

ERIK H. ERIKSON

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE  
AND THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD



# Gandhi's Truth

ON THE ORIGINS  
OF MILITANT NONVIOLENCE

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*On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*

BY ERIK H. ERIKSON

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*Childhood and Society* (1950, 1963)

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*This was to be Joan's book.*

~~*We are now dedicating it together to the memory of Martin Luther King.*~~

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# Preface and Acknowledgments

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THIS BOOK describes a Westerner's and a psychoanalyst's search for the historical presence of Mahatma Gandhi and for the meaning of what he called Truth.

My first trip to India in 1962 led me to the city of Ahmedabad, where I had been invited to lead a seminar on the human life cycle. Ahmedabad, largely bypassed by the tourist, has a unique history among Indian cities. It has been altogether dominated by the manufacture and export of textiles from antiquity to modern times. Today's industrialized and highly unionized city is often slandered as Pittsburgh is (or was) in America. And yet the city is of unique interest precisely because of the unbroken manner of its development from a municipality built on a medieval guild structure to a modern industrial city, financed primarily by local investments, and managed by some great families.

Living on the estate of one of these families, I soon became newly aware of the role which Gandhi had played in the labor relations of this city and of the significance of that role for his rise to national leadership. I say "newly aware" because I experienced that sense of *déjà vu* which can come to a visitor in a foreign city that he has been able neither to visualize nor to pronounce properly before. When I was young, I had known that Gandhi lived in or near the city of Ahmedabad or, at any rate, by the Sabarmati River. My generation of alienated youth in Europe had, in fact, read of Gandhi's first trial between the World Wars and had compared it with that of Socrates: this trial had taken place in the "Circuit House" which in Ahmedabad we passed daily on our early morning walks. And I had read in Gandhi's autobiography of a strike in 1918 which he had led in Ahmedabad, his main opponent at the time having been, as I finally realized, the very mill owner on whose estate we were living. Gandhi's main supporter and helper, in turn, had been the mill owner's sister. As I met others who had known Gandhi in those days as either devoted followers or puzzled opponents, I began to suspect that what was described by him and by some biographers as a mere episode in his life—and in Indian history—was, in fact, an event of vital importance in his advent as a national leader and as the originator of militant nonviolence.

To mark the year: it was on the Ides of March of 1918, the year of massive mechanized slaughter on the front in France, the year when empires collapsed and new world alliances were formed, the year of Wilson and above all of Lenin. And here in Ahmedabad one of the great charismatic figures of the postwar world was concentrating on a strictly local labor dispute, putting his very life on the line by fasting—an event scarcely noticed even in India at the time. That Mr. M. K. Gandhi chose to fast as part of a new method of civic and political leadership meant as yet nothing to anyone but a few friends, and the immediate consequence did not call for national or world attention. In fact, a certain embarrassment seems to govern later accounts—as though the Event itself had not proved quite worthy of the Mahatma's subsequent career. But this kind of denial does not exactly serve to divert the psychoanalyst's curiosity; and so—whether because it all happened in a city which had given me the first "feel" of India, or because I sensed that there was more to the story than the books allowed—I became fascinated with those months in Gandhi's middle years. I decided to reconstruct what in this book we will call the Event as a focus for some extensive reflections on the origins, in Gandhi's early life and work, of the method he came to call "truth force."

I am not a historian and not an expert on India. What "discipline" there is to my enterprise is best revealed in the telling of its story. The order of the chapters themselves reflects the problem



encountered.

The first chapter will convey, as subjectively as seems proper, the way in which the Event came to capture my attention. Since any *reviewer* of a bit of history makes it his own by the mere circumstance of his selective attention, a reviewer trained in clinical observation must account—at least to himself—for his own initial involvement much more systematically than has been the rule in most writing of history. A man's personal involvement, however, includes his friends, some of whom, in this instance, are well-known men and women; and some are also members of the family of the very man who was "pitted against" Gandhi in the Event and is respectfully mentioned throughout his autobiography. Not knowing what they had bargained for when they invited me to India, they now find themselves among the cast of a story which I did not know then I was going to write.

The *witnesses* to and the *recorders* of an event also make it "their own," whether they are the first ones to render it historical by recording it or, indeed, the last ones to remember it when prompted by the reviewer. The second chapter, therefore, will discuss the autobiographer Gandhi as his own witness and my encounters with the living witnesses after I had decided to become a reviewer of the history which they had participated.

Gandhi's existential experiments, as he makes abundantly clear, began in his youth. In the third chapter, then, we will go back to Gandhi's beginnings and see with a mixture of clinical and historical hindsight why what led up to the Event had to happen the way it did. This hindsight also helps clarify why and how Gandhi came to choose or to get involved with the witnesses, and what it was *their* past lives that now seems to make it so plausible that they were there and took a chance with their lives by involving them with his.

When in Chapter III the Event, as well as its immediate causes and consequences, can finally be retold in day-by-day detail, I trust that the real happenings will not come as an anticlimax. The fact that without a knowledge of its place in Gandhi's life and in India's history, the Event could, indeed, be considered a rather minor affair, hardly contributive to the fact that Gandhi was to emerge exactly a year later as the leader of the first nationwide act of civil disobedience.

In the final chapter we will at last be able to take for granted what we now know to have occurred after Gandhi's rise to the Mahatmaship of India. Only then can we ask in retrospect how the man, his method, and some of his first followers converged in Ahmedabad in 1918 in such a way that his philosophy of militant nonviolence became a *political instrument* ready to be used on a large scale and reaching far beyond the issue of industrial peace in the city of Ahmedabad. Only then can we see the place of such events in man's psychosocial evolution and recognize the singular importance of Gandhi's Truth in a future which will pit man's naked humanity against the cold power of super-machineries. But this will also call for detailed attention to the rigorous *discipline* which, for Gandhi, was an intrinsic part of the instrument of activism which he created.

I hope that these remarks will suffice to reassure the more systematic reader with a promise of a hidden method. This very method, however, decrees that I should begin by letting subjectivity and even circumstantiality reign. I will, therefore, start with a brief travelogue. This consists of excerpts from letters such as those I like to send to family and friends when traveling, perhaps because I like to address my diary to those I wish were with me to share my impressions. And impressionistic it will be, this beginning, for I am the kind of worker who must find his way from personal observation to what seems relevant enough to be recorded; and this means also that I must find my way from strong esthetic impressions to what survives as ethically urgent. Eventually, most of these early impressions will re-emerge as major themes in later chapters.

