

religious acts, mothers in sickness and woe.⁵⁴ And the goddess Parvati, with divine disdain for convention, remarks: 'Among all the pleasures of women, the greatest pleasure is to unite with a good man in private, and the misery that arises from its interruption is not equalled by any other. The second greatest misery is the falling of the seed in vain, and the third is my childlessness, the greatest sorrow of all.'⁵⁴

Numerous passages in legends and epics vividly describe the sufferings of the souls of departed ancestors if a couple remain childless and thus unable to guarantee the performance of the rituals prescribed for salvation. 'Because a son delivers his father from the hell called *put*,' Manu says, 'he was therefore called *put-tra* [a deliverer from *put*] by the self-existent himself.'⁵⁵ Hindu society is of course not unique in revering motherhood as a moral, religious, or even artistic ideal,⁵⁶ but the absolute and all-encompassing social importance of motherhood, the ubiquitous variety of motherhood myths, and the function of offspring in ritual and religious (not to mention economic) life all give to motherhood in Indian culture a particularly incontrovertible legitimacy.

Subjectively, in the world of feminine psychological experience, pregnancy is a deliverance from the insecurity, doubt and shame of infertility: 'Better be mud than a barren woman', goes one proverb. Moreover, until very recently, in Hindu society, as among the Jews, Muslims and certain West African tribes, a childless wife could be repudiated (even if not divorced) by her husband who was permitted then to take another wife. On the positive side, pregnancy marks the beginning of the psychological process which firmly establishes a Hindu woman's adult identity. The predominant element in this identity, the ideal core around which it is organized, is what Helene Deutsch has called 'motherliness'.⁵⁷ Its central emotional expressions are those of *tenderness, nurturing and protectiveness*, directed towards the unborn child. Many of the other psychic tendencies generally associated with the young woman's life-stage now become subordinate. The need for emotional closeness with her 'pre-oedipal' mother and the wish to be loved can be transformed into the wish to love; hostility, especially towards her new surroundings, can be directed towards the protection of her child from the environment; the longing of her reawakened sensuality can be temporarily sublimated, given over to physical ministrations to her child.

To be sure, the development of motherliness as the dominant mode

in a Hindu woman's identity and its harmony with other personality traits vary among individual women. Nonetheless, a Hindu woman's 'motherliness' (including manifestations of maternal excess) is a relatively more inclusive element of her identity formation than it is among western women. Given her early training and the ideals of femininity held up to her, motherhood does not have connotations of cultural imposition or of confinement in an isolating role.

For an Indian woman, imminent motherhood is not only the personal fulfilment of an old wish and the biological consummation of a lifelong promise, but an event in which the culture confirms her status as a renewer of the race, and extends to her a respect and consideration which were not accorded to her as a mere wife. It is not surprising that this dramatic improvement in her social relations and status within the family, the resolution of her emotional conflicts and the discovery of a way of organizing her future life around the core of motherliness tend to be experienced unconsciously as a gift from the child growing within her. The unborn child is perceived as her saviour, instrumental in winning for its mother the love and acceptance of those around her, a theme which recurs in many legends and tales. Thus Rama repents and is ready to take Sita back from her exile in the forest after he sees his sons for the first time; Dushyanta remembers and accepts Shakuntala as his legitimate wife after he comes face to face with his infant son; while in the two Bengali folk-tales of Sulata and Kiranmala, it is through their children's instrumentality that the injustice done to the mothers is redressed and they assume their rightful places as queens. In the case of a Hindu woman, at least in the imagery of the culture, maternal feelings of tenderness and nurturance occur in combination with a profound gratitude and the readiness for a poignantly high emotional investment in the child.

The 'Good Mother'

Although in the usage of pediatrics and medicine 'infant' refers to a child who cannot yet walk, the actualities of childhood and identity development in India suggest that the psycho-social *quality* of infancy extends through the first four or five years of life, the entire span of time in which feeding, toileting and rudimentary self-care, as well as walking, talking and the initial capacity for reasoning, become matters of course. This extension of the definition is not arbitrary. As we

shall see, in India, the first developmental stage of childhood, characterized by a decisive, deep attachment to the nurturing mother, by dependence upon her for the necessities and the pleasures of succour and comfort, and by the 'crisis' of trust in the benign intentions of others towards oneself, is prolonged in such a way that the second and third developmental stages seem not to take place sequentially but are compressed into one. Thus, it is not until between the ages of three and five that an Indian child moves away (in a psychological sense) from the first all-important 'Other' in his life, his mother. And it is at this time that he⁴⁶ confronts simultaneously the developmental tasks of separation and individuation, of autonomy and initiative, of wilful self-definition and oedipal rivalry, and moves as it were from 'infancy' to 'childhood' all at once.

During this period of prolonged infancy, the Indian child is intensely and intimately attached to his mother. This attachment is an exclusive one, not in the sense of being without older and younger siblings close in age who claim, and compete for, the mother's love and care, but in that the Indian child up to the age of four or five exclusively directs his demands and affections towards his mother, in spite of the customary presence in the extended family of many other potential caretakers and 'substitute mothers'.⁴⁷ Nor does the father play a significant caretaking role at this time.

This attachment is manifested in (and symbolized by) the *physical closeness* of the infant and his mother. Well up to the fifth year, if not longer, it is customary for Indian children to sleep by their mother's side at night. During the day she carries the youngest, or the one most needing attention, astride her hip, the others within arm's reach, as she goes about on visits to neighbours, to the market, to the fields and on other errands. At home, if not suckling or nestling in his mother's lap, the infant is playing on the floor or resting in a cot nearby. Constantly held, cuddled, crooned and talked to, the Indian infant's experience of his mother is a heady one, his contact with her is of an intensity and duration that differentiate it markedly from the experience of infancy in western worlds. At the slightest whimper or sign of distress the infant is picked up and rocked, or given the breast and comforted. Usually it is the infant's own mother who swiftly moves to pacify him, although in her occasional absence on household matters it may be a sister or an aunt or a grandmother who takes him up to feed or clean or just to soothe with familiar physical contact. It is by no means uncommon to see an old grand-

mother pick up a crying child and give him her dried-up breast to suck as she sits there, rocking on her heels and crooning over him. The intensity of the infantile anxiety aroused by inevitable brief separations from the mother is greatly reduced by the ready availability of the other female members of the extended family. Hindu cultural tradition enjoins women not to let their infants cry, and maternal practice in India anticipates the findings of contemporary empirical research on infancy which attributes infant distress, when a baby is not hungry, cold or in pain, to separation from the mother (or her substitute).

