

## Thinking Radically With Gandhi

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There is a great and natural tendency to think that *Hind Swaraj*<sup>1</sup> represents the reactionary Gandhi who opposed modernity, a position from which he slowly back-pedaled over the next few decades, as he allowed the experience of the long anti-colonial struggle he led, to educate him towards more progressive ideas and ideals. As I said, this is a *natural* reading of Gandhi, but it is not a reading that shows much sympathy for or comprehension of his deepest intellectual and political motives. It is a reading which, from the very outset, rules out the possibility that one might interpret his anti-modernism as *itself being progressive*.

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<sup>1</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, ed. Anthony Parel, Centennial Edition, Cambridge University Press, 2009

It might seem that there is something startling, something almost paradoxical, about using the word ‘progressive, as I just have in my last sentence. After all the whole point of the contrast between reactionary and progressive derives from an ideal of progress in which the past is overcome in one’s modernity and to hark back to it, is reaction; while to embrace one’s modernity is to be progressive. How then can a stance of anti-modernity be said to be progressive without paradox?

But this seeming paradox is amicably resolved if I replaced all occurrences of the word ‘progressive’ in what I have said so far with the word ‘radical’. I don’t mean radical in the very general sense of the vehement repudiation of conventional thinking (even Fascism is radical in that highly general sense). I mean rather ‘radical’ in the quite usual specific sense that Left-wing commentary intends to self-describe its own conceptions of politics, but which it often then muddles by equating that politics with what it describes as ‘progressive’ politics, thereby ruling out from the outset –as I said-- that one can be both anti-modernist and radical in this more specific sense that the Left aspires to

be.<sup>2</sup> To put it in a word, I am asking: Is there a Left-wing or radical Gandhi *in* the anti-modern Gandhi? And I am casting doubt on the more natural but unsympathetic, reading which asserts that there is a Left-wing Gandhi *despite* the anti-modern Gandhi?

One dialectic by which one might pursue the question I have just posed about the radical possibilities *in* Gandhi's anti-modernism is to find continuities between Gandhi's opposition to features of European (or what he sometimes called 'Western') modernity and the opposition in the *Early Modern* period by radicals in Europe to what they *presciently* foresaw as the alarming direction in which their *incipient* modernity was heading. Their alarms about that direction turned out to be entirely justified, given the passage in Europe from its Early to its Late Modernity that History has recorded. In other words their voices were the dissenting voices of a radical opposition in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that lost out in history. And if Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj*, was, in some core sense, expressing a counterpart alarm almost three centuries later, an alarm

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<sup>2</sup> In what follows I shall restrict my use of the word 'radical' to this particular meaning.

about an incipient modernity in India heading in the lamentable direction that the early dissenters had foreseen, a direction being imposed on it by its colonial masters, then a plausible way to press on with this dialectic is to read *Hind Swaraj* as being written under the shrewd perception by its author that, in 1909, when he wrote it, he thought India was at just the crossroads that Europe was in, in Early Modernity.

What I am proposing, therefore, is a genealogical grounding of his radicalism in the radicalism of an earlier period in the land of his colonial masters, so as to set up a very specific historical dialectic within which to argue that what seems anti-modern in his thought would not seem so, if we kept this dialectic firmly in our sights.

In general, that elements with affinities to the radical dissenting ideas voiced in the *Early Modern* period should appear to us as *Anti-modern* is due to a confluence of two closely related factors: first, our tendency to think of the path from Early to Late modernity as a teleological inevitability and, consequently, second, from the perspective of our lateness to stamp out the significance and the substantial presence of the

*dissenting* voices in the earlier period which lost out in the arena of social and political and intellectual conflicts of those times. These two factors conspire to make it seem as if any assertion of some of the radical ideas to be found in Early Modern dissenting traditions at a date as late as, for instance, 1909, when Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* necessarily occupies a stubbornly reactionary position --something they would not seem to do, if we viewed the teleology as uncompulsory, as Gandhi certainly did, and if we kept fully in our view of the past, the power and pregnant possibilities that those dissenting ideas possessed, despite their having lost out.

