

Swadeshi Ideals and Women Labour in India's Cashew Industry: Pathway to a Sustainable Future

Mrs. Madhura K¹, Prof. Ramakrishna B.M², Dr. Raghavendra B.³

¹*Research scholar, Department of PG Studies and Research in Economics, Mangalore university*

²*Professor, Department of Economics, University College, Mangalore*

³*Asst. Professor, Department of Commerce and Management, Spurthy College of Science & Management Studies, Bangalore.*

Abstract—The Swadeshi movement, rooted in the principles of self-reliance, local production, and community welfare, continues to hold relevance in contemporary discussions on sustainable development in India. Agro-based industries, particularly the cashew industry, reflect these ideals through their reliance on indigenous resources, decentralized production systems, and labour-intensive processes. The interaction between Swadeshi ideals and women's labour in India's cashew industry, with a special focus on regional production patterns, employment conditions, and pathways toward a sustainable future. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, relying primarily on secondary data collected from government reports, labour statistics, industry publications, and UGC-CARE listed academic studies. Conceptual analysis is used to examine Swadeshi philosophy, while state-wise and micro-level data are analysed through tables and graphical representations to assess women's labour participation and production trends. Particular attention is given to the gendered nature of cashew processing, where women constitute the majority of the workforce. The findings reveal that the cashew industry significantly contributes to rural employment and women's income security, thereby supporting Swadeshi-oriented local development. However, women workers face persistent challenges such as informal employment, low wages, occupational health risks, and limited access to social security and welfare benefits. State-wise analysis highlights uneven production and processing capacities, leading to regional disparities in employment opportunities and value addition. The cashew industry structurally aligns with Swadeshi ideals, achieving long-term sustainability requires integrating gender-sensitive labour policies, decentralized industrial development, and improved welfare mechanisms. Strengthening women-led cooperatives, formalizing employment, and promoting local value addition are identified as key

pathways toward building a socially inclusive and sustainable cashew industry in India.

Index Terms—Swadeshi ideals; Women's labour; Cashew industry; Sustainable development; Rural employment; Gender equity; Agro-based industries

I. INTRODUCTION

The Swadeshi movement emphasized indigenous production, self-reliance, and community development. In contemporary India, these ideals resonate strongly in agro-processing industries such as cashew processing, where production is locally embedded and labour-intensive. The cashew industry plays a vital role in rural employment, particularly for women, making it a significant site for examining gender, labor, and sustainability.

The Swadeshi movement, which emerged during India's freedom struggle, advocated the principles of local production, economic self-reliance, and community-based development as a means of resisting colonial economic exploitation. Although originally political in nature, Swadeshi ideals continue to hold significant relevance in contemporary India, particularly within rural and agro-based industries where production processes remain labour-intensive and deeply embedded in local socio-economic structures. In an era of globalization and market liberalization, revisiting Swadeshi principles offers an alternative development perspective that emphasizes sustainability, inclusiveness, and ethical labour practices.

India's cashew industry presents a compelling context for examining the application of Swadeshi ideals in practice. The sector encompasses the entire value

chain from cultivation and processing to domestic consumption and export and plays a crucial role in rural employment generation. Cashew processing, in particular, is characterized by manual, skill-intensive operations such as shelling, peeling, grading, and packing, which rely heavily on human labour rather than full mechanization. As a result, the industry employs a large workforce drawn mainly from rural and coastal regions, where alternative livelihood opportunities are limited.

A distinctive feature of the cashew industry is the overwhelming participation of women workers, who constitute nearly 85–95 percent of the processing labour force in many regions. Women's engagement in the sector has contributed significantly to household incomes, economic survival, and social mobility, especially among marginalized and low-income communities. At the same time, women workers often face challenges such as informal employment arrangements, low wages, occupational health risks, and inadequate access to social security and welfare benefits. These gender-specific vulnerabilities raise important questions about equity and sustainability within an industry that otherwise aligns closely with Swadeshi ideals of local empowerment.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the intersection of Swadeshi ideals and women's labour in the cashew industry, with particular attention to how localised production systems can promote sustainable and inclusive development. By analysing labour patterns, employment conditions, and institutional support mechanisms, the paper seeks to identify pathways through which the cashew industry can evolve into a model of sustainable rural industrialization. Emphasizing gender equity, worker welfare, and community prosperity, the study contributes to broader discussions on sustainable development, women's economic empowerment, and the relevance of indigenous economic philosophies in contemporary India.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

India is one of the world's largest producers and processors of cashew nuts. Major producing states include Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Processing units are often concentrated in coastal belts, providing employment to thousands of rural women.

