



FIND

India-Europe Foundation for New Dialogues

Founded by Alain Daniélou en 1969

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*"The first duty of man is to understand his own nature and the basic elements of his being, which he must fulfill to the best of his ability"*

Alain Daniélou



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## My India

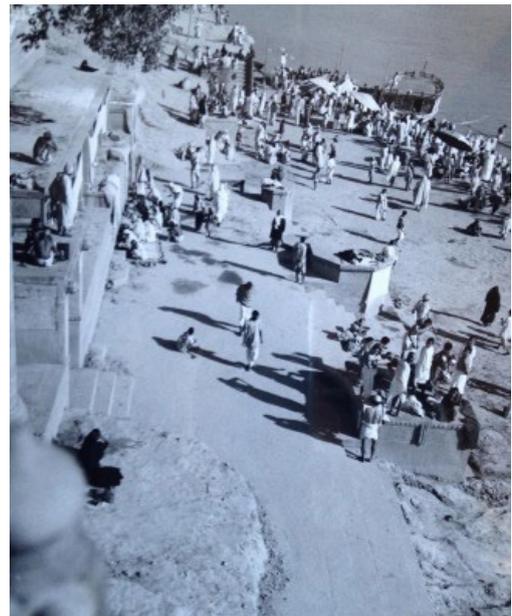
Alain Daniélou

*This text by Alain Daniélou was written in 1986 (1), at a time when there were no migratory waves across the world, but is very useful in helping us understand some of the problems of our time. India, the only great civilization with uninterrupted transmission, has been an experimental laboratory for 4000 years, whose results can only enrich us. Its plurality of languages, ethnic groups and local cultures, as well as its policies for integrating foreign populations, its openness to differences, its tolerance and absence of proselytism should, in our present context of general disorientation, at least provide a source of inspiration in rethinking the problems of our own culture.*

Jacques Cloarec  
FIND's Honorary President

In building our ideal of past civilisations, we do our best to ignore aspects that bother us. When we dream of Ancient Greece, we overlook slavery, social inequality, the genocide of conquered peoples, human sacrifice or the barbaric rites of the Bacchantes, and we pass in silence over the condemnation of Socrates and the destruction of Persepolis

In our ideal vision of India, we forget that this immense country belongs at the same time to the ancient world and to the modern, that it has a long and uninterrupted history. It is a 'multiple' country, where beliefs, knowledge, ethics and social concepts derive from different ages of mankind and seek to co-exist and come to terms with each other. In this multi-faceted civilisation, everyone can choose either an ideal or abominable India according to their taste, and with a little effort they can easily discover it, regardless of whether their interest lies in social problems, the slums of Calcutta, mysticism, or cosmological concepts. It is just the same for Indians as for foreigners: any overall portrayal of India can only be tendentious and fallacious.



Whatever our convictions concerning human rights, the existence of a god, transmigration, heaven or hell, we can find excellent examples in India for each one of them. The Mahābharata, that vast compendium of reflections and history, expresses it clearly enough: "Whatever exists elsewhere is here. What is not here is nowhere to be found."

*The bank of the river Ganges seen from Rewa Kothi, photo Alain Daniélou, 1942  
(FIND Archive, Zagarolo)*

My experience of India has been difficult and multiform, exasperating, distressing and marvellous. I have a logical mind, I am unprejudiced, curious and interested in the underlying nature of the world and in those realms of thought where material knowledge meets the unknowable. I loathe blind belief, sentimentality, religiosity, Sunday-school art, pseudo-mysticism, and that strict moralism of which India, at first glance, often gives such a particularly revolting display. I had to suffer, ignore and prudently leave behind this disgusting façade to reach the wisdom, freedom and prodigious knowledge that for me represent the highest expression of the human mind. I could indulge in total sexual freedom in the most puritan country in the world; I also found the most rigorous research on the nature of the world in a country with the most narrow-minded forms of religiosity. At every moment I had to choose and leave aside that profoundly disappointing contemporary India, with its sentimental Vishnuism of the ashrams or of Gandhi, as well as British Puritanism and the pseudo-traditional philosophy of the new prophets.

Even so, the India I was seeking was not a secret hidden world which, albeit ignored, is found everywhere, although modern Indians pretend not to see it and, if necessary, deny its existence.