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I can only attempt to acknowledge the support I received from those who were or became my

friends in the course of this inquiry. That they are still my friends bespeaks their generosity, for I have not only attempted to surmount cultural obstacles of great tenacity, but in doing so, I have employed psychoanalytic methods which add some hazard to any communication anywhere. Where I seem to have betrayed some trust, may my friends forgive me, my métier, and my Westernness. Otherwise may they accept my thanks for being what they are and for sharing this so freely with us.

I do not remember when it first occurred to us that my wife and I should visit Ahmedabad. Gardner and Lois Murphy had been there and had told us about the Sarabhais' remarkable civic, scientific, and clinical work; and the Murphys had told them about us. At any rate, when we first met Gautam and Vikram Sarabhai in this country, they made it seem natural that we should come. The person who finally took a tender and determined hand in the matter and provided both rationale and facilities for a seminar in Ahmedabad was Kamla Chowdhry of the Indian Institute of Management and Harvard University.

There would not be enough space to enumerate what each member of the Sarabhai family has done for us in daily detail and in over-all solicitude. As with others, I must let the text record the contributions to the enterprise that became this book. I was still able to interview Ambalal Sarabhai, the patriarch of the family and the city, who has since died. There were many hours of joyful conversation with his sister, Anasuya Sarabhai. To them, and above all to Shankerlal Banker, I owe the details which permitted me to retell the story of the Event as already known in the literature. As to the existing documents, Professor K. Swaminathan helped immeasurably by letting me see the galleys of the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* which contain the existing documents concerning the Event. The varied applicability of this monumental collection will be demonstrated even in my unorthodox uses of the texts.

Many Indians have received and attempted to help me, among them the former and the present president of India as well as members of the Cabinet and of Parliament; mill owners, mill workers, and labor union officials; Gandhi's principal biographers and some directors of public libraries. Where they contributed from personal experience to the clarification of the Gandhian period here under consideration, they will appear in the text and thus in the index. Otherwise, a mere listing of names could not convey the light which came through in many conversations or the deliberate twilight maintained in others. In interviewing, I jot down only an occasional word. Quotations, then, must be taken as approximations of what I remembered my informants to have said, in word and in tone. Thanks are due to Dr. Anand Paranjpe for excerpting the Poona Journals of 1918 for me, and to Nandini Joshi for orally translating for me certain Gujarati passages in Gandhi's writings. Where a literal translation seems to clarify a passage, it appears as a bracketed insert in the quotation in question.

Research trips cost air fare and local maintenance. Regular contributions of the Shelter Road Foundation for my research at the Austen Riggs Center paid for my first trip to India, while the Karmakshetra Educational Foundation of Ahmedabad took care of our needs in that city. The Center for Advanced Study in Stanford permitted me to make another trip as part of a fellowship, while the American Institute of Indian Studies provided travel and portal-to-portal expenses in India. Finally, I completed the manuscript in my capacity as FFFF—the First Field Foundation Fellow. My thanks for the sympathetic support received from these foundations.

As always, Joan Erikson was with me and "with it," soul and body. Her specific contribution, too, will be named in the text; her contemporaneous work on St. Francis helped greatly to clarify the kind of sainthood also found in Gandhi. The completed manuscript was, of course, edited by her. Some chapters would have been more unduly long but for the gentle severity of Kai T. Erikson. The manuscript was also read by Sudhir Kakar, friend and assistant at Harvard. It received a final check, both textually and bibliographically, from Pamela Daniels, my enthusiastic and painstaking associate.

at Harvard.

~~Chapters of this book were discussed in my seminars at Harvard and at Riggs, and above all in the~~ meetings of the psycho-historical study group, hosted by Robert Lifton during several summers in Wellfleet, and supported by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. What I learned in these discussions is summarized in “On the Nature of Psycho-Historical Evidence: In Search of Gandhi’s *Daedalus*, Summer 1968.

Finally, I would like to linger over a few names, the mere sound of which has come to mean a world to us: Vikram and Mrinalini, Gautam and Kamalini, Gira, Mani. There were quiet evenings by the Sabarmati with Kamla, visits to the Gandhi shrines with Romila Thapar, and vigorous walks in Delhi with Prem Kirpal. NAMASTE.

E. H. E.

*Stockbridge, Massachusetts*

Echoes of an Event

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## India: First Encounters

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AS THE PLANE SETS DOWN at the Delhi airport before dawn, the newcomer is enveloped in a new world of sights, sounds, and smells which darkly command him to reset all his senses before asking any questions. The faces of Indian friends glow with that special dawn responsiveness which is born of the ability to sleep any time and to awake any time. Kamla and Prem, two strong and warm Punjabis, firmly took Joan and me out of the travel circuit; they and their circle of friends would shelter us against and yet guide us slowly toward unknown depths and heights of experience.

We drove through the still, dark avenues of the imperial capital to the International Center, a modern hospice for scholars. Of modern Mogul style, it overlooks the ancient Lodi Gardens and the huge, sinister domes. Stepping out on the balcony, before trying to catch a bit of sleep—and then to awake in India—we had the almost guilty feeling of seeing India as one dreams it to be. For months we had strenuously read about the “realities” of this subcontinent in order not to be fooled either by ancient images or modern pretenses. But now, only the senses continued to register. Jackals were yapping in the distance and down in the caves of their day-time existence, and some early morning walkers appeared, gliding through the trees like white shadows. There was time, we had to tell ourselves. And this would remain: feeling almost lethargically at home with our senses and our affections as we never had anywhere else and yet a sense, too, of incomprehensible dread.