Eapen, Swaminathan, and Kanji (2003) highlight how liberalization intensified informalization and wage insecurity among women cashew workers. Muthu Kumar et al. (2016) discuss the structural importance of cashew processing in rural livelihoods, emphasizing its labour-intensive nature. Government and institutional reports from V.V. Giri National Labour Institute note that women constitute over 90 percent of the workforce in processing units, yet remain excluded from social protection mechanisms. Existing literature underscores the need for cooperative models, skill upgradation, and gender-sensitive labour policies, aligning closely with Swadeshi ideals of local empowerment and sustainable development.

Eapen, Jeyaranjan, Kanji, Swaminathan, and Harilal (2006) provide one of the foundational studies on the structural challenges facing the cashew industry's labour force. Their work examines global value chains and the power imbalances that disadvantage India's primarily female workforce. They find that competitive pressures and informalisation intensified under liberalisation, resulting in insecure employment for women, limited income growth, and persistent poverty despite their critical role in production processes.

Eapen et al. (2003) detail how trade liberalisation and industry restructuring have shifted labour from formal factory settings towards informal and seasonal work. Their analysis highlights deteriorating working conditions and gender-based wage inequalities where women receive less pay than men and lack basic social protections within processing units.

Krishnamurthy and Maharaja (2024), examines women's work-life balance in cashew units in Cuddalore (Tamil Nadu). They find that while employment provides economic autonomy and improved social status for women workers, industry decline due to relocation intensifies job insecurity and affects household wellbeing.

In Kerala, Kuzhiparambil's studies on home-based and informal cashew workers uncover the complex interplay between local labour markets and global supply chains. These studies show how many women are engaged in clandestine, home-based processing to cope with shrinking formal employment, underscoring the heterogeneity of work arrangements and the persistence of gendered restrictions on choices and earnings.

Health and ergonomic research, such as the review by Sivasangari and Sasikumar (2025), documents occupational hazards affecting women workers. They report that prolonged, repetitive tasks and exposure to shell liquids in processing units lead to musculoskeletal and dermatological disorders, emphasising the need for ergonomic interventions and labour welfare measures. A related survey in Kerala by Nair et al. (2024) finds high prevalence of musculoskeletal and respiratory symptoms among workers, again highlighting occupational risk as a major dimension of gendered labour burdens.

Socio-economic investigations also add depth. Studies in Kanyakumari and Kollam districts highlight that social disadvantage especially caste and economic marginalisation intersect with women's employment in processing units. These works note that nearly all processing workers are women from disadvantaged backgrounds, and that employment often sustains households but also reflects deeper structural inequality.

The literature underscores that women's participation in India's cashew sector is shaped by global market pressures, informal employment patterns, gendered wage structures, health risks, and social hierarchies pointing toward a need for policy, technology, and institutional reforms aligned with Swadeshi ideals of local empowerment and sustainability.

III. OBJECTIVES

- 3.1. To study the role of Swadeshi ideals in the cashew industry.
- 3.2. To analyze women's labour participation in cashew processing.
- 3.3. To examine state-wise production patterns.
- 3.4. To suggest sustainable policy measures.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach using secondary data from government reports, academic studies, and institutional publications. State-wise production data are used to analyze industry concentration.

4.1. Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the intersection of

Swadeshi ideals and women's labour in India's cashew industry, with a special focus on sustainability and regional employment patterns. The study combines conceptual analysis with empirical secondary data analysis to understand how indigenous economic principles shape labour-intensive agro-industries and women's participation within them.

4.2. Data Sources

4.2.1. Secondary Data

The study primarily relies on secondary data collected from:

- Directorate of Cashew & Cocoa Development (DCCD), Government of India
- Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare
- Labour Bureau of India
- National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reports
- Karnataka Department of Industries & Commerce
- District Industries Centre (DIC), Dakshina Kannada
- Published research articles from UGC-CARE listed journals
- Reports of the International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Government policy documents on MSMEs and women labour

4.2.2 Supplementary Sources

- Industry association reports (Cashew Export Promotion Council of India)
- NGO publications on women labour and informal sector employment

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The study is guided by the following conceptual framework:

Swadeshi Ideals → Localized Cashew Production → High Labour Absorption → Women's Employment → Income Security → Sustainable Rural Development

VI. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- Geographical scope: India with micro-level focus on Karnataka and Dakshina Kannada district
- Sectoral scope: Cashew cultivation and processing industry

- Temporal scope: Analysis based on recent available data (2018–2024)

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Dependence on secondary data and estimated figures for taluk-wise distribution
- Lack of updated official gender-disaggregated data at the micro level
- Informal nature of employment limits availability of precise wage and welfare statistics

Despite these limitations, the study provides a reliable analytical framework to understand women's labour and Swadeshi-based sustainability in the cashew industry.

