
UNIT 2 SWARAJ AND SWADESHI

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Basic Notions
- 2.3 Hind *Swaraj*
- 2.4 *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*: Village as a Republic
- 2.5 *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*: Historical Significance
- 2.6 Education and Upliftment of All
- 2.7 *Swaraj* in *Swadeshi*: in Gandhi's Own Words
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Key Words
- 2.10 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To inspire the students with Gandhian vision of *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*.
- To find the historical significance of these terms.
- To figure out the contemporary relevance of these two terms.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit tries to understand the historical context and significance of two key concepts of Gandhi: *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*.

2.2 BASIC NOTIONS

While the freedom struggle was in progress, Gandhi was working on ideas for a new social order for post-colonial India. He believed that there would be no point in getting rid of the British without getting rid of the centralised, exploitative and violent system of governance and the economics of greed that they pursued. Gandhi designed a new trinity to achieve his vision of a new non-violent social order. He called it *Sarvodaya*, *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*. The first of the trinity was *Sarvodaya*, the 'upliftment of all'. "All rise" - not a few, as in capitalism, not even the greatest good of the greatest number as in socialism, but each and every one should be taken care of. That is *Sarvodaya*. This includes the care of the Earth - of animals, forests, rivers and land. Gandhi's vision is better encapsulated in the concept of biocracy (where the interest of all living beings, including nonhuman species, local and global ecosystems, and future generations are taken into account, because their interest is our interest) rather than democracy (SSS).

In such a situation we need an economic development as consensus and profitable for all. Not "the rising tide lifts all boats" but "everybody in the water gets to ride in a boat" and even more, the trees have standing. The second aspect of the Gandhian trinity is *Swaraj*, 'self-government'. *Swaraj* works to bring about a social transformation through small-scale, decentralised, self-organised and self-

directed participatory structures of governance. It also implies self-transformation, self-discipline and self-restraint. Thus *Swaraj* is a moral, ethical, ecological and spiritual concept and therefore a *sattvic* method of governance. The third part of the trinity is *Swadeshi*, ‘local economy’. Gandhi opposed mass production, favouring production by the masses. Work for him was as much a spiritual necessity as an economic one. So he insisted on the principle that every member of society should be engaged in manual work. Manufacturing in small workshops and adherence to arts and crafts feeds the body as well as the soul, he said. He believed that long-distance transportation of goods, competitive trading and relentless economic growth are *rajasic*, verging towards *tamasic*, because they destroy the fabric of human communities. Within the context of *Sarvodaya*, *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*, taking care of each other and caring for the Earth, constantly and regularly, development emerges through *seva* and is *sattvic* development (SSS).

The English translation of *seva* as service does not convey the depth of its meaning. For example, one can be paid for a service but *seva* is offered as a gift. *Seva* implies devotion and a long-term commitment. It is good in itself, irrespective of results, outcomes and achievements. The person performing *seva* does not try to change the world but to serve the world. When one wishes to change others, there is a certain amount of *rajasic* hubris involved. When we want to change the world, we know what is good for the world and we want to shape it to our image and to our ends. The person engaged in serving the world accepts his or her limitations and offers himself or herself for the wellbeing of the other, believing that the other is none other than I, and I am none other than the other. There is no duality, nor separation between the one serving and the one served. Both exist in a web of relationships and both are seeking spiritual fulfilment as well as material and physical wellbeing. It was this spirit which inspired many thousands of Gandhian workers to commit themselves to *sattvic* development through service (SSS).

2.3 HIND SWARAJ

Hind Swaraj, the title of the first definitive writing of Mahatma Gandhi, and which continues to evoke critical interest the world over even now, literally means ‘self-rule in India’. This small book of about 30,000 words was written in Gujarat in November 1909 on board the ship during Gandhi’s return trip from England to South Africa after an abortive mission, within 10 days, 40 of the 275 pages being written with left hand. As stated by Gandhiji himself: “I wrote the entire *Hind Swaraj* for my dear friend Dr. Pranjivan Mehta. All the argument in the book is reproduced almost as it took place with him.” [CWMG 71: 238] It was published in the Indian Opinion in Natal and was soon banned by Government in India because it contained ‘matter declared to be seditious’. On that, Gandhi published the English translation from Natal to show the innocuous nature of its contents. The ban was finally lifted on 21 December 1938.