We stayed in Delhi two days, beginning each day by joining the early walkers in the Lodi Gardens. But to be in the India of today, one has to escape Imperial New Delhi. In Old Delhi, traffic has an Asian style. It overflows and contracts with the yielding and the ruthlessness of fast-flowing water. In an hour's walk one sees men, women, and children who call to mind every step in the history of the human species and every physical state of grace and crookedness, vigor and infirmity. The mere sight of the anonymous mass grips one with an apprehension matched only by the prevailing sense of unknown hazards to health. Stray off the tourist beat, and one is in a different, almost hostile ecology of mores and microbes. To survive and to begin to understand, one must mobilize some unlivable portions of individual and racial existence. One thinks of the riots (or the “furors,” as somebody called them) which erupted in the vacuum left by Gandhi's dying influence and by the departing British. But breathing is ever again restored by the handsome motion and the gay and warm expression of many of these people; and even the public urination and defecation (which at first the stranger cannot ignore) bespeaks a naive dignity. Only a day or so before, we had swum in the Lake of Galilee and had walked at night on the shores where, even among militant and pragmatic Israelis, one can never forget Him who had the gift to speak to fishermen in a manner remembered through the ages. Now I sensed again what I had known as a youth, namely, the affinity of that Galilean and the skinny Indian leader enshrined in Delhi. There is a word for what they seem to have had in common: presence—pervasive a presence as only silence has when you listen.

On our first evening in Delhi I had experienced what would happen often: a trusting Indian could lead

quietly transfigured if he perceived that I knew of that presence; while others who were doubtful me (after all, was I not a psychoanalyst?) would mildly slander the Mahatma in order to show that they were not easily fooled (did I know that as an old man “he used to sleep with his niece”?).

IN Washington, we seldom stay overnight without visiting the Lincoln Memorial. In Delhi, we went to Birla House and the place where Gandhi was assassinated. If shrines must be, I find the garden at Birla House peculiarly impressive, not because of its formality, but for a low building in the very background which contains nothing but a mural extending over three walls. None of our friends had seen it, we found later, partially because they avoid the whole location, and partially because the painting appeals more to the common people. It is not “great.” Naive, like Haitian folk art but decidedly more austere, it simply depicts scenes from Gandhi’s life, mostly as reported by him in his Autobiography. On the left, his life is traced to his spiritual and historical ancestors: an old seer, the author of an epic; the prince of the Bhagavad Gita, turning his face away from the drawn-up battle lines which shine, on both sides, with the armed splendor of his brothers and cousins; hermits, poets, and monks; Buddha himself—and the great emperor Ashoka. So far, so traditional. However, moving to the right, the mural reveals a strange concept of a leader’s emergence. It shows Gandhi’s self-confessed temptations, errors, and procrastinations on his way to becoming the man in the loincloth and the voice of the people. He is shown sinfully eating meat as a youth; leaving in utter panic the house of a yelling prostitute; waltzing in cutaway and high white collar with an English redhead; and, as a barrister, paralyzed with stage fright before a contemptuous judge. One scene stopped me: it shows Gandhi in front of his ashram, receiving a packet of money from a wealthy man who has stepped out of a Model T Ford. Was that ashram not Gandhi’s settlement in Ahmedabad? And was not the wealthy man the very mill owner who was to be our host there? His identity has become known, although Gandhi reports in his Autobiography only that this man who wished to remain anonymous had continued to support the ashram when all other contributors deserted it because a family of Untouchables had been admitted into the colony.

In contrast to this intimate memorial, the place of Gandhi’s cremation is being turned into a monument which, in the Mogul grandeur of its outlay, bespeaks the ambiguity of all greatness. To that place, the remains of the man of peace who never held public office were transported on a gun-carriage drawn by soldiers and sailors. In contrast, again (and contrasts tell you of a nation’s dimensions), the nearby Gandhi Museum offers an exceedingly sober review of his life in enlarged photographs, capped with stark quotations. Over the entrance door: “I am told that religion and politics are different spheres of life. But I would say without a moment’s hesitation and yet in all modesty that those who claim this do not know what religion is.” We saw only Indians (and, to all appearances, mostly of the lower classes) visiting any of these shrines. No tourists.

THE Sarabhai family is like a grove of tall trees, tightly linked in a family resemblance, yet all strong and striving individuals, in their strength and their inner conflicts true products of the individualist upbringing they received from their father. The oldest daughter is a calmly, almost mournfully controversial woman, a friend and follower of Gandhi’s in his lifetime. She met us for lunch in a hotel dining room. In the midst of all the loud and ostentatious informality of modern Indians and American tourists, she appeared in homespun khadi, with a dark face as “lived in” as any you will ever see. Like her brothers and sisters she has an outspoken profile—and an overweening cause: hers is the demand for a solution of the Kashmir dispute which would be equally acceptable to Pakistan and to the people of Kashmir—one of those inescapabilities of modern politics vigorously represented by her friend Sheikh Abdullah, and equally stubbornly ignored by another, Jawaharlal Nehru. He let her go to jail, in fact, for two years, and she is sadly angry with him.

Our friend, the physicist Vikram Sarabhai, the mill owner's youngest son, came to fetch us in Delhi for a quick trip to Kashmir before the snows would cover the approach to the Himalayan site of his Cosmic Ray Laboratory. On our flight over the formidable mountain ranges into the bucolic valley of Kashmir, we exchanged notes on the International Pugwash Conference from which he had just returned, and on the American Academy's conference on "alternatives to armed conflict," which I had recently attended on Cape Cod.

Our hearts were heavy. Up there along the snow-capped horizon of our flight view, the Chinese were streaming through the passes. "Border incidents?" Nobody professed to know. But I was only too aware of the fact that our destination, the airport of Srinagar, was the single potential landing place for Chinese jets. And indeed, the airport was an armed camp. But on landing, rather than being delayed by security measures, we found ourselves suddenly engulfed in a pageant. The Vice President of India, Zakir Husain, a Muslim highly welcome to the Kashmiris, had landed at about the same time for an official visit. Our driver could not avoid attaching himself to the slow cavalcade into the city. So we drove through lanes and lanes of waving children and youngsters, who beamed into our car with their intense and gay curiosity with which Indians "take in" strangers.

We stayed in a wing of the Maharaja's palace, which is now a hotel. Before daybreak we heard the rolling thunder of transport planes overhead conveying soldiers and equipment to the distant front.

In the morning we met Gautam Sarabhai, bearded and princely, who took us across the lake to the great mosque which houses a strand of Mohammed's hair. Kashmiris from all over the valley converged on this sacred spot in hundreds of small boats, debarked at long pools in order to wash their private parts discreetly, and went to the grounds of the Mosque, to kneel and bow to the ground in endless straight files, fusing in a ceremonial identity what was a moment earlier a scrambling mass.