If it were possible to use the expression “Early Modern” as an entirely innocuous description of a period of time in Europe, with no built-in implications of describing only those antecedents that would unfold into the developments of Late modernity there, the radicalism of that period might give us a sense of the possibilities that Gandhi still held out for in the India of the early twentieth century, which, as I said, he took to be at the sort of cusp that Europe was at in the “Early Modern” period. So, to

repeat the crucial dialectical point, at the risk of causing tedium: that we should see this stance as anti-modern rather than as the radical ideas they were with a *serious potential for preempting* in India in the early part of the twentieth century the path in political economy and aspects of political governance that had developed over the modern period in Europe, is only because the directional certainties of an assumed teleology that have the effect of writing out of history the great significance that dissenting voices had at the earlier time, leaving the impression only of those antecedents that make our own conditions seem inevitable for our own time. How to correct this tendency in us by elaborating this dialectical reversal of it, is the chief preoccupation of this brief lecture.

In past work, I have pursued this line of thought by working with a very specific question within intellectual history. The question whether what political philosophers and political economists widely consider a *rational* development in the history of politics and political economy, is indeed rational. I will not repeat the details of that work here, but I will

have to give at least a schematic summary of the argument in order to turn to the points I *do* want to raise about Gandhi's deep and sometimes quite shrill anxieties regarding modernity.

In the broad contours of my argument, I started with Amartya Sen's by now widely cited response to the protest against the dispossession of peasantry in recent years in India –that India in order to come into modernity would, unfortunately, simply have to go through the pain that England went through in order to create its Londons and Manchesters. I probed what underlies this assumption that countries like India must go through what their erstwhile colonial masters did, an assumption which is very widespread (Sen was only articulating a tacit conventional assumption); and I argued further that in Sen's case it was *not* based on some sort of commitment to iron laws of history that are sometimes attributed to Marx. Since Sen is writing within a liberal tradition of thought, he appeals not to a notion of *necessity* (as such iron laws were proposing), but rather to a notion of rationality. In other words, it is not by historical inevitability that India must go through what England went

through, but rather because what England went through was rational, its erstwhile colonies *ought* to do so. That is a quite different position, though as we know in a tradition that primarily owes to Hegel, rationality and necessity cannot be entirely kept separate either. The obvious and celebrated initial location of that liberal claim to rationality of what England went through was the argument in John Locke's chapter on property in the *Second Treatise of Government*. That was essentially a contractualist argument from Pareto improvement over the state of nature, whereby the privatization of the commons that came with the enclosures (hitherto carried out by brute force) was literally rationalized (i.e, rendered rational) by the thought-experiment of a social contract in which all commoners were said to be better off than they were in the state of nature if some of them privatized the land and the rest were hired by them as wage labour to work on the land.

As is well known some years before Locke's treatise, there was widespread protest against the enclosures by popular religion, a range of puritan Christian sects, resisting the high Anglican orthodoxy, which had

aligned itself with the commercial classes keen to transform mere agrarian living into what we now call agribusiness. These groups -- the Diggers, the radical Levellers (not by any means all the levellers), and a variety of others -- memorably studied by Christopher Hill and other historians of that period were appealing to ideals of communal and collective cultivation of the commons. So in my extended argument I had anachronistically ventriloquized onto their lips a response to Locke, (I say anachronistically because, as I said, they predated Locke), which was essentially a response from opportunity cost. The radical dissenters could be attributed the thought: Yes Locke would be right to say that the commoners who were hired to work for wages in this social contract were indeed better off than they were in the state of nature but they are not better off than they *would have been*, had the commons not been privatized in the first place and if there had been a collective cultivation of the commons instead.

I then argued that a great deal of the driving conceptual and ideological backdrop to liberal political economy over the next few centuries may be

seen as a sustained response to this counter claim from opportunity cost. The claim, as I presented it, was that the *avoided* benefit of deciding to privatize in the first place (opportunity costs being avoided benefits that result when one makes a decision) was the pursuit of an alternative ideal of the collective cultivation of the commons. It is the cogency of this alternative ideal of the collective cultivation of the commons that becomes the target of attack by a fundamental outlook of modern political economy, which in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was summed up in a celebrated paper entitled ‘Tragedy of the Commons’. It is an outlook primarily expressing a certain view of the nature of human rationality. It is this ideal of rationality and the mentality or outlook that it expressed that Gandhi was constantly opposing from different angles, taking on all its ill effects on modernity. The particular paper I mentioned by Garrett Hardin elaborates the outlook in game-theoretic terms in the form of a multi person prisoners’ dilemma. This is merely a formalization of a widespread outlook which Sen’s remark is basically taking for granted. I won’t repeat the elaboration here but instead will fasten only on one aspect of its main thrust –which is to argue that no individual commoner

could *rationally* commit to the *cooperation* that is entailed by a collective cultivation of the commons. Rationality requires each commoner to think that though it is certainly true that if all commoners cooperated, everybody would gain, there is the constant anxiety, ‘What if I cooperated and others did not?’ If one is thinking rationally, this anxiety has no answer to soothe it --such is the situation of a multi-person prisoners’ dilemma; so each commoner, if he is rational, refuses cooperation which, in turn, would of course entail the destruction of the commons. That is the tragedy, and therefore a better bet than its collective cultivation is the privatization of the commons. That is the game-theoretic updating of Locke.

Gandhi’s entire conception of ashram life repeatedly expressed exactly the opposite view of rationality and in my philosophical gloss on that view I had argued that Gandhi was providing a whole basis for saying that the qualms about the requisite cooperation (expressed in the anxiety, ‘What if I cooperated and others did not?’) that is so central to the epistemological outlook of liberal political economy is itself a deep-

going manifestation of the *alienation* that characterizes modern society. The finessing of this alienation was absolutely central to Gandhi's anti-modernism since he attributed such alienation entirely to the modern period. In this, I had said he was Marx's intellectual partner, though unlike Marx, who came to his ideas from a remarkable life-long diagnostic study of modern industrial capital and the solidarities of labour in which the unalienated life was first glimpsed, Gandhi, who lived and struggled in a quite different historical and social context, sought the sources of an unalienated life in the same social and cultural field as his *Early Modern precedents* that I had mentioned earlier— the folk and spiritual traditions of popular religion.

It is simply not possible to come to grips with the remarkable effectiveness of Gandhi's methods of mobilization, deploying the ideas that he did, without understanding how much he was tapping the social outlooks of popular religion in India. The idea that he could abandon this fundamental source of his effectiveness for a more modern ground for anti-imperialism such as the lawyerly set of constitutional demands

for Indian self-governance and eventual independence as many of his other colleagues aspired to or for the terror-based tactics of the insurgent anti-imperialists or for the more purely class-based formulations that sought to mobilize the masses, is to simply miss the point of what was unique about Gandhi's strength and conviction. In fact there is every reason to think that the mobilization of the 1930s that often targeted not the British but were more purely class-struggles by tenants and sharecroppers against their overlords, on which Gandhi and the Congress often did not have control, *would not have emerged* without the dynamism of the Khilafat movement whose reach extended to kisaans and quite generally the Gandhian non-cooperation of an earlier period, movements which by contrast with the more purely class struggle, mixed anti-imperialism, peasant consciousness, and popular religion in a way that only Gandhi's mobilizational innovations could have devised.

I will return to this point about popular religion when I take up some of the more controversial points about anti-modernism at the very end.

Let me first raise a question about this dialectic that I have set up in order to come to grips with Gandhi's anti-modernism as carrying a form of radicalism, which is of a piece with the radicalism of the Early Modern period in the land of its colonial masters. When Amartya Sen made his remark whose uncritical assumptions about rationality I have been skeptically addressing, other critics made an empirical criticism (rather than the philosophical one I have been making) that seems so obviously right that it is surprising that Sen had not seen it. Thus, for instance, Prabhat Patnaik and others pointed out that the historical analogy that Sen makes is historically quite inexact since in England those dispossessed by primitive accumulation migrated in very large numbers to other parts of the temperate belt, whereas there is no place for the dispossessed of rural Bengal or Chattisgarh or wherever else, to go, except to the slums of the already glutted cities within their own national borders. In other words the primitive accumulation in Europe led to the diffusion of capitalism to other parts of the world, whereas in India, given the restrictions on the mobility of labour, all it has led to is the further pushing of people into destitution.

This point gives us a chance to explore something that has significance for why Gandhi thought that the developments of the modern period in Europe were besides the point for countries such as India.

In Marx's 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Capital* and in the completely familiar and standard accounts that derive from it, primitive accumulation is seen as the coercive, frequently brutal, extermination of communities of a pre-capitalist form as a result of the deracination of petty producers from the sources or the means of their particular form of producing, and who then morph into a proletariat, either in the form of metropolitan industrial labourers or a reserve army. These accounts, though they observe the coercive and brutal nature of this destruction of pre-capitalist communities, are nevertheless also presented as their transformation into a new class formation, in which the old hierarchical oppressive features of social life are undermined, even if they are replaced by the newly minted oppressive features tied to the specifically exploitative and alienation-inducing conditions that metropolitan capital imposes on industrial labour.

In the extensive commentary on Gandhi people tend to focus on his occasionally articulated *normative* stance that the worst aspects of pre-capitalist communities --the socially conservative primordial ties with their oppressive hierarchies-- *ought* to be addressed *without* their destruction and transformation into these new class formations. (The ‘ought’ there signifies its normativity.) Now, however we assess that stance, what I want to focus on instead is not this normative stance he took, but something more purely descriptive that was presciently foreseen by him which puts into doubt the universal applicability of a vision that is found in the canonical accounts of primitive accumulation grounded in Marx.

The question that we might ask is whether what motivated Gandhi’s normative stance –whatever we think of the stance itself-- is an instinct that the conditions of large agrarian societies of the colonized regions of the south are not exactly the ground on which (or to which) the classical accounts of primitive accumulation apply. To explore this, let us first ask a counterfactual question about European populations. Imagine the

following scenario that is counter to fact. There is no settler colonialism that moves vast numbers of the European peasant population to various parts of the world –across the entire Atlantic and to the antipodes and to the southernmost corners of Africa. There is no centuries of the internecine warfare in Europe that mobilized millions of peasants to their death. And there are no epidemics nor any famines in the century that Marx himself lived and wrote. In this counterfactual scenario millions of peasants who in fact migrated or died, instead live and remain sedentary. What reason is there to think that they would be absorbed into a new community of industrial labour? What reason is there to think that they would be inside the domain of capitalist production? There is every reason to think that they would remain as a vast residual pre-capitalist community. How would contemporary capitalism have characterized their place? What grounds are there for thinking that the standard accounts of primitive accumulation would so much as apply to whatever characterization one would give of them? And so the crucial question arises: would they have overcome the oppressive hierarchical and divisive features owing to primordial ties? –

the tribal divisions, the deeply rivening religious schisms (just consider the fact that whole wars were fought for years on end over obscure issues such as transubstantiation),...?

So really I am asking whether Gandhi might have taken his normative stance—whether or not we agree with it—because of a canny understanding that in colonial and post-colonial capitalism, the colonized lands were the *factual* version of something that was merely the *counterfactual* scenario in Europe as I just presented it above. To put it differently, primitive accumulation as it is presented in the canonical Marxist accounts depends not entirely on the truth of an *apriori analysis*, but it essentially depends instead also on *contingent empirical* features in European history (the *fact* of massive departure or death of peasant populations). There could be no such analysis (at least not a plausible one) if the empirical features were not also present. So even if primitive accumulation (taking over of land for mining, for factories, for the creation of townships and eventually cities, for the building of highways and dams and bridges, etc as well as the creation

of a new sort of consumer for the new sort of products that these changes furnish) is the ground on which the brave new 'growth' economies, as they are called, emerge, what I am suggesting is that Gandhi understood well that in the colonized lands, given quite different empirical features, none of this can absorb the displaced millions as industrial labour. In fact they are not even likely to be transformed into a reserve army. He understood that his people, the vast agrarian populations, are just simply superfluous to this 'growth economy'. In terms of its economic outlook and trajectory, there is no caring whatever what happens to these people whom he thought comprised the heart of India. From his point of view there is no reason to believe that colonialism had or would create any scope for the industrial transformation of societies like India's. Even if we do not summon the counterfactual/factual comparison I am making, Gandhi understood that colonialism's relation to its colonized lands were never motivated to nor had the effect of making these transformations. The extractive nature of colonialism that his various campaigns and his non-cooperation movement implicitly were opposing, was precisely intended to withhold

such a transformation from these lands. This is why he did not grant that primitive accumulation would lead to the emergence of a relatively liberated (even if differently subjugated) industrial labour, and instead even industrial labourers would continue to be caught up in the hierarchical features of precapitalist community, something we see everywhere in urban India today and the politics of identity that surfaces not just in rural but in metropolitan India as well. (As, sociologists have observed, communal riots occur predominantly in cities, a symptom of the precapitalist community's metropolitan survival. )

As I said, I am taking no position on whether Gandhi was right to take the normative stance he did on the matter of how we ought to overcome the oppressive hierarchical social features of pre capitalist community *without* the destruction of those communities and their transformation into new class formations. I am only suggesting that the normative stance was expressive of an instinct that colonialism depended on something that was actual (or factual) in the colonies even though it may have been merely counterfactual in Europe as I had presented that

counterfactual a moment ago. Therefore, Gandhi's anti-modernism reflected in his resistance to the destruction of precapitalist communities was not just a sentimental *moralist's* position. Though, of course, it was a normative stance, it was a normative stance that was driven by, and contextualized by, an instinctive empirical understanding that colonial capitalism had not and would not create the conditions for the industrial morphing of predominantly agrarian countries like India, and thus an understanding that the effects of imperialism, by their nature, relied on the colonized world not possessing the transformative conditions that existed in European capitalism and its diffusionary spread. Part of the burden of my argument about Gandhi's anti-modernism being itself a form of radicalism is precisely the refusal to see him as a moralist and a philosopher independent of this anti-imperialism, but rather constantly informed *by* this anti-imperialism. In fact I think we can go so far as to say that from what Gandhi had glimpsed of modernity and capitalism in the colonialism he experienced at the time he wrote *Hind Swaraj*, he could not possibly even have developed the hopes (illusory in the end, as we know) expressed in the policies pursued in the Keynesian period in

countries of the north. Those policies and the hopes of a prospective constraining of capital only came into view in very special circumstances of an economic crisis and a post-war context. For Gandhi, given the knowledge of capitalism that he acquired through the colonial experience, nothing of that sort could redeem it – nor indeed, as even a glance at Hind Swaraj reveals, was it redeemed by such other more specific things as the development of railways which he explicitly saw as nothing but an instrument to connect the hinterland to the ports for the gains sought by his colonial masters; not even by the professionalization of the concept of law in the person of lawyers which he explicitly saw as the commodification and debasement of the very idea of justice; not even the manifest advantages of modern medicine and drugs which he explicitly declared had brought just as many ill effects to the body as those they had cured and failed to acknowledge that cure itself was much more than a restoring of physical function but also a restoration of an equilibrium of emotions, meanings, and peace of mind.

I will return to some of the shrill excesses of his anti-modernism just before I close, but before I do let me say something about my deployment of the term 'radical' in describing Gandhi's anti-modernism. It might seem that this use of the term 'radical' means precious little, or perhaps I should say it would mean something merely precious, if a certain kind of objection that is of some currency and, in my experience, of some insistence, is not addressed. The objection is that the dialectical relation I have drawn between the radicalism I have claimed for Gandhi's reactivity to the outlooks of modernity and the prescient radical dissenting voices of Early Modern Europe, precisely because it harks back to a lost and distant past, are an exercise in nostalgia. From the point of view of this scepticism, the radicalism of the Early modern period, which may have had its possibilities for politics in a past time, could only have a wistful revivalist status at the time that Gandhi was writing and ever since, because the plain fact is that those possibilities of the Early Modern period were never realized in subsequent modernity, and political economy by now has advanced in directions in which the very thought of those ideals being realized is a nostalgic illusion.

Before I begin to address this line of objection, I can't resist saying that, in the face of such frequent sneering about nostalgia, I almost always feel an intense irritation because it is most often to be found on the lips and pens of complacent people. Such people need to be reminded that the most creative efforts of the Renaissance were very likely dismissed, by similarly frequent sneering on the part of mediaeval scholastics, as a nostalgia for a bygone classical age. The fact is that the complacency from which this qualm is expressed is actually often *not innocent*. What people choose to be complacent about and what they therefore choose to be dismissive (as nostalgic) about is rather selective and the selectivity is driven by ideological considerations. Charges of nostalgia are a cousin of a phenomenon, we might call the 'It's too late...' phenomenon. If something is too late to reverse, it is nostalgic to wish to reverse it. "It's too late to return to 1967 borders in Israel, there have been far too many settlements over the last decades....", is just one among any number of complacencies regarding present conditions that one can cite. But notice that no one ever said during the decades long cold war: "It's too late, the Soviet Union is here to stay and in a large part of the world, private

capital is simply a thing of the past. It would be nostalgic to aspire to return to it there.” Instead they unrelentingly put pressure even the pressure of untold violence in South East Asia and Latin America, on any socialist experiment, whatever its faults, decade after decade till virtually ever such experiment excepted apart. Thus qualms about nostalgia, of what is and isn’t too late, are made not only from a point of view of complacency, but a complacency drive by ideological points of view, with deliberate selectivity.

Motives apart, how shall we assess the charge of nostalgia brought against all efforts to associate criticism of capitalism with criticism as in Gandhi of the *outlooks* of modernity that is inflected by the effects of capital on our minds and our cultures. Let me approach this subject by returning to such an outlook, underlying liberal political economy that I had earlier described. I had said of such an outlook that the notion of alienation that Gandhi sought to overcome, is the alienation of a social world in which an individual is prone, by rationality, nothing less, to ask what if I cooperated and others did not. Gandhi’s idea of an unalienated

social world (one that he thought sought to implement in ashram life, but also thought was present in many other local contexts) was a world in which that apparently rational anxiety would not occur to anyone. As I said his notion of an unalienated life was not a moralist's critique of self-interest, it was rather an epistemological silencing or preempting of a question that comes to mind within a certain conception of rationality. Can this Gandhian ideal of an unalienated life be convicted of a nostalgic hankering for a pre-modern social outlook?

Gandhi's stubborn refusal to be dissuaded by all such dismissals of his position is based, I think, on a very insightful claim on his part that not just the prospect of but the *reality* of such unalienatedness is everywhere available, not in some outlook of the remote past, but in the *quotidian present*. I emphasize both 'quotidian' and 'present' quite deliberately.

To understand this claim of his, I think we have to invoke the notion of a frame, which I will borrow from the theoretical vocabulary of psychologists. Psychologists often talk of something they call 'the frame problem'. Human subjects often find themselves thinking in two

different frames. Because these frames are sealed off from each other, we may have thoughts (or responses to the world) that, were they in the same frame, would be felt as being contradictory, but, being in different frames, they are not. The inconsistency in the thoughts and responses is, therefore, not felt by the subject. Let me give you a *very* simple and personal example to illustrate this. My mother in law is a conservative Republican. On one of her visits, I had to pick her up from the airport in New York and drive her home. On the route from the airport to my home on the Upper West side near Columbia University, one has to traverse the slums in Harlem. My mother in law, driving past the homeless poverty of the denizens of Harlem, was genuinely upset by what she saw. More than once she repeated with heartfelt compassion: “This is simply terrible. Something has to be done about these conditions of people living like this.” I was very pleased by this. We arrived home. She, being a New England Yankee, I fixed her a martini, and for an old colonial such as myself, a scotch and soda. Over these drinks I asked her, “Dorothy, your response to what you saw in Harlem was wonderful. So, do you think there should be public expenditure to

improve the conditions you just saw?” She looked at me with horror. “Are you mad? Absolutely not!” As I said this is the simplest of examples of what psychologists call ‘the frame problem’. In one frame Dorothy Rovane expressed real humanity. It was the quotidian frame of a subject responding directly to what she perceived in the world around her. In the other frame, no doubt a frame shaped by courses she took in Economics in her American school, her response was quite inconsistent with the other response. Except that it was not inconsistent *within her psychology*, because these two frames are sealed off from one another and from the subjective point of view, there is consistency only *within a frame, not across frames*.

What made Gandhi impervious to charges of nostalgia about an unalienated existence is that he was convinced that there are many quotidian contexts in the present, not just in a bygone past, in which we are completely *unalienated*. Let us take his understanding of unalienatedness as I expounded it. One sign of unalienatedness, I said, consists in the question “What if I paid the cost of cooperation and

others did not?” never so much as occurring to one. There are many contexts, for instance in everyday ashram life, he said that such a question would never occur to one. Or, we might say, it would never occur to a father (or most fathers) to ask such a question of his daughter. (What if I cooperated and she didn’t?). But, in the very same people, there are frames, again frequently shaped by the sort of education provided by the zeitgeist of capitalist modernity that he was repudiating, where that question does surface and drives one thinking and behaviour and one has no awareness that one is being inconsistent because each response is in a distinct insulated frame. But his point was that the former frame in which one’s responses are unalienated is frequently possessed by subjects of society here and now, not just societies of a past to which Gandhi was nostalgically appealing. And it was his conception of a humane politics that we first need to remove the boundaries between these frames, creating a unified frame, so that people first come to realize their inconsistencies and then to publicly educate people into the importance of *scaling up* the sorts of response that were expressed in the quotidian frame to criticize and revise the

sorts of response that occurred in the other frame more relevant to the domain where social principles and policies are articulated. For Marx this sort of humane politics was to be found in the solidarities that the proletariat forged in their revolutionary struggles. For Gandhi, it was to be an extension of the outlooks forged in ashram life and in the pluralist practices of popular religions all brought to bear in a variety of movements he led and mobilized during the long freedom struggle. That differential politics was inevitable, given the different historical contexts about which they wrote as well as the different political positions they took (Gandhi, though a radical, was not a revolutionary socialist). But my point is that the radicalism in Gandhi was quite of a piece with Marx regards the *moral psychology* that lay behind their politics, the ideas and ideals of seeking to overcome the alienation induced by capitalist modernity. It is this anti-modernism in which the radicalism lies.

I turn finally to the feature of his anti-modernism that titillates everybody, his occasional appeal to traditional superstition and myth, to make a moral and political point. I do so not with a view to defending

him at all but to steer people, who disdain him for it, to understand how much more sophisticated it was than it might initially seem. It is fine to criticize a philosopher who may be wrong. But you have to first get right what it is that you think is wrong. Let's take the most spectacular example of this occasional tendency in Gandhi, his deliberately provocative public assertion that the Bihar Earthquake was divine admonishment to us all for our complicity in the sin of untouchability, a mythical theological lesson, as it were, in the attribution of collective responsibility. As we know, it sent Tagore into heights of denunciation. Amartya Sen bent my ear over a seemingly interminable high table dinner, repeating Tagore's criticism at *new* heights of indignation. The chief criticism seems to be that he should not have been feeding, as he did with that assertion, the worst aspects of tradition and superstition in India since that is precisely what keeps us back from advancing into modernity.

Let us look in a little more detail at the exchanges on the subject, both private and public, including with Tagore himself. In these exchanges,

Gandhi was sometimes told: why don't you just say that you meant your assertion to be a *metaphor*. Gandhi blithely responded: "Let it be a metaphor. But there is no other way for me to put it." Consider that response. There is an insight in it that is worth recording, even if, in the end, you side with Tagore and not Gandhi. An apt metaphor, Gandhi was suggesting, cannot be paraphrased away into literal statements. If you tried to do so, you would lose something. All theoretical linguists would agree with this point. A good metaphor is not paraphrasable away without some loss of meaning. But if that is so, it cannot merely be a point about language. It is a point about the world or reality as well -- that there is an aspect or fragment of reality that cannot be expressed by anything but that metaphor. That is what Gandhi was insisting on.

Now, of course, there is no doubt that for all of us in this room, Gandhi's assertion about the earthquake, was saying something, which if taken literally (rather than as a metaphorical attribution of collective responsibility) is utterly false. There really is no room for doubt about this. But the fact is that almost all metaphors, taken literally, are false. 'Juliet is the sun' said Romeo!! Juliet is NOT the sun. In fact the only

true metaphor that I have ever come across is “No man is an island”.

Almost all metaphors are false. So far we are all square then. Gandhi is as off beam as Shakespeare. But Shakespeare does not provoke Amartya Sen to heights of denunciation. So, the point must be that some metaphors even if they get the point across as nothing else can, are inappropriate for social and political reasons. As I said, in a traditional society, one must not be feeding the tendency to superstition. But Gandhi explicitly said to Tagore, ‘I am not speaking to scientists and to scientifically educated urban elites, I am speaking to the ordinary, illiterate masses among our people to convey something on a social matter of the utmost importance. If I were speaking to scientists, I would certainly say something different on this matter.’

So a question arises. Is this just the familiar relativism of different cultures, a traditional folk and spiritual culture of popular religion that Gandhi was constantly tapping as I pointed out earlier, and a modern scientific culture. That is to say, is it just the standard relativism about truth whereby what is true in the culture of popular religion is false in

the culture shaped by scientific knowledge? I do not believe that that is what underlies Gandhi's response to Tagore at all. You might think that I am just projecting this on to Gandhi because of my own admittedly emphatically anti-relativist views. But I am not. What Gandhi is suggesting here is not that familiar and implausible relativism, that truth itself is relative to a culture, but rather a much deeper and more fascinating question. The question: *why is it that something that is viewed as a truth in some cultures can ONLY be viewed as a metaphor in another?* One can surely show Gandhi the sympathetic courtesy of acknowledging that he is, in the end, asking Tagore to think about this deeper question even if one rightly refuses to follow the more familiar relativist in allowing many assertions of this sort within the culture of popular religion, the prestige of truth.

