163. Walter Anderson also describes the Mahasabha as a loosely organised group collected around prominent individuals before Savarkar's accession'. See W. Anderson, 'The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh-II Who Represents the Hindus', *Economic and Political Weekly* March 18, 1972, pp. 633.
  15. It was rumoured that N. C. Kelkar, a prominent Poona Congress leader, had encouraged Savarkar to accept the leadership of the Hindu Mahasabha and carry on the Tilakite tradition. See, I. Rothermund, *Gandhi and Maharashtra: Nationalism and the Provincial Response*, *South Asia*, August 1971, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 70.
  16. *Mahratta*, August 30, 1940.
  17. The two prominent groups were Dr. Moonje, N. C. Kelkar and Bhai Parmanand and Swami Shradhanand and Lala Lajpat Rai. For more details see, W. Anderson, 'The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh-II Who Represents the Hindus', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 18, 1972, pp. 633.
  18. See D. Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, (Marathi) (Bombay, 1972), pp. 2-3.
  19. Bombay Presidency Police Abstract of Intelligence. (hereafter B.P.P.A.I.) Report of May 29, 1937. See Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, (Marathi) (Bombay, 1972).
  20. *Mahratta* November 18, 1939; S. R. Date, *Maharashtra Hindu Sabhecha Karyacha Itihas*, (Marathi), (Pune, 1975), pp.259.
  21. Letter from Savarkar to Indra Prakash, February 18, 1940. File C 26, A.I.H.M.P., N.M.M.L., New Delhi. Many other letters from Savarkar to the other leaders can be found in some of the files which suggest that he did make the effort of establishing more branches of the Mahasabha all over India.
  22. Savarkar's Presidential speech at the 19th session of the All India Hindu Mahasabha in Ahmedabad, 1937. *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya Volume VI :Hindu Rashtra Darshan* (Poona, 1964), pp. 299.
  23. Savarkar's Presidential speech at the 20th session of the All India Hindu Mahasabha in Nagpur, 1938. *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya Volume VI: Hindu Rashtra Darshan* (Poona, 1964), pp. 335.

24. *Ibid.*, pp.334.
25. The Reception Committee in a self-congratulatory letter described the popularity achieved by the Mahasabha, December 12, 1938. Savarkar Papers (Microfilms). N.M.M.L., Delhi. Ian Copland has problematised this representation of the satyagraha and its central message that Hindus were being oppressed. He points out in his analysis that both politically and economically Hindus were actually in a better position than a significant element of Hydrabadi Muslims. See I. Copland, "Communalism" in *Princely India: The Case of Hyderabad, 1930-1940*. *Modern Asian Studies* 22, 4 (1988), pp. 783-814.
26. *Ibid.*
27. B.P.P.A.I. (Secret) November 19 and 26, 1938. Paras 980 & 1003, Vol LI, No 7.
28. Letter of Intelligence Bureau Home Department (Secret), July 21, 1938. IOR R/1/1/3173 'Congress activities in the Hyderabad'. One such private meeting of the Congress socialists was held in Bombay where the editor of the Marathwada paper delivered a lecture on the subject "Situation in the Nizam's Dominion". The speaker criticised the administration of the state which he said was being run in the interests of the Muslims 'to the entire detriment of Hindus'. At the end of his speech which was described by the Home Department officials as 'very impressive', he requested the audience and members to 'take up cudgels on behalf of the oppressed Hindus in the State. Intelligence Bureau, Home Department (Secret) Political Department Papers IOR R/1/1/3173 'Congress Activities in Hyderabad State'.
29. This included members like P. M. Bapat, Malik Khan, S. K. Limaye, N. G. Gore, R. N. Abhyankar, Tulpule and Raghvendra Sharma. 'Congress Activities in Hyderabad State'. Intelligence Bureau, Home Department (Secret) Political Department Papers IOR R/1/1/3173.