THE next morning, on the way to the Cosmic Ray Laboratory, we hiked the last three miles up to about 9,000 feet, although most travelers rode horseback or jeeps. This was the last week in the year before the snows close in; the air was crisp, and yet the sun strong. Now and again one could step out on the edge of a rock and look for a timeless instant into those pensive valleys; but not even here was one ever alone for long. Indian tourists would pass on horseback and ask whether we *enjoyed* the climb. And were we *Canadian* perchance?

RAILROAD stations afford a singular view of the Indian people, to whom each station is a center of intense sociability and scrambling argument. The arrival at night in Ahmedabad proved to be an infernal experience. The station was jammed with overcrowded trains and filled with gratuitous whistle noises; and we made our first acquaintance with that Indian phenomenon of hundreds of people sleeping in isolated spots or in dense rows inside and outside the station building, a few on mats, some on newspapers, many on the naked asphalt. Westerners sometimes seem perversely eager to believe that all these people are homeless and starving to death right in front of their eyes. The trouble is, it is hard to know. A few are apt to die like this in any night, and many during famines, but the general phenomenon of sleeping outdoors is a more normal and more complex one. Most of the people, while looking terribly thin, are not in worse condition than tens of millions sleeping "at home." Many have never known a "bed," and some have come to prefer sleeping on streets to sleeping in overcrowded rooms. And, at any rate, there are no hotels in India for ordinary Indians. But in view of such masses of indistinct and emaciated bodies I could recover only very gradually a sense known to me when I was young, namely, how at home one can feel in a sleeping crowd of strangers.

The upper class, however, sleeps with friends; and a car was expecting us to take us to the mill owner's "Retreat." Here we were lodged in a small house in a corner of the estate where, I was told, F. Andrews, the friend of the greatest of all friends, had stayed in the past. In the morning we were

awakened by what sounded like a rattling earthquake overhead. It turned out to be only the gleeful bounces of holy monkeys from a nearby temple demolishing the tiles of the roof. The servants were helpless; they could only try to scare the rascals with rocks but had to avoid hitting them, as the monkeys well knew.

THE immediate deep attachment to India is shaken first by two experiences: the poverty, abysmal and as wide as the horizon—and the near-inevitability of dysentery.

We had felt it coming on during the railroad trip, and it hit Joan on arrival. She was soon too dehydrated for the best of home care. At this point the mill owner's family showed us how in this civilization the joint family takes over in a way comparable to that of dolphins lifting a sinking member of their school to the surface. Having waited out the matter for about four days, they went into action within hours. Five or six family members converged on our house, as did the medical school's chief of internal medicine, the head doctor of the mills, and the Chief Secretary of the State of Gujarat. They all discussed the matter in an urgent and ominous way—in Gujarati, of course—and then asked me, as the head of my family, what my decision was: to wit, did I agree to the hospitalization they had agreed on? The mill owner's regal wife—diminutive mother of that strong-willed clan of sons and daughters—drove off with three of her servants to clean a hospital room doubly clean for a foreign lady. Others went off with bed sheets and flowers, and eventually the mother reappeared in her limousine to pack Joan off. But by this time the patient let herself be carried away by the wave of familial sympathy, much too entertained to worry about her hopelessly leaking condition. A graceful "nurse matron," at the head of a small army of young nurses, all Syrian Christians from South India, took over. In the next room one sick child was attended by father, mother, and two healthy little brothers who all slept on mats on the floor. Thus, the all-pervasive spirit of the "joint family" transformed this frightening experience. And in the back of my mind, I remembered having read somewhere that the mill owner and his wife, decades ago, had come to the rescue of Gandhi when he was prostrate somewhere near Ahmedabad, exceedingly weak in body and low in mood.

All the Sarabhais have overweening causes. They have money and do not deny it, but they also have a passion for spending it relevantly: one is tempted to call them (with some sharp corrections in detail) the Medicis of Ahmedabad. Unnecessary to say, this generosity is widely met with ambivalence, and their patronage will make us, too, suspect in the eyes of some. However, I had a barter agreement with them: they would provide room, board, and local transportation (and the means, in India, a servant, a cook, and a driver) for us, as wealthy Indians have always done for their traveling friends and the friends of their friends, and as they are now wont to do for foreigners with intellectual or artistic offerings. In return, I would offer my seminar on the human life cycle, in order to give me and a number of interested citizens of Ahmedabad a chance to compare our clinical ideas of the stages of life with those of Hindu tradition.

ALL well again, we had Divali morning breakfast at the palatial house of Ambalal Sarabhai, with all the shiny young of the family present. Divali is the New Year Festival of Lights, and the city was alive with firecrackers exploding every half-second on the half-second, even though Nehru had tried to suggest over the radio that at this moment in India's history shooting had all too painful connotations. On the spacious terrace feudal scenes were repeated when servants and gardeners, colorfully clad, lined up with their families to bring New Year's greetings, some by touching their master's feet, and some by receiving good wishes and sweets.

Then we went next door to offer New Year's regards to Ambalal's sister, the venerable Anasuya Sarabhai. As we entered her simple villa, the firecrackers suddenly sounded far away. One of Gandhi



earliest supporters, the saintly yet simple old woman was holding court of a different order. In her cool and modestly appointed living room sat the labor minister of Gujarat State and some of the city labor leaders in white khadi and Gandhi caps, wishing a good new year to this staunch old “Mother Labor,” now so frail and detached. There was a photo of Tolstoy on the wall, inscribed to Gandhi by Tolstoy and willed to Anasuya by the Mahatma; and next to it hung a photo of the Mahatma himself, deep in thought, in the corner of a train-bench—third class, as we were pointedly advised. The labor leaders looked prosperous and hardy.

AFTERWARDS Ambalal Sarabhai led me to one of his terraces, which overlook a sea of trees, and offered it to me as a study, not without telling me—more reverently than ostentatiously—that Tagore had worked here.

To be guests in such a compound permitted us to gather our thoughts while making forays in Ahmedabad as mood and necessity dictated. At dawn men and boys hurry all over the countryside with little pitchers of water for their morning toilet; the women, apparently, precede them when it is still dark. At dusk the air is permeated by the odor of burning (dried) cow dung, which is the only fuel available to the poor. At all times one is conscious of one’s own heavy-footed tramping while those about one move with the gliding agility of the barefooted.

