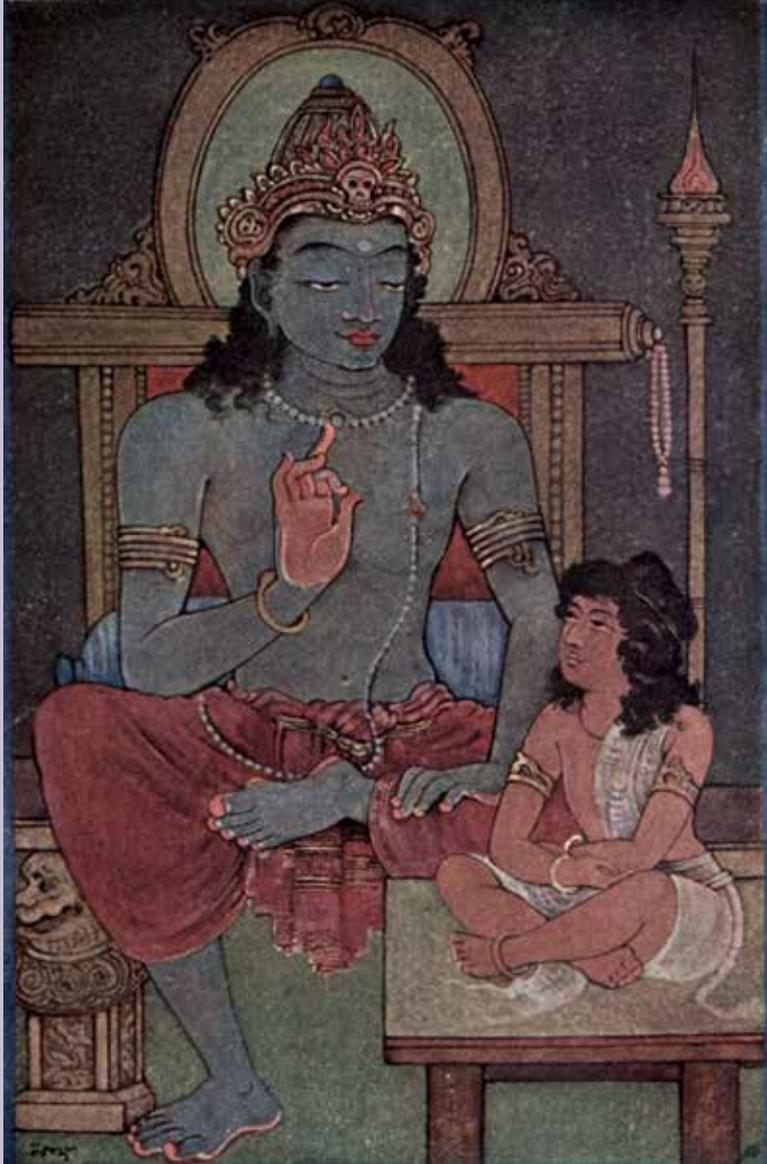


# ADITI



GURU & DISCIPLE

*In an age marked by the collapse of the social structures of the modern world and the spiritual derailment of so many religious traditions, Hinduism, with its metaphysical and primordial perspective on man, the world and the Sacred, occupies a unique position. A few westerners may find in it an echo of the religions of Ancient Europe and a minority an authentic initiatory path as demanding as those that may still exist in the margins of Abrahamic traditions. Whereas Buddhism is well established in France and represented institutionally through organizations, journals and publishing houses, nothing similar exists for Hinduism. In general, the landscape is dominated either by an agnostic academic discourse or by new age publications that totally distort Hindu teachings.*

*The Aditi Center for the Study of the Hindu Tradition intends to fill up this gap. Without dismissing the importance of scholarly works on Hinduism, it focuses on the initiatory dimension of the *Sanātana Dharma*. It also rejects all the New Age attempts to reduce Hindu symbols and spiritual practices to a few superficial techniques for self-development and well-being. To some extent, this center finds its inspiration in the work of the French metaphysician René Guénon, without being affiliated to any school per se.*