A number of editions have been published thereafter, the most common being that published by Navjivan press in India in 1938 with the title ‘*Hind Swaraj: the Indian Home Rule*’. *Swaraj* lays stress on governance not by a hierarchical government, but self governance through individuals and community building. The focus is on political decentralization. Since this is against the political and

social systems followed by Britain, Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* laid stress on India discarding British political, economic, bureaucratic, legal, military, and educational institutions. The book has 20 chapters and 2 appendices. Some useful quotes from this book are given below:

Concept of *Swadeshi*

"God set a limit to man's locomotive ambition in the construction of his body. Man immediately proceeded to discover means of overriding the limit. God gifted man with intellect that he might know his Maker. Man abused it so that he might forget his maker. I am so constructed that I can only serve my immediate neighbors, but in my conceit I pretend to have discovered that I must with my body serve every individual in the Universe." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. X]

Why was India Lost?

"The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them. When our Princes fought among themselves, they sought the assistance of Company Bahadur. That co-operation was versed alike in commerce and war. It was unhampered by questions of morality. Its object was to increase its commerce and to take money. The Hindus and the Mohammedans were at daggers drawn. This, too, gave the Company its opportunity and thus we created the circumstances that gave the Company its control over India. They wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods. They will leave no stone unturned to reach the goal. It is my deliberate opinion that India is being ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization. We are turning away from God." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. VII & VIII]

Indian Civilization

"Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization means 'good conduct.'" [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] "The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] "We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] "They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and an encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] "They saw that kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the Rishis and the Fakirs." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XVI] "Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no touts to lure people into them. This evil, too,

was noticeable only in and around capitals.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] ”The tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII]

Swaraj is Self-Rule

“It is *Swaraj* when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands. But such *Swaraj* has to be experienced, by each one for himself. One drowning man will never save another.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIV] ”I believe that you want the millions of India to be happy, not that you want the reins of government in your hands. If that be so, we have to consider only one thing: how can the millions obtain self-rule?” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XV]

Freedom from England

“If the English become Indianized, we can accommodate them. If they wish to remain, in India along with their civilization, there is no room for them.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIV]

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Briefly mention the new trinity Gandhi designed to achieve his vision of a new non-violent social order.

2) What is *Hind Swaraj*?

2.4

SWARAJ AND SWADESHI: VILLAGE AS A REPUBLIC

What Gandhi was looking for was what he called *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*. These two terms taken together represent the type of society that Gandhi was looking for. *Swaraj*, very badly translates as independence/autonomy/home rule/self-rule. *Swadeshi* can be translated as self-sufficiency or self-reliance (Burke 2000). *Swaraj* for Gandhi was not simply a question of ousting the British from India

19

and declaring independence. What it implied was a wholly different type of society. He did not want the British to be replaced by Indians doing exactly the same. If that was all they achieved, they would not have achieved true freedom but merely the same type of government run by a different set of men. He wanted the value system and life style of the British Raj to be done away with and totally replaced by a simpler, more spiritual, communal life. This new type of society, reflecting the old values of pre-colonial days, was to be based on the village. He stated that: “[I]ndependence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic ... having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world... In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom.”

Therefore, Gandhi’s vision for a new India entailed that ‘every religion has its full and equal place’. (That is why Gandhi was totally opposed to the partition of India). Equally, ‘there would be no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands’. In his *Collected Works* there is a passage, written in 1942, that amplifies his ideas on the role of the village. He states that ‘my idea of village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity’ (Burke 2000). He continues: “Thus every villages first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding *ganja*, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hail. It will have its own waterworks, ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of... non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by a [council] of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this [council] will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.”

Gandhi was quite certain that any village could become such a republic straight away without much interference even from the colonial government because he believed that their sole effective connection with the villages was the collection of village taxes. All that was needed was the will to do it. He referred to his ideal state as one of ‘enlightened anarchy in which each person will become his own ruler’. It is interesting to see that throughout his writings on the autonomous self-sufficient village communities we see echoes of the anarchist lifestyles proposed by such writers as Tolstoy or Thoreau in the nineteenth century (Burke 2000).