Between the residential surroundings of the Sarabhais’ Retreat and the broad riverbed of the Sabarmati is the old city. To walk through the city streets is (or once must have been) like swimming in a friendly but turbulent element. But to drive into the city is a hair-raising experience, like boating through rapids. Everybody and everything spills out into the middle of the street, people on foot and on bicycles, on oxcarts and occasionally on camels—and erratic goats, trotting donkeys, ambling cows, and bulky buffaloes. All of this seems to approach one’s car like a solid phalanx not yielding an inch until the very last moment and only at the shrieking insistence of the driver’s horn. But then it yields easily, almost elegantly. Accidents are rare, which is lucky since drivers and passengers are apt to be roughly handled, especially if a cow gets hurt. And, indeed, in the middle of all of this one may suddenly look into the big round eye of a sacred cow. These creatures have never learned to anticipate danger or malice and walk through it all with dull majesty. And all roads eventually lead to the wide bed of the river Sabarmati.

Joan soon began to visit the craftsmen by the river, and she described how nowadays, as in the past, the weaving, printing, and dyeing of textiles takes place in the streets and on the sands of the Sabarmati, whose water is said to contain special properties for the setting of dyes, while the river flats are ideal for drying and bleaching the cloth. As great factories belch out smoke and blow sirens to call their workers, the life on the river retains the ancient patterns of hand work.

Hand work is family work, and the river bed is alive with men and women, boys and girls—and babies. But all the sounds of the river are topped by the constant rhythmic banging of cloths on large stones. The washermen stand holding the cloth by one end and beat it firmly and noisily, letting out a great gasp of breath with each stroke. Sometimes this gusty accompaniment emerges as the fragment of a song, or as a breathy “Sita” or “Rama.” How any cloth survives is a wonder, but it seems to be woven to meet this test. The river bed sings with colors—blue, yellow, purple, and green—as hand-printed and hand-dyed fabrics are spread out under the burning, blinding glare of the sun.

This is the craftsman’s view of the unchanging life of the river bed.<sup>1</sup> The old walled city, however, is a merchant’s city, or better, a mercantile fortress, subdivided into caste fortresses, each with its secret life. I had as a guide an erudite socialist born into this city and yet critical in his analysis; and he helped me to begin to weigh, as one must, the rigidities and cruelties of the caste world-view against the security and identity it once provided to some people in some ways—and, mind you, it provided an identity which lasted through a whole series of rebirths.

The old city and the adjoining river are surrounded by fast-growing greater Ahmedabad, a city of avenues and bridges, and above all, of mills—85 mills, 125,000 workers in a population of a million and a quarter. As Pittsburgh has, or once had, its rich mixture of unreconstructed immigrants, Ahmedabad attracts a variety of rural tribes who live under the poorest conditions before being absorbed into the labor population, finding a function in city life, or joining the slum dwellers. Among the most impressive are the red-turbaned Tachartas, very lean, masculine “cowboys,” and the beautiful fast-moving women. These cowboys now cut a kind of mammal centaur figure, by riding on bicycles with enormous milk cans dangling on either side. Each of these urbanized tribes has its dances and ceremonies, and often we heard the drums all night (interrupted only by the shrieking factory sirens) from one or another torch-lit dead-end street.

An acquaintance with Pittsburgh somehow helps one in Ahmedabad. For one thing, Indians everywhere, when informed that one is going to or coming from this city ask, “Why Ahmedabad?” the way Americans once wondered what could lure one to Pittsburgh. But here, too, belching smoke means prosperity. Whatever wealth, culture, and public welfare exists was first a feudal gift from a few wealthy families and was only subsequently secured as a right by the bargaining unions. And the Ahmedabad industrialists, like the early ones in Pittsburgh, are widely spoken of as robber-barons with cultural pretensions. The repugnance is reinforced by the fact that this is a city dominated by the “Banias,” some of them members of an ancient merchant caste, adhering to what they insist is their religion in its own right, Jainism. Only the combination “Pittsburgh Yankee” might be a vaguely American analogue to the national image of the Ahmedabad Bania. The more respectable traits attributed to them are enterprise, caution, realism, compromise, and shrewdness. Gandhi, incidentally, was from a small-town Bania caste—his very name means “grocer”—and on return from South Africa, he settled here in his ashram across the river for the very reason that he felt he should approach his vast homeland from the region and with the language of his origin. But few of the educated young want to live here; the trend is to Bombay—or beyond.

In mere numbers and in national importance, Ahmedabad is, of course, overshadowed by Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, and Madras. But it is and always has been the most unified and the most unionized city in India, and certainly the one with the most modern welfare institutions. One must see labor relations at work (in the mills, at the teeming Association building, or in the “integrated” maternity hospital) in what is otherwise still a poverty-stricken and caste-ridden population, to realize what the continued “presence” of one such man as Gandhi was able to accomplish at one time—with the help of such rebels from the Bania élite as Anasuyaben.

Across the river, there is still Gandhi’s old ashram, now part memorial, part orphanage for former “Untouchable” children. We spent Christmas morning there, having been invited to attend the prayer meeting of the children. The solemnity of the occasion was lightened only by the children’s subdued giggles when they saw my Western efforts to sit Indian fashion next to the slim and saintly man who presided.

NOT far from the Retreat on a boulevard leading to the governor’s mansion is Gujarat’s official “Guest House.” One day we stopped there on our morning walk and were accosted by a friendly and dignified old man named Shankerlal Banker, whom we had met that Divali morning at Anasuyaben’s house. We had passed him often on our morning walks, but he had always modestly avoided any conversation. He is a man of seemingly unmanly traits: wrapped in khadi and countless shawls, completely toothless, and shy in an almost coy manner. In this he is not entirely un-typical; but it contrasted with what I had heard of the man, namely, that in the days of Gandhi’s ascent he was a superb organizer. He later became the secretary of the national khadi (home spinning) movement.

“You know what happened here?” he asked that morning, calling the “Guest House” a court house

This had been the place of Gandhi's trial in 1922! In my youth we had read with awe the dialogue of the encounter between Gandhi and his British judge. The judge had said:

Mr. Gandhi, you have made my task easy in one way by pleading guilty to the charges: nevertheless, what remains, namely, the determination of a just sentence is perhaps as difficult a proposition as a judge in this country could have to face.... It would be impossible to ignore the fact that in the eyes of millions of your countrymen you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics, look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and even saintly life.... But it is my duty to judge you as a man subject to the law.