VIII. TO STUDY THE ROLE OF SWADESHI IDEALS IN THE CASHEW INDUSTRY

Swadeshi, as articulated during India's national movement and later elaborated in Gandhian economic philosophy, emphasizes self-reliance, local production, ethical consumption, decentralized industries, and employment generation at the grassroots level. The Swadeshi framework advocates the use of indigenous resources and skills to strengthen rural economies while minimizing dependence on external markets and capital-intensive technologies. Unlike purely profit-driven industrial models, Swadeshi prioritizes social welfare, community development, and human dignity in labour. In contemporary development discourse, Swadeshi ideals align closely with the principles of sustainable development, particularly in promoting environmentally responsible production, inclusive growth, and social equity. Agro-based industries such as the cashew sector embody these ideals due to their reliance on agricultural raw materials, localized processing units, and labour-intensive production methods.

8.1.1. Swadeshi Ideals and the Structure of the Cashew Industry

The cashew industry in India reflects Swadeshi ideals in several structural aspects:

1. Use of Local Resources: Cashew cultivation and processing are primarily dependent on locally grown raw nuts, especially in coastal and semi-arid

regions. This localized sourcing reduces transportation costs, strengthens farmer–industry linkages, and supports regional self-sufficiency.

2. Decentralized Production Units: Cashew processing units are typically small or medium-scale enterprises dispersed across rural and semi-urban areas. This decentralization is consistent with Swadeshi philosophy, which discourages excessive industrial concentration and promotes equitable regional development.
3. Labour-Intensive Production: The industry relies heavily on manual labour for shelling, peeling, grading, and packing. While mechanization exists, human skill remains central to quality control, making the industry a significant source of employment for local populations.
4. Community-Based Livelihoods: Many cashew units operate as family-owned enterprises, cooperatives, or MSMEs, fostering community participation and shared economic benefits rather than centralized corporate ownership.

8.1.2. Swadeshi Ideals and Women's Labour

Women's extensive participation in the cashew industry represents one of the most tangible expressions of Swadeshi principles in practice. By absorbing a predominantly female workforce from rural and economically weaker sections, the industry:

- Enhances household income stability
- Promotes women's economic participation
- Enables home–workplace proximity, which is particularly significant in conservative rural settings

From a Swadeshi perspective, women's employment in local industries strengthens the social fabric by enabling income generation without mass migration or urban displacement.

However, the study also recognizes contradictions between ideals and realities. Despite alignment with Swadeshi values, women workers often face:

- Low wage levels
- Informal employment contracts
- Limited access to social security
- Occupational health hazards

These gaps highlight the need to reorient Swadeshi practices toward gender-just and rights-based frameworks.

8.1.3. Swadeshi Ideals and Sustainable Development
The cashew industry's adherence to Swadeshi ideals contributes to sustainability in multiple dimensions:

- **Economic Sustainability:** By creating stable local employment and supporting MSMEs, the industry strengthens rural economic resilience.
- **Social Sustainability:** Employment opportunities for women enhance social inclusion and reduce gender disparities.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Cashew cultivation requires relatively low chemical inputs and supports land use in marginal areas, aligning with eco-friendly agricultural practices.

Nevertheless, the sustainability of the sector depends on institutional support, technological upgrades, and policy interventions that uphold Swadeshi values while addressing labour welfare.

Objective 8.2: To analyze women's labour participation in cashew processing

Women's labour participation constitutes the backbone of India's cashew processing industry. Across major cashew-producing and processing regions, women account for nearly 85–95 percent of the workforce, particularly in processing stages such as shelling, peeling, grading, and packing. These tasks require manual dexterity, patience, and precision skills traditionally associated with women's work in rural economies. The concentration of women in these labour-intensive segments reflects both economic necessity and gendered labour norms.