2.5 SWARAJ AND SWADESHI: HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The first nationalistic sentiment among the members of the Indian National Congress was to representation in the government bodies. Dadabhai Naoroji successfully contested in an election and become the first Indian member in the British House of Commons (Friends of India 2007). Aware of the economic devastation that British rule had brought on the country, India's broad masses were responding eagerly to the nationalist message. But the nationalist movement was also becoming exceedingly divided between two poles representing radically different currents and tendencies. Whereas one side attempted to restrict the national movement to a struggle for political reforms, the other side sees the aspirations of the general public and called for the complete liberation from colonial rule. Bal Gangadhar Tilak eloquently and succinctly summarized the sentiments of the new and increasingly militant national movement. He spoke of British rule as having ruined trade, caused the collapse of industry, and destroyed the people's courage and abilities. Under the colonial regimen, Tilak asserted that the country was offered neither education, nor rights, nor respect for public opinion. Without prosperity and contentment, the Indian people suffered constantly from poverty, famine and drain. He believed that without political power Indian industry could not develop, the nation's youth could not be educated, and the country could win neither social reforms nor material welfare for its people (Friends of India 2007). *Swaraj* can mean generally self-governance but the word usually refers to Gandhi's concept for Indian independence from foreign domination. *Swaraj* lays stress on governance not by a hierarchical government, but self-governance through individuals and community building (Friends of India 2007).

Tilak was the first Indian nationalist to embrace *Swaraj* as the destiny of the nation. Tilak deeply opposed the British education system that ignored and defamed India's culture, history and values. He resented the denial of freedom of expression for nationalists, and the lack of any voice or role for ordinary Indians in the affairs of their nation. So he considered *Swaraj* as the natural and only solution. His popular slogan "*Swaraj* is my birthright, and I shall have it" became the source of inspiration for Indians. For Tilak the idea of *Swaraj* is not only an end to foreign rule but also an end to exploitative social traditions indigenous to the country. He knew that it is possible only by drawing our people belonging to all sections of society in to the national movement. His vision and his desire to achieve *Swaraj* through the mobilization of common people constituted a turning point in the independence movement. The Home Rule Movement that he started with other prominent members forced the British to concede that introduction of responsible Government was their final objective. His activism and his passionate advocacy, especially through the media, inspired an entire generation. Tilak wrote in the journal *Kesari*: "When Hindus and Muslims jointly ask for *Swarajya* from a common platform, the British bureaucracy has to realize that its days are numbered." (Friends of India 2007).

Gandhi had a more philosophical view of *Swaraj*. According to him, adopting *Swaraj* means implementing a system whereby state machinery is virtually nil, and the real power directly resides in the hands of people. Gandhi wrote "Independence begins at the bottom... A society must be built in which every

village has to be self sustained and capable of managing its own affairs... It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without... This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbors or from the world. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces... In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.”

The *Swadeshi* movement was a successful economic strategy to remove the British Empire from power and improve economic conditions in India through following principles of *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency). Strategies of the *Swadeshi* movement involved boycotting British products and the revival of domestic-made products and production techniques. *Swadeshi*, as a strategy, was a key focus of Gandhi who described it as the soul of *Swaraj* (Wikipedia 2011). Gandhi described *Swadeshi* as “a call to the consumer to be aware of the violence he is causing by supporting those industries that result in poverty, harm to workers and to humans and other creatures.” Gandhi recognized that alienation and exploitation often occur when production and consumption are divorced from their social and cultural context, and that local enterprise is a way to avoid these problems. “*Swadeshi* is that spirit in us which requires us to serve our immediate neighbors before others, and to use things produced in our neighborhood in preference to those more remote. So doing, we serve humanity to the best of our capacity. We cannot serve humanity by neglecting our neighbors”.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) Give the meaning and significance of *Swadeshi*.
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- 2) What does Bal Gangadhar Tilak speak about British rule?
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2.6 EDUCATION AND UPLIFTMENT OF ALL

