Gandhi's Philosophy of Swadeshi*

The three decades during which Gandhi led the Indian struggle for Independence witnessed an unprecedented awakening of the masses of this country. The extensive and intensive dimensions of this awakening have hardly any parallels in the history of resurgence or renaissance at any time, or anywhere in the history of humanity. Gandhi had an extraordinary genius for communicating or radiating his message to the masses, dispelling their scepticism and inertia, and steeling and enthusing them for courageous action.

Many factors contributed to create the magical impact that Gandhi had on the mind of the masses. Gandhi himself threw some light on one of these factors when he said: "My life is my message". His life of utter and rigorous dedication to Truth, the enchanting and inspiring transparency of his Sadhana, his commitment to a life of asceticism and renunciation, his unflinching determination and courage, and his restless preoccupation with action for altruistic ends combined to create a unique impact on the mind of the masses. Perhaps another factor was the receptivity that the Indian mind has to the messages and exhortations of those whom they recognise as pilgrims on the path of the spirit. Yet another factor might have been Gandhi's ability to relate his perceptions and programmes to some of the beliefs that lay embedded in the psyche of the average, even unlettered Indian.

For these reasons as well as others that we may not recount have, Gandhi had an extra-ordinary way of kindling faith and self-confidence, and creating rapid, almost instant, mass awareness of the significance and implications of his
revolutionary concepts, and the practicability and efficacy of his strategy or programmes of action. *Satyagraha* and *Swadeshi* were two such concepts that captured public imagination and showed the way to freedom and regeneration.

In spite of the context in which Gandhi placed these two concepts before the country and the world, he did not view them as mere slogans of combat. To him, they were principles of evolution. They were pointers to a creative and constructive way of transformation that would lead to Truth and freedom. To him, they were principles that one had to follow to achieve one's goal of self-realisation and freedom.

Gandhi did not believe in a personal God. To him Truth was God. He believed that the most comprehensive and correct way of describing or identifying God was to say 'Truth is God'. He repeatedly declared that the only God he worshipped was Truth. Truth is the reality behind what is manifest and apparent. It is the Law that governs the Universe, and determines the nature of what we see in the Universe. It is only by discovering this Law and living according to it that we can survive and advance towards self-realisation. To Gandhi, the Law and the Law Giver are one, and the Law is auto-active. In other words, the power that enforces the Law is inherent in the Law itself. Thus the Law, the Law Giver and the enforcer are all one. Gandhi saw this Law as *Dharma*, the determinant of the nature of reality as well as the force of cohesion that determined the identity or integrity of phenomena. Thus, survival and progress depended on the observance of this *Dharma*. The human being could be conscious, aware of the nature of this *Dharma*, as well as his own individual *Dharma* (*Swadharma*) as part of the whole, of which he was a part. Gandhi said that his ambition was to pursue this *Dharma* or Truth, and make all aspects of the life of the individual and society 'Dharma-maya', or consistent with the Law or *Dharma*. Gandhi considered *Satyagraha* as well as *Swadeshi* as obligations that flowed from
this *Dharma* and *Swadharma*. To him, therefore, *Satyagraha* and *Swadeshi* were both *Dharmik* or ethical imperatives and operational necessities of his *Sadhana*. They were the corollaries of *Dharma* (*Swadharma*) and the application of the Law of *Dharma* to the field of social life, including economic and political activity. Thus, to Gandhi *Swadeshi* was a Law or principle that applied to all fields of human activity, - economic, political, cultural and religious.

He therefore defined *Swadeshi* as a Law of Nature. No one can go against the Laws of nature, and hope to succeed or prosper or build anything sustainable. Gandhi's *Swadeshi* therefore was not negative or exclusive. It was positive adherence to the Law of nature which compels us to recognise the importance of the proximate as a means of progress towards the ultimate or distant. It is a fundamental axiom of nature that progress towards the ultimate is possible only through the proximate. Any effort to reach the ultimate or distant except through the proximate or the immediate is fraught with the risk of failure; it will be infructuous, illusory, self-defeating and futile. One has only to look at time or space or motion to see the working of this Law of nature. There can be difference in the choice of the vehicle, speed, acceleration, the choice of the medium through which one traverses, like land or water or air; but there is no escape from the Law that one has to move from and through the proximate to reach the distant or the ultimate goal. *Swadeshi* is the same Law of nature applied to human activity and the environment. Here, environment includes the social as well as the natural environment.

