
UNIT 6 SELF-RELIANCE AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

Winners do not do different things. They do things differently. Many of the conceptions Gandhi used, developed and made popular were not new. Gandhi claimed no originality for himself. He said, "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as hills" (Harijan, 28.03.1936, p.49). Originality does not always lie in inventing new ideas. It also lies in giving old ideas new meanings and made practical and are popularised. Swadeshi was one of the ideas, which was not new. Much before Gandhi, political reformers had talked of reviving indigenous industries. India had centuries-long traditions of indigenous industries.

The Indian patriots had realised, long before Gandhi that the poverty of India was principally due to the neglect of their industry at the hands of the British. R.C.Dutt's 'Poverty of India - under British Rule,' depicts it effectively about which Gandhi said that when he read it he was so powerfully affected that he began to shed tears. They felt that unless there was a revival of Indigenous Industry, the masses of India would remain poor.

The Swadeshi movement received a great impetus during the agitation of the Partition of Bengal (1905) and was characterised by a great deal of emotion and sentiments. During the partition days patriots could weave beautiful words but they could not produce articles of use. The result was that merchants passed off imported goods as India made. Early in 1919 a meeting was arranged between Gandhi and a patriotic mill-owner. The latter told Gandhi, "You are aware that in the days of partition (Bengal) the mill owner fully exported the Swadeshi movement. When it was at its height, I raised the price of cloth and did even worse things. We are not conducting our business out of philanthropy. We do it for profit" (Kripalani, 1967). Gandhi then understood why the Swadeshi movement of the partition days had fizzled out.

Gandhi realised that the Swadeshi and the boycott movement could not prosper without an increase in indigenous production, which would be independent of the mills. He also realised that in olden days the agricultural masses in India had always some subsidiary industries to add to their meagre income. He felt that the textile industry as the most viable one especially because of its being the biggest item of import from England. The tradition of hand-spinning and hand-weaving had been given up owing to the import of mill yarn from England and was wiped out in competition with foreign mill cloth. Upon realising that spinning and weaving could best provide subsidiary work to the agricultural masses of India, Gandhi worked for the revival of this industry; it would not only make the import of cloth from abroad superfluous, but also would greatly add to Indian's economic, social and political strength.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to

- Discuss the Gandhian concepts of Self-Reliance and Self-Sufficiency.
- Examine the relevance of Gandhi's concepts of Swadeshi in the contemporary world.

6.2 SWADESHI, SWADHARMA, SWABHAVA

Gandhi's conception of Swadeshi was very identical to that of Swadharma in the Gita. This Swadharma depends upon Swabhava, one's fundamental nature. People must follow in life such avocations as would not do violence to this nature. *The Gita* says: "One's own dharma though imperfect is better than the dharma of another well performed. The dharma of another is fraught with fear". Gandhi says of this: "Interpreted in terms of one's physical environment, this gives us the law of Swadeshi, for Swadeshi is Swadharma applied to one's immediate environment" (Ibid).

In a speech delivered before the Missionary Conference, Madras, on 14 February 1916, he defined Swadeshi in the following terms: Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of definition, I must restrict myself to ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate surroundings. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In domain of politics, I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting" (CWMG, Vol. 13, p.219).

As Dr. Gopi Nath Dhawan noted, Gandhi's views on Swadeshi seem to have undergone an evolution (Dhawan, 1951, p.106). A study of his address delivered at the Missionary Conference, Madras, 1916 shows that he then stood for total self-sufficiency of the country and its economic isolation from the world. Referring to the external trade, he said: "Much of the deep poverty of the masses is due to the ruinous departure from Swadeshi in the economic and Industrial life. If not an article of commerce had been brought from outside, she would be today a land flowing with milk and honey". He further said, "It has been argued that India can not adopt Swadeshi in the economic lift at any rate. Those who advance this objection do not look upon Swadeshi as a rule of life. With them it is a patriotic effort not to be made if involved any self-denial. Swadeshi is a religious discipline to be undergone in utter disregard of the physical comfort it may cause to individuals. Under its spell the deprivation of a pin or needle, because these are not manufactured in India, need cause no terror. A Swadeshist will

learn to do without hundreds of things which today he may consider necessary. Moreover, those who dismiss swadeshi from their minds by arguing the impossible, forget that swadeshi is the only doctrine consistent with the law of humility and tone” (CWMG, vol.13, p.222).