From the moment of birth, then, the Indian infant is greeted and surrounded by direct, sensual body contact, by relentless physical ministrations. The emotional quality of nurturing in traditional Indian families serves to amplify the effects of physical gratification. An Indian mother is inclined towards a total indulgence of her infant's wishes and demands, whether these be related to feeding, cleaning, sleeping or being kept company. Moreover, she tends to extend this kind of mothering well beyond the time when the 'infant' is ready for independent functioning in many areas. Thus, for example, feeding is frequent, at all times of the day and night, and 'on demand'. And although breast feeding is supplemented with other kinds of food after the first year, the mother continues to give her breast to her child for as long as possible, often up to two or three years: in fact, suckling comes to a gradual end only when there is a strong reason to stop nursing, such as a second pregnancy. Even then, weaning is not a once-and-for-all affair, for an older child may also occasionally suckle at his mother's breast. It is not uncommon to see a five- or six-year-old peremptorily lift up his mother's blouse for a drink as she sits gossiping with her friends, an event which is accepted as a matter of course by all concerned.

Similarly, without any push from his mother or other members of the family, the Indian toddler takes his own time learning to control his bowels, and proceeds at his own pace to master other skills such as walking, talking and dressing himself. As far as the mother's and the family's means permit, a young child's wishes are fully gratified and his unfolding capacities and activities accepted, if not always with manifest delight, at least with affectionate tolerance.

The predisposition of an Indian mother to follow rather than lead in dealing with her child's inclinations and with his tempo of development does not spring from some universal component of maternal

pride. In part, it reflects the cultural conception of and respect for the specific 'inborn' individuality of every child. In part it has been influenced by the facts of life in traditional India; given the infant mortality rate which used to range above twenty per cent, a surviving child was accorded by his mother the most deferential care, for he would become the parents' source of economic support in later life, and through his participation in the rituals of death and mourning, their guarantee of *religious* merit and of righteous passage into the next life. But above all, this quality of deference and indulgence in Indian motherhood has *psychological* origins in the identity development of Indian women. As I have described above, in daughterhood an Indian girl is a sojourner in her own family, and with marriage she becomes less a wife than a daughter-in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman, and can make a place for herself in the family, in the community and in the life cycle. This accounts for her unique sense of maternal obligation and her readiness for practically unlimited emotional investment in her children. These are the cultural, social, religious and developmental threads which are woven together in the formation of conscious attitudes and unconscious images in the mother which, in turn, give Indian infancy its special aura and developmental impact.

Given the experience of his mother's immediacy and utter responsiveness, an Indian generally emerges from infancy into childhood believing that the world is benign and that others can be counted on to act in his behalf. The young child has come to experience his core self as lovable: 'I am lovable, for I am loved.' Infancy has provided him with a secure base from which to explore his environment with confidence. This confidence in the support and protection of others, together with the memory traces of maternal ministrations, provide the basic modality for his social relations throughout the life cycle. In other words, Indians are apt to approach others with an unconscious sense of their own lovability and the expectation and demand that trustworthy benefactors will always turn up in times of difficulty. Suspicion and reserve are rare. Many character traits ascribed to Indians are a part of the legacy of this particular pattern of infancy: trusting friendliness with a quick readiness to form attachments, and intense, if short-lived, disappointment if friendly overtures are not reciprocated; willingness to reveal the most intimate confidences about one's life at the slightest acquaintance and the expectation of a reciprocal familiarity in others; and

the assumption that it is 'natural both to take care of others . . . and to expect to be cared for'.⁶⁰ Considering the oppressive economic environment in which most Indians live, I find no other explanation than the emotional capital built up during infancy for the warmth that is abundantly and unreservedly given and received in the most casual encounters, for the bouts of spontaneous laughter (and crying), and for the glow of intimacy and vitality that characterizes social relations.

Setting aside our consideration of the unconscious for a moment, we can observe that an Indian child tends to experience his mother almost totally as a 'good mother'. The proportion of Indian men who express or experience an active dislike, fear or contempt for their mothers at a conscious level is infinitesimally small. This is strikingly apparent in clinical work; in initial interviews and in the early stages of psychotherapy, patient after patient invariably portrays his mother as highly supportive and extremely loving. In studies of family relations, sociologists and anthropologists confirm the existence of a very close mother-son relationship of the 'good mother' variety in different regions and social classes throughout India.⁶¹

Literary evidence further corroborates her sentimental prevalence. Thus, short stories and novels by Indian writers such as Sarat Chandra and Premchand tend to portray the mother in her benign and nurturing aspect, with a nostalgia uncomplicated by the slightest trace of hostility or guilt. Nor do autobiographical accounts deviate from this psychological stance of conscious devotion to the 'good mother'. Nehru, recalling his mother, writes, 'I had no fear of her, for I knew that she would condone everything I did, and because of her excessive and indiscriminating love for me, I tried to dominate over her a little.'⁶² And Yogananda recollects, 'Father . . . was kind, grave, at times stern. Loving him dearly, we children yet observed a certain reverential distance. But mother was queen of hearts, and taught us only through love.'⁶³

It needs to be noted here that this idealized image of the 'good mother' is largely a male construction. Women do not sentimentalize their mothers in this way. For daughters, the mother is not an adoring figure on a pedestal: she is a more earthy presence, not always benign but always *there*.

I have so far described the core of Indian personality in terms of confidence in the safeguarding supportiveness of others and trust in

the fundamental benevolence of the environment. Mythological and religious representations of the 'good mother' as she is personified in the widely worshipped goddesses, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Parvati or Gauri, allow us to elaborate on the Indian experience of this 'basic trust'. In Hindu mythology we find that the specifically oral aspect of maternal nurturing is represented by very minor deities such as Annapurna, portrayed as a fair woman standing on a lotus holding a rice bowl, or by the heavenly cow Surabhi who gives an eternal fountain of milk. But the central feature of the 'good mother', incorporated by every major goddess in the Hindu pantheon and dramatized either in her origins or in her function, is not her capacity to feed but to provide life-giving reassurance through her *pervasive presence*. Thus Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and good fortune, comes to *dwell* with men, while those in adversity are spoken of as being *forsaken* by her. Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, is identified as *Vak* (speech)—the mother soothing, consoling, talking to her infant. And Parvati, according to one of the Puranic accounts, came into existence to protect the gods against the distress caused by the demon Andhaka (born of Darkness), the representation of one of the elemental fears of childhood. The reassurance provided by the goddesses Sarasvati and Parvati against the terrific estrangements of infancy reminds me of Freud's account of the child who called out of a dark room, 'Auntie, speak to me! I'm frightened because it's so dark!' His aunt answered him, 'What good would that do? You can't see me.' 'That does not matter,' replied the child, 'if anyone speaks, it gets light.'⁶⁴