It has already been pointed out that the Law of *Swadeshi*, since it is a Law of nature applies not only to the field of economic activity, but also the fields of politics, culture and religion.

Let us first look at the field of economic activity.
Gandhi was dissatisfied with the economic order as it existed in his time. I suppose we too are dissatisfied with the economic order as it exists today. We want a just economic order. At the international level, we are, at least till quite recently, we were, among those who demanded a New Economic order. We want the new economic order to be based on justice, and equality, internationally and nationally. A just economic order has to be a non-exploitative economic order, because an exploitative order can be maintained only by fraud and force, and these will sooner or later lead to violent social conflict. An exploitative economic order can not therefore ensure peace, and without peace there can be no progress. Gandhi therefore believed that our effort in the economic field should be to build up a non-exploitative economic order. He identified four pre-requisites of a non-exploitative or non-violent economic order.

Firstly, he believed that a society that sanctified and extolled greed, and prescribed it as the prime motive of one's activity in any field was bound to be rent by conflict and exploitation. One cannot pursue greed without creating and countenancing inequality, exploitation, jealousy and potential conflict. If the desire for acquisition and aggrandizement is not tempered, exploitation and its progeny will make their appearance. In fact, the interdependence that is inevitable in human society demands a measure of altruism, and not the blind and unenlightened pursuit of self-interest at the cost of others. Gandhi therefore identifies Aparigraha or abstention from acquisitiveness as a first requisite, and since interdependence calls for a measure of love for each other, Gandhi wants that love should substitute greed as the motive of our activity.

Secondly, Gandhi believes that we have no right to hold or sequester what we have not produced, or what we do not need. Any such sequestration is a subtle form of theft. So he believes that a non-exploitatve society can be built only on the
basis of abstention from all forms of gross and subtle theft. He calls this 'Asteya'.

Thirdly, if one is to abstain from all forms of stealing, one can not live on anyone else's labour. One has therefore to earn one's living by one's own labour. Thou shall earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow. This he called 'Sharirashram'.

Fourthly, he pointed out that the Law of Swadeshi flowed from the inescapable Laws of Nature that governed growth and evolution. We have to adhere to it if we are to work for a balanced growth of the individual and the environment, and discharge our responsibility to ourselves and our environment.

In economic activity, we utilise resources to produce what we need for the satisfaction of our wants. These resources include human as well as material resources, including financial resources. The Law of Swadeshi prescribes priority or preference for the proximate. Without going into the details of the implications of according priority to the proximate, we can see that if we ignore local human resources and induct workers from distant areas, we will invite tension and non-co-operation or antagonism, and at the same time condemn our neighbours to a life of unemployment and poverty. If we do not use the material resources available in the proximity, but depend on resources from distant areas we will be responsible for loss where the resources are perishable, and non-utilization where the resources are non-perishable. If we depend on resources from a distance, including from distant countries, we may have to resort to unjust, questionable and violent means to ensure the continuing access to the resources on which our industry or industrial system depends. In fact, it is the anxiety to ensure the uninterrupted availability of such crucial resources at the lowest possible prices, and to ensure markets for manufactured goods at the highest possible rates of profit that led to colonialism and
imperialism, and the desire to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries to ensure client governments. In recent times, these have led to the manipulation of the terms of aid and trade to suit the interests of the industrial former colonial countries.

But before we examine these questions and the relevance of *Swadeshi* in the context created by the tactics employed by the powerful industrial nations, we must have a look at Gandhi's definition of *Swadeshi*, and try to remove some misconceptions.

Let us then turn to Gandhi's definition, and see (1) whether the *Swadeshi* he advocated was 'exclusive' (exclusivist), or based on unfriendliness or hostility for other countries, and (2) whether the spirit or philosophy of *Swadeshi* is hostile to modern technology.

