

SWADESHI TO ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT: CONTINUITY OF DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA'S ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Swadeshi has remained a persistent and evolving idea in Indian economic and political thought, symbolising self-reliance, ethical production, and cultural autonomy. Although it was created as an anti-colonial tool in the struggle against the freedom, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya developed its philosophical dimension in an even deeper way using the doctrine of Integral Humanism. This paper examines Atmanirbhar Bharat as a contemporary reinterpretation of Swadeshi through the philosophical framework of Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism. Through the examination of the economic philosophy of Upadhyaya and the impact it has had on post-2014 policy programs such as Make in India, Skill India, Digital India, Startup India and Atmanirbhar Bharat, the study posits that modern self-reliance rhetoric is extensively informed by the philosophy of Integral Humanism. However, the paper also critically evaluates the gaps between ideological intent and policy outcomes, highlighting structural challenges and contradictions. The paper concludes that Swadeshi as envisioned by Upadhyaya can still be useful as a holistic and ethical alternative to Western capitalist and socialist approaches, it moves beyond symbolic nationalism toward inclusive and decentralised development.

Keywords: Swadeshi, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Integral Humanism, Deendayal Upadhyaya, Economic Self-Reliance, Antyodaya.

INTRODUCTION

Swadeshi is a foundational concept in Indian political and economic thought based on the idea of self-reliance and Indian development. Swadeshi is a term based on the Sanskrit words swa (self) and desh (country), meaning originating in one's own country. Swadeshi refers to the use of locally produced goods, services, and institutions while reducing dependence on foreign systems. During the Indian freedom struggle, Swadeshi emerged as a powerful response to colonial exploitation and economic drain. Swadeshi as an economic and moral ideal was stressed by leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi. India tried state-led industrialisation after independence and followed by liberalisation which watered down the popularity of Swadeshi. But, it is Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya who gave a more systemic and indigenous reinterpretation of Swadeshi by his philosophy of Integral Humanism. Swadeshi has gained renewed attention in the 21 st century, especially since 2014 with the renewal of Swadeshi by such programs as Atmanirbhar Bharat. This paper explores whether Atmanirbhar Bharat represents a continuation of Upadhyaya's economic philosophy or a departure shaped by globalised market realities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research methodology to analyse ideological continuity between Swadeshi in Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism and its contemporary expression in Atmanirbhar Bharat. It relies on textual and conceptual analysis of primary philosophical writings,

especially Integral Humanism and the idea of swadeshi, supported by a systematic review of secondary literature on Indian political thought and development. Policy discourse analysis of official government documents is employed to examine normative framing. A critical-evaluative approach assesses gaps between philosophical intent and structural constraints.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SWADESHI

The intellectual roots of Swadeshi can be traced to several nationalist thinkers. The Drain Theory of Dadabhai Naoroji revealed the exploitative nature of the colonial rule, showing how the Indian wealth was gradually moved to Britain (Naoroji, 2020). His analysis made a good economic argument of the indigenous production and self-reliance. Bal Gangadhar Tilak made Swadeshi a mass-based political movement. By advocating the boycott of foreign goods and promoting indigenous industries and national education, Tilak linked economic self-reliance with political mobilisation and cultural pride (Chandra et al., 1989). Public celebrations like Ganesh Utsav and Shivaji Utsav assisted in popularising Swadeshi among people (Pradhan, 1985). Mahatma Gandhi made Swadeshi a political principle and a moral and spiritual ideology. To Gandhi Swadeshi referred to serving the immediate environment through application of local resources and fostering simplicity, non-violence and self-restraint (Gandhi, 2009). His ideas of khadi, village industries and Gram Swaraj linked economic self-reliance with moral living and self-reliance of the community (Parel, 1997).

DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA AND INTEGRAL HUMANISM

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya synthesised the economic critique of Naoroji and the moral vision of Gandhi into a comprehensive philosophical framework known as Integral Humanism. He argued that Western economic model capitalism and socialism were did not fit for India because they ignored cultural values, ethical responsibilities, and spiritual dimensions of human life (Upadhyaya, 1965). Integral Humanism considers human beings as complete beings comprising of body, mind, intellect and soul. Economic growth should thus be able to find the equilibrium between material growth and moral and cultural well being. Upadhyaya opposed industrialisation based on profit and overstate control and argued in favour of decentralized production, local employment and localized village economies (Upadhyaya, 1965). Central to his philosophy is the principle of Antyodaya, which emphasises the upliftment of the last person in society. Swadeshi as an aspect of Integral Humanism does not only encompass domestic production but about insuring of social justice, cultural continuity and ethical economics. Upadhyaya was not against modern technology; instead, he demanded that it should be in the interests of the nation and empower the locals instead of encouraging dependence (Upadhyaya, 1965).