This emphasis on a nurturing, fear-dispelling presence as the fundamental quality of the 'good mother' is unmistakable in the descriptions of the appearance of these goddesses: They *shine* 'with pearl and golden sheen', *glow* 'with splendour, bright as burnished gold' and gaze with faint smiles upon the worshippers.⁶⁵ Erikson has called this the 'numinous element, the sense of hallowed presence'.⁶⁶ This is the 'good mother', in earthly mothers and in maternal divinities, smiling down on the dependent infant, or on the devoted believer, who, each in his own way, yearns to be at one with that gracious presence. Shiva's lament at the loss of Parvati evokes the sense of intactness the mother's presence gives, as well as the dread of separation or abandonment: 'With thee I am almighty, the framer of all things, and the giver of all bliss; but without thee, my energy, I am like a corpse, powerless and incapable of action: how then, my

beloved, canst thou forsake me? With smiles and glances of thine eyes, say something sweet as *amrita*, and with the rain of gentle words sprinkle my heart which is scorched with grief . . . O mother of the Universe! arise.'⁶⁷ The theme of isolation and its transcendence, as we have seen in Chapter II, constitutes the core of the *moksha* ideal. This theme has its ontogenetic source in the specific form and quality of the interactions between mothers and infants in Indian society; and it is vividly elaborated in Hindu mythology as the persistent nostalgic wish for the benevolent presence of the 'good mother' as she was experienced in infancy.

The preoccupation with the themes of loneliness and separation, together with the strong unconscious desire for the confirming presence of the 'good (M)Other', stays with the individual in India throughout the course of his life. This is in striking contrast to most western cultures in which the yearning for a loved one and distress caused by her or his absence are often held to be 'childish' and 'regressive'. But as Bowlby, marshalling impressive evidence from clinical, empirical and ethological research, has demonstrated, the tendency to react with fear to the threat of being left alone is a natural one which has developed out of a genetically determined bias in man and has the character of an instinctive response.⁶⁸

Yet in western culture on the whole, and especially in psychotherapy, ' . . . little weight is given to the component of "being alone"'. Indeed in our culture for someone to confess himself afraid when alone is regarded as shameful or merely silly. Hence there exists a pervasive bias to overlook the very component of fear-arousing situations that a study of anxious patients suggests is most important!⁶⁹ When a patient's suffering stems from certain phobias, or even when it involves free-floating anxiety, clinicians resort all too readily to complex explanations hinging on 'internal dangers'; no other anxiety-provoking situation is overlooked or camouflaged, either by the patient or by the clinician, as is the common fear of isolation and separation. In India, on the other hand, patients openly allude to, and even insist upon, the fear of being cut off from 'attachment figures' and the consequent threat of loneliness. This fear is acknowledged by family and society in India (however negligible it is to the clinician trained in the West); it has a cultural legitimacy which reinforces its vicissitudes in the course of an individual neurosis and hence merits serious consideration by clinicians. Indeed, in India the fear of isolation is projected on to the Creator himself: In one of the

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Hindu myths we are told that Creation began because Purusha, the soul of the universe, was alone and 'hence did not enjoy happiness'.⁷⁶

The yearning for the confirming presence of the loved person in its positive as well as negative manifestation—the distress aroused by her or his unavailability or unresponsiveness in time of need—is the dominant modality of social relations in India, especially within the extended family. This 'modality' is expressed variously but consistently, as in a person's feeling of helplessness when family members are absent or his difficulty in making decisions alone. In short, Indians characteristically rely on the support of others to go through life and to deal with the exigencies imposed by the outside world. Some western as well as Indian social scientists have chosen to interpret this as a 'weakness' in the Indian personality, the price to be paid for the indulgence enjoyed in infancy and early childhood. Statements like, 'Training in self-reliance and achievement are conspicuous by their absence. Children are not encouraged to be independent. They, like adults, are expected to seek aid in difficulty,'⁷⁷ or, 'Family life tends to develop an acute sense of dependence with a strong sense of security, and a clear sense of responsibility without an accompanying sense of personal initiative or decision,'⁷⁸ are the rule in studies which touch on the developmental aspects of Indian character. And this invariably carries with it the general value implication that independence and initiative are 'better' than mutual dependence and community. But it depends, of course, on the culture's vision of a 'good society' and 'individual merit', whether a person's behaviour in relationships approaches the isolation pole of the fusion-isolation continuum, as postulated by the dominant cultural tradition in the West today, or the fusion pole as maintained in traditional Indian culture. To borrow from Schopenhauer's imagery, the basic problem of human relations resembles that of hedgehogs on a cold night. They creep closer to each other for warmth, are pricked by quills and move away, but then get cold and again try to come nearer. This movement to and fro is repeated until an optimum position is reached in which the body temperature is above the freezing point and yet the pain inflicted by the quills (the nearness of the other) is still bearable. In Indian society the optimum position entails the acceptance of more pain in order to get greater warmth.

The Indian resolution of the tension between the coldness of distance and the price (in dependency) of nearness is not 'deviant', nor are the consequences in patterns of social behaviour 'regressive'.

Even in the West, as Bowlby points out, a consensus is emerging among clinicians of many theoretical persuasions that emotional maturity includes the capacity to rely trustingly on others, and that true self-reliance is not only compatible with the capacity for mutual dependence but grows out of it and is complementary to it.⁷⁹ The capacity to be truly alone is greatest when the 'Other', originally equated with the accepting, giving 'good mother', has become a constant and indestructible presence in the individual's unconscious and is fused with it in the form of self-acceptance. We have seen in an earlier chapter that this paradox also underlines the Indian guru's meditation, his striving towards the attainment of *moksha*, wherein he attempts to reach the *sine qua non* of autonomy through the total introjection of the 'Other', the not-self. And, as ever, the imagery of Hinduism is uncompromising: Shiva, arch-ascetic and epitome of lonely self-sufficiency, is often portrayed in such close embrace with Shakti, the 'mother of the universe', that they are one, inseparable for the duration of a world-age.

The 'Bad Mother'

I have suggested above that much of the so-called dependent behaviour observed in individuals and in social relations in India is a manifestation of the universal wish to avoid isolation and the need to share the responsibility for one's life with others. The apparent ubiquity of these needs in India, and their open, undisguised expression, reflect not so much a regressive striving or an 'oral fixation' as the cultural acceptance and even encouragement of such needs and behaviour, an acceptance that is itself rooted in an ideal model of human relationships which diverges sharply from the corresponding ideal in the West. Yet even if we can transfer the larger part of 'dependent' behaviour from the domain of the 'infantile' to that of the 'normal', the fact remains that anxiety around the theme of separation is much more common and intense in India than in western cultures. However, it is inappropriate to attribute the neurotic warp of an otherwise normative element in Indian identity to a prolonged infancy characterized by affectionate care. This theory of 'spoiling', which often crops up in discussions of personality development and psychopathology in India, rests on an uncritical acceptance of Freud's contention that an excess of parental love serves to magnify for the child the danger of losing this love, and

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renders him in later life incapable of either temporarily doing without love or accepting smaller amounts of it.⁷⁴ In spite of the widespread popularity of this hypothesis and its dogged influence on studies of character formation, there is little evidence to support it. In fact, all the available data⁷⁵ point in the opposite direction, namely, that a child becomes anxious and clinging if parental affection is insufficient or unreliable.