All articles manufactured in a country do not necessarily qualify to be considered 'Swadeshi' on the mere ground that they are manufactured in the country. It is therefore necessary first to identify the principle of *Swadeshi*. In fact, it is easier to define the principle than to make a list of the articles that can be described as *Swadeshi*. To Gandhi the principle of *Swadeshi* flows from the Laws of Nature. It is a spiritual Law, and since Gandhi believed that all spiritual Laws were valid in the material or mundane realm as well, the spiritual Law of *Swadeshi* too was valid in the field of mundane activity, which included activity in the economic, political and other fields. The Law lays down that all activity in pursuit of goals in any field should start with the identification, marshalling and utilisation of one's own resources. Progress is dependent on the effort of the individual, and effort depends on, and begins with the utilisation of one's own resources. Dependence on external or outside resources imposes severe limitations. At any rate, it has to come after one has discovered, organised and made use of the resources inherent within one. When one reaches the
limits of one's body or resources, one reaches the immediately proximate, and thus through a succession of proximates, progresses to the ultimate, or infinite. In the physical world there is no escape from this Law. That is what makes Gandhi identify it as a Law of nature. When a thought of the mind has to be translated into action, the Law of movement through proximates begins to take effect. In certain realms the mind may not be subject to this limitation. But progress to a physical goal is subject to this Law. Thus one begins with one's internal resources or the resources in one's psycho-physical aggregate, and then augments these resources by invoking resources that are adjacent or proximate, except when what one needs is available only at a distance.

To quote Gandhi then, "Swadeshi is the Law of Laws enjoined by the present age. Spiritual Laws like Nature's Law need no enacting. They are self-enacting..... The Law of Swadeshi is engrained in the basic nature of man, but it has today sunk into oblivion..... If this interpretation of Swadeshi be correct, then it follows that its votary will, as a first duty, dedicate himself to the service of his immediate neighbours. This involves exclusion or even sacrifice of the interests of the rest, but the exclusion or sacrifice would be only in appearance."¹ In further explanation, he says: "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."²

Here we have to examine the element of ‘exclusiveness’ in Gandhi's philosophy of Swadeshi. Three questions arise. Does Gandhi's philosophy prescribe the exclusion of everything foreign, or of anything merely on the ground that is of foreign origin? Does his insistence on preference for the immediate neighbour or neighbourhood mean unconcern for all others? Is
the motive behind his uncomprising preference for the proximate parochialism or prejudice or hostility to other countries or other people?

Let us take the first question. Gandhi leaves no room for doubt when he says: "I have never considered the exclusion of everything foreign under every conceivable circumstance as a part of Swadeshi. 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 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, and irrespective of the fact that it impoverishes nobody, is a narrow interpretation of Swadeshi."³

Gandhi is clear that his insistence on priority for the immediate neighbour will not mean injury to or unconcern for the interest of those who are not in the neighbourhood. His reasoning is lucid and perhaps unanswerable. The neighbour has a neighbour, and he or she, in turn, has his or her neighbour. Since each gives priority to his or her neighbour, or bases his action on concern for his or her neighbour, there can be no contradiction or conflict, and no unconcern or injury. Each constitutes or provides a link in the chain of concern that links all humanity. Gandhi "believed in the Truth implicitly that a man could serve his neighbours and humanity at the same time, the condition being that the service of the neighbour was in no way selfish of exclusive, i.e. did not in any way involve the exploitation of any other human being. The neighbour would then understand the spirit in which such service was given. They would also know that they would be expected to give their services to their neighbours. Thus considered, it would spread like the proverbial snowball gathering strength in geometrical progression encircling the whole earth. It followed that Swadeshi was that spirit which dictated man to serve his
next door neighbour to the exclusion of any other. The condition that he had already mentioned was that the neighbour thus served had in his turn to serve his own neighbour. In this sense, *Swadeshi* was never exclusive. It recognised the scientific limitation of human capacity for service.  