30. *Ibid.*, Although Copland points out that the Hindu community of Hyderabad was by no means monolithic he stops short of examining the possible sympathetic attitude that some Hindus might have had towards the Mahasabha or the pro-Hindu inclinations of members who styled themselves as the Hyderabad State Congress. In the case of the Hyderabad Satyagraha, the State Congress members lent their support to the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj activities. This was in direct contrast to an earlier trend, and the one seen during the tenure of Mookherjee, where many local Sabha members joined the Congress.
31. Meeting of the Dadar Working Committee, 1940. File C 30 A.I.H.M.P., N.M.M.L., Delhi.
32. Savarkar's Presidential speech at the 22nd session of the All India Hindu Mahasabha at Madura, 1940. *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya: Hindu Rashtra Darshan, Writings of Swatantrya Veer V. D. Savarkar Vol VI*, (Poona, 1964).
33. *Indian Annual Register*, (hereafter *I.A.R.*) July-December, 1939, Vol II, pp.34.
34. A. Walter 'The Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh-II'.
35. Between 1938-39, the Mahasabha established as many as 24 branches in Maharashtra. A summary of these can be found in the various reports of these two years of the B.P.P.A.I..
36. An extensive summary of the activities of the Mahasabha in connection with the Hyderabad struggle can be found in the B.P.P.A.I. (Secret) Reports. The reports of the two years (1938-39) list the nature and extent of activities

- of the Maharashtra branch in support of the movement.
37. Weekly Report of the Director of Intelligence, (Home Department), Delhi, February 3, 1940. (hereafter Intelligence Report) IOR L/P&J/12/482.
  38. The number of Hindus as commissioned officers in the army had increased from two to ten lakhs. *Samagra Savarkar Wangamaya: Hindu Rashtra Darshan Vol VI* (Poona, 1964), pp.431 There are some letters in the Savarkar files that suggest that quite a few of these recruits showed a sympathetic attitude towards the Mahasabha. Political preferences of others is difficult to discern.
  39. Letter from Linlithgow to Roger Lumley, the Governor of Bombay, October 13, 1940. See IOR MSS. Eur 125/54 Linlithgow Collection. This decision was in agreement Secretary of the State, Leopold Amery.
  40. The Mahasabha's representative on the expanded Viceroy's Council was Sir J. P. Shrivastava. He was a prominent business man in the U. P. and represented the Upper India Chambers of Commerce in the Provincial Legislative Assembly. After some time at the Manchester School of Technology, Sir Jwalaprasad was the Industrial Chemist in the U. P. government, leaving this post for the textile business in Cawnpore. In 1931, Minister of Education and Industries and later Finance Minister in the U. P. government. He resigned in 1937. He was also a member of the National Defence Council. He was also a member of the Mahasabha delegation that met Sir Stafford Cripps. IOR L/I/1/754, File No 462/21E 'Expansion of Viceroy Executive Council and Indian Representation: Note on J. P. Shrivastava'.
  41. For a similar argument with respect to the war time relationship between the Communist party and the British Government see, S. Bhattacharya, *The Colonial State and the Communist Party of India*'.
  42. Letter from Lumley to Linlithgow, January 15, 1942. Linlithgow Collection, IOR MSS Eur F 125/56.
  43. Report on the Hindu Mahasabha session at Bhagalpur, 1941 by the District Magistrate. IOR L/P&J/8/683.
  44. Extract from a secret letter from Amery to Linlithgow, December 30, 1941. IOR L/P&J/8/683.
  45. Transcribed Tape Recording of S. R. Date, S 32, Centre of South Asian Studies Archive Collection, Cambridge.
  46. Letter from Deputy Commissioner to the Commissioner, Nagpur Division, August 24, 1942 IOR MSS Eur. F 125/63.
  47. Lumley's information on the Mahasabha was based on the opinion of some ex-ministers of the Congress in Bombay. Telegram from Secretary to Governor of Bombay to Secretary to the Viceroy. October 8, 1939. IOR MSS Eur F125/53.