The judge then consulted the accused as to the sentence which should be imposed: "You will not consider it unreasonable, I think, that you should be classed with Mr. Tilak [before his death in 1920, the most powerful of India's militant nationalists who had once been sentenced to six years imprisonment in exile.] If the course of events in India should make it possible for the Government to reduce the period and release you, no one will be better pleased than I." Gandhi affirmed that it was "his proudest privilege and honour" to receive the same sentence as Tilak—a sentence he considered as light as any judge could impose on him.<sup>2</sup>

I then realized that nearly all of the people whom I could now consider my friends had been present at that trial, if only as children; and had not Shankerlal Banker been, in fact, Gandhi's lone co-defendant? I asked our friend whether he had ever written up the memories of the year which he had subsequently spent in jail with Gandhi. But he shook his head in a kind of mock-horror.<sup>3</sup> It also appeared that he had been energetically involved in the strike which was, through many conversations, gradually emerging for me as a memorable event, in the context of which I might visualize Gandhi's presence in this city in all the humor, candor, and forcefulness of his personality. I told Shankerlal how much Romain Rolland's book had meant to me when I was young, and the next day he brought me a copy. Here is Romain Rolland's description of Gandhi:

Soft dark eyes, a small frail man, with a thin face and rather large protruding eyes, his head covered with a white cap, his body clothed in coarse white cloth, bare-footed. He lives on rice and fruit, and drinks only water. He sleeps on the floor—sleeps very little and works incessantly. His body does not seem to count at all. There is nothing striking about him—except his whole expression of "infinite patience and infinite love." W. W. Pearson, who met him in South Africa, instinctively thought of St. Francis of Assisi. There is an almost child-like simplicity about him. His manner is gentle and courteous even when dealing with adversaries, and he is distinguished by immaculate sincerity. He is modest and unassuming, to the point of sometimes seeming almost timid, hesitant, in making an assertion. Yet you feel his indomitable spirit. He makes no compromises to admit having been in the wrong.... Literally "ill with the multitude that adores him" he distrusts majorities and fears "mobocracy" and the unbridled passions of the populace. He feels at ease only in a minority, and is happiest when, in meditative solitude, he can listen to the "still small voice" within.

This is the man who has stirred three hundred million people to revolt, who has shaken the foundations of the British Empire, and who has introduced into human politics the strongest religious impetus of the last two hundred years.<sup>4</sup>

## A Seminar in Ahmedabad

BUT I HAD WORK TO DO; and work is a welcome counterbalance when impressions become too varied and too crowded. It was good to meet a small group of sincere men and women of all ages appointed times, to close the doors (in India, always a figure of speech) and to engage in a familiar procedure: a seminar. And in trying to join what craftsmanship one brings along with some vital concerns of one's hosts, there is always a better chance to become aware of the universally human and the fleeting phenomena. The participants in the seminar included physicists and industrialists, physicians and educators. Saraladevi alone, in her khadi sari, represented the Gandhian past.

I, of course, presented my life stages, not without arousing some mirth as well as an incredulity tempered only by an accustomed deference to authority. Each of the other members contributed in his "currency"—from the poet Uma Shankar Joshi,<sup>5</sup> who reconstructed the life cycle as depicted in Sanskrit scriptures, to Vikram's dancer-wife, Mrinalini, who gave a recital in her open-air theater by the river, illuminating the Hindu stages of life with her partner and her troupe. Others reported on particular crises of life: Tagore's childhood; identity problems of a youth from one of the former "criminal" tribes or castes; the relationship of women students to their mothers. The concepts discussed ranged from caste to indeterminacy. I wrote memoranda, distributed between the sessions in an attempt to tie the wealth of material together and to relate it—where this could be done without violence—to "my" stages.<sup>6</sup> The Vedas and I, of course, are both constrained to follow closely what is given in phylogeny and ontogeny. But exactly what image of human life appears in a given age and culture, an image so conscious and obvious that no explanation seems necessary, or what image is (as the physicist Ramanathan discussed in the seminar) so much "in a man's bones" that he need not be conscious of it—*that* must be put into words in each age, if a mutual understanding is desired. It becomes clear, then, that the changing images provided by modern psychology, scientific as they may be in the verification of some details, nevertheless harbor what Freud himself called a "mythological trend. And even in the most rational world, the continued presence of traditional (and maybe consciously repudiated images) is, to the clinician, an inescapable fact. For such images and ideas are absorbed early in life as a kind of space-time which gives coherent reassurance against the abysmal estrangements emerging in each successive stage and plaguing man throughout life: against early mistrust as well as against shame and doubt, against a sense of guilt as well as against a sense of futility of effort, and, finally, against a confusion of identity as well as against a sense of isolation, stagnation, or senile despair. And even where such explicit world-images are dispensed with in the expectation—or under actual conditions—of "happiness" or "success," they reappear implicitly in the way man reassures himself when feeling adrift.

But I can report here only on my first comparative encounter with Hindu stages of life, as described and lived by men and women who (depending on their ages) have grown up with them more or less explicitly. Here I must be schematic.

The Hindu scriptures are “platonic” in the sense that they outline the eternal meaning of the pre-ordained stages which pervade the variety of mortal lives and local customs. “Eternal meaning” can, of course, become righteous tyranny at the height of priestly power, and something of a hoax in an era of cultural disintegration; but since today we know so much more systematically and attend so much more passionately to the distortion and perversion of all meaning than to the values always to be restored or regained, it may be well to try to recognize, even in glaring deviations, the order suggested by the way in which human beings strive to grow. From clinical and developmental observations, we have gained much insight into the strategic stages of infancy and childhood; and in my own attempt to give these stages a place in the whole course of life, I have postulated that the first year of life establishes the fundamental “virtue” of hope, while childhood forms the rudiments of will and purpose, of initiative and of skill, before adolescence grounds adult life in some system of fidelity.