SWADESHI IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

In the 21st century, Swadeshi has re-emerged not only as a political idea and economic policy direction but as a conceptual response to the structural pressures of globalisation. Contemporary initiatives like Make in India, Vocal in Local and Atmanirbhar Bharat have shown efforts to redefine Swadeshi as a model of economic sovereignty, but the level to which these policies have been influenced by the underlying philosophy of Swadeshi is a concept that needs a theoretical examination. The economic growth in India was boosted by globalisation and liberalisation, but it also led to the weakening the local industries because of exposure to very competitive international market (Pavcnik, 2016). This period of market expansion intensified socio-economic inequality, as the benefits of liberalisation were unevenly distributed across regions and social groups (Chancel & Piketty, 2017). Simultaneously, the role as a member in the global trading systems made India more dependent on foreign markets and institutions, and brought structural weaknesses instead of independent development (Rodrik, 2011). This reflects what Stiglitz (2002) identifies as global asymmetry, in which the developing countries engage in the markets on unequal terms with institutional strength, resulting in vulnerability rather than genuine competitiveness. The COVID-19

crisis also revealed how India was vulnerable to international supply chains, especially in essential industries such as healthcare and pharmaceuticals, proving how weak the externally dependent development is (Reuters, 2021; Siddharth et al., 2024). . Vaccine export restrictions and Oxygen trains were the symptoms of emergency measures which indicated the repositioning of Swadeshi as a tactical requirement rather than rhetorical commitment.

The introduction of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan needs to be seen in the wider theoretical framework of self-reliance and structural capability development. The policy is officially determined as a roadmap to decrease the dependence on imports and strengthen domestic systems of production but symbolically complies with Swadeshi by focusing on the national capacity, local production relationships, and strategic economic autonomy (Press Information Bureau, 2020). However, the concurrent reliance on foreign direct investment for industrial expansion introduces a degree of ideological ambiguity that complicates its alignment with the foundational principles of Swadeshi. This dependence on global capital raises critical questions regarding whether Atmanirbhar Bharat constitutes substantive structural transformation or a hybrid model of conditional self-reliance shaped by global market pressures (UNCTAD, 2025). The self-reliance that can be considered truly Swadeshi means the development of capability as opposed to the symbolic claim, which is also in accordance with the view of Sen (1999), which states that the development process must enhance the internal institutional capacity but not merely expand one's involvement in the international trade.

The modern resurgence of Swadeshi in the form of Atmanirbhar Bharat is not merely a reaction of policy but also it is a quest of a self-sufficient economy within a globalised world. The equilibrium between the external and internal ability demonstrates that the current discussions cannot only be interpreted in administrative terms. They refer to even more fundamental questions concerning the Indian model of development and the values that should be the guiding principles. This is the logical cause that puts Atmanirbhar Bharat on the philosophical basis that its continuity with Deendayal Upadhyaya Integral Humanism and the ethical concept of Swadeshi.

ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT AS A PHILOSOPHICAL CONTINUATION OF INTEGRAL HUMANISM

The idea of Swadeshi in modern India has been executed by various policy programs, the greater meaning of Atmanirbhar Bharat is the continuation of the philosophical tracking of the doctrine of Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya. Rather than concentrating on individual schemes or their immediate outcomes, this section focuses on the ideational and normative congruence between the concept of Integral Humanism and the concept of self-reliance expressed through the concept of Atmanirbhar Bharat. Atmanirbhar Bharat represents the contemporary institutional expression of India's long-standing Swadeshi tradition, reinterpreted to respond to the structural vulnerabilities revealed by globalisation while remaining firmly rooted in indigenous philosophical foundations. Conceptually, it does not encourage economic isolation or the defensive protectionism, but rather it enhances a moderate version of self-reliance that seeks to enhance the strength, resiliency, and strategic independence in an integrated global economy.