The third question we raised was whether Gandhi's *Swadeshi* had an element of chauvinism or hatred for the foreigner. Let us look at Gandhi's reply: "I have never been an advocate of prohibition of all things foreign because they are foreign. My economic creed is a complete taboo in respect of all foreign commodities whose importation is likely to prove harmful to our indigenous interest. This means that we may not in any circumstance import a commodity that can be adequately supplied from our own country ... ... ... In other words, I would not countenance the boycott of a single foreign article out of ill-will or a feeling of hatred." Further, "A true votary of *Swadeshi* will not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. *Swadeshi* 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 economic field, our activities are oriented towards the production and consumption of goods and services for the satisfaction of our wants. Let us see how Gandhi's philosophy applies to both these fields. In production, one will have to give priority to the utilisation or employment of local resources in materials and man-power; in consumption too one will have to give priority to what is manufactured locally. In both cases, the arguments that are put forward against according priority to the neighbour or local man-power and resources, and in the field of consumption, to local employee is incompetent, he is inadequately equipped in skills; his technology is inferior, and therefore, the quality of his products can not compare with the quality of the goods produced elsewhere, generally in other countries. The second argument is that indigenous products are costlier, more expensive. If we
follow these arguments, and switch to or prefer goods manufactured in other countries, we will put our neighbour out of employment, and contribute to a money drain that will benefit other countries at the cost of our nation. The spirit (Law) of Swadeshi would demand that we work for the improvement of our skills, improve our technology, and improve the quality and excellence of our goods-and put up with poorer quality till such time as we improve the quality of our goods. In reality the spirit of Swadeshi thus acts as an incentive to improve our technology. There is nothing in the philosophy of Swadeshi that asks us to be content with archaic or ineffective technology or to abjure the upgradation of technology.

The history of the last three centuries demonstrates the consequences of an economic philosophy that depends on resources from distant lands acquired at minimum or nominal prices, and on markets in distant lands created and maintained through force, deceit and unequal terms of trade. It is this philosophy that has led to the North-South divide; the impoverishment of nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the ever increasing affluence of the countries that followed the Western philosophy of industrialism. The initial days of colonialism and imperialism witnessed the enslavement of countries, the establishment of imperial 'possessions', - some were termed jewels in the Crown, and a systematic process of the use of naked power and force to destroy indigenous industry, create a vacuum and fill it with the export of manufactured products from the colonising countries, and further, the destruction of surviving Indian industries by compelling them to compete on unequal terms. This led to what our great economists and leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji; Justice Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale described as the "bleeding" of our people.

As early as the first years of the 20th century, even
before the Partition of Bengal, our leaders talked of the relation between Swadeshi and Swaraj or Independence, and exposed the sanctimonious arguments of the exploiting powers.

Let us look at what Gopal Krishna Gokhale, one of the Indian Leaders who were held in the highest esteem in the British Empire had to say in 1907: "Deliberate steps were taken by the Company to destroy the industries of the people and to make room for Western manufactures ……This was the first stage in our industrial decay. The second stage began when England forced on us the policy of free trade, i.e. of leaving the door wide open to the competition of the whole world. England's own policy for centuries had been that of Protection, and by that policy she had built up her vast industrial system. … … … But forcing this policy of free trade upon a country circumstanced as India was, a wholly different thing, was bound to produce results of a most disastrous character. … … … We did not possess anything like the combination, skill or enterprise of the West … … Our industries were, therefore, bound to perish as a result of the shock of this sudden competition to which they were exposed, and as a matter of course the introduction of free trade in this country was followed by the rapid destruction of such industries as had existed in the country. … … "

Gokhale then turned to trade, and asked: "Now, I will put a simple question to those present here. If a hundred rupees come into your house every month, and a hundred and fifty rupees go out, will you be growing richer or poorer? And if this process goes on year after year, decade after decade, what will be your position after a time? This has been the case with India now for many years. … … No country, not even the richest in the world can stand such a bleeding as this." He said that this bleeding was at the root of our economic ruin, and pointed out that the struggle that Free Trade had brought for Indian industry was like the struggle between a dwarf and a giant. "If
you will form the least idea of the resources of the Western people, then you will understand what a tremendously difficult problem we have to face in the economic field.