In India the anxiety that may fester around the theme of separation stems at least partly from that moment in later infancy when the mother may suddenly withdraw her attention and her presence from her child. And indeed, retrospective accounts of adults as well as anthropological observations of child-rearing practices suggest that this is a widely used method of disciplining young children in India. 'I don't remember my mother ever scolding me or hitting me. If I became too much for her she would become sad and start crying and would refuse to speak to me.' Or: 'She often told me that she would go away and leave me. If I was especially bothersome, she would say that the ghost living in the mango tree outside our courtyard would take me. I still cannot pass that mango tree without shivering a little inside.' These are typical recollections of patients in a culture where frightening a child with ghosts or goblins, or locking him up alone in a dark room—in short, threats of abandonment and isolation—are deemed the most effective methods of socialization. These are the apprehensions that make an Indian child 'be good'; yet if these punishments are threatened or carried out in a context of reliable mothering and family affection they do not immobilize development, but recede into the depths of the psyche, a flickering trace of the dark side of the Indian inner world.

If there is dis-ease in the mother-infant relationship (with its probable consequences in the formation of the Hindu psyche) it stems not so much from styles of maternal reprimand and punishment, and not from the duration or the intensity of the connection between mother and infant, but rather from the danger of inversion of emotional roles—a danger which all too frequently becomes a reality particularly in the case of the male child. By inversion of emotional roles I mean this: An Indian mother, as we have shown, pre-consciously experiences her newborn infant, especially a son, as the means by which her 'motherly' identity is crystallized, her role and status in family and society established. She tends to perceive a son as a kind of saviour and to nurture him with gratitude and even reverence as

well as with affection and care. For a range of reasons, the balance of nurturing may be so affected that the mother unconsciously demands that the child serve as an object of her own unfulfilled desires and wishes, however antithetical they may be to his own. The child feels compelled then to act as her saviour. Faced with her unconscious intimations and demands, he may feel confused, helpless and inadequate, frightened by his mother's overwhelming nearness and yet unable (and partly unwilling) to get away. In his fantasy, her presence acquires the ominous visage of the 'bad mother'.

Before I elaborate on the specific form the 'bad mother' theme takes in Hindu psyche and culture, it is necessary to emphasize that the 'bad' aspect of the mother is not unique to India. The 'bad mother' lives at the opposite pole from the 'good mother' in the fantasies of all of us. As Erich Neumann has shown in an analysis of the myths of ancient cultures, and as clinical reports have demonstrated in contemporary society, a generative, nurturing and compassionate femininity has always had its counterpoint in the demanding, destroying and devouring maternal image.⁷⁶ And, in unconscious fantasy, the vagina as the passage between being and non-being is not only perceived as a source of life and equated with emergence into light, but also shunned as the forbidding dark hole, the entrance into the depths of a death womb which takes life back into itself. At this most fundamental level of the psyche, no one is entirely free from ambivalent feelings towards the mother. The theme of the 'bad mother' merits particular attention in the Indian context not just because it exists, but because it is characterized by a singular intensity and pervasiveness. Considered from this angle, the idealization of the 'good mother' doubtless betrays the intensity of emotion aroused by her during infancy and suggests a secondary repression of the anxious and hostile elements of these feelings.

Images of the 'bad mother' are culturally specific. To a large extent they are a function of the relationship between the sexes in any society. In patriarchal societies, moreover, they reflect the nature of the mother's own unconscious ambivalence towards the male child. Thus, for example, aggressive, destructive impulses towards the male child are a distinct probability in societies which blatantly derogate and discriminate against women. Traditional psycho-analytic theory compresses the abundant variety of affect and fantasy deriving from the basic duality of the sexes into the concept of penis envy, claims for it a stubborn prominence in the feminine unconscious,

and concludes that this prevents women from finding the satisfaction of emotional and psycho-sexual needs in marriage and predisposes them to seek this satisfaction from their infant sons. The invariability of these propositions in individual lives is questionable; however, it is more than likely that erotic feelings towards the child will be more intense and closer to consciousness in a society such as India where a woman is expected and encouraged to find emotional fulfilment primarily in her relationship with her children.

In all societies the image of the 'bad mother' combines both the aggressively destroying and the sexually demanding themes. The question as to which of the two aspects, in any society, casts a longer shadow over the infant's earliest experience and thus contributes to the formation of a culturally specific image of the 'bad mother' depends upon the position and status of women within the society and also upon the means and circumstances of socially sanctioned feminine expression of aggressive and erotic impulses. It goes without saying that in this analysis I am speaking of the imagery that informs a collective fantasy of the 'bad mother', and necessarily setting aside individual variations, attributable to the life-historical fates of individual mothers within a given culture.

In Indian society as a whole, for reasons suggested earlier, the aggressive dimension of maternal feeling towards the male child is comparatively weak. Rather, it is in the sphere of unsatisfied erotic needs, a seductive restlessness, that the possibility of disturbance lies. By this I do not mean to imply that Indian women are without feelings of envy and hostility for the males among them; the castration fantasy of turning all men into eunuchs in the Arundhati myth, however much a patriarchal projection, is but one illustration of the ambivalence that governs relations between the sexes. Given the overwhelming preference in Indian society for the birth of male offspring, it would indeed give the psycho-analytic interpreter pause if such envy were non-existent or totally repressed. However, for the purposes of elaborating the imagery of the 'bad mother' in Indian personality development, we must shift our attention from the 'aggressive' sphere of rivalry and rage to the 'erotic' sphere of love and longing. We must attend to the outcome of female psycho-sexual development in traditional Indian society.

The fate of an Indian girl's sexuality is a socially enforced progressive renunciation. The birth of a child does not change this prescription; in fact, maternity often demands an even greater repudia-

tion of a woman's erotic impulses. The familial and social expectation that she now devote herself exclusively to her child's welfare, the long periods of post-partum taboo on sexual intercourse in many communities, her increasing confinement to female quarters—these are a few of the social factors which dispose a young mother to turn the full force of her eroticism towards an infant son.