Integral Humanism was defined as an indigenous system that was aimed to coordinate economic action with morality, culture and to respond to the needs of societal social obligations (Upadhyaya, 1965). Upadhyaya opposed a blind following of Western economic models and he suggested that the development should be based on Indian social and cultural realities. In a Similarly, Atmanirbhar Bharat focuses on an indigenous model of development that could be more focused on the national potential, social integration, and economic pride, rather than overreliance on foreign influence (Press Information Bureau, 2020). A central point of philosophical continuity lies in the understanding of self-reliance as inner strength rather than isolation. Upadhyaya viewed Swadeshi as a process of strengthening internal economic and social capacities so that engagement with the external world occurs from a position of confidence and autonomy (Upadhyaya, 1965). Atmanirbhar Bharat reflects

this perspective by presenting self-reliance but not as the denying of involvement to world systems but rather the ability to engage in the global systems on an equal footing without being a victim or being structure-dependent.

This philosophical orientation finds institutional expression in the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, which is structured on the basis of five interconnected pillars economy, infrastructure, system, vibrant demography, and demand together forming a comprehensive framework for sustainable and inclusive development (Press Information Bureau, 2020). The economic pillar aims at making India a globally competitive manufacturing center through an increase in the productivity, innovations and efficiency and a decrease in the dependence on critical imports. The infrastructure pillar emphasises the role of having world-class physical and digital infrastructure, and it identifies connectivity, logistics, and industrial corridors as the pillars of self-reliance. The system pillar is concerned with governance reforms based on digitalisation, simplification of regulations, and transparency so that institutions facilitate support of domestic enterprise. The vibrant demography pillar views the young population of India as a development resource, focusing on talent building, entrepreneurship and human capital. The demand pillar is to enhance local consumption by promoting local production as well as the involvement of the citizens by pushing up local products by projects like Vocal for Local. Another significant aspects of continuity between the Integral Humanism and Atmanirbhar Bharat include incorporation of ethics into the economic thought. Integral Humanism holds that economic progress must be guided by *dharma*, understood as moral duty and social balance rather than religious orthodoxy (Upadhyaya, 1965). Similar opinions were expressed by Atmanirbhar Bharat who sees economic self-reliance as a national responsibility, with a focus on ethical consumption, social solidarity and civic engagement. This ethical orientation reflects Upadhyaya's insistence that economic behaviour cannot be separated from moral consciousness. Theoretically, the five pillars of Atmanirbhar Bharat reflect in his development vision based on human-centred development through decentralisation, ethical governance, and cultural values instead of extreme profit maximisation (Upadhyaya, 1965).

Integral Humanism also conceptualises the nation as an organic entity in which economic, social, and cultural dimensions are closely interrelated. Upadhyaya argued that policies that are based on economics but not on cultural foundations create alienation and instability (Upadhyaya, 1965). Atmanirbhar Bharat's emphasis on national confidence, cultural pride, and indigenous capability reflects this organic understanding of nationhood, linking economic strength with cultural self-awareness and collective identity. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a critical catalyst in this context by exposing India's to be overly reliant on the global supply chains, particularly in essential sectors of the country such as healthcare and pharmaceuticals, thereby reinforcing the urgency of strengthening indigenous manufacturing and localised production networks (Reuters, 2021). It is important to recognise that this philosophical continuity does not imply identical application. Integral Humanism was expressed in pre-liberalisation context, and Atmanirbhar Bharat is working in a globalised economic world. However, the fact that it still focuses on self-restraint, moral development, and the national duty indicates that Atmanirbhar Bharat gains conceptual legitimacy through Integral Humanism while adapting its principles to contemporary realities. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, MSME support schemes, and sector-specific reforms are some policy instruments aimed at operationalising this vision by enhancing internal capabilities without being selectively integrated with the global markets (NITI Aayog, 2020).

Thus, Atmanirbhar Bharat can be understood as a contemporary reinterpretation of Integral Humanism, where the language of policy replaces philosophical discourse, but the core values of Swadeshi, ethical economics, and national self-reliance remain intact. It represents the primary contemporary expression of Upadhyaya's Swadeshi philosophy and provides the broader framework for initiatives such as Make in India and Vocal for Local. These initiatives are not independent policy decisions but the extensions of the ideological foundation laid down by the Integral Humanism, and