First, it must be noted that traditional Hindu images of life, in contrast to our clinical emphasis on infantile vulnerabilities, do not conceptualize stages before the “sense” age is reached, that is, before a child can listen attentively to things told and read and sung and shown to him, and when he is eager to attach himself to people who will teach him: until a boy is eight years old, he is like one newly born, marked only by the caste in which he is born.<sup>7</sup> Up to then ceremonies are held “over” him, as it were, but without his comprehension and participation. Nevertheless, the ceremonies do emphasize the critical stages known to us—only that, where we would view hope as the fundamental human strength emerging from the first year of life, the Hindu view would (fairly enough) allocate it to the beginning of all time:

“Whence, however, does Hope arise? ... Hope is the sheet-anchor of every man. When Hope is destroyed, great grief follows which, forsooth, is almost equal to death itself.... I think that Hope is bigger than a mountain with all its trees. Or, perhaps, it is bigger than the sky itself. Or, perhaps, O King, it is really immeasurable. Hope, O Chief of *kurus*, is highly difficult of being understood and equally difficult of being conquered. Seeing this last attribute of Hope, I ask, what else is so unconquerable as this?”<sup>8</sup>

What we would ascribe to the beginnings of the life cycle the Hindu view projects into previous lives which determine the coordinates of a person’s rebirth in this one: not only *where* a child was to be reborn (*desha*) and *when* (*kala*), but also his *innate* trends (*gunas*) and therefore the effort (*shrama*) which can be expected of one thus endowed and growing up in his caste at his period in history. He may emerge, then, in the caste of the Brahmans and learn to be literate, or in that of the Kshatrias and learn how to fight and to rule, among the Vaisyas and handle goods or hold land, or among the Sudras to toil in the sweat of his brow. Or, indeed, he may miss all of these honorable occupations and go through this life doomed to touch what others will avoid and, therefore, to be untouchable himself. But the Untouchable, too, has unlimited chances ahead of him.

We in the West are proudly overcoming all ideas of predestination. But we would still insist that child training can do no more than underscore what is given—that is, in an epigenetic development fixed by evolution. And we can certainly sense in any seminar—clinical or historical—how we continue to project ideas of doom and predetermination either on hereditary or constitutional given, on early experience and irreversible trauma, or on cultural and economic deprivation—that is, on the past, as dim as it is fateful. And let us face it: “deep down” nobody in his right mind *can* visualize his own existence without assuming that he has always lived and will live hereafter; and the religious world-views of old only endowed this psychological given with images and ideas which could be shared, transmitted, and ritualized.

The first well-defined stage in the Hindu life cycle is *Antevasin*, the stage of apprenticeship, youthful orientation. It knits together the basic skills allocated to one’s caste and transfers to a certified teacher (*guru*) the blind attachment to parental figures in order to anchor one’s fate and personality in concrete techniques and in significant persons. This corresponds closely to the way in which we would have school age develop a rudimentary sense of competency, and would consid-

adolescence the source of a sense of fidelity basic to the stage of youth, and essential for a sense of identity. Yet, again, what we treat as a matter of maturational stages for the Hindu is *dharma*—a life task determined by previous lives as well as by acquisition and choice. And *dharma* is both highly personal and as determining as what we call identity: “Better one’s own *dharma*, [though] imperfect than another’s well performed; Better death in [doing] one’s own *dharma*; Another’s *dharma* brings danger.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet only the linkage of individual *dharma*s holds the world together. “Neither the state nor the king, neither the mace nor the mace-bearer, govern the people; it is only by *dharma* that people secure mutual protection,” says the *Mahabharata*.<sup>10</sup> There is much in *dharma*, then, which we have conceptualized as Ego, if understood as that which integrates the individual experience and yet is always communal in nature.<sup>11</sup> If individuals depend on each other for a maximum and optimum *mutual activation*, *dharma* is a consolidation of the world through the self-realization of each individual within a joint order.

In young adulthood the stage of *Antevasin* is replaced by that of the householder (*Grhastha*). It is very congenial that this whole scheme allows for a succession of pointedly different life styles. Instead of the almost vindictive monotony of Judean-Christian strictures by which we gain or forfeit salvation by the formation of one consistently virtuous character almost from the cradle to the very grave, the Hindu system first decrees that the *Antevasin* delay and sublimate his sexuality in order to be a devoted student of eternal values, but then assigns to him as the first duty of young adulthood the experience of all those varied sexual and sensual pleasures which are so comprehensively depicted in the temples devoted to this aspect of life.

But he must not get lost in these, either; as he settles down to marry, he is encouraged to devote himself to *Artha*, the “reality” of family relations, of communal power, and of productivity. The *Manusmriti* declares, “He only is a perfect man who consists of three persons united, his wife, himself, and his offspring.”<sup>12</sup> Much of this corresponds to our assumption that the varied intimacies of young adulthood will ripen to a capacity for true Intimacy which is a fusion of identities. This, in turn, is the basis for that sense of Care which crowns what we call Generativity and becomes a source of strength for all who are united in procreation and productivity.

This successive involvement in the orders of learning, of sexual mutuality, of family-building, and of communal consolidation is gradually replaced by the third stage, *Vanaprastha*, or the inner separation from all ties of selfhood, body-boundness, and communality and their replacement by striving which will eventually lead to *Moksha*: renunciation, disappearance.

This traditional scheme shows correspondences to what I have come to emphasize as a *sequence* of stages and an *aggregate* of the strengths developed in each. Manu says: “Some declare that the chief good [of man] consists in the acquisition of *dharma* and *Artha*, others place it in the gratification of *kama* [sensual enjoyment] and the acquisition of *dharma* alone and others say that the acquisition of *Artha* alone is the chief good here below: but the correct decision is that it consists of the aggregate of those three.”<sup>13</sup>

It would be fruitless as well as impossible to compare these schemes point for point. What is most important is the principle which makes them comparable at all—that is, the epigenetic principle according to which in each stage of life a given strength is added to a widening ensemble and reintegrated at each later stage in order to play its part in a full cycle—if and where fate and society permit.

Such correspondence as outlined here, however, makes both schemes suspect in the eyes of the modern sceptic; and it did so in our seminar. A group of otherwise well-trained individuals who were confronted with religious world-images never quite knows whether to consider the existence of such

remnants of magic thinking the result of meaningless habituation or an irrational systematization. And yet, a pragmatic world-view which shuns all concepts of the cycle of generations can cause widespread disorientation. In such a dilemma, one cannot help admiring the ideational and ceremonial consistency of the older world-images.

For what an ingenious scheme this is: all caste, subcaste, and not-yet-caste having been predetermined, one comes into life with a curse that can be lived down if one lives up to minute prescribed ways; and by living and dying well, one becomes deserving of ever better lives until having exhausted the available life cycles, one is ready for release from the whole big cycle.