*The center and the journal it publishes are symbolically placed under the patronage of the Goddess Aditi. In the Ancient Vedic literature, the Mother of all the gods is called Aditi. She is both a divine person to whom devotees can address their prayers and the symbol of the universal and infinite consciousness that the metaphysician discovers within himself. The Vedic worship of Aditi prefigures the tantric worship of Goddesses such as *Pārvatī*, *Kālī* or *Tripurasundarī* in contemporary Hinduism.*





*Female ascetic in the Himalayas (Picture by Alexi Liotti)*

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*Shakti Devi killing demons in a Shaivist Hindu temple in Karnataka (Picture by Sarah Welch)*

# Editorial

According to Hindu cosmology, mankind passes through different cycles of evolution. The *kali yuga*, the age of darkness, that began in 3102 BC, is supposed to last for hundreds of thousands of years but signs are accumulating that we are approaching the end of some minor cycle. All over the globe, we are witnessing a crisis of those civilizations that were established historically on monotheistic faiths. In the West, the process of secularization and the loss of sense of the sacred have given birth to a post-Christian society in which individuals are cut from their roots and human existence has become essentially meaningless. In Muslim countries, the so-called return to religion has led to the rise of a new form of totalitarianism that is destroying Islam from within.

In the West, it seems that modernity no longer has the resources to renew itself, nor to resist the nihilistic forces it has contributed to unleash in the world. And in fact, since the Oriental Renaissance of the early 19th century, the most spiritually receptive segment of Western civilization has periodically turned to other cultures in the hope of recovering what had been lost. Religions of Indian origin have proven particularly attractive, with Buddhism spreading rapidly in the West, especially since the Chinese invasion of Tibet. However, the study of Hinduism has remained largely an academic endeavor. When it was not

the case, Hindu spirituality has been disfigured by new age counterfeits or by pseudo-*guru* alienated from their own tradition. In the French context, an author like René Guénon was one of the few who foresaw what the encounter with India could spiritually mean for a Western civilization in decline. Surprisingly enough though, he and most of his disciples turned to Islam, which they deemed more accessible than Hinduism in their lifetime.

The following question remains nonetheless as relevant today as it was in Guénon's time. The prospect of a collective *metanoia*, of a restoration of order in the West seems largely out of reach but, what can we learn from Hinduism (or from the *Sanātana Dharma*) as individuals born in the West but who do not belong inwardly to the West? We would like to sketch out a three-fold answer to this question.

First, one finds at the core of Hinduism a non-dualistic vision of reality. At the risk of oversimplifying, one can argue that Greek philosophy and Christianity are based on an experience of "tension" between the Divine and the human.<sup>1</sup> In Plato, the Divine is discovered through an intellectual experience of participation. In Christianity, it is mostly through ecstasies that mystics have experienced God. The dominantly dualistic structure of Western spirituality – there are of course exceptions – has periodically led to millenarian

1 I borrow this concept of "tension" (*metaxy*) from the German-born American philosopher, Eric Voegelin.

derailments when politico-religious movements have sought to bridge the gap between the divine and the human and to establish a paradise on earth through revolutionary violence. On the contrary, Hinduism, since at least the Axial Age and the *Upanishad*, is rooted on an intuition of a Supreme Identity between the Absolute (*Brahman*) and the Self (*ātman*). *Tat tvam asi*. "You are That", you are the Ground of Being. To realize God is to know oneself and to know oneself is to know God. For that reason, Hindu consciousness never yielded to the temptation of seeking the Absolute outside of itself, in history. The wisdom of the *Upanishad* can thus shed a new light on the trajectory of Western civilization.

Second, by what seems at first glance a detour through Hinduism, we can rediscover some of the oldest roots of western civilization, especially the meaning of some of its myths and symbols. Since the early 19th century, Western scholars have been struck by the similarities between the Vedic Religion and the religions of Ancient Europe. They were forced to conclude that these religions had to a common origin, potentially representing two branches of the same Indo-European tradition. Today, some Indian historians and a few westerners even believe that India could have been the cradle of a proto-historical culture that later spread across Eurasia. To study Hinduism is therefore not to yield to the temptation of exoticism but on the contrary to learn more about ourselves, to accomplish a form of remembrance (*anamnesis*) in the platonic sense. The experience of the cosmos, which belonged

to our ancestors, will never be restored by any neopagan revival but remains largely alive in contemporary Hinduism. What makes Hinduism different however from the religions of Ancient Europe and probably explains why it managed to resist, at least partially, the century-old process of "disenchantment of the world", was its ability to keep the balance, historically, between the worship of the intracosmic gods (Indra, Agni, Varuna and, in a later period, Vishnu, Shiva etc.) and the mystery of the God without form, the God of the beyond (the *Brahman* of the *Upanishad*).

Third Hinduism teaches us that the divorce between "being" and "knowing", which lies at the core of modern subjectivism, is avoidable, that it is possible through spiritual practices that may have existed in the West but that have long been forgotten, to realize the truths that were once revealed to the primeval Seers (*rishi*) at the beginning of times and later included in the *Veda*. According to the *Mundaka upanishad* (III, 2, 9), "the one who knows *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*." And in fact, in India any philosophical doctrine is oriented toward a process of inner transformation that has little to do with the techniques of "personal development" that have been popularized in the West under the name of *yoga* since the goal is not to free the individual but to get rid of individuality as such. The preservation and transmission of these forms of spiritual disciplines presuppose, however, an unbroken chain of teachers (*guru parampara*) and a ritual of initiation (*dīksha*). In *Perspectives on Initiation*, Guénon defines initiation as "essentially

the transmission of a spiritual influence”. This process of transmission, without which a tradition becomes a corpse, is precisely the topic of this first issue of *Aditi*. This issue explores the master-disciple tradition and the transmission of Sacred Knowledge – metaphysical science, culminating in self-knowledge but also traditional disciplines such as Indian classical dance – in traditional and contemporary Hinduism.

For this first issue, we were very fortunate to be able to interview Swami Swarupananda Saraswati, who is the Shankarācārya for Northern and Western India. In his contribution, Álvaro Enterría provides a basic introduction to the practice of initiation in India and addresses the question whether or not Westerners are qualified for receiving a Hindu initiation. Ira Schepetin analyzes the figure of the *guru* and the spiritual method of enlightenment in *Advaita Vedānta*. Vasanthi Srinivasan summarizes the teaching of Shri Chandra Sekhara Saraswati, the former Shankarācārya of Kanchi, addressing in particular the issue of the balance between devotion to the *guru*, which the Hindu tradition strongly valorizes, and critical mind. Martine Chiffrot contrasts the two paths of knowledge and love and how they combine in the master-disciple relationship. With Colette Poggi, we are introduced to a different Hindu tradition, the teaching of Abhinavagupta, the foremost exponent of Kashmir Shaivism, on initiation and the master-disciple tradition. Patrick Laude in his article compares the perspective of *Advaita Vedānta*, Kashmir Shaivism and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, exploring the

paradoxical relation between the means (the *mantra* and the *guru*) and the goal (*moksha*) in a non-dualistic context. He reminds us that any distinction, even the one between master and disciple remains real as long as the Self or Supreme knowledge has not been realized. Sarah Vieira Magalhaes shares her unique experience as a dancer of *Bharat Natyam*, a form of Indian classical dance. The issue concludes with an article on a documentary that we filmed at the Paramhansi Ganga Ashram, one of the residences of Swami Swarupananda Saraswati.

As Krishna explained to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (IV, 1-3), He taught Sacred Knowledge to Vivasvat when the world was still young. Vivasvat then taught it to Manu, and Manu to Ikshvaku. During periods of disorder and spiritual ignorance like ours, it seems that the Primordial Tradition has been lost, that the *asura* have defeated the gods. Knowledge, however, be it kept only by a minority, never totally vanishes. As Swami Swarupananda Saraswati declares in the interview published in this issue, “the seed will never perish”. By the “seed” (*bija*), he means the essence of the *Sanātana Dharma*, which is immortal like the Self shining beyond darkness.

Renaud Fabbri, Editor-in-chief