Thus Gokhale and Ranade diagnosed the reasons for the industrial domination and consequent impoverishment of India as: (1) the use of political power to destroy indigenous industry; (2) the policy of opening our markets to the products of the Western countries, enforcing an unequal competition between the "giant and the dwarf", leading to the further destruction of whatever had survived of Indian industry or whatever was set up by Indian industrial interests; and, (3) the consequent unfavourable balance of trade resulting in the "bleeding" of the Indian economy.

Since then, the days of naked Imperialism and direct wielding of political power have ended. Political power has been transferred to the people of India, and Britain has withdrawn. But has the picture changed radically after the liquidation of political Imperialism, and the nation's accession to power? We have not preserved or upgraded indigenous technology, nor even succeeded in copying or adapting the technology that the West used. No one has been willing to transfer modern technology to us, inspite of all promises of aid and collaboration in the field of production. The technological lag continues. We have been compelled to open our markets to the consumer goods manufactured in the developed countries or by multi-national corporations functioning from where they get cheap labour, and can produce to maximise profits. Their goods are good, offered in flashy and attractive presentations. They are backed up by a blitzkrieg of propaganda on the Television and other media. How can Indian manufactures compete? They are compelled to salvage whatever they can through becoming subsidiaries or holders of franchise. The Indian consumer is told that these are days of globalisation, that globalisation is the only way in which the consumer can have access to goods of
quality. The temptations and dazzling presentations of the consumer goods that are paraded before him and the spell that is cast on his mind by the insidious and persistent propaganda to which he is exposed by the mass media, in many cases owned or pressed into service by the very concerns that are seeking to entice him, — lead him into a trance in which he becomes oblivious of the effect that his action as consumer is bound to have on the producer in his own house or his neighbourhood. Women and the vulnerable and impressionable minds of children are the special targets of this propaganda. The targeting is patent. Yet one does not know whether one should describe it as brazen or as artful.

One of the specious arguments that have been sedulously floated, and echoed by innocents or the infatuated is that the concepts of Swadeshi has no value in a world in which the concept of nationalism and the nation-state is getting out-dated and people are moving towards a global society. The question that immediately comes to mind is whether all nations have begun to dismantle national frontiers and give up nationalism, whether the powerful and industrially advanced countries have opened their frontiers to goods and human beings from other areas. Or is it that the advice and call to confirm to futuristic ideas and patterns are meant only for the weak and exploited nations of the world? Competition between the weak and the strong will lead only to increase in disparity, and to exploitation, whether it takes place within nations or between nations.

Gandhi believed that humanity would evolve towards a world community. But he also believed that such an evolution would depend on our ability to extend the Law that holds the family together to wider and wider units till it ruled all interpersonal, inter-group and inter-national relations. The Law that governs the family is the Law of Love, and humanity can become one community only when love substitutes greed, and
concern substitutes cut-throat competition. There can be no equality, no justice, and therefore no peace if globalization means license for the powerful to pursue greed and gobble up the weak in the name of free competition and supranationalism.

In the field of production, the removal of all restrictions, the invitation to multi-nationals and foreign companies to enter all, fields of production, including the production of consumer items and articles that form part of the daily menu, the removal of or dilution of restriction on limits of equity participation, management, volume of profits and repatriation of profits etc. have exposed Indian manufacturers to unequal competition, and left the choice of priorities in the hands of multi-nationals and foreign companies over which the Government has no or little control. The motive of capturing the market and maximising profit has substituted the motive of ending unemployment and poverty, assuring adequate incomes, and ensuring access to essential consumer goods at prices that the lowest strata of the population can afford.

It is not the political power of an Imperialist Government that has brought about this situation,—but the economic power and 'conditionalities' of international economic and financial agencies,—multi-nationals and Governmental consortia that determine the conditions on which we can get aid. We are compelled to go to them to seek financial and technological assistance and trade facilities because we have chosen to depend on their brand of technology and copy their pattern of economic growth and development.