  48. Another example of the debates between various levels of colonial officials and the factors responsible for the Government's strategy of 'non-interference' is the 1920-22 Non-Cooperation Movement. Although the situation created by the outbreak of war and the Quit India movement was by far the most worst moments for the British Government, it is interesting to note how during both events, different levels of Government's decision making authorities continued to carry out an re-appraisal of their policies. In formulating these policies, however, the Central decision making officials faced opposition, disagreements or warnings from the army, senior

- Government servants and in some cases the Cabinet in London. See, 'The Govt of India and the First Non-Cooperation Movement, 1920-1922', pp. 23-53 in D. A. Low, *Rearguard Action: Selected Essays on Late Colonial Indian Politics* (Delhi, 1996).
49. Letter from Linlithgow to the Leopold Amery, Secretary of State for India, October 7, 1939. IOR MSS Eur F125/8.
  50. At a meeting of the Working Committee held at Dadar in March 1941, a resolution was passed calling upon all Provincial and District Hindu Sabhas to form Hindu Sainikikaran Mandals to encourage young Hindu men to join the armed forces. A.I.H.M.P., File C 26, N.M.M.L., Delhi.
  51. A memorandum prepared by Major General Lockhart-Military Secretary, India Office, had also convinced the Viceroy to retain the support of the Mahasabha. IOR L/WS/ 1/456.
  52. The number of Brahmins from Bombay to join the armed forces were 253 Brahmins; from the Central Provinces 207 Brahmins joined. The total number of Marathas from Bombay, Central Provinces and Hyderabad were 57, 800. The total number of Mahars from Bombay, Central Provinces and Hyderabad were 10,000. The above information is compiled from IOR L/WS/1/456 and IOR L/MIL/7/5/2153.
  53. Intelligence Report, January 13, 1940. IOR L/P&J/12/482.
  54. The daily growing popularity of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) which was described by Twynam as "the kernel of the Hindu Mahasabha" became a matter of concern for the local authorities. But Walter Anderson in his article notes how the founder of RSS, Hedgewar, was influenced by the writings of Savarkar. Until the death of Hedgewar, Savarkar commanded the respect and following of many Swayamsewaks. The relations gradually started deteriorating after Golwalkar took over as the Sarsanghchalak. For more details see W. Anderson and S. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (New Delhi, 1987).
  55. The Viceroy had instructed the Governor "to keep an eye" on the RSS-Hindu Mahasabha activities. Letter from Linlithgow to Twynam, December 3, 1942. IOR/3/1/36.
  56. D. Keer, *Veer Savarkar* (Bombay, ), pp.359.
  57. S. P. Mookherjee, *Leaves from a Diary* (Calcutta, 1993).
  58. Bruce Graham mentions that Mookherjee belonged to the Bengal bhadralok, a landed group 'which had sensed the opportunities offered by Calcutta, the mode of Britain's commercial and political empire in India, and the importance of English education as a means of entry to the professions and the civil service'. See, B. D. Graham, 'Syamaprasad Mookherjee and the Communalist Alternative' in D. A. Low (ed) *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*. ( London, 1958), pp.331.
  59. Appendix to the Press from G. G. Drewe to E. Conran Smith, Secretary, Government of India, Bombay, Home Department, January 19, 1945. IOR L/P&J/5/166.
  60. The Chief Secretary reported that 'after the Bengal famine, reaction towards Fazlul Huq were without any sympathy' and that 'Syamaprasad Mookherjee had a growing reputation for rectitude and patriotism which was fast growing...' Report from the Chief Secretary, Bombay to Secretary, Government of India, October 2, 1943. IOR L/P/1/5/164.

61. *Ibid.*
62. The Conference was held on 13 and 14th March. D. Keer, *Veer Savarkar* pp.290. The second session was held on the 26th and 27th July. I.A.R., July-December, 1941, Vol II, pp.7.
63. The first of the resolutions demanded a 'complete reconstruction of the Viceroy's Executive Council' and the second demanded 'constitutional changes in India with a view to ensuring the unity and integrity of the country'. I.A.R., January-June, 1941, Vol I.
64. I.A.R., July-December, 1942 Vol II, pp.30.
65. The meeting took on 5th August at Sewagram. S. P. Mookherjee Papers, File 207, N.M.M.L., Delhi; I.A.R., July-December, 1942, Vol II, pp.59-60.
66. India Years's Book, 1943-44, pp.838. Also quoted in C. Jaffrelot, 'Des Nationalistes En Quete D'Une Nation: Les Partis Nationalistes Hindous Au Vingtieme Siecle, Tome I'. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Institut d' Etudes Politiques, Paris, 1991, pp.444.
67. I.A.R., July-December, 1942, Vol II, pp.26.
68. The meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee was held on 30th August. I.A.R., July-December, 1942, Vol II, pp.28.
69. Moonje Papers File No 59, National Library Calcutta.
70. I.A.R., July-December, 1942, pp.31.
71. It was rumoured that M.S. Aney's All India Nationalist League would support the 'Special Committee'. N.C. Kelkar and Jamnadas Mehta were keen to merge the Democratic Swaraj Party with the Hindu Mahasabha. Letter to Banerjee, July 1, 1942. Jayakar Papers, Reel No 123. N.A.I., New Delhi.
72. Many prominent political personalities like M. S. Aney, N. C. Kelkar and M. R. Jayakar, Maheshwar Dayal Seth and C. Rajagopalachari attended the meeting at Allahabad. I.A.R., 1942, July-December Vol II, pp. 57.
73. I.A.R., July-December, 1942, Vol II, pp.30.
74. However, it must be pointed out that official intelligence reports declared that Savarkar deputed Moonje to attend the meeting so as to prevent Mookherjee and Seth in agreeing to "any unpalatable decisions" regarding the country's future. Intelligence Report, January 9, 1943 No2. IOR L/P&J/12/485.
75. Savarkar's biographer states how on 20th February, Savarkar too expressed concern over the Mahatma's health. D. Keer, *Veer Savarkar* pp.333.
76. I.A.R., July-December 1944, Vol II, pp.59-60.
77. But the meeting with the League's leader did not offer any feasible results. Jinnah had no word of praise for Sapru's Conference held in Bombay and Poona in July 1941. He was convinced, 'that a concerted attempt was being made by the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha leaders to secure the acceptance of their demands by the British Government in total disregard of the position of the Muslim League'. Strictly Secret Report on the Congress and Muslim League, Enclosure to the Memorandum of the Intelligence Bureau (Home Department), Government of India, Simla, August 21, 1941; Also See, Intelligence Report, October 10, 1942 No 39. IOR L/P&J/12/484.
78. Mookherjee and Seth maintained close correspondence during the months following Mookherjee's resignation from the Bengal ministry. One of his letter to Seth reflects how keen Syamaprasad was to play a key role in the 'standing committee called by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru at Allahabad. Letter

- from S. P. Mookherjee to M. D. Seth, Copy of November 23, 1942. IOR R/3/2/41.
79. S. P. Mookherjee, *Leaves from a Diary* (Calcutta, 1993), pp.106.
  80. I.A.R., July-December,1942, Vol II, pp.33.
  81. Letter from Wavell to Amery, October 3, 1944. *Transfer of Power*, (hereafter TOP) September, 1944 to July 1945, (London, 1974.) pp.73.
  82. T.O.P., Extract from letter of Sir Hugh Dow, Governor of Sind, October 6, 1944. pp. 91.
  83. S. P. Mookherjee, *Leaves from a Diary* (Calcutta, 1993), pp.29
  84. Private and Secret letter from Marshal Viscount Wavell to Amery, July 1, 1945. TOP, Vol VI, pp.1182; Also see IOR L/PO/10/22.
  85. B.P.P.A.I., (Secret), Vol LVIII, No 7 Report of July 14, 1945, para 635.
  86. 'The reactions of the Mahasabha and the League along with the Sikhs against the Gandhi-Jinnah talks were reported to have been strongly critical. See, Confidential M.O. 12 M.I. 2 (a), August 31, 1944. WO 208/761 'Internal Situation in India from 1939-1946. Public Record Office, Kew, Surrey (hereafter P.R.O.).
  87. Various factors like the Party's exclusion in the negotiations held at Simla, the accession of Bhopatkar (Savarkarian faction) as the party President were responsible for a shift in Mookherjee's political loyalties.
  88. B.P.P.A.I., Report of February 16, 1946. para 157.
  89. Low mentions how since 1939, a considerable number of senior colonial authorities knew that 'for all practical, political and /or moral reasons, their days were numbered.' On the other hand, Low also points out the determination, especially on the part of the ruling Conservative party to hold on to power which finally only increased and embittered the political relationship between the British Government and the Indian political parties. See D. A. Low, *Rearguard Action: Selected Essays on Late Colonial Indian Politics* (Delhi, 1996), pp.192. For a detailed analysis of the decline of British Authority in Colonial Western India after the Quit India movement, See Simon Epstein, 'District officers in Decline: The Erosion of British Authority in the Bombay Countryside, 1919 to 1947', *Modern Asian Studies*, 16, 3 (1982), pp. 493-518.
  90. Top Secret Report on the All India Hindu Mahasabha. IOR L/WS/1/746.
  91. B.P.P.A.I., (Secret) February 1940 Vol LIII, No 7. Report of April 6 and 13, 1940. Paras 363 & 390.
  92. Roger Finney Papers, Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge.
  93. The RSS, Hindu Mahasabha, Akali Dal, Khaksars, Sainik Dal, Muslim National Guards, Ahrars had formed volunteer armies spread their network in different provinces and number of volunteers of each figured in thousands or more. P. R. O. WO 216/468.
  94. For Auchinleck's views, see note to Sir David Monteath, 1946, L/WS/1/1008.
  95. July 3, 1947 was observed as anti-Pakistan day by the Mahsabhaites. In Bombay city, the day had some success and it was particularly successful in middle class Maharashtrian localities. Black flags were displayed on a large scale and a photograph of Jinnah was exhibited with a garlands of chappals around it. Meetings were also held at which Mhasabhaites condemned the partition of India. Chief Secretary's Report of July 18, 1947. IOR L/P&J/5/167.

96. Intelligence Report, October 1946, Extract (Secret) from a fortnightly appreciation of the political situation in the U. P. published by the C.I.D.. IOR L/PO/10/24.
97. Copy of letter from Syamaprasad Mookherjee to Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth, Nov 23, 1942. IOR R/3/2/41.
98. S.Bhattacharya, See S. Bhattacharya,, 'Wartime Policies of State Censorship and the Civilian Population'.
99. *I.A.R.*, July-December, 1942, Vol II, pp.57; also see, S. P.Mookherjee, *Leaves from a Diary* (Calcutta, 1993), pp.86.
100. Letter of November 19, 1942. File 31, Collection II. IOR R/3/2/41. Also See, Enclosure to letter from S. P. Mookherjee, Minster of Finance to A. K. Fazlul Huq, Chief Minister, Government of Bengal, November 16, 1942.
101. For instance, the *Vishwa Bandhu*, a pro-Mahasabha paper, declared that all the quotations from the *Harijan* [Gandhi's mouthpiece] in the official publicity designed to attack the Congress had 'been torn out of context and used arbitrarily'. Reactions to the pamphlet entitled 'Congress Responsibility for Disturbances', K.W. IV to H.P.F.(I) 3/79/42, N.A.I.
102. In 1947, it was estimated that there were about twelve 'private armies' and there were a total of 413,000 volunteers in these organisations. Extract from minutes of Governor's Conference (second day), April 16. 1947. IOR L/P&J/ 8/679 Coll 117/C/81/A.S

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