

GANDHI'S VIEWS ON SWADESHI

For M.A, Semester-II
Gandhian Philosophy (Phil CC-07)
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Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, is not considered by many as an academic philosopher .However, his spirituality, approach to politics and his philosophical outlook are interconnected. He is a profound philosophical thinker and has given his views on Non-violence, Morality, Truth and Swadeshi etc.He rejected all forms of violence and considered even ethical condemnation of one's opponent as a type of violence.

Gandhiji's concept of "Swadeshi" connotes belonging to one's own country.In his wide conceptual framework Swadeshi has a special significance.He always laid emphasis on the value of Swadeshi. He used it comprehensively and constantly endeavoured to apply it to all sphere –social, political, economic, and cultural.

Swadeshi is neither a negative nor a parochial concept.However, ordinarily or generally , it has a political connotation and is also considered as a viable vehicle for the promotion of Nationalism and is also reflective of one's patriotism . It is not only a theoretical concept but has

innumerable inalienable practical aspects. The inculcation and adoption of Swadeshi ideal encourages an individual to keep one's own country interests paramount regardless of its impact on other foreign countries.

Swadeshi is fundamental in Gandhi's philosophy of life. According to Gandhi, the whole gamut of man's activities constitutes an indivisible whole. Life cannot be segregated into watertight compartments like social, economic, political, religious and so on. The concept of swadeshi was not an exception. It was not merely an economic doctrine. In fact the concept of swadeshi covered all aspects of the human life. Gandhi's vision of swadeshi is a universal concept even though he propounded it in the context of India's struggle for freedom. He used swadeshi as a means to achieve India's swaraj. India's struggle for freedom was a source of inspiration for many non-violent struggles in different parts of the globe. Swaraj through swadeshi is a principle of universal application and it can be emulated by people in their struggle for freedom. It was one of the eleven vows Gandhi prescribed for a satyagraha way of life. Swadeshi as a generic concept covers almost every aspect of human life, all his ideas, concepts, methods and programmes.

According to Gandhiji Swadeshi is supreme universal law that is law of laws. Like nature's law it needs no enacting. It is self-acting one. When one neglects or disobeys it due to ignorance or other reasons, the law takes its own course to restore to the original position like the laws of nature. The necessity for the inclusion of swadeshi as a vow is due to the fact that the people have forgotten this law; to use Gandhi's own words, the law is sunk into oblivion. A person by temperament following this law need not follow it as a vow, that is, a rare thing.

According to Gandhi swadeshi in its ultimate and spiritual sense stands for the final emancipation of the soul from her earthly bondage. Therefore, a votary of swadeshi has to identify oneself with the entire creation in the ultimate quest to emancipate the soul from the physical body, as it stands in the way of realising oneness with all life. This identification is possible only by performing the primary duty, that is, the service of one's immediate neighbour. In outward appearance, it may look as exclusion or disservice to others, i.e., the rest of humanity. Pure service can never result in disservice to the far away person. In swadeshi there is no distinction between one's own and other people. With the temptation of serving the whole world, if one fails to perform the duty towards the immediate neighbours, it is a clear violation of the very principle of swadeshi. The very first step of serving the world starts with the immediate neighbour. Service to the nearest individual is service to the Universe.

According to Gandhi, swadharma in Gita interpreted in terms of one's physical environment gives us the Law of Swadeshi. Gandhi quotes Gita "It is best to die performing one's own duty or Swadharma. Paradharm, or another's duty, is fraught with danger. Further Gandhi explains: "What the Gita says with regard to swadharma equally applies to swadeshi also, for swadeshi is swadharma applied to one's immediate environment." The law of swadeshi demands that one should not take more than required to discharge the legitimate obligations towards the family. In swadeshi there is no space for selfishness and hatred. It is the highest form of altruism and acme of universal service in the Gandhian scheme. In the light of the above understanding and after much thinking and reflection, Gandhi defined swadeshi as the "spirit in us which restricts us to the use and services of our immediate, to the exclusion of the more remote."