In these circumstances, since many consumer goods and other commodities are manufactured in the country by multi-national corporations or their subalterns or collaborators, a question arises about the attitude of the philosophy of Swadeshi to foreign investments, foreign capital and foreign technology.
Gandhi himself was asked this question by Congress Ministers who were in office between 1937 and 1939. His answer indicates criteria that a nation can ignore only at its own peril, peril to the economic condition and freedom of its people, and its system of Government. He said: "Any article is Swadeshi if it subserves the interests of the millions, even though the capital and talent are foreign, but under effective Indian control. Thus Khadi of the definition of the All India Spinners' Association would be true Swadeshi even though the capital may be all foreign and there may be western specialists employed by the Indian board. Conversely, Bata's rubber or other shoes would be foreign though the labour employed may be all Indian and the capital also found by India. The manufactures will be doubly foreign because the control will be in foreign hands and the article, no matter how cheap it is, will out the village tanner mostly, and the village mochi always. Already the mochis of Bihar have begun to feel the unhealthy competition."

Thus Gandhi has two criteria, - the interests of the Indian masses in employment and incomes, and the retention of effective control in Indian hands. Where these criteria are not fulfilled, the products or the Industrial plant is not "true Swadeshi". Gandhi distinguished between true Swadeshi and false Swadeshi. He said: "If I have to use the adjective 'true' before Swadeshi, a critic may ask, 'Is there also false Swadeshi?' Unfortunately, I have to answer yes. … … … I do hope these ministers and others who guide or serve the public will cultivate the habit of distinguishing between true and false Swadeshi." In the 1930s, as the spirit of Swadeshi began to cast its spell on the public mind, and as the boycott movement began to make its impact felt, some well-known foreign owned companies began to register their companies or their subsidiaries in India and advertise their names adding "India"
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within brackets. They did so in the hope of misleading consumers into believing that the companies were Indian, and so the goods manufactured by them were *Swadeshi*. Gandhi was asked whether such companies and their products could be regarded as 'Swadeshi'. He answered: "As regards the definition of a *Swadeshi* Company, I would say that only those concerns can be regarded as *Swadeshi* whose control, direction and management ... are in Indian hands. I should have no objection to the use of foreign capital, or to the employment of foreign talent, when such are not available in India, or when we need them, - but only on condition that such capital and such talents are exclusively under the control, direction and management of Indians, and are used in the interests of India. But the use of foreign capital or talent is one thing, and the dumping of foreign industrial concerns is totally another thing. The concerns you have named can not, in the remotest sense of the term, be called *Swadeshi*. Rather than countenance these ventures, I would prefer the development of the industries in question to be delayed by a few years in order to permit national capital and enterprise to grow up and build such industries in future under the actual control, direction and management of Indians themselves."\(^9\)

During the days of the struggle for Independence or *Swaraj*, the British Imperialist Government held the reins of power. They did not have the interests of the Indian masses at heart. Their strategy was to destroy indigenous industry, flood the market with attractive goods manufactured by them, reduce the millions of our people to consumers", look upon our country as a market for their goods and undertakings, fleece, or bleed our economy and our people, compel unequal competition to ensure that we languish and wither while the rich becomes richer, and national and international disparities increase. Today, political power vests in our hands, but it appears as though our weakness before the economic might of
trans-national and multi-national corporations has created genuine fear of a second coming of the syndrome. In spite of decades of aid and trade and development, the net outflow from our country is far higher than what we received through trade and aid, and unemployment and disparities are increasing.

It is in such circumstances, and in the face of an Imperialist Government that used Governmental power in naked and subtle ways to destroy Indian industry, Indian skills and the Indian economy itself that Swadeshi or the Swadeshi Movement became an instrument of struggle for the defence of our economy and for freedom from exploitation and eventual impoverishment and slavery. It became an effective answer to the tactics of those who wanted to dominate our economy, and exploit our masses by creating an addiction for foreign consumers' goods. Depending on foreign goods also meant tuning oneself to foreign tastes and patterns of thought and values. It led to the atrophy of Indian skills and the Indian genius for originality and variety, and to attraction for the goods and fashions of the West in the induced belief that conformity with the ways of the West is a sign of modernity and progress.