In regions like Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, and Maharashtra, cashew processing units are often located near residential areas, enabling women to combine paid employment with household responsibilities. This spatial proximity enhances women's labour force participation without necessitating migration, making the industry a critical source of livelihood for rural and semi-urban women.

8.2.1. State-Wise Cashew Processing Data with Women Labour Participation and Social Security/Wages

State	Est. Cashew Processing Units	Est. Total Workers	% Women Workers	Wages & Payment Basis	Social Security / Welfare
Kerala	~557–800 units	~250,000–300,000	~95% women	Mostly piece-rate with low base; wages often below minimum unskilled rate	ESI, PF, Cashew Workers' Relief & Welfare Board; benefits inconsistent; some grievance access issues
Karnataka	~400–450 units (major coast)	~40,000–50,000 (est.)	~90% women (industry norm)	Predominantly piece-rate; lower daily income; no specific state scheme (CASHEW quality)	General schemes like ESI, PF apply when formal; many informal workers lack coverage
Maharashtra	~2000+ units (historically)	~100,000+ (est.)	~90% women	Piece-rate with small base pay common; wage varies by unit type	Informal workers often lack ESI/PF; dependent on union negotiation
Andhra Pradesh	~700 units in key Palasa area (Srikakulam)	~60,000–70,000 (estimated from units)	~90% women	Piece-rate or daily rates; wage details not systematically published	Social security limited; potential central/social insurance schemes are possible but under-absorbed
Odisha	~500–700 units (est.)	~60,000–80,000 (est.)	~85–90% women	Similar piece-rate dominant wage system	Workers often informal; some access to statutory schemes but low enrolment
Tamil Nadu	~150–200 units	~30,000+ (est.)	~90% women	Piece-rate; lowest wages tend to be around state unskilled minimum wage when applied	ESI/PF apply in organized units; many unorganized without coverage
Goa	~50–80 units	~10,000 (est.)	~85–90% women	Piece rate common; sometimes higher due to small scale	Social security less documented due to small scale units
Others (Gujarat, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh)	Small units emerging	~10,000–20,000 total	~80–90% women (industry norm)	Similar to other states; casual & informal pay	Mostly informal; limited documented welfare benefits

8.2.2 Socio-Economic Profile of Women Workers

The majority of women engaged in cashew processing belong to economically weaker sections, including smallholder farming families, landless labour households, and marginalized social groups. For many women, cashew processing represents their primary or supplementary source of income, contributing significantly to household survival, children's education, and basic health expenditures.

Despite their economic contribution, women workers often remain positioned at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy. Employment is frequently informal, with limited job security, absence of written contracts, and piece-rate wage systems. Such arrangements expose women to income instability and limit their bargaining power within the labour market.

8.2.3. Working Conditions and Occupational Challenges

Cashew processing involves exposure to occupational hazards, particularly during shelling and peeling, where workers come into contact with cashew nut shell liquid (CNSL), a corrosive substance that can cause skin burns and respiratory problems. Women workers often lack access to adequate protective equipment, health insurance, and regular medical check-ups.

Long working hours, repetitive manual tasks, and inadequate workplace infrastructure further exacerbate physical strain. These conditions highlight the contradiction between the industry's labour-intensive employment potential and the quality of employment available to women.

8.2.4. Wages, Welfare, and Social Security Access

Women workers in the cashew industry typically receive lower wages compared to male workers, even when performing comparable tasks. Wage determination is often based on output rather than time, reinforcing income insecurity. Additionally, access to statutory welfare measures such as:

- Employees' State Insurance (ESI)
- Provident Fund (PF)
- Maternity benefits
- Paid leave

remains limited due to the informal nature of employment and small-scale enterprise structures.

However, in some states, cooperative models and women-led processing units have demonstrated better compliance with labour welfare standards, suggesting the potential for institutional reforms to improve working conditions.

8.2.5. Gender Dimensions and Empowerment Outcomes

While employment in cashew processing has enabled women to achieve a degree of financial independence, the extent of empowerment remains constrained by structural inequalities. Regular income enhances women's decision-making power within households, yet limited upward mobility, lack of skill diversification, and absence of leadership roles restrict long-term empowerment.

From a gender perspective, women's labour participation in the cashew industry reflects both economic inclusion and systemic vulnerability. Addressing this duality requires interventions that move beyond employment generation toward rights-based labour protection and skill enhancement.

Linkage with Swadeshi and Sustainable Development Women's labour participation aligns closely with Swadeshi ideals by promoting:

- Local employment
- Household-based economic resilience
- Community stability

At the same time, sustainable development demands that women's participation be accompanied by:

- Fair wages
- Safe working conditions
- Social security coverage
- Skill upgradation opportunities

Without these safeguards, the sustainability of women's employment remains fragile.

Objective 8.3: To examine state-wise cashew production patterns in India

8.3.1. Overview of Cashew Production in India

India is one of the world's leading producers, processors, and exporters of cashew nuts. Cashew cultivation and processing are geographically concentrated in specific coastal and semi-arid states, where climatic conditions, soil suitability, and historical trade linkages have supported the industry's growth. The state-wise distribution of cashew

production reflects both natural endowments and policy-driven industrial development.

Cashew production in India is not uniform across states; rather, it displays significant regional variation in terms of cultivated area, processing capacity, labour

absorption, and export orientation. Examining these patterns is essential to understanding how cashew production contributes to employment generation particularly women's employment and sustainable regional development.

8.3.2. State-Wise Cashew Production (2023–24)

Table 1: Cashew production state-wise in India (2023–24)

State	Area ('000 ha)	Production ('000 MT)	Productivity (kg/ha)
Maharashtra	191.6	197.3	1003.6
Andhra Pradesh	200.6	133.8	678.4
Odisha	223.5	126.1	564.5
Karnataka	139.3	79.9	576
Kerala	110	76.6	726
Tamil Nadu	175	80.4	459.5
Goa	59.9	26	441
Others	44.6	25.9	
Total (India)	1,195	782	674

Source: CMIE, DCCD reports in academic summaries

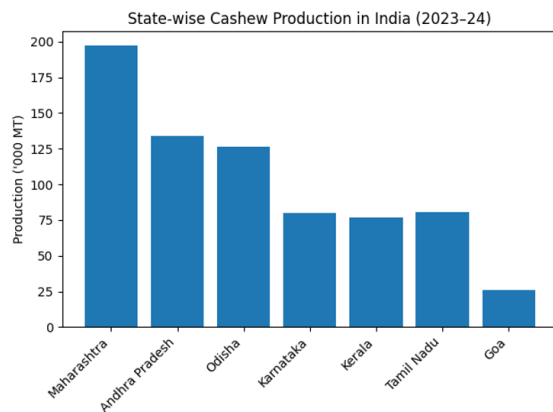


Figure 1 shows state-wise cashew production in India.

8.3.3. Major Cashew Producing and Processing States

The leading cashew-producing and processing states include Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. Each of these states exhibits distinct production characteristics:

- Kerala has historically been the hub of cashew processing, with a highly skilled workforce and long-established processing units, though recent years have seen a decline due to rising labour costs and raw nut shortages.
- Karnataka, especially in coastal districts such as Dakshina Kannada and Uttara Kannada, has emerged as a significant processing centre, supported by MSME-based units and a predominantly female workforce.

- Andhra Pradesh and Odisha have expanded cashew cultivation and processing through government-supported plantation programmes, contributing to regional employment generation.
- Maharashtra and Goa maintain medium-scale production, with a mix of traditional and export-oriented units.

8.3.4. State-Wise Production and Employment Linkages

A key analytical dimension of this objective is the relationship between production volume and employment generation. States with higher processing capacity tend to employ larger workforces, particularly women, due to the labour-intensive nature of processing activities.

The study finds that:

- States with decentralized, small- and medium-scale processing units generate higher female employment per unit of output.
- Export-oriented states demonstrate greater processing intensity but also greater pressure to reduce costs, which can adversely affect labour welfare.
- States emphasizing local processing rather than raw nut export retain more value addition within the regional economy.

This variation highlights how production strategies influence labour outcomes and sustainability.

8.3.5. Regional Disparities and Structural Challenges
Despite India's overall strength in cashew production, notable disparities exist between states. Some states focus primarily on cultivation with limited local processing, resulting in the outflow of raw nuts to other regions. This limits employment opportunities, particularly for women, and undermines local economic development.

Challenges identified include:

- Unequal distribution of processing infrastructure
 - Dependence on imported raw nuts in some states
 - Fluctuations in global demand and prices
 - Inconsistent policy support across states
- These disparities raise concerns about regional equity and the long-term sustainability of the industry.

8.3.6. Cashew Production, Swadeshi Ideals, and Sustainability

From a Swadeshi perspective, state-wise production patterns reveal varying degrees of alignment with indigenous economic principles. States that prioritize local cultivation, local processing, and local employment demonstrate stronger adherence to Swadeshi ideals. Conversely, states that rely heavily on imported raw materials or centralized industrial models exhibit weaker local linkages.

Sustainable cashew production requires:

- Strengthening state-level value chains
- Supporting MSMEs and cooperatives
- Enhancing inter-state coordination
- Promoting women's participation across all producing states

Objective 8.4: To suggest sustainable policy measures for strengthening women's labour and swadeshi-oriented development in the cashew industry

8.4.1. Need for Sustainable Policy Interventions

The analysis of Swadeshi ideals, women's labour participation, and state-wise production patterns reveals that while the cashew industry plays a vital role in local employment generation, particularly for women, it faces significant structural challenges. These challenges include informal employment arrangements, low and irregular wages, occupational health risks, regional imbalances in industrial development, and limited access to social security. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive and gender-sensitive policy interventions that align

economic efficiency with social justice and environmental sustainability.

Sustainable policies must therefore move beyond short-term productivity concerns and focus on long-term human development, labour dignity, and community resilience, which are central to Swadeshi philosophy.

8.4.2. Policy Measures for Women's Labour Welfare

Formalization of Employment: Governments should encourage the registration of cashew processing units under MSME frameworks and labour laws. Formalization would ensure women workers' access to statutory benefits such as minimum wages, paid leave, maternity benefits, Employees' State Insurance (ESI), and Provident Fund (PF).

Wage Rationalization and Income Security: State governments should implement and periodically revise minimum wage standards specific to cashew processing, taking into account skill levels and inflation. Transparent wage payment systems, preferably through digital platforms, can enhance income security for women workers.

Occupational Health and Safety Measures: Mandatory provision of protective equipment, ergonomic workspaces, and regular health check-ups must be enforced. Special attention should be given to mitigating risks associated with cashew nut shell liquid exposure.

8.4.3. Strengthening Swadeshi-Based Industrial Development

Promotion of Women-Led Cooperatives: Supporting women's cooperatives and self-help groups (SHGs) in cashew processing aligns strongly with Swadeshi ideals. Cooperative models empower women through collective ownership, improve bargaining power, and ensure equitable distribution of profits.

Decentralized Processing Infrastructure: Establishing small-scale processing units in underdeveloped taluks and districts can reduce regional disparities and create localized employment. Decentralization strengthens rural economies and minimizes migration pressures.

Local Value Addition and Market Access: Policies should prioritize local value addition over raw nut exports by providing incentives for packaging, branding, and domestic marketing. This approach retains economic value within local communities and enhances income generation.

8.4.4. Skill Development and Technological Support
Skill Upgradation and Training Programmes: Targeted training programmes for women workers in grading, quality control, and packaging can enhance productivity and wages. Training should also include financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills to promote upward mobility.

Appropriate Technology Adoption: Introduction of women-friendly, low-cost mechanization can reduce physical strain without displacing labour. Technology must complement, not replace, women's employment.

8.4.5. Environmental and Economic Sustainability
Sustainable Cashew Cultivation Practices: Promoting eco-friendly cultivation methods, such as organic farming and water-efficient practices, can enhance environmental sustainability and ensure steady raw material supply.

Resilient Supply Chain Development: Strengthening local supply chains reduces dependence on imports and global market volatility, reinforcing Swadeshi self-reliance and economic resilience.

8.4.6. Policy Integration and Institutional Coordination

Integrated Policy Framework: Sustainable development of the cashew industry requires coordination between agriculture, industry, labour, and women's welfare departments. Integrated policy planning can address structural gaps holistically.

Monitoring and Gender Audits: Regular monitoring and gender-sensitive audits of cashew processing units can ensure compliance with labour laws and assess the impact of policies on women's well-being.

IX. FINDINGS

9.1. Alignment of the Cashew Industry with Swadeshi Ideals: The study finds that the cashew industry strongly reflects Swadeshi principles through its reliance on local raw materials, decentralized production units, and labour-intensive processing methods. The industry plays a significant role in sustaining rural economies and preventing large-scale migration. However, while structural features align with Swadeshi ideals, the ethical dimension of labour welfare central to Gandhian thought remains inadequately addressed.

9.2. Dominance of Women's Labour in Cashew Processing: Women constitute the overwhelming majority of the workforce in cashew processing, particularly in tasks such as shelling, peeling, grading, and packing. Their participation contributes significantly to household income and local economic stability. Despite this, women's work remains undervalued, with low wages, informal employment arrangements, and limited opportunities for skill advancement and leadership roles.

9.3. Uneven Regional and State-wise Production Patterns: State-wise analysis reveals substantial regional disparities in cashew production and processing capacity. States with well-established processing infrastructure generate higher employment, especially for women, while others focus mainly on cultivation with limited value addition. Such imbalances restrict local employment opportunities and weaken the sustainability of regional cashew economies.

9.4. Inadequate Social Security and Occupational Safety: The study finds limited coverage of social security benefits such as ESI, PF, maternity benefits, and paid leave for women workers. Occupational health risks, including exposure to cashew nut shell liquid and repetitive strain injuries, are prevalent due to inadequate safety measures. These conditions undermine the quality and sustainability of women's employment.

9.5. Potential of Swadeshi-Based Sustainable Development: Despite existing challenges, the cashew industry holds strong potential to evolve into a model of sustainable, inclusive development. Women-led cooperatives, decentralized processing units, and local value addition initiatives demonstrate that Swadeshi-oriented strategies can enhance both economic resilience and gender equity.

X. SUGGESTIONS

1. Formalization and Labour Protection
 Governments should promote the formal registration of cashew processing units under MSME and labour law frameworks to ensure women workers receive statutory benefits, including minimum wages, social security, and maternity protection.

2. Gender-Sensitive Wage and Welfare Policies

State-specific minimum wage standards for cashew processing should be revised regularly, with strict enforcement mechanisms. Wage parity and transparent payment systems must be ensured to reduce gender-based income disparities.

3. Promotion of Women-Led Cooperatives and SHGs
Encouraging women-led cooperatives and self-help groups can enhance collective bargaining power, improve working conditions, and promote equitable profit-sharing, in line with Swadeshi ideals of community ownership.

4. Decentralized Industrial Development

Establishing small-scale processing units in underdeveloped districts and taluks can reduce regional disparities, generate local employment, and strengthen rural economies. Decentralization supports balanced and inclusive growth.

5. Occupational Health and Safety Interventions

Mandatory provision of protective equipment, ergonomic workspaces, and periodic health check-ups should be enforced. Awareness programmes on occupational safety must be integrated into labour welfare schemes.

6. Skill Development and Upgradation

Targeted training programmes for women workers in advanced processing techniques, quality control, packaging, and entrepreneurship can improve productivity, wages, and long-term employability.

7. Strengthening Local Value Addition and Markets

Policies should prioritize local processing and branding over raw nut exports. Improved access to domestic and international markets can enhance incomes and ensure sustainable value retention within local communities.

8. Integrated and Swadeshi-Oriented Policy Framework

A coordinated policy approach involving agriculture, industry, labour, and women's welfare departments is essential. Such integration can align Swadeshi ideals with modern sustainability goals and gender-inclusive development strategies.

XI. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the interplay between Swadeshi ideals and women's labour in India's cashew industry, with a focus on sustainability, regional production patterns, and labour welfare. The

findings reveal that the cashew industry remains one of the most significant agro-based sectors that embody Swadeshi principles such as local resource utilization, decentralized production, and employment generation at the grassroots level. Its labour-intensive nature has enabled the absorption of a predominantly female workforce, thereby contributing to household income security and rural economic stability.

However, the study also highlights a critical gap between the philosophical foundations of Swadeshi and the lived realities of women workers. Despite their central role in processing activities, women continue to face challenges related to informal employment, low wages, occupational health risks, and inadequate access to social security benefits. These issues undermine the social sustainability of the industry and call for a reorientation of development strategies that prioritize labour dignity alongside economic efficiency. State-wise and micro-level analyses further demonstrate that uneven production patterns and regional disparities limit the potential of the cashew sector to deliver balanced development. Regions that emphasize local processing and value addition show stronger alignment with Swadeshi ideals and better employment outcomes for women. The study therefore concludes that integrating Swadeshi philosophy with gender-sensitive labour policies, decentralized industrial development, and sustainable production practices is essential for ensuring the long-term viability of the cashew industry.

Overall, the research affirms that the cashew industry holds considerable promise as a model of inclusive, sustainable, and indigenous industrial development, provided that institutional support, policy reforms, and labour welfare mechanisms are strengthened to protect and empower women workers.

XII. SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDY

While the present study offers valuable insights, several areas remain open for further research:

1. Micro-Level Primary Research: Future studies may conduct field-based surveys and interviews with women workers to generate primary data on wages, working conditions, health outcomes, and social security coverage.
2. Comparative State and District Studies: Comparative analyses between leading cashew-processing states or districts can provide deeper

understanding of best practices and policy effectiveness across regions.

3. Impact of Mechanization and Technology: Research may examine how partial mechanization and technological interventions affect women's employment, productivity, and skill requirements in the cashew industry.
4. Role of Cooperatives and Women-Led Enterprises: Further studies can evaluate the performance of women-led cooperatives and self-help groups in improving labour conditions, income stability, and empowerment outcomes.
5. Health and Occupational Safety Studies: Detailed medical and ergonomic studies focusing on occupational hazards faced by women workers would contribute to evidence-based policy formulation.
6. Policy Impact Assessment: Longitudinal studies assessing the impact of labour laws, MSME policies, and welfare schemes on women workers' well-being can enhance policy effectiveness.
7. Global Value Chain and Trade Dynamics: Future research may explore how international trade pressures influence labour practices and sustainability in India's cashew industry.

By building on Swadeshi ideals and centering women's labour welfare, future research and policy initiatives can contribute to transforming the cashew industry into a resilient, equitable, and sustainable model of rural development. The present study thus lays a foundation for continued scholarly engagement with indigenous economic thought, gender justice, and sustainable industrial growth.

REFERENCES

- [1] Eapen, M., Swaminathan, P., and Kanji, N. (2003). *Liberalisation, Gender and Livelihoods: The Cashew Nut Case*. International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).
- [2] Muthu Kumar, S., et al. (2016). *Cashew Industry in India*. International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS).
- [3] V. V. Giri National Labour Institute. (2020). *Cashew Workers in India*. V. V. Giri National Labour Institute.
- [4] Gandhi, M. K. (1961). *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. Navajivan Publishing House.
- [5] Gandhi, M. K. (1965). *Village Industries*. Navajivan Publishing House.
- [6] Kumarappa, J. C. (1951). *Economy of Permanence*. Sarva Seva Sangh.
- [7] Desai, A. R. (1984). *India's Path of Development: A Marxist Approach*. Popular Prakashan.
- [8] Beneria, L. (2003). *Gender, Development, and Globalization: Economics as if All People Mattered*. Routledge.
- [9] Kabeer, N. (2012). "Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth: Labour markets and enterprise development." *International Development Research Centre*, 44(10), 1–70.
- [10] Standing, G. (2011). *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- [11] International Labour Organization (ILO). (2018). *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture (3rd ed.)*. International Labour Organization.
- [12] Eapen, M., Jeyaranjan, J., Kanji, N., Swaminathan, P., and Harilal, K. N. (2006). *Globalization and Labour: The Case of Women Workers in India's Cashew Industry*. International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).
- [13] Eapen, M., Swaminathan, P., and Jeyaranjan, J. (2003). "Labour conditions in a globalised industry: The case of cashew processing in India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(32), 3353–3360.
- [14] Kannan, K. P., and Raveendran, G. (2009). "Growth sans employment: A quarter century of jobless growth in India's organised sector." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(10), 80–91.
- [15] Nair, S., Joseph, A., and Thankappan, K. R. (2015). "Occupational health problems of women workers in cashew nut processing industry in Kerala." *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 19(2), 93–98.
- [16] Sivasangari, R., and Sasikumar, P. (2021). "Occupational hazards and ergonomic issues among women workers in cashew processing units." *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 11(6), 45–58.
- [17] Directorate of Cashew and Cocoa Development. (2023). *Cashew Statistics at a Glance*. Ministry

- of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.
- [18] Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. (2022). Annual Report 2021–22. Government of India.
- [19] Government of Karnataka. (2021). Industrial Policy of Karnataka. Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Karnataka.
- [20] Labour Bureau. (2020). Report on Employment and Wages in India. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India.
- [21] United Nations. (2015). Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations General Assembly.
- [22] Sen, A. (1999). Development as Freedom. Oxford University Press.
- [23] World Bank. (2020). Gender Equality and Development. World Bank Publications.
- [24] Krishnamurthy, R., and Maharaja, S. (2024). “Work–life balance of women workers in cashew processing units: A study of Tamil Nadu.” South East European Journal of Public Health, 18(2), 1–12.
- [25] Rao, N. (2017). “Assets, agency and legitimacy: Gender equality and women’s empowerment in India.” World Development, 95, 43–57.