Gandhi was convinced that the deep poverty prevailing among masses was mainly due to the ruinous departure from the path of swadeshi in the economic and industrial life. Gandhi advocated that one who follows the spirit of swadeshi should use only things that are produced by our immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient, and strengthen them in areas where they are found deficient. During the time of India's struggle for independence Gandhi realised that the economic salvation of India consists in encouraging and reviving indigenous industries. Gandhi found khadi as the necessary and most important corollary of the principle of swadeshi in its practical application to society. Khadi fulfils the kind of service envisaged in swadeshi .

He thought universalising khadi or spinning wheel will improve these conditions. For him, khadi is the Sun of the village solar system. The various industries are the planets which can support khadi. Khadi mentality means decentralisation of production and distribution of the necessities of life. Gandhi advocated the concept of swadeshi in the spirit of universal love and service. A votary of swadeshi will give preference to local products even if they are of inferior grade or dearer in price than things manufactured elsewhere and try to remedy the defects of local manufacturers.

However, Gandhi warned the votary of swadeshi against making it a fetish. "To reject foreign manufactures merely because they are foreign, and to go on wasting national time and money in the promotion in one's country of manufactures for which it is not suited, would be criminal folly, and a negation of the swadeshi spirit. A true votary of swadeshi will never harbour ill-will towards the foreigner.

Gandhiji preached that Swadeshism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest ahimsa, i.e. Love. In the swadeshi economic order there will be healthy exchange of products and not cut-throat competition through the play of market forces with other villages where they are not locally producible. In such an economic system there will be an organic relationship between production, distribution and consumption.

The application of swadeshi in politics calls for the revival of the indigenous institutions and strengthening them to overcome some of its defects. Gandhi pleaded the need for internal governance (swaraj) as early as 1909 in his noted booklet Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule. He wanted to empower the people through political self governance. His vision of decentralized political system was Panchayati Raj by which the innumerable villages of India were governed.

In the social realm, embracing Swadeshi reconciled Gandhiji to institution of varna system initially. He followed the four-fold division of the society purely based on duties performed by different sections of people. He made an earnest attempt to overcome the defects of the caste system. He vehemently opposed the prevailing caste system based on birth and the social status attached to it. He launched one of the most relentless battles against the curse of untouchability which was a part and parcel of the caste system in India. Gandhi looked at the scourge of untouchability as a blot on Hinduism.

To follow the spirit of Gandhi's swadeshi in the field of religion one has to restrict to the ancestral religion. It calls for the use of one's immediate religious surroundings. It is the duty of a person to serve one's own religion by purging its defects.

Gandhiji unambiguously opposed and rejected the modern medical system . He thought it to be curative and not preventive . It is also very expensive and out of reach from the hands of poor population of this country . He prescribed living according to the laws of nature.

He rejected British educational system prevalent in India. He envisaged education as an instrument to develop all facets of personality. He never considered it as a means to earn livelihood. He believed that education has to be rooted in the culture and traditions of the country. Castigating British educational system, he claimed that education through a medium of foreign language put undue stress upon the nerves of the children and they become foreigners in their own country. They are completely cut off from the realities of life.

He placed before the nation an alternative system of education called “Nai Talim or Basic education” which relied on practical or skill-based education encouraging students to learn handicraft or other vocations. He defined education as follows: "By Education, I mean, an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training."¹¹ In his scheme the craft was the pivot and centre of all educational activities. He placed before the nation alternative institutions like Gujarat Vidyapith, Kashi Vidyapith and others during the struggle for independence. Later he broadened his concept of basic education and looked upon education as a lifelong process starting from cradle to grave.

Gandhi’s Swadeshi doctrine is not an isolated concept and claims kindred with the ideals of Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Truth and Non-violence.

The doctrine of Swadeshi is employed for the protection of home industry. In no way, it suggests that the use of foreign goods must be discarded at all costs. In no way swadeshi promoting nationalism is opposed to internationalism. Because internationalism comes only after nationalism. Internationalism is an extension of nationalism. Gandhi's insistence on Swadeshi is not contradictory with his belief in essential unity of everything and love for one's own country that is love for only one aspect of mankind. According to him, nationalism and internationalism are not essentially opposed to each other. The establishment of a nation based on nationalistic ideals and spirit of nationalism is a sine qua non precondition for the emergence and growth of internationalism representing the interests of whole mankind.

Thank you.