Like Dadabhai Naoroji, Ranade, Gokhale, Tilak, Rabindranath Tagore, Lala Lajpat Rai and other Titans of our struggle for freedom, Gandhi also saw Swadeshi as an answer to the Western strategy of economic domination and exploitation. But to him, Swadeshi was more than an answer to British strategy. It was part of his philosophy of non-co-operation and self-reliance. He pointed out that there was an element of co-operation that the victim unwittingly extended to the exploiter, and it was the duty of a rebel or revolutionary or Satyagrahi therefore to withdraw this co-operation, - refuse to co-operate to bring about one's own ruin. It was also the duty of the Satyagrahi to build up an alternative to the system with which he non-cooperated.
Gandhi's philosophy of Swadeshi therefore meant the renunciation or boycott of goods that were not Swadeshi, and intensive efforts to revive Indian industry and make it more efficient to meet the demand for products of excellence that could compete with the quality of products from anywhere in the world. It is, as part of these efforts that Gandhi set up the All India Spinners’ Association and the All India Village Industries Association. Along with the bonfires and boycott of foreign goods he also worked assiduously for the regeneration of village industries, for the upgradation of the skills and technology used in them, and the organisation of artisans, craftsmen and workers engaged in these industries.

It cannot be gainsaid that boycott was the cutting edge of the movement to combat economic domination. This had to be so when the British Government was interested not in protecting Indian industry, but in getting entrenched in the Indian market or capturing the Indian market and driving out Indian goods through unequal competition. But Gandhi never believed that the people were helpless without power. He did not want the people, who are the repository of constitutional and revolutionary power, to feel helpless without the Government. Therefore to him boycott or non co-operation or Satyagraha was the 'ultimate guarantee of freedom', the exercise of peoples' power in the cause of freedom. If people are sovereign, and they are sovereign in democracy, they can not abdicate their responsibility to defend political sovereignty as well as their economic and industrial interests. Gandhi was more interested in what people could do than in waiting on Governments: While the Government has the power to determine policy and invoke sanctions, people have the power to boycott, to decline to buy. And in a configuration where the goal or interest of trans-national corporations or multi-national corporations is to make us 'consumers', the only effective power that is left with the people may be to refuse to consume
or to buy, to refuse to become consumers in a captive market, and thus decline to be partners in the conspiracy against their own economic interests. This may be all the more so, when military, political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of those who want to convert others into mere consumers, those whose driving force has not been philanthropy, but the desire to dominate and use power to seek their own benefit at the cost of others. In Gandhi's philosophy, therefore, Swadeshi is both a principle of evolution or construction, a creative principle, as well as an instrument of struggle for the economic regeneration of the masses.

As we have already seen, Gandhi believed that the philosophy of Swadeshi was equally valid in all spheres of human activity, and all spheres in which man was capable of evolution. I have devoted most of my time to the implications of Swadeshi in the field of economic activity. I must now say a few words about the spheres of culture, and of political and spiritual evolution.

In the realm of culture, Swadeshi demands that we do not uproot ourselves from our heritage. Our heritage has taken shape from the thoughts and efforts of those who are, and who were proximate to us. To be ignorant of this heritage or to repudiate it is inconsistent with the spirit of Swadeshi; it is the base on which one builds. One can and should contribute to its improvement or enrichment. For this, one must be introspective, and must be able to detect and remove deficiencies and whatever is untenable. One must not fear exposure to other cultural heritages. In fact one should absorb whatever good one finds anywhere. But one should not allow one's roots to wither or be eroded. Gandhi has been quite graphic in outlining the paradigm: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides, and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to blow about in my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. Mine is
The need to be familiar with one's own cultural moorings before one turns to those of others has been endorsed and annotated by the great savant and orientalist, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy: "Just so with all other indigenous arts and industries; we neglect what lies at our doors, to buy from abroad what we do not understand and cannot use to advantage. No wonder we are poor; but, what is worse, we are intellectually and aesthetically sterilising ourselves as well. We want a Swadeshi of ideas, of music, of art, and commercial Swadeshi is bound to follow. I do not mean a boycott of foreign ideas; but I mean that Indians have yet to realise that they cannot adequately appreciate foreign ideas, foreign arts or foreign music, if they cannot appreciate their own. Remember we have a duty not only to ourselves, but to the world; that duty is to develop our talents and not bury them."