that economic decision making is related to the moral accountability, cultural anchoring and national pride (Upadhyaya, 1965). In this sense, Atmanirbhar Bharat is positioned not merely as a reform agenda but as the practical operationalisation of Upadhyaya's principle that self-reliance must emerge internally through indigenous capability, social cohesion, and reduced dependency on external structures. This interpretation aligns with the academic work on Indian developmental philosophy that links national competency to cultural identity, which places Atmanirbhar Bharat as a modern-day restatement of Swadeshi philosophy to state policy without sacrificing the ideals of cultural confidence, moral maturity, and independent national development.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Swadeshi and Atmanirbhar Bharat reflect a significant ideological and policy reorientation in India's development strategy, based on indigenous philosophical traditions and especially the Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya. The self-reliance, ethical economics and cultural rootedness are close to the perspective of Upadhyaya development where the concept of the material progress should be combined with social responsibility and moral awareness (Upadhyaya, 1965). Contemporary initiatives like Make in India, Vocal for Local, and Atmanirbhar Bharat symbolically reintroduce Swadeshi, with the focus on local production, local capacity and national pride. However, a critical evaluation of the same exposes however, a continuing discrepancy between the ideological will and the structural results. Despite policy emphasis on self-reliance, India remains deeply embedded in global value chains, particularly in sectors such as electronics, defence, and advanced manufacturing, where dependence on imported components and foreign technology continues (Abhimanyu, 2024). This is inherently a tension between Swadeshi aspirations and the realities of globalisation where economic independence is becoming more of a strategic relation than a self-sufficiency (Rodrik, 2011).

This contradiction could be well traced in the manufacturing sector. While Make in India and PLI schemes have attracted investment, manufacturing's share in GDP has not increased, and the growth in employment has been low because of capital-intensive expansion and automation in manufacturing (Mehrotra, 2020). These results challenges the Integral Humanist focus on human-centred development as well as decentralised livelihoods (Upadhyaya, 1965). From this perspective, growth without adequate employment absorption risks undermining the Antyodaya principle, which prioritises the upliftment of the last person in society (Upadhyaya, 1965). Similarly, the emphasis on MSMEs and local businesses under Atmanirbhar Bharat has yielded both positive and negative outcomes. While policy rhetoric celebrates small producers as carriers of Swadeshi, institutional constraints such as limited credit access, delayed payments, and administrative bottlenecks continue to restrict their transformative potential (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2021). This unequal policy effect throws doubt on the issue of whether Swadeshi has been substantively operationalised or it is still quite symbolic to the grassroot economic actors.

The digital dimension of self-reliance also exposes critical exclusions within the Atmanirbhar framework. As a facilitator of Atmanirbhar Bharat, the Digital India initiative has expanded digital infrastructure, yet it has not adequately reduced regional, gendered, and caste-based disparities in digital access and literacy (Parsheera, 2022). Such disparities create what scholars describe as "conditional inclusion," where access to welfare and services depends on digital capability rather than universal citizenship rights (TRAI, 2024). This outcome has been in conflict with the whole picture social harmony and inclusivity of Integral Humanism. At the theoretical level, the revival of Swadeshi through Atmanirbhar Bharat must also be evaluated against broader critiques of global capitalism. According to the scholars, lack of institutional power to integrate into global markets may increase dependency instead of enhancing autonomy (Stiglitz, 2002). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these vulnerabilities, particularly in healthcare and supply chains, reinforcing the strategic necessity of domestic capacity-building (Siddharth et al., 2024). However, long term investment in research,

education, and indigenous innovation is necessary to maintain self-reliance, and not the crisis responses as short-term (Sen, 1999).

Swadeshi and Atmanirbhar Bharat represent an important normative shift in India's development discourse, which reaffirmed cultural confidence, ethical economics, and national self-reliance, following the Integral Humanism of Deendayal Upadhyaya. Nevertheless, their transformative potential remains constrained by structural bottlenecks, uneven inclusivity, and still dependent on global capital and technology. A genuinely Swadeshi-based model of development must therefore move beyond symbolic assertion toward real institutional reform, decentralised capacity-building, and human-centred development that balances globalism with internal capacity or strength.

CONCLUSION

This shift to Swadeshi to Atmanirbhar Bharat reflects a deep and continuous current in Indian economic thought based on the Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of Integral Humanism. His vision provides a distinctively Indian version of Western capitalist and socialist through introducing ethics, culture, decentralisation, and the principle of Antyodaya into the development process. While post-2014 policies indicate a renewed commitment toward self-reliance, including such initiatives as Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat, the ultimate success of the policy would be determined by the extent of how the policy is followed through the deeper moral and social underpinnings of Swadeshi. For Atmanirbhar Bharat to truly embody Upadhyaya's holistic vision, it must move beyond slogans and symbolic nationalism towards inclusive, ethical, and community-centred development that strengthens indigenous capacities and uplifts the weakest sections. In an era of global uncertainty and structural vulnerabilities, Swadeshi thus remains not only relevant but essential as a guiding framework for sustainable, dignified, and self-reliant national growth.

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