Here, it must be remembered that a mother's inner discontents are conveyed to her infant, wordlessly, in the daily intimacy of her contact with him, and that the relief of his mother's tension may become as important to the child as the satisfaction of his own needs. And indeed, clinical experience has consistently and convincingly demonstrated that the displacement of a woman's sexual longings from her husband to her son poses one of the most difficult problems for a boy to handle. At a certain point, the mother's touch and stimulation, whether or not her ministrations are deliberately seductive or overtly sexual, together with the unconscious erotic wishes that infuse her caretaking arouse an intensity of feeling in the male child which his still weak and unstructured ego cannot cope. The surge of unbidden and uncontrollable affect seems to threaten to engulf him while at the same time it arouses acute anxiety. The son's predicament is extreme: although he unconditionally needs the physical tending and emotional sustenance that at first only his mother provides,* he is profoundly wary of the intensity of his feelings for her (and of hers for him) and unconsciously afraid of being overwhelmed and 'devoured' by her. As the infant boy grows—cognitively, psycho-sexually and socially—as he develops the capacity to 'put it all together', he senses that he cannot do without his mother nor remove himself from her presence, but at the same time he is incapable of giving her what she unconsciously desires. 'Realizing' his inadequacy in this regard, he also begins to fear his mother's anger and the separation which her disappointment in him seems to forebode. In his fantasy, the mother's body and especially her genitals may assume an ominous aspect. As Philip Slater in his interpretation of child-rearing in ancient Greece has expressed: 'In so far as the child receives a healthy, non-devouring love from the mother he will regard the female genitalia as the source of life. But in so far as he fails to receive such love, or receive it at the price of living solely for

*As we have noted on p. 80, the mother's primacy and the potential for a psychological 'clinch' between mother and son is prolonged well into childhood—and indeed into the whole life cycle.

the satisfaction of maternal needs, he will regard the female genitalia as threatening to his very existence.⁷⁷

In the child's fantasy, the menace implicit in the female genitalia may become concrete, magnified in horrific imagery—a chamber full of poison, causing death in the sexual act—or jaws lined with sharp teeth—the so-called *vagina dentata*. This ferocious motif, which occurs frequently in Indian legends and myths, is vividly illustrated in the following myth from the *Kalika Purana*: "During a battle between the gods and the demons, Sukra, the guru of the demons, was able to revive all the demons who were slain. Siva knew that Sukra could not be killed because he was a Brahmin, and so he resolved to throw Sukra into the vagina of a woman. From Siva's third eye there appeared a horrible woman with flowing hair, a great belly, pendulous breasts, thighs like plantain tree trunks, and a mouth like a great cavern. There were teeth and eyes in her womb. Siva said to her, "Keep the evil guru of the demons in your womb while I kill Jalandhara [the chief of the demon army], and then release him!" She ran after Sukra and grabbed him, stripped him of his clothes and embraced him. She held him fast in her womb, laughed and vanished with him."⁷⁸

Whereas the Sukra myth is a symbolic dramatization of the child's helplessness in the face of the dreadful mother, another Siva myth from the *Matsya Purana* manages to incorporate the child's own sexual excitement and his fantasied revenge through the complementary motif of *penis aculeatus*—the sharp phallus: Siva once teased Parvati about her dark skin, and she resolved to perform *tapas* to obtain a golden skin. As Parvati departed, she said to her son Viraka, "My son, I am going to do *tapas* [ascetic practices], but Siva is a great woman-chaser, and so I want you to guard the door constantly while I am gone, so that no other woman may come to Siva!" Meanwhile, Adi, the son of the demon Andhaka, who had resolved to kill all the gods to revenge his father's death, learned that Parvati had gone to do *tapas*. Adi did *tapas* and won from Brahma the boon that he would only die when he had transformed himself twice. Then he came to Siva's door and seeing Viraka there, he changed himself into a serpent to delude him, forgetting the stipulation about the manner of his death. Once inside the house, he took the form of Parvati in order to deceive Siva, and he placed teeth as sharp as thunderbolts inside her vagina, for he was determined to kill Siva. When Siva saw him he embraced him, thinking him to be Parvati,

and Adi said, "I went to do *tapas* in order to be dear to you and lovely, but I found no pleasure there so I have returned to you." When Siva heard this he became suspicious, for he knew that Parvati would not have returned without completing *tapas*, and so he looked closely for signs by which to recognize her. When he saw that the illusory Parvati did not have the mark of the lotus on the left side of her body, as the true Parvati did, he recognized the magic form of the demon, and he placed a thunderbolt in his own phallus and wounded the demon with it, killing him.⁷⁹

The figure of the mother is indeed omnipresent in the psyche of Indian men. Yet what these typical myth fragments make clear is the ambivalence with which she is regarded in fantasy: she is both nurturing benefactress and threatening seductress. The image of the 'bad mother' as a woman who inflicts her male offspring with her unfulfilled, ominous sexuality is not just a clinical postulate, supported by mythological evidence; it is indirectly confirmed by the staunch taboos surrounding menstrual blood and childbirth throughout traditional India.⁸⁰ A menstruating woman may not prepare food, nor make offerings, nor participate in family feasts. She is forbidden to go into the temple, into the kitchen, into the granary or to the well. Men have a mortal horror of being near a woman during the time of menstruation. As with many other customs in India, the menstruation taboos have a hoary tradition. Manu is customarily blunt on the subject: "The wisdom, the energy, the strength, the might and the vitality of a man who approaches a woman covered with menstrual excretions utterly perish."⁸¹

Thus, underlying the conscious ideal of womanly purity, innocence and fidelity, and interwoven with the unconscious belief in a safeguarding maternal beneficence is a secret conviction among many Hindu men that the feminine principle is really the opposite—treacherous, lustful and rampant with an insatiable, contaminating sexuality. This dark imagery breaks through in such proverbs as, "Fire is never satisfied with fuel, the ocean is never filled by the rivers, death is never satisfied by living beings and women are never satisfied with men." In mythology, when Shiva destroys Kama, the god of sexual desire, Kama's essence enters the limbs of Devi, the great mother-goddess and archetypal woman. Or, the women in the Pine Forest, in their efforts to seduce Shiva, quote from a text which appears in several Upanishads and Brahmanas: "The Vedas say, "Fire is the woman, the fuel is her lap; when she entices, that is the smoke,

and the flames are her vulva. What is done within is the coals, and the pleasure is the sparks. In this Vaisvanara fire, the gods always offer seed as oblation." Therefore have pity. Here is the sacrificial altar.¹⁹³

The anxiety aroused by the prospect of encountering female sexuality is also evident in the mildly phobic attitude towards sexually mature women in many parts of India. Dube's observations in a Hyderabad village—"Young people have a special fascination for adolescent girls "whose youth is just beginning to blossom." Young men who succeed in fondling "the unripe, half-developed breasts" of a girl and in having intercourse with one "whose pubic hair is just beginning to grow" easily win the admiration of their age-group . . . Success—real or imaginary—with an adolescent girl is vividly described¹⁹⁴ illustrate the widespread preference for immature girls and the concomitant fear of mature female sexuality. The fantasy world of Hindu men is replete with the figures of older women whose appetites debilitate a man's sexuality, whose erotic practices include, for example, vaginal suction, 'milking the penis'. These fantastic women recall the Hindu son's primitive dread of the maternal sexuality that drains, devours and sucks dry. Here we may note that the common term of abuse, 'Your mother's penis', whose meaning puzzles Dube, stems from precisely this dark side of the Hindu male's emotional imagery of maternity; as Karen Horney has shown, the attempt in male fantasy to endow the woman with a penis is an attempt to deny the sinister female genitals—in India, those of the mother.¹⁹⁵