All world-images are apt to become corrupt when left to ecclesiastic bureaucracies. But this does not make the formation of world-images expendable. And I can only repeat that we deny the remnants of old-world images at our own risk, because we do not overcome them by declaring them—with a touch of the righteousness of scepticism—something of a secret sin. They are not less powerful for being denied. In India, I found, outside the seminar at any rate, that anyone who trusts a stranger not to smile will soon confide to him the magic reaffirmations he receives from sources other than those the West calls rational—from astrology to mysticism. But it is true for us, too, that the imagery of our traditional inner resources must be transcended, rather than denied, by what we are learning to learn.

SO MUCH FOR my encounter with the wise. But in Ahmedabad there is also a combined school and clinic under the patronage of the Sarabhais, and there Kamalini Sarabhai, Gautam's wife, arranged for me not only to attend the discussion of case-histories, but also to "listen" to Indian school children by seeing them repeat a play performance, which has taught me much about our children. As described in *Childhood and Society*, one method of play study consists simply of confronting one child at a time with an empty table (the "stage") and a series of toys (the "cast") and of asking him to build a "scene." I tried to induce my friends to treat this matter methodically and to provide each child brought in to construct a play scene with exactly the same instructions and the same general setting. But, since I was sitting behind a one-way screen in order not to be seen, I could not interfere when some children appeared in the playroom accompanied by members of their families or by some additional staff member, while others were led in by only one adult; or when one child was given an instruction five times as long as the others. In either case the explanation later given was that the child *needed it* in order to do his *best*. In the end I learned to forget about the scientific imperatives of psychologists at home and to enjoy the social habits which, at least in a preliminary experiment, provide the only true context for such a study in India.

In America we had asked the children to invent scenes from an imaginary moving picture; here we suggested a *folk play*. If I should say what difference first appeared forcefully in the few constructions I saw emerging, it was this: American children select a few toys carefully and then build and rebuild a circumscribed scene of increasingly clear configuration. Indian children, in contrast, attempt to use all the toys at their disposal, creating a play universe filled to the periphery with blocks, people, and animals but with little differentiation between outdoors and indoors, jungle and city, or, indeed, one scene from another. If one finally asks what (and, indeed, *where*) is *the* "exciting scene," one finds it embedded somewhere where nobody could have discerned it as an individual event and certainly not as a central one. Once it is located, however, a Gestalt emerges and suggests some relation to the child's history and background—as do the scenes at home. And since, with all my wordiness, I am of the "seeing" type, what the children did before my eyes merged with configurations that had impressed me in case-histories and, indeed, in Indian fiction.

Significant moments embedded in a moving sea of unfathomable multiformity: does not life on the street or at home anywhere offer such an over-all configurational impression? In fact, this is the way we have come to feel about Indiá, often not without a trace of sensory and emotional seasickness. For our

moves in a space-time so filled with visual and auditory occurrences that it is very difficult to lift an episode out of the flux of events, a fact out of the stream of feelings, a circumscribed relationship out of a fusion of multiple encounters. If, in all this, I should endow one word with a meaning which unites it all, the word is *fusion*. And I am inclined to indulge in the generalization that Indians want to give and to get by fusing—actively and passively. This may come as a shocking observation to those who, on the basis of one-sided reading, emphasize the *isolation* of the Indian individual and a lifelong nostalgia for solitude and meditation. But fusion and isolation are polar themes. I have suggested in *Childhood and Society* that one may begin rather than end with the proposition that a nation's identity is derived from the ways in which history has, as it were, counterpointed certain opposing potentialities; the ways in which it lifts this counterpoint to a unique style of civilization, or lets it disintegrate into mere contradiction. In this sense, the fusion enforced and, no doubt, often enjoyed in the joint family and in crowded life in general results in a polarity. There is, no doubt, a deep and recurring need to escape the multitude, and there is a remarkable capacity for being alone in the middle of a crowd. I have, in fact, never seen so many individuals in a catatonic-like isolation in the middle of a chattering crowd. But aloneness, too, is often dominated by a deep nostalgia for fusion with another, and this in an exclusive and lasting fashion, be that "Other" a mentor or a god, the Universe—or the innermost Self.

To change the subject, but only seemingly so: Westerners have "principles." Truth, for us, is the sum of what can be isolated and counted. It is what can be logically accounted for, what can be proved to have happened, or what you really mean at the moment when you say it, while keeping it somehow consistent with what you meant earlier or expect to say later. Deviation from such truth makes you a liar; and I have heard it said often enough that Indians, because truth means something different for them, are habitual liars. Now Gandhi himself tried to infuse into Indian life an almost Christian or, any rate, Socratic "Yes, yes" and "No, no," sometimes insisting on factualness of content, sometimes on honesty of confession, and sometimes on unequivocal cooperation. To him all this was enveloped in a Truth which would reveal itself only in intuitive fusion with the innermost self or (or *and*) the will of the masses. But of course he too has been called, in the East and in the West, a hypocritical politician and a saint of uneasy honesty. It is, therefore, important to note the baseline of truthfulness in India and to realize that such "principles" as *dharma*, *Artha*, *kama* and *Moksha* cannot be compared with Western principles in the sense that they provide categorical permissions or prohibitions. Rather they are forms of *immersion* in different *orders of self-abandonment*. That these orders, because of their very lack of guidelines, become expressed in minutely detailed handbooks of ways to abandon oneself with utmost conscientiousness—that is another matter. Westerners on first acquaintance are apt to admire the self-abandonment of the Kama Sutra or the affluent eroticism of the temple statues as expressing a freedom denied for too long to our artistic and erotic imagination: yet the Kama Sutra is really a most bureaucratic inventory of coital variations, and the author is said to have been ascetic himself. Even the steaming eroticism of temple sculptures suggests, after the first shock of stimulation or revulsion, a gigantic endeavor not to leave out anything, while not emphasizing any one possible (or impossible) form of erotic gymnastics more than any other.

One must learn, then, to see a dynamic polarity rather than an inner contradiction in what at first looks like a basic inconsistency, such as that between fusion-in-the-mass and utter solitude, between sensual license and compulsive order, or between an utterly a-historical sense of living and inventories of assembled facts.

And this is my first impression of some basic quality of family life: something a man of modern training always tries to sense in order to orient himself. The deep nostalgia for fusion is reborn, it seems, from generation to generation out of the diffusion of the mother in the joint family, in which she must respond to each and, at the same time, to all, and thus can belong to the individual child on



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