Why Gandhi proposed the introduction of productive handicrafts into the school system was not really as outrageous as may appear. What he really wanted was for the schools to be self-supporting, as far as possible. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, a poor society such as India simply could not afford to provide education for all children unless the schools could generate resources from within. Secondly, the more financially independent the schools were, the more politically independent they could be. What Gandhi wanted to avoid was dependence on the state which he felt would mean interference from the centre. Above all else, Gandhi valued self-sufficiency and autonomy. These were vital for his vision of an independent India made up of autonomous village communities to survive. It was the combination of *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* related to the education system. A state system of education within an independent India would have been a complete contradiction as far as Gandhi was concerned (Burke 2000).

He was also of the opinion that manual work should not be seen as something inferior to mental work. He felt that the work of the craftsman or labourer should be the ideal model for the 'good life'. Schools which were based around productive work where that work was for the benefit of all were, therefore, carrying out education of the whole person - mind, body and spirit. The right to autonomy that Gandhi's educational plan assigns to the teacher in the context of the school's daily curriculum is consistent with the libertarian principles that he shared with Tolstoy. Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. Under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Textbooks were mandatory so that Gandhi found that 'the living word of the teacher has very little value. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils. On the other hand, Gandhi's vision implied the end of the teacher's subservience to the prescribed textbook and the curriculum. It presented a concept of learning that simply could not be fully implemented with the help of textbooks. Of equal, if not more importance, was the freedom it gave the teacher in matters of curriculum. It denied the state the power to decide what teachers taught and what they did in the classroom. It gave autonomy to the teacher but it was, above all, a libertarian approach to schooling that transferred power from the state to the village (Burke 2000).

Gandhi's basic education was, therefore, an embodiment of his perception of an ideal society consisting of small, self-reliant communities with his ideal citizen being an industrious, self-respecting and generous individual living in a small cooperative community. For informal educators, we can draw out a number of useful pointers. First, Gandhi's insistence on autonomy and self-regulation is reflected in the ethos of informal education. Gandhi's conception of basic education was concerned with learning that was generated within everyday life which is the basis on which informal educators work. It was also an education focused on the individual but reliant on co-operation between individuals. There is also a familiar picture of the relationships between educators and students/learners: "A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than he teaches them. He who learns nothing from his disciples is, in my opinion, worthless. Whenever I talk with someone I learn from him. I take from him more than I give him. In this way, a true teacher

regards himself as a student of his students. If you will teach your pupils with this attitude, you will benefit much from them.” (Talk to Khadi Vidyalaya Students, Sevagram, Sevak, 15 February 1942 CW 75, p. 269 quoted in Burke 2000) Lastly, it was an education that aimed at educating the whole person, rather than concentrating on one aspect. It was a highly moral activity and a spiritual endeavour leading to full *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*.

2.7 SWARAJ IN SWADESHI: IN GANDHI’S OWN WORDS

The following is taken from *Young India*, 10-12-1919 and is written by Gandhi himself. Though some of the historical events have become outdated, Gandhi’s eagerness for *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* and his reasons are clearly evident in the passage given below. “The much-talked-of Reforms Bill will become the law of the land within a few days and in due course the new legislatures will take the place of the old. The Viceroy has announced that he is going loyally to abide by the new scheme and that he will try to make it a success. I have refrained from expressing an opinion on the report of the Joint Committee for I do not feel sufficiently interested in it. It is not possible to be enthused over a thing which when analysed means little for the people. So far, therefore, as the Reform Scheme is concerned, I would simply urge that we should take the fullest advantage of it and, like the Viceroy, loyally work to make it a success. That it is an improvement upon the original measure is admitted by all.”

“But the real reform that India needs is *Swadeshi* in its true sense. The immediate problem before us is not how to run the government of the country, but how to feed and clothe ourselves. In 1918 we sent sixty crores of rupees out of India for buying cloth. If we continue to purchase foreign cloth at that rate, we deprive the Indian weaver and spinner of that amount from year to year without practically giving him or her any other work in exchange. No wonder a tenth at least of the population is cruelly half-starved and the majority of the rest underfed. He who has eyes may see for himself that the middle-class people are already being underfed and our babies are not getting enough milk for themselves. The Reform Scheme, no matter how liberal it is, will not help to solve the problem in the immediate future. But *Swadeshi-Gan* solve it now.”