The latent sexual dread of the mature female is also the main *psychological* reason for the unusual disparity in age between men and women at the time of marriage in India, although this difference in age rarely approaches the number contemplated by Manu as right and proper: namely, sixteen to eighteen years! Yet even a girl bride gets older, of course. She becomes an adult woman who, especially after childbirth, moves dangerously close to the sexually intimidating mother of infancy in her husband's unconscious fantasy. The most direct expression of this (generally unconscious) association in the male psyche is the myth of Skanda, the son of Shiva and Parvati: 'When Skanda killed Taraka [a demon who had been terrorizing the gods], his mother, Parvati, wished to reward him, so she told him to amuse himself as he pleased. Skanda made love to the wives of the gods, and the gods could not prevent it. They complained to Parvati,

and so she decided she would take the form of whatever woman Skanda was about to seduce. Skanda summoned the wife of Indra [the king of gods], and then the wife of Varuna [the wind-god], but when he looked at each one he saw his mother's form, and so he would let her go and summon another. She too became the image of his mother, and then Skanda was ashamed and thought, "the universe is filled with my mother", and he became passionless.¹⁹⁶ On the other side of the coin, the counterphobic attitude, the conscious seeking out of what is unconsciously feared, is expressed in the following passage from the *Yogatattva Upanishad*: 'That breast from which one sucked before he now presses and obtains pleasures. He enjoys the same genital organs from which he was born before. She who was once his mother, will now be his wife and she who is now wife, mother. He who is now father will be again son, and he who is now son will be again father.'¹⁹⁷

One of the likely psycho-sexual consequences of this anxiety-provoking process of association in unconscious fantasy is a heightened fear, or the actual occurrence, of impotence. And indeed this is a phenomenon to whose ubiquity Indian psychiatrists as well as their traditional counterparts—the *vaids* and *hakims* to whom a majority of Indians turn with psychosomatic complaints—can bear witness. This anxiety is plainly in evidence in the advertisements for patent medicines plastered or painted on the walls enclosing the railway tracks in any of the larger Indian towns. Together with cures for barrenness, the major worry of Indian women, these remedies hold out the promise of sexual rejuvenation for men. Psycho-sexual development and problems of intimacy between Indian men and women suggest the vicious circle that spirals inward in the Indian unconscious: mature women are sexually threatening to men, which contributes to 'avoidance behaviour' in sexual relations, which in turn causes the women to extend a provocative sexual presence towards their sons, which eventually produces adult men who fear the sexuality of mature women.

Given the concurrence of these phenomena, we must conclude that the sexual presence of the 'bad mother' looms large in the unconscious experience of male children in India and is therefore critical to an understanding of the Hindu psyche. And indeed, as I attempt to show below, the mine of collective fantasy around this theme is unusually rich. Certainly all societies call upon witches, vampires, ghosts and other spectres to symbolize the forbidding,

negative aspect of a real mother; these phantoms, along with other mother surrogates such as a stepmother and evil goddesses, are infused with meanings derived from archaic early childhood fears of the mother's emotional needs and fantasied threats. These are familiar figures in individual and collective fantasy across cultures, and the *dayans*, *jinn*s, and *bhoots* who people the Indian night and the Hindu imagination in such profusion are unexceptional. Female vampires who suck the blood from the toe of a sleeping man suggest (even without an analysis of the obvious sexual symbolism) the fantasied rapacious mother as graphically as Ghitachi, Measka, Rambha, Urvasi, Chitralekha and all the other *apsaras*, or 'heavenly damsels', who lure men from their practice of 'rigid austerities' and deprive them of their 'spiritual' life substance.

A vivid illustration of the collective male fantasy of the child's encounter with the sexual mother is the mythical meeting of Arjuna, a hero of the epic *Mahabharata*, with the *apsara* Urvasi, which is one of the most popular and frequently enacted subjects in Indian dance drama. As described in the *Mahabharata*, the episode has a dreamlike quality. It begins with the child's pleasurable feeling of wonderment at his mother's beauty and his desire for her presence, a tender expectancy which gradually changes into its opposite—anxiety about his inadequacy to fulfil her sexual needs. The conflict is resolved through a self-castration which appeases the mother. In fantasy, the mother takes the initiative and approaches the child: 'And when the twilight had deepened and the moon was up, that *Apsara* of high hips set out for the mansions of Arjuna. And in that mood, her imagination wholly taken up by thoughts of Arjuna, she mentally sported with him on a wide and excellent bed laid over with celestial sheets, and with her crisp, soft and long braids decked with bunches of flowers, she looked extremely beautiful. With her beauty and grace, and the charm of the motions of her eyebrows and of her soft accents, and her own moonlike face, she seemed to tread, challenging the moon himself. And as she proceeded, her deep, finely tapering bosoms, decked with a chain of gold and adorned with celestial unguents and smeared with fragrant sandal paste, began to tremble. And in consequence of the weight of her bosom, she was forced to bend slightly forward at every step, bending her waist exceedingly beautiful with three folds. And her loins of faultless shape, the elegant abode of the god of love, furnished with fair and high and round hips, and wide at their lower part as a hill, and decked with

chains of gold and capable of shaking the saintship of anchorites, being decked with this attire, appeared highly graceful. And her feet with fair suppressed ankles, and possessing flat soles and straight toes of the colour of burnished copper and high and curved like a tortoise back and marked by the wearing of ornaments furnished with rows of little bells, looked exceedingly handsome. And exhilarated with a little liquor which she had taken and excited by desire, and moving in diverse attitudes and expressing a sensation of delight, she looked more handsome than usual.'