Dr. Coomaraswamy has also pointed out that the spirit of Swadeshi should make us question the senseless adoption of systems that originated elsewhere and were once hailed as beneficial, but later discovered to be injurious to society. The countries in which these systems or practices originated were having second thoughts and introducing correctives, but some in India were still victims of infatuation. "Now consider another aspect of Swadeshi. Are we going to compete with the West by introducing a factory system and a capitalist ownership of the means of productions, corresponding to that prevailing in Europe? The results of the capitalist system, wherein the possession of the means of production by a few, enables them to exploit the many, are so unfavourable in the West, that we shall do well to question very severely whether it is wise for us to attempt to compete with the West on the same lines; especially as we are quite out of touch with the regenerative tendencies referred to in the West. If Indian industries are to continue to benefit the people of India, and not merely a few
capitalists in India, they must still be the village and home industries of the past, aided of course, by the adoption of such improvements as appear really desirable."

In the realm of religion, Gandhi's philosophy of Swadeshi demands that we be respectful and loyal to the religion into which we are born. One should in fact be respectful to all religions. No religion is perfect. All religions have some truth in them. We must therefore be respectful to all religions, and must learn whatever is good in them to enrich the quality of our own religions. It is not by giving up one's religion and opting for some other religion that one can improve one's religion; when all religions are imperfect, if one changes one's religion, one is only moving from one imperfect religion to another imperfect religion. If one religion needs purification and augmentation to be made less imperfect; so does the other, so, one's duty does not lie in abandoning one's religion, but in making one's own understanding and practices more perfect, and in purifying and augmenting one's own religion.

In the field of spiritual evolution, the practice of Swadeshi is the practice of Swadharma. By Swadharma Gandhi means both the specific duty of a person that has crystallized from his nature, his past, and his current situation and context, as well as the general duty of or need for persistent self-reliant effort to overcome obstructions and evolve towards one's spiritual goal of liberation. One can receive guidance and encouragement. But the effort has to be one's own. Nothing external can substitute the internal process. Since the ultimate effort or Sadhana is to 'identify himself with the entire creation', he has to commence his altruism with the beings with whom he comes into contact in his neighbourhood, - around him. One relates to distant beings only in and through one's imagination. It is the beings in our immediate neighbourhood that harm us, irritate us or remind us of separateness. It is the
proximate being therefore with whom we can practise altruism. It is the proximate being that enables us to move along the path of altruism, identification and the conquest of ego, thus helping us to be 'emancipated from the bondage of the physical body.'\[1\]

In the field of politics, Gandhi believed in the preservation and modernisation of indigenous institutions of administration, and institutions and processes for the administration of justice and the indigenous tradition of self-restraint and the Rule of Dharma, a state or society in which the ruler as well as the ruled was kept on the straight path by the tenets and codes of Dharma.

Thus, in Gandhi's Swadeshi, "there is no room for selfishness; or if there is selfishness in it, it is of the highest type, which is not different from the highest altruism. Swadeshi in its purest form is the acme of universal service."\[12\]

For Gandhi Swadeshi is the extension of the law of nature to one's environment. "What the Gita says with regard to Swadharma equally applies to Swadeshi, for Swadeshi is Swadharma applied to one's immediate environment." \[13\]
3. *Young India* June 17, 1926.
5. Ibid., p. 77.
8. Ibid.
10. *Young India*, June 1, 1921.
12. Ibid., p. 42.
13. Ibid., p. 41.

* Text of Eighth Gandhi Memorial Lecture delivered by Ravindra Varma on September 5, 1997 at Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi.