



## GANDHI'S SWADESHI MYTHOLOGY AND ECONOMY – A STUDY

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Mahatma Gandhi contributed his life for home economy known as "Swadeshi". His dream to encourage villages and his motivation of Swadeshi for long-term survival was magnificent. His vision was self-reliant and self-employed people dwelling in village communities, gaining their right livelihood from the products of their homesteads. Aim of swadeshi, whatever is made or produced in the village must be used first and foremost by the members of the village. His ultimate dream was self-sufficiency of the village community. Swadeshi prevents dependence of economic on international market forces could make the village community insecure and unsafe. Every village must construct a firm economic base to fulfil most of its needs and all extremities of the village community should give importance to products and services. It is significant that Gandhi believed in adopting the principle of production by the masses and village communities would be able to restore dignity to the work done by human hands. The concept of Swadeshi as developed by Gandhi to become a major weapon in his anti-colonial strategies had both political and economic dimensions.

In contrast to British industrialized, mechanized and centralised mode of production, Gandhi reversed this principle and visualized home-grown, hand-crafted and decentralized way of production. The advantage of the village groups would be able to reinstate self-respect to the work done by human hands. In communities exercising swadeshi, economics would have a place but would not dominate society. Swadeshi is the way to serenity between peoples, with oneself and with



nature. Swadeshi is the way to comprehensive peace: Peace with oneself, peace between peoples and peace with nature. The global economy drives people toward high performance, high achievement and high ambition for materialistic success. This results in stress, loss of meaning, loss of inner peace, loss of space for personal and family relationships and loss of spiritual life. Gandhi realized that in the past, life in India was not only prosperous but also conducive to philosophical and spiritual development. Gandhi said "There is enough for everybody's need, but not enough for anybody's greed. Swadeshi is thus a prerequisite for peace.

### **Objectives**

1. To study the importance of Swadeshi
2. To study the economic vision of Gandhi

The broad definition of Swadeshi is the use of all home-made things to the exclusion of foreign things, in so far as such use is necessary for the protection of home industry, more specially those industries without which India will become pauperized. In my opinion, therefore, Swadeshi which excludes the use of everything foreign, no matter how beneficial it may be, and irrespective of the fact that it impoverishes nobody, is a narrow interpretation of Swadeshi (YI, 17-6-1926, P-21).

Spirit of 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 the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is, the use of my immediate religious surrounding. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the 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. It is suggested that such Swadeshi, if reduced to practice, will lead to the millennium (Source: From the Book "Mind of Mahatma Gandhi" chap.87)

Indian economy was dependent upon the most productive and sustainable agriculture, horticulture, pottery, furniture making, metal work, jewellery, leather work and many other economic activities. Each village had its spinners, carders, dyers, and weavers who were the heart of the village economy. Gandhi idea was that, if the villages were made self sufficient and self reliant, people would not move to urban areas. Second, there was an aura of romanticism of 'city life', which promised the poor debt-laden villager a short cut to economic gains. The sociological implications of the Gandhian view of promoting village self-reliance was that it would perpetuate the existing social, economic inequalities by discouraging social and economic mobility and keep prosperity and education tied down in as narrow, a sector as the village and thus not expose the villagers to the challenge of technological development. In long run it would prove to be anti-rural and result in the creation of dual economies which would make the urban and rural sector separate entities by themselves. (G.Thimaiah) However When India was flooded with machine made, inexpensive, mass produced textiles from Britain, the textile artists were put out of business and the village economy suffered terribly (Satish Kumar).

Gandhi never created a body of literature known by the name Gandhian Economics. He neither claimed to be an economist nor was trained in Economics. Gandhi is very specific on non-possession. It looks individual to dispossess his wealth and income beyond his requirements so that the economic welfare of the less capable is realized. The synthesis of the ideas of Gandhi with the ideas of the modern world will create a more holistic and integrated society. It is



important to mention that Gandhi was deeply influenced by Ruskin's book "Unto This Last" and teaches the three basic truths:

1. The life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsmen is the life worth living (Swadeshi & Village Industries).
2. The good of the individual is contained in the good of all (Sarvodaya)
3. Each person has the right to earn livelihood from his work and there is dignity of labour (Bread Labour).

Bread labour is central to the economic philosophy of Gandhi. He claimed that "True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard just as all true ethics must also be good economics .... True economics stands for social justice; it promoted the good of all including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life", Gandhian economics boils down to a simple injunction that "never advocate actions of policies that lead to material advancement at the cost of social, moral or spiritual impoverishment" (Diwan & Lutz). Gandhi desired people to consume locally produced goods and particularly village industry manufactured goods instead of imported or factory goods. He said "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" (Swadesh and Nationalism, Young India, 12 March 1925).

### **Gandhi's economic vision**

Gandhian economic vision differs widely to the concept of globalization discourses of economy as he was against the centralization of economy while globalization is a process of profit seeking exclusive control on natural resources. He demonstrated the ideas of welfare economy in his 1916 speech at Muir College, Allahabad when he accepted the promotion of happiness as the only justification to the



social policy (Dr.Pankaj Dodh). Gandhi's economic philosophy is firmly matched to the inclusive and democratic development of villages. He said India lives in her villages and hence the village economy must be revived. In order to create village swaraj, khadi and village industries must be established and considered the spinning wheel as a symbol of non-violence and akin to the sun in the solar system with the village industries as the planets within it. In his opinion a person wearing khadi will abjure violence and hypocrisy.

By 1907-08, the emphasis on swadeshi efforts was beginning to shift away from industrial production towards banking, insurance and inland trade where profits seemed much easier to make and capital correspondingly less shy. Therefore, swadeshi ideas as propagated from mainly the economic point of view did not gain the support of every sector. The industrialist class for example, was opposed to these ideas of swadeshi clashing with their entrepreneurial needs and they found it to be an unnecessary waste of public energy and this discontent found expression in their lack of total support to the movement (Sumit Sarkar). Sachs & Dube in the 1980's considered Gandhi as one of the philosophers of alternative development (Ishii 2001)

Gandhi believed machinery whetted consumer's appetite to the extent that it inevitably produced exploitation, unemployment and ultimately starvation. His solution was not to perfect industrialization but to eliminate the process all together. Gandhi writes: Instead of welcoming machinery as a boon, we should look upon it as an evil... but our forefathers knew that if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our more fibres. His economic thought is assimilate in his overall philosophy and his holistic approach aims at the socio-economic reconstruction of the society. Reconstruction of village economy based on "Gram Swaraj" is the pillar of economic development and in his vision, each village is a totally autonomous and self-sufficient unit which will be totally self-reliant in fulfilling the basic



needs (Charkha or Carrefour). Gandhi concerns of the rural poor and demonstrated: “If my brother, the weaver is out of work because of imported cloth, then how can I be better of it” (Patnaik 2011). Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy which still attracts around sixty percent of the country’s population. It is very unfortunate that the contribution of agriculture which forty seven percent in 1950 has come down at present. Gandhi’s Khadi programme was a stroke of genius. It had a political message, was a social weapon, an economic solution and a national symbol.

Economies built on the code of ethics alone can serve the society. As Mahatma Gandhi emphatically noted, “Commerce without morality” is a sin. The economy that resulted out of such unfair trade and commerce practices might surely be considered as a social evil rather than been acclaimed as a social upliftment. Gandhi’s economic vision was aimed at the removal of exploitation, economic inequality and a world order based on war. He conceptualized the ideas of co-operation & sharing, universal participation in physical labour, voluntary limitation of wants, decentralization of economic activities, a new technology called “Swadeshi” in consonance with the new goals, and the transformation of private ownership into trusteeship (Balamurali Balaji). Economy has nothing to do with the society, as many perceive. The commercial aspect of economy has little to do with the customer’s life as many economists believe that it generally has its implications only on their purchasing behaviour and capacity.

According to the Swadeshi movement, one sees, its economic aspects had two national objectives: (i) Economic self reliance and (ii) employment for the people (B.N.Ganguli). The genesis, growth and economic aspects of Swadeshi have been reviewed with the specific purpose of understanding its transformed role under the influence of Gandhi after 1905. It was during the last phase of the Swadeshi movement-Gandhian phase (1920-47), that the congress became truly



national in its complexion and its composition changed from that of western educated minority group to a mass organization with swaraj as its only and ultimate goal (A. Krishna Swamy). Gandhi not only helped the masses to find a standard living wage but also an opportunity for cultivating self-respect by throwing off the symbol of slavery from their backs and gave the craftsmen “A creative joy through the exercise of his credit which forms the true index of civilization” (Pattabhi Sitaramyiah). It is important and worthwhile at the economic thoughts of Gandhi. M.K.Gandhi (1869-1948) developed a vibrant critique of the mode of development and also of the very idea of “civilization” as it was then exemplified by the western nations. This model of ideology, as he argued, rested on violence and exploitation such as colonization & slavery and abandoned both morality and spirituality, while creating new needs which were impossible to satisfy. The industrialization and globalization of the economy, he argued, a disaster for India. For Gandhi, the economy was meaningful to the extent that it opened out the possibility of wellbeing for all people (Sarvodaya). That entailed a system of production, of distribution and consumption defined by the essential needs of most deprived people in the society (Antyodaya-the least) with the aim of supporting the highest values of human life. His understanding of the path to sarvodaya was through a village economy which maximized the powers of the traditional Indian handcrafts and only employed modern machines that allowed for a ‘production by the masses’ rather than ‘mass production’ (Friedman, 2008). Schumacher was greatly influenced by Gandhi when he later established his philosophy of “Small is Beautiful”, and Sachs and Dube in the 1980’s considered Gandhi as one of the philosophers of alternative development (Ishii 2001).

Gandhi believed that the rich people could be persuaded to part with their wealth to help the poor. In his words “Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth- either by way of legacy or by means of trade



and industry – I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; What belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community” (Godinot 2010). Gandhi visualized a new India involved a fresh outlook on economics-a view that dismissed capitalism for its exploitative excesses and socialism for its connection to industrialization. He insisted that no longer should India rely on a global market based on the freedom of exchange of goods and capital, argued Gandhi. Having rejected capitalism and socialism, Gandhi’s speeches and writings suggest that he envisaged an Indian state grounded in unconventional economics advocating self-reliance. He desired a self-sustaining nation that embraced communal cooperation and manual labour. Gandhi advocated the rejection of private property in favour of public ownership; owners would be trustees of public property managed in the common interest. Gandhian economy conceives of redistribution of material wealth as way of assuring human self respect.

1. Production should be decided by demand and not by personal impulse.
2. An individual cannot retain and used their wealth for egoistic satisfaction, ignoring the interests of society.
3. Private property is not absolute but is subordinated to the common good.
4. The variation in income must be reasonable, fair and variable over time with the trend toward reducing the variances.

In comparison to western utilitarian philosophy, Gandhi was critical to the dictatorship of majority. He was a conscience keeper of minorities and oppressed in the society. Gandhi extends a very spontaneous solution to the hyper economic possessions resulting into rich-poor gap in the contemporary neoliberal economic practices as he



demonstrates, 'Civilization in the real sense of the word consists not in the multiplication but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants (Rivett 1959). Interestingly Gandhi was not against market, industry and capital import and export. His intention was to rationalize and prioritise the economic practices in the supreme welfare of poor and marginalized sections of the society. He was never preferred of such economic practice that produces large scale unemployment, economic inequalities and social exclusion. The major focus in this respects remains to increase production and create job opportunities through toning up the foundations of rural agriculture and cotton industry. Gandhi's vital thrust remained to invent and diffuse village based employment oriented technology and synthesize the utilization of modern technology in a way that it could insure greater productivity and employment in the rural India (Bhatt 1982). Gandhi knew that with the globalization of the economy, every nation would wish to export more and import less to keep the balance of payments in its favour. There would be unceasing economic crisis, unending unemployment and perpetually discontented, dissatisfied human beings.

Seven criteria characterize economic independence according to Gandhi:

1. Agriculture that is respectful of the environment as a basis for the creation of a durable economy.
2. Elimination of poverty and the minimizing of wealth.
3. Production that is based as far as possible on small groups.
4. Self sufficiency of each unit in its basic needs.
5. Identification of basic human needs and the means of meeting them.



6. Control and elimination of distorted views by basic education and technical formation.

7. Limitations to the concentration of economic power (Goldinot)

Mahatma Gandhi said: "Industrialism is going to be a curse for mankind. The world we must strive to build needs to be based on the concept of genuine social equality in it, the price and the peasant, the wealthy and the less well-off, the employer and the employee are on the same level. Economic progress cannot mean that few people charge ahead and more and more people are left behind". He always said: "Think about tomorrow, but act for today" not a bad mantra for the new millennium (Gupte 2000).

His economic thought is assimilate in his overall philosophy. His approach is holistic and aims at the socio economic reconstruction of society. In present days, many people tend to ridicule the Gandhian thought as "old fashioned and anti-progress". Gandhi visualized a total socio-economic reconstruction, so his economic thought must be viewed in this context. He doesn't give any theoretical model regarding economic development but gives some basic dogmas based on which we can decipher what kind of economic structure is the need of the hour. Gandhi has given the concept of constructive work. Gandhi's economic philosophy is firmly fitted to the inclusive and participatory development of villages. He expressed his concerns and commitment for village when he said, "For me, India begins and ends in the villages" (Gandhi 1979b). The purpose of economic practices therefore, remains to ensure equitable and sustainable development where all unemployed workers would get living wages through strengthening rural economy. He wanted a society where each would get according to his talent and labour. He believed that the first priority of government is to ensure every citizen the basic necessity of food and clothing. According to him food and clothing are the basic prerequisites for economic development (Koshal & Koshal1973). If all the land and resources available in the



country was completely utilized, it would certainly fulfil the needs of all human being. It also provides opportunities to the original talent and vision of the people. The Gandhian emphasis on austerity was reflected in the import restrictions on several items of luxury consumption. India should adopt the economic way and idea of Gandhi which totally favourable in today's Indian economy because India's proportion of payment is not favourable, because India import more from other countries rather than produce in our country by using labour intensive technology. On one hand most of the products imported in India is highly technology based and on the other hand, India should follow his ideas of self sufficiency and Swadesi would avoid India from economic problems. Therefore our country badly needed to go back to his economic ideology.

## **Conclusion**

Gandhi's swadeshi and economic vision is certainly good for the country to eliminate poverty and unemployment. Most of the leaders inherit Gandhi's ideology to make the country self sufficient. Even Swadeshi, like any other good thing, can be ridden to death, if it is made a fetish. That is a danger that must be guarded against. Significantly his notion of individual self-sufficiency based on the village republic. On one side, the importance of global economy cannot be denied and on the other side, significant rural developments would make his dream in to real. His economics plays an importance to means of achieving the aim of development and this must be non-violent, ethical and truthful in all economic spheres. His economic thought was small scale and local production oriented using local resources and meeting local needs from local resources. His economic thought is a exceptional emphasis on 'Plain Living' which helps in reducing wants and being self reliant, Supreme consideration is to be given to men rather money. It is very sad, that "SWADESHI" & "GANDHIAN ECONOMY" were real in the past and a dream for present situation.



Gandhian notions are gradually fading away. In fact, the lessons of swadeshi may bring hope for an economics of permanence even among Westerns, once the fraudulent promise of economic growth and industrialism is exposed. Still there is a strong belief that there is a need to adopt Gandhian philosophy and ideology in overall world to eliminate troubles and make peaceful world. Besides global economic scenario, Gandhism is relevant ever and forever,

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