“The Punjab has made the solution still clearer to me. God be thanked that the beautiful women of the Punjab have not yet lost the cunning of their fingers. High or low, they still know the art of spinning. They have not yet burnt their spinning-wheels as many Gujarati women have done. It is to me a perfect delight to find them throwing balls of yarn into my lap. They admit they have time at their disposal for spinning. They admit that the khaddar woven from their band-spun yarn is superior to the machine-spun yarn. Our forefathers were well able to clothe themselves with little effort and with perfect comfort without having to buy from the foreign markets.”

“This beautiful art and yet so simple is in danger of being lost if we do not wake up betimes. The Punjab gives proof of its possibilities. But the Punjab too is fast losing her hold of it. Every year witnesses a decrease in the output of band-spun yarn. It means greater poverty in our homes and greater idleness. The women who have ceased to spin are not utilizing their time in any other or better manner

than gossiping.” “But one thing is needful to undo the mischief. If every educated Indian will realize his clear primary duty, he will straightway present the women of his household with a spinning-wheel and provide the facilities for learning the art of spinning. Millions of yards of yarn can be produced from day to day. And if every educated Indian will condescend to wear the cloth produced from such yarn, he will support and assist in rebuilding the only possible cottage industry of India.” “Without a cottage industry the Indian is doomed. He cannot maintain himself from the land. He needs a supplementary industry. Spinning is the easiest, the cheapest and the best.”

“I know this means a revolution in a mental outlook. And it is because it is a revolution that I can aim that the way to *Swaraj* lies through *Swadeshi*. A nation that can save sixty crores of rupees per year and distribute that large sum amongst its spinners and weavers in their own homes will have acquired powers of organization and industry that must enable it to do everything else necessary for its organic growth.” “The dreamy reformer whispers, “Wait till I get responsible government and I will protect India’s industry, without our women having to spin and our weaver having to weave.” This has been actually said by thinking men. I venture to suggest that there is a double fallacy underlying the proposition. India cannot wait for a protective tariff and protection will not reduce the cost of clothing. Secondly, mere protection will not benefit the starving millions. They can only be helped by being enabled to supplement their earnings by having a spinning industry restored to them. So whether we have a protective tariff or not, we shall still have to revive the hand-spinning industry and stimulate hand-weaving.”

“When the war was raging, all available hands in America and England were utilized in the naval yards for building ships and they- built them, too, at an amazing pace. If I would have my way, I would make every available Indian learn spinning or weaving and make him or her do that work for a certain fixed portion of every day. I would start with schools and colleges presenting as they do ready-made organized units.” “Multiplication of mills cannot solve the problem. They will take too long to overtake the drain and they cannot distribute the sixty crores in our homes. They can only cause concentration of money and labour and thus make confusion worse confounded.”

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How is *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* related to the education system?

2) “Gandhi’s basic education was, therefore, an embodiment of his perception of an ideal society” Comment..

2.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we saw the basic notions leading to *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*. From a historical perspective, we have been able to see Gandhi’s ideal vision as the upliftment of all, including the villagers. Making the proud and giving them the dignity that is due is the basic principle of self-rule. Gandhi’s self-rule is the key to understanding India’s unique identity and destiny. It may be mentioned that though the cultural and economic situation in India today is very different, the basic insights of Gandhi is still valid. Unless we are proud of our own dignity and unless we have the right to determine our own destiny, we cease to be a nation.

2.9 KEYWORDS

- Biocracy** : Our current ideal of democracy, which is a form of tyranny of one generation of humans, has been a phase of our cultural evolution, and one that is now outdated, according to some thinkers. We need to move from a democracy to a biocracy. A process of decision making where the interest of nonhuman species, local and global ecosystems, and future generations are taken into account, because their interest is our interest.
- Swaraj** : Self-government; independence
- Swadeshi** : A movement, part of the Indian independence movement, was a successful economic strategy to remove the British Empire from power and improve economic conditions in India through following principles of *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency)

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