Urvasi enters Arjuna's palace. 'Upon beholding her at night in his mansion, Arjuna, with a fear-stricken heart, stepped up to receive her, but from modesty, closed his eyes. And Arjuna said, "O thou foremost of the *Apsaras*, I reverence thee by bending my head down. O lady, let me know thy commands. I wait upon thee as thy servant." ' Without the circumlocution and hyperbole so dear to the Hindu, Urvasi expresses her sexual desire for Arjuna frankly and directly. But—'Hearing her speak in this strain, Arjuna was overcome with bashfulness. And shutting his ears with his hands, he said, "O blessed lady, fie on my sense of hearing, when thou speakest thus to me. For, O thou of beautiful face, thou art certainly equal in my estimation unto the wife of a superior. Even as Kunti [his mother] of high fortune or Sachi the queen of Indra [King of gods] art thou to me, O auspicious one . . . O blessed *Apsara*, it behoveth thee not to entertain other feelings towards me, for thou art superior to my superiors, being the parent of my race." ' Urvasi, however, insists, and Arjuna expresses the increasing helplessness of the child who desires the mother's comfort and care but instead is confronted with her sexuality: 'Return, O thou of the fairest complexion: I bend my head unto thee, and prostrate myself at thy feet. Thou deservest my worship as my own mother and it behoveth thee to protect me as a son.' The conflict now crescendos, for thus addressed, 'Urvasi was deprived of her sense by wrath. Trembling with rage, and contracting her brows, she cursed Arjuna saying that since he disregarded a woman who is pierced by shafts of Kama, the god of love, " . . . Thou shalt have to pass thy time among females unregarded, and as a dancer and destitute of manhood and scorned as a eunuch." '

As in all Hindu myths and legends, there is a benevolent power in the background who comes forward to mitigate the extreme consequences of the curse. In striking contrast to ancient Greek mythology with its blood-thirsty homicides, mutilations and castrations, in

Indian fantasy the murderous impulses of parents towards children or of children towards their parents do not result in permanent injury or death. Even in the rare instance when an actor goes beyond the attempt to actual fulfilment, there is always a good figure, a god or goddess or ancestral spirit, who helps to undo the act that has been committed. Thus, Arjuna must live only one year in the castrated state as eunuch, a solution with which he 'experienced great delight and ceased to think of the curse'.⁸⁷

The renunciation of masculine potency and prowess, mythically depicted in Arjuna's transient fate, is one of the principal unconscious defences of the male child against the threat posed by the mother's sexuality. This 'typical' defence is cartooned in yet another, less well-known myth: 'The demon Ruru with his army attacked the gods, who sought refuge with Devi. She laughed and an army of goddesses emerged from her mouth. They killed Ruru and his army, but then they were hungry and asked for food. Devi summoned Rudra Pasupati (Siva by another name) and said, "You have the form of a goat and you smell like a goat. These ladies will eat your flesh or else they will eat everything, even me." Siva said, "When I pierced the fleeing sacrifice of Daksa, which had taken the form of a goat, I obtained the smell of a goat. But let the goddesses eat that which pregnant women have defiled with their touch, and newborn children and women who cry all the time." Devi refused this disgusting food, and finally Siva said, "I will give you something never tasted by anyone else: the two balls resembling fruits below my navel. Eat the testicles that hang there and be satisfied." Delighted by this gift, the goddess praised Siva.'⁸⁸ Here, in spite of commendable efforts to dilute the elements of disgust and dread at the heart of the fantasy by adding such details as the multitude of goddesses, the goat, and so on, that maternal threat and the defence of self-castration are unmistakable, although perceived and couched in the rapacious oral imagery of earliest infancy.

The fantasied renunciation of masculinity is but one resolution which the male child may resort to in his helplessness in this dilemma. Hindu mythology gives dramatic play to others—such as the unsexing of the 'bad mother'. Consider the myth of Surpanakha, sister of the demon-king Ravana. The giantess, 'grim of eye and foul of face', tells Rama that he should

This poor misshapen Sita leave
And me, thy worthier bride, receive.

Look on my beauty, and prefer
A spouse more like me than one like her;
I'll eat that ill-formed woman there,
Thy brother, too, her fate shall share.
But come, beloved, thou shalt roam
Through our woodland home.⁸⁹

Rama staunchly refuses her advances. Thinking Sita to be the chief obstacle to her union with him, Surpanakha is about to kill her, but is forcibly prevented from doing so when Rama's brother cuts off Surpanakha's nose. In accordance with the well-known unconscious device of the upward displacement of the genitals, this becomes a fantasied clitoridectomy, designed to root out the cause and symbol of Surpanakha's lust.

Another 'defence' in the mythological repertoire against the sexually threatening 'bad mother' is matricide followed by resurrection and deification. Philip Spratt, summarizing the legends of twenty-nine popular goddesses locally worshipped in the villages of southern India, points out that nineteen of the women who were eventually deified had met first with a violent death; moreover, in fourteen of these legends the woman's forbidden sexual activity is the central theme.⁹⁰ Thus: 'Podilamma was suspected of sexual misconduct. Her brothers, who were farmers, threw her under the feet of their oxen. She vanished, and all they could find was a stone. Her spirit demanded that they [the villagers] worship the stone.' Or: 'A widow named Ramama had immoral relations with her servant. Her brother murdered them both. Cattle-plague broke out, and the villagers attributed it to her wrath and instituted rites to pacify her spirit.'⁹¹ On the one hand, the fantasy underlying these legends aims to accomplish and gratify the sexual wishes of the mother, while on the other, the child revenges himself upon her for putting him, with his own unsettling 'wishes', his inexperience and his woeful lack of mature genital equipment, in this hopeless predicament. By the 'murder' of the sexual mother, however, the child's source of affirmation, protection and motherly love is also eliminated, thus arousing an unbearable sense of longing and guilt. To reclaim the filial relationship, to restore the forfeited mutuality, the mother must be resurrected as no less than a goddess.

Yet another defence in the male child's struggle against the 'bad mother' is the fantasy of having been born of a man, in which case one's existence has nothing whatsoever to do with the mother and is

thus unquestionably masculine. This fantasy is expressed in one version of the birth of Ganesha, one of the most popular deities in the Hindu pantheon. Ganesha is usually portrayed as a short, corpulent god with an elephant's head and a large belly. His image, whether carved in stone or drawn up in a coloured print, may be found in almost any Hindu home or shop. Important matters of householding, whether in the sphere of the family or of business, whether the task at hand is the construction of a house or embarking on a journey or even writing a letter, are not undertaken without an invocation to Ganesha. In the particular version of his birth I have in mind here from the *Varaha Purana*, it is related that gods and holy sages, realizing that men are as liable to commit bad acts as good ones, came to Shiva and asked him to find a way of placing obstacles in the path of wrongdoing. While meditating on this request, Shiva produced a beautiful youth with whom all the heavenly damsels fell in love and who was charged by his father with the task of hindering evil. But Shiva's wife, the great mother-goddess Uma (also known as Durga, Parvati or Gauri), became extremely jealous of the youth's immaculate conception and incomparable beauty, and so she cursed him with a large belly and the head of an elephant.

Other accounts in Hindu mythology of the origin of Ganesha's incongruous physiognomy reflect the strikingly different sequential 'editions' of unconscious fantasy that inform infantile psycho-sexual development. Thus, in the version of the *Brahmavalvarta Purana*, it is narrated that Parvati who was very desirous of having a child was finally granted her wish after a long period of penance and prayer. All the gods come to Shiva's house to congratulate the couple and to admire the newborn. But Sani, the ill-omened Saturn, refuses to look at the baby, and keeps his gaze firmly fixed on the ground. When asked the reason for this discourtesy, Sani replies that he is cursed and that any child he looks upon will lose its head. Parvati, however, forces Sani to look at the infant, whereupon Ganesha's head is severed from his body and flies off. Parvati's pitiful lamentations over her son's decapitation attract the sympathy of Vishnu who intercedes and finds an elephant's head which he joins to the infant's trunk. Thus Ganesha is resurrected.

In the sequence of developmental time within the individual psyche, these two versions of the Ganesha myth exist in close proximity. Without elaborating on the unconscious equation of genitals and head so prominent in Hindu fantasy, it is clear that each version of

Ganesha's genesis threatens the son, symbolically, with the loss of his penis at the behest of the 'bad mother'. Moreover, when Ganesha's head is restored, we witness one of the psyche's marvellous compensations, for the replacement is not an ordinary human head, but the head of an elephant, with a trunk for good measure!

In the third version of the Ganesha story, which is from the *Shiva Purana*, the variation of the fantasy is more advanced; it condenses and reflects the dominant themes of a later, oedipal, stage of development. A new conflict arises out of the intrusive presence of the father, his claims on both mother and child, and the threat this poses to their earlier symbiosis. In this version of the myth, Siva has nothing to do with Ganesha's birth. Rather, the infant is said to have been fashioned solely by Parvati from the impurities of her own body and brought to life by being sprinkled with 'maternal water' from the holy river Ganges. Charged by Parvati to stand at the door and guard her from intruders while she is bathing, Ganesha refuses to let his father enter. In his anger at being kept from his wife, Shiva cuts off Ganesha's head. But when Parvati tells Shiva that her son was only carrying out her orders and when she proves inconsolable at the loss of her son, Shiva restores Ganesha to life by taking the head of a passing elephant and fitting it to the child's headless body.

The oedipal struggle in this version of the myth and the way the son resolves it, through castration by the father, is not my main concern here. I merely want to indicate, and stress, the various sequential transformations of fantasy from stage to stage in psychological development and their co-existence in the unconscious. Moreover, this may occur in relation to a *single* mythological figure, who thus comes to represent a plurality of psychic propensities. The enormous popularity enjoyed by Ganesha throughout India, a phenomenon of considerable puzzlement to Indologists, can thus be partially explained if we recognize Ganesha as a god for all psychic seasons, who embodies certain 'typical' resolutions of developmental conflicts in traditional Hindu society.

These, then, are the legendary elaborations of the Indian boy's encounters with the 'bad mother'. The evidence of popular myths, religious customs and anthropological observations converges to suggest that the modal resolution of the conflict is a lasting identification with the mother.²² This process of identification contrasts with the earlier grateful incorporation of the 'good mother' into the

infant's budding ego in that it contains an element of hostility, for the source of anxiety, the mother, is only eliminated by being taken inside oneself.

In psycho-sexual terms, to identify with one's mother means to sacrifice one's masculinity to her in order to escape sexual excitation and the threat it poses to the boy's fragile ego. In effect, the boy expresses his conviction that the only way he can propitiate the mother's demands and once again make her nurturing and protective is to repudiate the cause of the disturbance in their mutuality: his maleness. In myths, we witnessed this process in Arjuna's encounter with Urvashi, in Shiva's offer of his testicles, in Ganesha's losing his head because of Parvati's jealousy.⁶³ In the ancient and medieval tales collected, for example, in *Hitopadesha*, *Vikramaditya's Adventures* and *Kathasaritsagar*, the cutting off of one's own head (symbolic of self-castration) as an act of sacrificial worship to the mother-goddess occurs frequently. Western readers may recollect Thomas Mann's treatment of the Indian tale, in *The Transposed Heads*, in which two friends caught in a sexually tempting and dangerous situation repair to the goddess Bhavani's temple and cut off their heads.

In its purely sexual sense, the puerile identification with the mother is even more explicit in the story of King Bhangaswana in the *Mahabharata*, who, after being transformed into a woman by Indra, wished to remain in that state. Refusing Indra's offer to restore his masculinity, the king contended that a woman's pleasure in intercourse was much greater than a man's.⁶⁴ Philip Spratt's painstaking collection of anthropological evidence—traditional village ceremonies in which men dress as women, the transvestite customs of low-caste beggars in Bellary, the possession of men of the Dhed community in Gujarat by the spirit of the goddess Durga, the simulated menstrual period among certain followers of Vallabhcharya—need not be further catalogued.⁶⁵ And although we may be tempted to view these phenomena as aberrant, as extreme manifestations of marginal behaviour, we must nevertheless acknowledge the possibility that, just as the 'sick' member may act out the unconscious conflict of the whole family, thereby permitting other family members to remain 'normal', so these marginal groups disclose the governing emotional constellations within Hindu society as a whole. Nor is this to deny that transvestism, like any aspect of behavioural style, is 'overdetermined'. As a re-enactment of a powerful-infantile

conflict, rituals such as these represent not only the boy's attempt to identify with his mother but also the man's effort to free himself from her domination. By trying to be like women—wearing their clothes, acquiring their organs, giving birth—these men are also saying that they do not need women (mothers) any longer. The counterpart of such extreme 'femininity' rituals among men are those rites, common in many parts of the world, in which men behave in a rigid, symbolic masculine way. Both extremes suggest a family structure in which the mother is perceived by the male child as a dangerous, seductive female presence during his early years. However compelling the sexual idiosyncrasies spawned by this childhood identification with the mother may be, our main concern is the broader question of its consequences on the evolution of Indian identity.

Infancy and Ego: Origins of Identity in a Patriarchal Culture

We have seen that minimal demands are placed on the Indian infant to master the world around him and to learn to function independently of his mother. The main emphasis in the early years of Indian childhood is avoidance of frustration and the enhancement of the pleasurable mutuality of mother and infant, not encouragement of the child's individuation and autonomy. By and large, an Indian child is neither pressed into active engagement with the external world, nor is he coerced or cajoled to master the inner world represented, temporarily at least, by his bodily processes. Thus, with respect to elimination, the toddler in India is exempt from anxious pressure to learn to control his bowel movements according to a rigid schedule of time and place. Soiling of clothes or floor is accepted in a matter-of-fact way and cleaned up afterwards by the mother or other older girls or women in the family without shame or disgust.

This does not of course mean that no attempts of any kind are made at training toddlers in cleanliness. A child may indeed be taken outside in the morning, seated on a hollow made by his mother's feet and coaxed to relieve himself. What is relevant here is that such attempts are not a matter of systematic instruction or *a priori* rules; therefore they rarely become occasions for a battle of wills in which the mother suddenly reveals an authoritarian doggedness that says her nurturing love is, after all, conditional. More often than not, an Indian child gradually learns to control his bowels by imitat-