6.3 NOT AGAINST FOREIGN TRADE

In 1926 Gandhi wrote, “I have never considered the exclusion of every thing foreign under every conceivable circumstances as a part of Swadeshi. The broad definition of Swadeshi is the use of all home made things to the exclusion of foreign things, insofar as such use is necessary for the protection of home industry, more especially those industries without which India will become pauperized. In my opinion, therefore, Swadeshi which excludes the use of everything foreign no matter how beneficent it may be, is a narrow interpretation of Swadeshi” (Young India, 17.02.1926, p.213). From the excerpts of Yervada Mandir, we read: “To reject foreign manufactures because they are foreign and go on wasting national time and money in promotion in one’s country of manufacture for which it is not suited would be criminal folly, and a negation of Swadeshi spirit” (Gandhi, 1957, p.66).

This shows that he moved away from his earlier position. Now he has permitted international trade and exchange of commodities if this meant an exchange of equal advantage and did not involve injustice. However, if it was to be a question of choice, he would have preferred self-sufficiency. But as a matter of practical policy he did not think that India should stand aloof in the matter of trade. “I would not wish India to live a life of complete isolation whereby it (sic) would live in water-tight compartments and allow nobody to enter her borders or to trade within her border” (Rajagopalachari, 1957, p.51).

He defined Swadeshi articles as any article which “subverses the interest of the millions even though the capital and talent are foreign but under effective Indian control” (Harijan, 25.02.1969, p.25). What was meant by effective control? What industry could satisfy Gandhi as being Indian? “An Industry to be Indian must be demonstrably in the interest of the masses. It must be manned by Indians both skilled and unskilled. Its capital and machinery should be Indian and the labour employed should have a living wage and be comfortably housed, while the welfare of the children of the labourers should be guaranteed by the employers. This is an ideal definition” (Ibid, 23.10.1937, p.311).

Though Gandhi did not ordinarily favour legislative interference, yet we find him as an ardent supporter of protectionism. He pleaded strongly for stiff protective duties upon foreign goods in order to nurture national interest. This may be cited as showing his allegiance to the Indian capitalist class. But a correct reading will be that he was not guided by any such definite interest, though objectively the Indian capitalists benefited by this demand. As P. Spratt reminds us, “His support is no doubt likely to benefit the capitalists rather than anybody else, but he does not advocate with that intention. His protection is a villagers’ protection, designed to help the effort for self-sufficiency, not that for profits” (Spratt, 1939, p. 223).

6.4 PRINCIPLE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD

We have duties to all humankind but the duties we owe to all segments of it are not of equal importance. There is a hierarchy of duties based on the degree of proximity. Proximity is the decisive element in forming ties in terms both of closeness of feelings and knowledge of circumstances: “Our capacity for service is limited by our knowledge of the world in which we live” (CWMG, Vol. 63, p.233). Accordingly, we must start with service to our neighbours. An individual’s service to his country and humanity consisted in serving his neighbours. One

should not serve one's neighbour and claim to serve one's distant cousin in Antarctica, for one must not serve one's distant neighbour at the expense of the nearest. This is not only the teaching of all the religions in the world but also the foundation of true and humane economics. Gandhi saw no contradiction between the principle of Swadeshi, interpreted in terms of neighbourhood, and that of rendering service to all humanity, which he also upheld.

Asked if a man can serve the immediate neighbours and yet serve the whole of humanity, Gandhi replied that he can, provided the service to neighbours was not itself exploitative of others. The neighbour himself would in turn serve his neighbours and in this way the chain of service would be expanded to include the world, rather than shut it out. For the same reason, the principle of neighbourhood, according to Gandhi, was neither metaphysical nor too philosophical for comprehension but just good common sense, for 'If you love your neighbour as thyself, he will do likewise with you, and both would gain thereby' (Ibid, Vol. 60, p.254).

The neighbourhood principle was not confined to the choice of commodity bundles but applied quite generally to choice of states of affairs. When you demand Swaraj, you do not want Swaraj for yourself alone but for your neighbours too. It was the choice of commodities however, that formed the primary concern of the Swadeshi Movement.

The neighbourhood principle has a direct consequence for the interpretation of ethical preferences in terms of Swadeshi, namely that whenever local products are available they should be preferred to their imported counterparts. Whether the latter were imports from foreign countries or from other regions of the same country made no difference. From around 1919 onwards Gandhi spelt out this moral imperative of local buying in much detail using numerous specific examples (Ibid, Vol. 16, p.30).

As between countries the neighbourhood principle translates as patriotism. An individual's preference ordering over commodity-bundles should therefore be guided by patriotism. The law of each country's progress demands on the part of its inhabitants preference for their own products and manufacturers. Accordingly, for Indians, there is a moral obligation to use products made in India whenever they can get them, even though these may be inferior to their foreign counterparts.

"There are several Swadeshi things on the market which are in danger of disappearance for want of patronage. They may not be up to the mark. It is up to us to use them and require the makers to improve them whenever improvement is possible", he pleaded (Ibid, Vol. 40, p.435).

Gandhi does not, however, explain how consumers continuing to use a product could, at the same time, require the makers to improve them. He mentions a number of goods belonging to this category. India produces a sufficient quantity of leather. It is therefore a duty on the part of an Indian consumer to wear shoes made of Indian leather in preference to foreign leather shoes, even if they are comparatively dearer and of an inferior quality. For the same reason products of Indian textile, sugar or rice mills 'must be preferred to the corresponding foreign product'. Swadeshi items should not be discarded in favour of better or cheaper foreign things, for comparisons of price or quality are not relevant for the kind of consumer's choice Gandhi is talking about, but patriotism is. "We attend flag-hoisting ceremonies and are proud of our national flag. Let me tell you that our pride has no meaning if you do not like things made in India and hanker after foreign ones" (Ibid, Vol.62, p.324).

If, on the other hand, a particular commodity is not, or cannot easily be made in India, the argument ceases to apply. Accordingly, while Gandhi regards it as a sin to import wheat from

Australia on the score of its superior quality, he would not rule out importing Oatmeal from Scotland, for Oats are not grown in India. "I buy useful healthy literature from every part of the world. I buy surgical instruments from England, pins and pencils from Austria and watches from Switzerland" (Ibid, Vol.26, p.279). For the same reason, in his Presidential Address at Belgaum Congress on December 26, 1924, he asserts "All British goods do not harm us. Some goods such as English books we need for our intellectual or spiritual benefit" (Ibid, Vol.25, p.475).

While upholding the principle of 'patriotic preference', Gandhi was at pains to explain that the spirit of Swadeshi was not vindictive. Exclusion of foreign goods was not intended as a punishment, it was a necessity of natural existence. Nor was it narrow or parochial, 'for I buy from every part of the world what is needed for my growth'. But by the same token, 'I refuse to buy from anybody anything, however nice or beautiful, if it interferes with my growth or injures those whom nature has made my first care' (Young India, 12.03.1925, p.88).

Not all foreign things, therefore, were to be excluded but only certain foreign things, especially cloth. Gandhi attached considerable moral importance to this distinction, "If the emphasis were on all foreign things, it would be racial, parochial and wicked. The emphasis is on all foreign cloth. The restriction makes all the difference in the world". Equally, the ethics of Swadeshi required that the exclusion should not be targeted at British cloth only. It applied just as much, say to the import of cloth from Japan, which was rapidly increasing during the 1930s. 'How can I take a single yard of Japanese cloth however fine and artistic it may be? It is poison to us, for it means starvation of the poor people of India' (CWMG, Vol.68, p.188).

6.5 SELF-RELIANCE: A MORAL IMPERATIVE

Gandhi's doctrine of buying local products was a moral imperative that had protectionist implications, but Gandhi had no particular allegiance to free trade. Responding to a comment that no country was free from foreign competition, Gandhi observed that on contrary each sovereign nation tried to protect its infant industries by bounties and tariffs and pointed to the sugar industry in Germany which had developed under a prohibitive tariff-wall. However, the exercise of ethical preference by consumer was, he claimed, a better solution because it was voluntary and was in correspondence with the principle of non-violence and was more likely to benefit the poor. Consumption behaviour that corresponded to the principle of ethical preferences, far from destroying the economic benefits flowing from foreign trade, would be conducive to the healthy growth of nations and so promote both matter and moral progress.

"That economics is untrue which ignores or disregards moral values. The extension of the law of non-violence in the domain of economics means nothing less than introduction of moral values as a factor to be considered in regulating international trade." He emphasised this approach to foreign trade would not lead to anarchy. "There will be nations that will want to interchange with others because they cannot produce certain things. They will certainly depend on other nations for them but the nations that will provide for them should not exploit them" (Harijan, 12.02.1938, p.5).

6.6 ECONOMICS OF KHADI

While the argument applies in principle to all home grown products, Gandhi singled out the products of village industry for special attention. In that Khadi claims place of pride. Indeed, the Swadeshi movement comes to be regarded primarily as a means of encouraging consumer

to wear Khaddar. Accordingly, people were asked to buy Khaddar in preference to mill-made cloth and to boycott foreign cloth altogether.

Gandhi's identification of the Swadeshi Movement with village industry, and with hand-spinning in particular, was based on a two-fold argument, that the urban population of India owed a special moral duty towards the villages; and that this duty would be best discharged by providing a market for village products and above all for hand-spun cloth. This argument is a logical consequence of the principles of neighbourhood (there are few towns or cities in India that are not surrounded by villages) and patriotism (most Indians are villagers). Gandhi sought to strengthen it further by introducing yet another moral principle, that of historical justice. Both economic and moral standards in the villages had declined through long neglect. City people as a whole were partly to blame. "The poor villagers are exploited by the foreign government and also by their own countrymen, the city dwellers. They produce the food and go hungry. They produce milk and their children have to go without it" (CWMG, Vol.83, pp.26-27).

Reparation had to be made. "We are guilty of a grievous wrong against the villagers and the only way in which we expiate it is by encouraging them to revive their lost industries and arts by assuring them of a ready market" (Ibid, Vol.60, p.256).

This solution was entirely feasible, provided, that city people come to accept their moral responsibility. 'We have to be rural minded and think of our necessities and the necessities of our households in terms of rural mindedness- it is in consonance with the true economics of our country' (Ibid). Gandhi saw himself as an exponent of this 'true economics'. 'A link has been built to bridge the yawning gulf between the cities and villages. We have only to cross this bridge. Patronising village industries will constitute the crossing of the bridge'. To Gandhi this was not a matter of charity, but a purely commercial proposition, requiring one to exercise ethical preferences when choosing one's consumption bundle.

The second part of the argument seeks to justify the use of hand-spun cloth as the appropriate means of repaying the debt that city people owe to the villagers, and is based on standard economic reasoning. Spinning was a solution for rural unemployment. The whole scheme of Khadi, according to Gandhi, rested upon the supposition that there were millions of poor people in India who had no work during at least four months of the year. Around three-quarters of the population of India belonged to this category, because agricultural work was seasonal, they remained idle for a third of the year or more. This contributed to their endemic poverty, pushing them to the verge of starvation. If there was crop-failure or famine, the extent of involuntary unemployment became much greater and many of them died of hunger and disease. For the semi-starved but partially employed millions, spinning provided a means of part-time employment as well as insurance against famine. Spinning, therefore, is primarily a supplementary industry for agriculture.

Why, one might ask, choose spinning rather than some other subsidiary occupation for agricultural workers? Gandhi answered that 'Spinning had long been practiced by villagers in the past. It required a few simple and low cost implement and little technical knowledge and skill. It could be learnt easily, did not require too much attention, could be done at odd moments and, for these reasons, was suitable as part time employment for masses of rural people. Neither cattle-breeding nor weaving, which has been suggested as possible alternatives to spinning, as a supplement to agriculture, enjoyed these advantages even though they were more remunerative'.

Spinning was the easiest, the cheapest and the best, that requires minimum capital outlay and organisational efforts. The test of Swadeshi was not the universality of the use of an article which goes under the name of Swadeshi but the universality of participation in the production or manufacturing of such articles. Judged by this test spinning had a potential unmatched by other contenders.

Gandhi neither contemplated nor advised the abandonment of a single, healthy life giving industrial activity for the sake of hand-spinning. On one occasion, he found that a number of women had been spinning who were not without occupation or means of making a living. 'Perhaps they spin in response to our appeal and because they realize it is good for the country' (Ibid, Vol.30, p.386). Gandhi remained firm in his resolve that their spinning should stop, for the Charkha movement had not been conceived with such people in mind but only for able bodied people who were idle for want of work. The operative principle was quite clear: if there were no crises of semi-unemployed people, there would be no room for spinning-wheel.

Gandhi viewed Khadi as not only an economic but also as a political phenomenon. He believed that the universal adoption of Khaddar by Indians was equivalent to the acquisition of Swaraj. Daily spinning on the wheel was a symbolic offering-of dedication to India. Khadi was also the symbol of unity of India. Spinning was a daily sacrament and a concrete viable technique of participation for the unification and revivification of India. Further, Khadi was a potent instrument of mass-uplift and mass-education. The spinning-wheel, therefore, was divine instrument and satisfied the needs of the meanest and humblest of human beings.

Much to Gandhi's disappointment Khadi could not become a sustainable alternative. It had limited patronage, and never became an economic proposition as he viewed it.

6.7 ESSENCE OF SWADESHI

The essence of the concept of Swadeshi lies in the following propositions:

1. An individual, a la' consumer, will reduce one's wants. In reducing one's wants, the utility function will depend upon the commodities that are, or can be produced locally by neighbours. In other words, one's utility function will not be made up of commodities imported in their entirety. In urban areas, particularly in developing countries, the utility functions of the affluent members of the society are entirely made up of important commodities. Such a utility function is un-swadeshi since it denies the local producers the necessary means to produce commodities and thereby earn a livelihood for themselves.
2. Not only will the consumer redesign his or her utility function such that it is made up of commodities produced, or producible, in the neighbourhood, but also the consumer will make an effort to obtain these commodities from the neighborhood itself. In other words, the consumer will prefer the commodities produced by the immediate neighbour to the commodities produced by a distant neighbour except when either the immediate neighbour does not produce these goods or refuses to improve the efficiency of production. Only in such cases will the consumer obtain these goods from a distant neighbour.
3. The consumer will cooperate with the producer neighbour in the process of improving the efficiency of production. This translates into the idea that the utility function not only contains the commodities produced in the neighbourhood but also a variable reflecting cooperation with the producer. In this sense the consumer and producer do not generate antagonistic relationships as the consumer is sovereign and the producer the willing slave.

On the contrary, the consumer and the producer are jointly involved in a cooperative effort.

4. Translated in economic language swadeshi involves two shifts: an upward shift in the demand curve and a downward shift in the cost curve for a commodity produced in the neighbourhood/locality. Both these shifts take place simultaneously. It ensures that the production of the needed goods producible in the neighbourhood is profitable and hence feasible. Swadeshi, thus, is opposite to the trend in the last fifty years where the demand curve has been shifting downwards and the cost curve upwards. This was exactly the policy of British colonialism in India. People were encouraged to consume goods produced in England and high taxes were levied on the producer in India of competing goods. Neo-colonialism is also operating through this mechanism. As a result of these two movements, the village industries have become uneconomic and eventually have gone out of production.

Swadeshi, if revived, can provide the resurgence of village industries. In view of the dynamic interactions between the consumers and producers, it can lead to a process of self-reliance.

6.7.1 Swadeshi: Some Misunderstandings

As the idea of Swadeshi mingled with the national movement for independence, a number of even well meaning intellectuals equated Swadeshi, with the 'buy Indian' movement. This 'buy Indian' movement stood by itself and was, in a way, the economic dimension of the political movement. It involves an act of resistance. It was argued that the British colonialism was able to obtain resources through exports to India. Further, the 'buy Indian' movement will generate production, employment and income of Indians. This will help the resistance. This idea of buy nationally produced goods has been refined into a new 'import substitution industrialisation strategy of development'. In this strategy, the country attempts to produce goods that it imports and goods that are produced in other countries. Both these versions reflect a misunderstanding of the Gandhian concept of Swadeshi. In the 'buy Indian' idea the consumer should switch to production within India which is different from the idea of production, by the immediate neighbour. The 'buy Indian' idea does attempt to shift the demand curve for the goods in India upwards. However, it also pits the Indian manufacturer against the foreign producer; i.e., it involves a concept of narrow national patriotism and generates a competitive struggle between the national and the international or foreign producer. In this sense, it goes against the Swadeshi spirit which is to serve the world via service to the immediate neighbour. The import substitution strategy, on the other hand, does not have any redeeming features. It is based on the proposition that the utility function of the consumer is based on commodities produced in foreign countries from which imports are obtained. Swadeshi involves changing these utility functions. Import substitution strategies work towards the satisfaction and further accentuation of such utility functions. Since import substitution is not necessarily based on the idea of local resources, the import substitution prices do not even ensure the reduction in the cost curves of the production of substitution goods. There is thus nothing Swadeshi about import substitution.

Some scholars have confined Swadeshi with autarky, where a country produces everything within its borders. It is a state in which there is no trade. Autarky concerns itself only with production. It differs from Swadeshi in that autarky poses no relationship between the consumer and the producer. Swadeshi involves a dynamic relationship between the consumer and the producer wherein cost curves are shifted downwards and demand curve upwards. In an autarky, demand curve remains independent of production and cost curves may be shifted upwards. Furthermore, autarky imposes a competitive relationship between the foreign and domestic producers.

6.7.2 Contemporary Relevance

During the freedom struggle, most of the Congress leaders missed the comprehensive nature of Swadeshi as conceived by Gandhi. They merely concerned themselves with its economics. In the boycott of British goods they also found an effective weapon to fight the foreign government. They did not fully grasp the meaning of Swadeshi, as enunciated by Gandhi in terms of Swadharma, which meant for him, as has been already discussed, that the swadeshi dharma required people to give preference to the goods made by their neighbours over goods made at far-away places. In India or outside, the educated Congressmen, and more especially the socialists and communists, conceived of Swadeshi in its limited aspect of patronising Indian goods, whether made through village and cottage industry in the villages or factories in the cities.

The economics and business of India's globalisation of trade and investment flows have undermined its complex cultural and strategic policy perspective. India's economic priorities have to be shaped within the emerging global power structure, maintaining internal socio-economic stability and defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

6.8 SUMMARY

If India is to emerge as a nation whose global relevance is commensurate with its image, it must establish its credentials by furthering productive multilateral economic and political relationship all around, and not remain hostage to the western global interests. In fact the linkage of India's economy with the global economy is such that India has no option but to grapple with the dynamics of globalisation. Whether to globalise India or not is not the question now because globalisation of the world financial system is a historical process. India is already hooked on to both the world financial economy and the ballooning flow of world information. It cannot hope to remain half-pregnant, and its choice now is either to abort or to go all the way. It is in this context that the application of Gandhi's Swadeshi assumes much relevance for us.

6.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the Gandhian Concepts of Self-Reliance and Self-Sufficiency.
2. Examine the relevance of Gandhi's concept of Swadeshi in the present world.
3. 'Swadeshi does not mean close door Economy, but is based upon 'Swadharma and Swabhava'. Comment.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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