All this led to strange paradoxes. While the strict Brahmans, the repositories of ritual tradition, viewed with horror a Mahatma Gandhi who spoke of nothing but religion, devotion and charity, they showed every sympathy and esteem for Rajiv Gandhi, a pragmatist and self-declared atheist.

In our efforts to understand the nature of the world and approach the divine, the object of our research can only be reality. The religious aspirations of our own times, like those of the Golden Age of India, are not to be found in rigid beliefs expressed in so-called "sacred texts". They are found in what is for us a new opening of science to Universal Consciousness. Through the fissures of materialism appears the vision of a transcendent spirit that has nothing to do with the fiction of an active god governing the world with interventions, edicts and prohibitions that are merely projections of human concepts. So, among the vestiges of the ancient world we can rediscover a pragmatic and realistic approach to the world, to religion and society, which – despite appearances and later distortions – remains India's true message.

It is from this civilisation that we inherit the political art of the Artha Shastra, the art of love of the Kama Sutra, the cosmology of the Samkhya and the philosophical theories of the Darshanas, the sublime reflections of the Upanishads, the techniques of Yoga, and the Shaivite rites of the Agamas and Tantras – an art of life and thought that has no equivalent elsewhere.

The pseudo-philosophical lucubrations, the puritanism, sentimentalism and irrational religiosity of modern India are ultimately of secondary importance. It is in Ancient India, always alive though secret and ignored, that we find the message of wisdom, reason, moderation and knowledge, a message that can be an inspiration for us and a guide for the world's future.

After living for twenty years in India, whenever I meet orientalist or people claiming to be interested in the thought and culture of India, I am surprised by their reluctance and criticism. They create an abstract picture of India for themselves, and reproach the Buddhists for not being chaste and the Hindus for not being non-violent. They are as convinced as ever that Western ideas of social justice, hygiene, spirituality, or even Yoga, are irrefutably superior. Instead of trying to understand, they always want to improve on it. This superiority complex, which makes us believe that the happiness of others lies in resembling ourselves, will always make our relations with the developing world and with migrants unpleasant and destructive. We are so convinced that the slogans of the French Revolution or of Marxism (which have had such pitiful results in the West) represent the happiness of mankind that we often miss the opportunity of profiting from a

millenary experience and wisdom from which we have very much to learn. This is particularly the case with rules of social ethics established by wise legislators making it possible for the most diverse peoples to coexist, without trying to assimilate the non-identical, and have made India a refuge for all those groups that are persecuted elsewhere, whether primitive tribes or Jewish, Christian or Persian communities, or even the Tibetans in our own time.

India will come back to life and rediscover its identity as the world's spiritual centre only after sweeping away the sentimental religiosity and the pseudo-humanitarian social conceptions, only after returning to its source, which is also true modernity



*The bank of the river Ganges seen from Rewa Kothi, photo Alain Daniélou, 1942  
(FIND Archive, Zagarolo)*

*Alain Daniélou*

The Labyrinth, February 1986

Note:

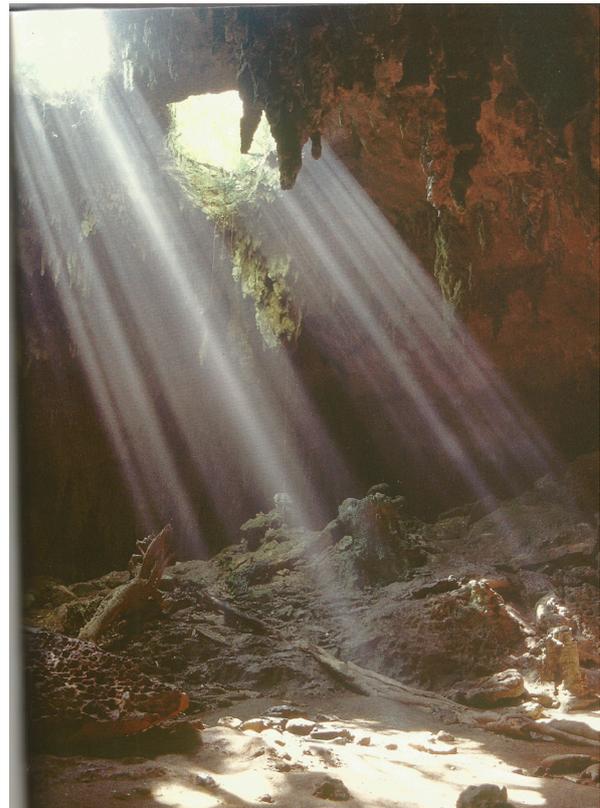
(1) The English version presented here is based on three manuscripts in French from FIND's Archive at Zagarolo, out of which a selection was made by Adrián Navigante and translated into English by Kenneth Hurry. The last version of these French manuscripts was published in the Swiss review *Emoi* (May 1986).

## Alain Daniélou's Idea of "Tradition"

*Adrián Navigante, FIND Director of FIND Research and Intellectual Dialogue*

### I. Alain Daniélou and Tradition: Preliminaries

Ever since the movement called "Integral Traditionalism" (1) or "Perennialism" (2) attained the necessary degree of codification to reach a certain visibility in the history of human ideas, a radical opposition between "Tradition" (with a capital) and "modernity" seems to have established itself to the point of dismantling *a priori* every attempt at a reconciliation of opposites. In fact, it is not so much a question of opposition, as a matter of conflictive incommensurability. If we were to summarize the conflict, we could say that with regard to Traditionalism what is being affirmed has an absolute value and its validity (as a result of its absoluteness) proves irrevocable. In addition to this, the value referred to (or more precisely: the "metaphysical Truth") goes hand in hand with the process of its own affirmation: it gets *transmitted*, and even if transmission [*trāditiō*] itself presupposes the entrance of that absolute into the realm of time (and hence relativity), it ultimately undergoes no loss. Hence transmission moves in a double direction: not only horizontally (along a time-chronology), but also vertically (as a permanent irruption of the absolute within the realm of the relative). Last but not least, transmission dynamics implies a double limitation, in terms of the condition of vertical reception (Tradition is not transmitted to everyone but only to a *select few*) and of horizontal visibility (Tradition is concealed in history and is therefore necessarily "esoteric"). On the other side (modernity), the matter looks altogether different: affirmations have only a relative value, and universality has to be constructed, not deduced from *a priori* (revealed) principles. Knowledge, being human and therefore relative, is always fallible and at each stage of its development must be accessible to all – which is precisely the engine of progress in all spheres of human action. Verticality (crystallized in mythological, symbolic or religious values) has no other correlate than psychological projection; in other words, there is no transcendence (identified with the sacred, God or some absolute revealing itself), but only worldly immanence with its cognitive and emotive modalities of apprehension – all of them as imperfect and fragmentary as the individuals producing and receiving them. As to "truth", it is not to be written in capital letters, since the term refers to the semantic value of propositions related to specific contexts and states of affairs (never to the whole of existence or reality). Any other prescription of truth beyond this limited sphere would come immediately under suspicion of ideological manipulation.



*The eternal interaction (and tension) between the solar and the chthonic. Source: Loltun Cave, Yucatán. Source: Paul Devereux. Der Heilige Ort, Baden: München 2000.*

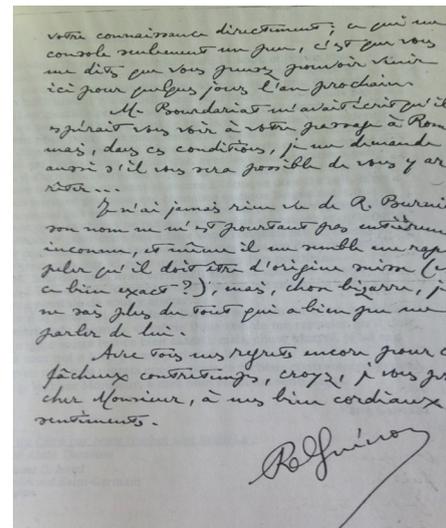
The first contact Alain Daniélou had with the idea of Tradition was not in India and did not come from any *paṇḍit* or *saṃnyāsīn*, but from a Western author who made a lifelong effort to erase every trace of his Western provenance, sources and background from his own work: René Guénon. "When I first became interested in the religion and philosophy of

India”, writes Daniélou, “the only works I found useful were those of René Guénon. I had carefully read all his books and subscribed to *Le Voile d’Isis*, a review published under his patronage, later called *Études Traditionnelles*” (3). Daniélou’s correspondence with Guénon between 1947 and 1951, his fragmentary translations of some of Guénon’s writings into Hindi for the review *Siddhanta*, as well as a certain (and in the case of Daniélou somewhat surprising) recurrence of the motif of *sanātana dharma* in a manner not exactly akin to orthodox Hindu discourse (where *param̐parā* or even *saṁpradāya* are preferred) (4) account for Guénon’s lasting influence on Daniélou in spite of the latter’s awareness of their unbridgeable differences. The mere fact that one of Daniélou’s most important books containing speculations about what he termed “orthodox Hinduism” is called *Shiva and the Primordial Tradition* seems to include him within the galaxy of traditionalists like René Guénon, Julius Evola, Frithjof Schuon and Ananda Coomaraswamy, all of whom agree (in spite of the specificity of each one of their approaches) without any doubt on the basic assumptions and main features characterizing Perennialism (as explained above). Beyond that mere fact, there are other processes and experiences, such as his deep assimilation of pre-Colonial Hindu culture (music, philosophy and religion), his initiation into Shaivism under the guidance of Swāmī Karpātrī and his undeniably critical view of the Western world (5). However, this is not enough to attribute to Daniélou the convictions of the Perennialist school, since there are essential points at which his views differ considerably from those of the one who initially inspired him to approach the Hindu world: René Guénon. In order to understand what we would like to call a “differential” model of Tradition (corresponding to Daniélou’s views, as opposed to Guénon’s “identity” model), a special type of reconstruction is required that is usually very difficult to find in the reception of the authors in question. Radical as both of them were (each in his own way), the usual reactions are either full admiration of and blind faith in their knowledge and message, or total rejection of their conceptions and modes of thinking. In either case one misses the point and falls back into commonplaces – perhaps because commonplaces (in the form of absolute affirmations or negations) are the easiest tool to keep unsubstantial convictions alive.

## II. René Guénon (Re-)Contextualized: Light and Shadow Effects

In speaking about René Guénon, the first challenge is not to get entangled in the dual axis “attraction-rejection”, especially if we wish to do justice to the remarkable and complex figure he was. Between the out-of-hand dismissal of a Jacques Lacan, who considered him among the lowest specimens within the bunch of mentally retarded seeking initiation (6), and the grotesque *imitatio Guenonis* of so-called traditionalists who mechanically repeat neo-Vedantic formulae about the One (as highest metaphysical Truth) and the trans-rational knowledge of it (which they claim to possess), we are confident that a middle way is possible if we try to reconsider at least some aspects of his thinking in the light of today’s context, especially with regard to the kind of influence he exercised on Alain Daniélou, in which the understanding of Hinduism plays a central role

Few people have been so courageous and radical in following their own convictions as René Guénon. We owe him a singular re-invention of the Orient and its metaphysical Truth, a conception situated at the antipodes both of the mainstream thinking of its time (scientific positivism, from Auguste Comte to the Vienna Circle) and its most common alternative (modern occultism, from Madame Blavatsky to Eliphas Lévi and Papus). But most important of all, René Guénon inaugurated a hermeneutics of religious phenomena in which the analytic dimension is supported by an intuitive and analogical substratum that in a certain way prevents knowledge from becoming fragmentarily specialized to the point of incoherence (7) (a sensation one can experience nowadays in reading scholarly publications). His life-path, from his early engagement with the esoteric



Letter extract of René Guénon to Alain Daniélou.  
 FIND Archive, Zagarolo

circles of the Parisian “Belle Époque” to his later settlement in the traditional milieu of early XX century Egypt (8), is sealed with the authenticity of somebody who – whatever the validity of his position and choices – lived according to a coherent idea of Truth and never deviated from his path. The scholarly reception of religious phenomena limits itself to describing them *objectively*, that is, from a distance that prevents any form of identification with the kind of experience involved in such phenomena. The scholarly reception of metaphysics ended up eliminating every trace of transcendence from that field, reducing a doctrine of pure (real) being to an internal clarification of the conceptual (purely linguistic) sphere. The way inaugurated by Guénon aims to recover and revivify the meaning of transcendence by a careful consideration of the sacred sphere in terms of a type of knowledge (the highest) that has not been severed from experience. Each religious phenomenon has a surface (temporal) structure of dogma, moral and cult (9), and a deep (a-temporal) structure of metaphysical knowledge; the former varies with each culture, the latter is the same in all religions. This hermeneutics of the sacred, going from isolated religious phenomena in each culture to the core of an eternal Truth uninterruptedly transmitted through esoteric chains, is called sacred or traditional science [*science sacrée, science traditionnelle*] and is Guénon’s battle horse against Western secularization, as we can clearly see in one of his best-known books, *Le règne de la quantité et le signe des temps* (1945): “In the present study, we will attempt to show even more exhaustively and in a more general manner the true nature of traditional science and therefore the abyss that divides it from profane sciences – the latter appearing as a caricature or a parody of the former” (10). Even if modern science with its empirical method were to destroy every claim to knowledge on the part of religion and reduced metaphysics to a carcass without content, Guénon declared – already in his first book – that true (that is, Oriental) metaphysics has nothing to do with the whole polemic of secularization. In fact, science and modern philosophy (11) reject a religious view of life that is only the exoteric, external, and sentimental side of what he himself will exhume: the forgotten Tradition, the knowledge of which is “purely intellectual”, that is, “truly metaphysic”. One might ask what legitimates Guénon’s distinction between a true (Oriental) metaphysics and a fake (Occidental) one. The answer lies in the scholastic distinction of *universalia*. For Guénon true universal knowledge is knowledge of *universalia ante rem*, the universality of modern metaphysics is based on knowledge of *universalia post rem* (12). *Ante rem* (“before the thing”) means that universal cognition needs no empirical basis on singular beings, because it takes place before their existence, that is, in the divine intellect; *post rem* (“after the thing”) means that universality can only be located in language, that is in concepts constructed out of limited cognition or cognition of singular things. In other words, Guénon is convinced that true metaphysical knowledge is ultimately based on intellectual intuition, the type of intuition that, according to him, represents the point of juncture between the human and the divine intellect. In the case of India (which is paradigmatic for traditionalist cultures), Guénon affirms that this mode of knowledge can be traced back to the Vedic sages or seers [ṛṣi-s] and that it was later codified in mythological and symbolical language (13). The essays collected in his posthumous book *Symboles de la science sacrée* (1962) bear witness to his hermeneutics of myth and symbol and cover the religious thought of many cultures, while *Les états multiples de l’être* (1932) is intended as a sort of metaphysical compendium dealing with the “multiplicity of transcendental order [...] applicable to all domains constituting the different worlds or degrees of existence” (14) up to the highest principle beyond all degrees of manifestation: non-being or *more-than-being* (15).

This last aspect introduces the dimension that interests us in order to understand not only the singularity of Guénon’s project but also its limitations and pitfalls. The strong emphasis on metaphysics as knowledge of the primordial One, the transcendent principle that he calls (following the apophatic tradition) non-being in order to avoid any possibility of conceiving a separation, a fragmentation, a tension or even a potential asymmetry in this indivisible unity of the non-manifested (16), has a double root: on the one hand Gnosis, on the other hand the Vedānta/Sufism complex.

The first element is present in Guénon’s life already at an early stage, but it permeates his whole work. Horrified as he was by scientific universalism, he found an alternative in the occult circles of early XX century France, especially because the occultist project consisted of transposing that universalist ideal of science into the spiritual realm (17). After a conflict with the famous French occultist Gérard Encausse (Papus) in 1908, Guénon left the *Ordre Martiniste* (founded by Papus himself)

and entered the neo-Gnostic sect *Église Gnostique de France*, which had been inspired by another famous occultist, Jules Doriel (18). In spite of their differences, both Papus and Doriel had founded esoteric movements after intensive research on Theosophy, Masonry and Gnosticism, and the key issue was their identification with them and the ensuing need to “realize” the very subject of their own speculations (in the case of Doriel, the Gnostic movement of Catharism). It is *symptomatically evident* that the foundations of Gnosticism remained deep-rooted in Guénon throughout his life. In fact, although he wrote nothing directly related to the religious movement of Gnosticism in late antiquity, he most surely incorporated it without any feeling of temporal distance. Symptoms of eternity are fascinating but also dangerous, and they lead to what we may call a black-or-white kind of thinking, the main features of which are the following:

1. Rejection of multiplicity as the sphere of the relative and transient, and especially as the mode of being in which the metaphysical Truth becomes fully obliterated.
2. Conception of the whole Western world as anomalous due to the dominance of non-Traditional systems (which, on a geopolitical level, translates the Gnostic motif of the “fallen world” and the location of salvific light in another sphere).
3. Drastic separation from the spiritual and the psychological (like the Gnostic distinction of psyche-pneuma) to the point of believing in the possibility of transfiguring the whole psychic sphere and attaining (in life) a full realization of the impersonal Spirit.

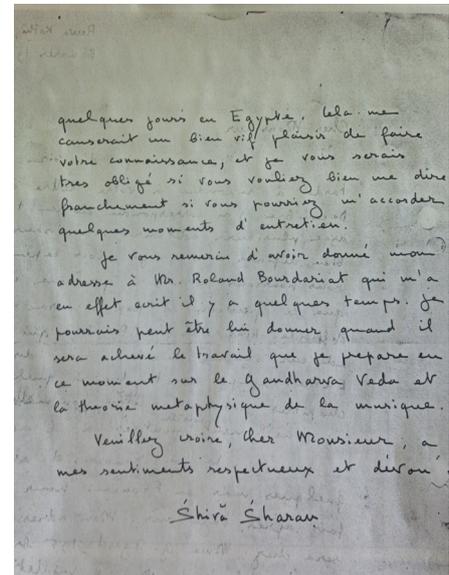
Such convictions led Guénon to modes of behaviour and thinking that to a certain extent cast a shadow on the luminous figure that he was and puts the future of the Traditionalist movement at the risk of a (pseudo-) intellectual exercise of fundamentalism. Guénon actively ignored every philosophical development after Leibniz (to whom he devoted his *diplôme d'études supérieures de Philosophie* in 1916), especially mathematical reformulations of ontology and metaphysics (from Georg Cantor and Alfred North Whitehead to Paul Cohen) and the paradigmatic change in Physics from the Newtonian model to Quantum field theory. Such developments break with the idea of science he himself criticized. His Western model of thought was and remained Scholastic philosophy (with its distorted interpretation of antique sources and its stubbornness on the question of dogmatic knowledge), which he learned to a great extent from one of the most rigorous Thomists of France, Jacques Maritain. He rejected the aesthetic sphere as a product of arbitrary imagination, for example in Ancient Greece (19), and demonized reason as a form of perverted intellect incapable of true principles (20). Natural religion and polytheism were for him an aberration and showed the ignorance of those practicing it. Worst of all, he suspected many things which did not fit into his scheme of initiatic affiliation [*rattachement initiatique*] of actively exercising counter-initiation; that nurtured belief in an occult plot in which the forces of darkness permanently threaten those of light. In his autobiography, Julius Evola (also a radical traditionalist) expresses his astonishment at Guénon's interpretation of his unfortunate accident in Vienna in the spring of 1945, when he was paralyzed during a bombing raid by the Allies: “He [Guénon] asked me whether I did not suspect somebody of having secretly acted against me [...]. I explained to him that nothing of that kind could be applied to my case, since if it were so, one would have to think of an extremely powerful kind of magic spell, something that might have determined a whole scaffolding of external circumstances such as the bombing raid, the moment and place of the dropping of the bombs and so on” (21).

The second element in the thought of Guénon found considerable resonance in the reception of his work, especially among traditionalists who contributed to a hagiographic and in many ways regressive reading of it. Guénon's writings on the esoteric dimension of Hinduism and Islam cannot be understood without considering his Gnostic background, since it is precisely the Gnostic motif that led to his unflinching demonizing of “the West” and his excessive idealization of “the East”. Since (as a matter of principle) Hinduism and Islam belonged, not only geographically, to his idea of “the East”, Guénon made a hermeneutic effort to create a homogeneous whole out of the manifold dimensions of these religions, using the esoteric dimension as his synthetic catalyst. This was not so difficult in the case of Islam, at least theoretically, and Guénon's reflection on the complementarity of religious legislation [*ṣarī'a*] and inner truth [*ḥaqīqāh*] corresponds to his conviction that everyone (or at least every religiously-minded person) participates in the Tradition – albeit with different degrees of awareness (22). Of course from theory to practice there is usually a big gap. Guénon's scheme is only valid if we make certain historical abstractions, beginning with the fact that Sufis have been persecuted by Islamic

fundamentalists precisely because of their mystic (23) application (and transformation) of the positive religion of Islam. In addition to this, Guénon's scheme is applicable to Islam and (under ideal conditions) perhaps to monotheistic religions in general, but not to Hinduism with its polytheistic basis (not only in Puranic literature and Sectarian movements, but also in the first period of Vedic religion) and the insurmountable ambiguity of its sacred sphere. His insistence on the Doctrine of Unity [*Et-Tawhîd*] shows an utter rejection of the phenomenological dimension of experiencing the divine (as can be seen in early Tantric and Shakta sources), especially when he writes: "There has never been any doctrine that can be really called 'polytheistic', that is, a doctrine allowing an absolute and irreducible plurality of principles. This pluralism is not possible but as a deviation resulting from the ignorance and lack of understanding of the masses, from their tendency to attach themselves to the multiplicity of the manifested world, from idolatry in all its forms" (24). This is the reason why his three main works on Hinduism, *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* (1921), *L'homme et son devenir selon le Vedânta* (1925) and the posthumous *Études sur l'hindouisme* (1967), can be read as a tenacious operation to build a Vedântic canon and subsume the totality of Hindu *dharma* within parameters grounded after the fashion of a doctrine of unity with strictly monotheistic implications. The problem in applying this scheme to Hinduism is that, even if we adopt the Traditionalist view, it is impossible to overlook many different initiatic chains, and especially the fact that Tradition is grounded in a plurality of world-views and modes of religious existence rooted in a highly elaborate ritual and symbolic practice. In this sense, a reduction of the whole to a specific form of metaphysical monism turns out to be impossible (at least if one does not want to betray the Hindu spirit). Guénon tries to justify this approach by homologating the late Upaniṣadic elaboration of Brahmanism with Vedic religion and defining the Tantric tradition as a full emanation of the Veda (25). The problem is that in Vedic religion there is no such thing as *brahman* in the soteriological sense of Upaniṣadic philosophy (that is, as ultimate and radically transcendent principle of reality), and orthodox Brahmins would never legitimate sacred transmission in terms of "intellectual intuition" (as Guénon does), but rather in terms of technical, ritual and hermeneutic mastery of the codified canon (*Śāstra* literature) going back to the first Seers [*ṛṣi-s*], with whom they nevertheless do not directly identify (26). The fact that no scholar would ever have taken this interpretation of Hinduism seriously didn't prevent Guénon from carrying on his work. On the contrary: scholarship (in spite of Guénon's availing himself of it for his own research) was also the enemy, since it belonged to the domain of profane science. However, he needed legitimation for his judgements, and he found this legitimation in esoteric initiation (27). There is evidence of his being initiated into Sufism (actually by a European, the multifaceted Swedish artist and mystic Ivan Aguéli), but not into Hinduism. However, Hindu *dīkṣā* is taken for granted because of the type of knowledge he had acquired and also because of the testimony of his biographer and friend Paul Chacornac (28). The important point for us is, as pointed out earlier, the irrevocable affirmation of this type of knowledge and the exonerating function of it. As Jean-Pierre Laurant remarks: "When Guénon affirms having received from Oriental masters the type of knowledge he develops in his doctrinal works, this places him in an infinitely superior position to Western scholarly works or even Indian schools of interpretation going in an opposite sense [...]. He found himself *ipso facto* freed from having to render explanations or justify his position" (29). Of course one can come to the conclusion that Guénon's knowledge, in spite of his mistakes and excesses, was so outstanding for the period, that he may well have had other sources than mere readings just for the sake of merely understanding Hindu (*and per extensionem* Sufi, perhaps even Taoist) spirituality, but the real problem is the history of effects, in which the seeds of prejudice and narrow-mindedness of the master (both of them human characteristics!) are infinitely potentiated among today's (pseudo-)elites of so-called perennialists who cling to such self-immunization strategies (initiation, metaphysical Truth and transcendent knowledge) without the faintest trace of Guénon's background and intelligence, ignoring altogether the challenge of thinking in Guénonian terms more than half a century after Guénon's death, that is, in quite another context. Change of context implies the need to re-contextualize the author and his work, and when an author has become the voice of absolute truth, the task turns out to be next to impossible. To use Samuel Beckett's words: "it is easier to raise a temple than to bring down the worshipped object" (30).

### III. Daniélou and the Labyrinth of Tradition

It would be a mistake not to acknowledge that Guénon had not only an episodic but also a lasting influence on Daniélou, but it would also be erroneous to believe that they shared the same conception of Tradition (and ultimately the same world-view). Guénon's powerful discourse and his skilful construction of authority are two essential factors to monopolize the referential field of Tradition. In fact, the most creative perennialists (Evola, Schuon, Coomaraswamy, Hossein Nasr) – who contributed to an extension of the horizon, and some of whom even criticized some aspects of Guénon's thought (like Schuon) – ultimately remained within the same framework of thought with their backs turned against the world and their will focused on overcoming nature and realizing the Spirit. It is Daniélou who, speaking within the same semantic field (Tradition and initiation, religion and esotericism, myth and symbol), changes not only the value of those terms, but also opens another dimension for the practical application of traditional wisdom in the life of the individual and eventually of a whole community. This variation in the conception of Tradition interests us especially because it does not appear as a rupture, but rather as an *internal turning*. Daniélou criticizes many aspects of modern Western culture, he also thinks in terms of cyclic time and world ages [*yuga*], he questions the so-called universal values (from missionary monotheism to the utopian expansion of European Enlightenment) as an expression of will-to-power, and he insistently points to forgotten layers of wisdom buried in human history as possible instruments to redress the balance in a world adrift. In this sense, he shares fundamental presuppositions with Perennialism which place him on the opposite pole to a man fully integrated in the modern paradigm of secularized life. It is precisely from this very common ground that the differences come into play, and this makes the case interesting, because it is not easy to dismiss Daniélou as somebody who dwells on the opposite shore and presents differences from the outside.



Letter extract of Alain Daniélou (Shiva Sharan, as the signature reads) to René Guénon.  
 FINE Archive, Zagorol

In the first place, Guénon's Absolute or primordial One appears in Daniélou as the outer limit of experience: "Transcendent reality is, by definition, beyond the limitations that condition our means of knowledge. Yet, even if we cannot understand its nature, we may indirectly conclude that some form of being beyond the sphere of our perceptions must exist [...]. This divinity cannot be grasped nor understood, for it begins where understanding fails, yet it can be approached from many sides; any attempt at understanding its nature can merely be called a 'near approach', an *Upa-niṣad*" (31). According to Daniélou, Upaniṣadic philosophy is an attempt to reach the root of the manifest world. But this attempt does not end with a full immersion in Transcendence and an ensuing devaluation of multiplicity. It rather inaugurates the question of "perspectives", which will reach a differentiated systematization in the six classical schools of philosophy, the so-called *ṣaḍdarśana-s* (literally: "six visions"): Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya and Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. Interestingly enough, Daniélou sees non-dualism [*a-dvaita-vāda*] and the animistic conception of the divine (which he identifies as the first form of religiosity) as complementary to each other, inasmuch as non-duality, in radical thought, is neither duality nor unity, but rather all-pervading (and therefore goes beyond every limitation in terms of individuation principle and perceptive or cognitive structure). The difference with regard to Guénon's approach to Hinduism is quite significant. While Guénon, in his exposition of the darśana-s, privileges Vedānta over all other systems as the purest expression of knowledge of the non-manifest, Daniélou points to the symmetrical nature of all perspectives and rejects the centralization of Vedānta. Beyond metaphysical superiority (as affirmed by Guénon) he sees a struggle for religious power: "Identifying the soul, conceived as the centre of the living being, with a non-manifested Absolute is [...] a contradiction of terms. Brahman, envisaged by the Sāṃkhya as the prime cause, neutral, impersonal, and unknowable, in actual fact becomes, without it

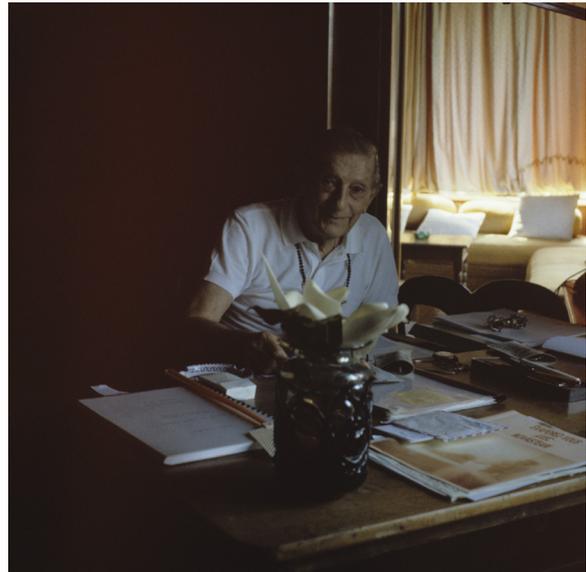
being admitted, an only god, easily personified, close to the Christian and Muslim concept. Under the name of Vedanta, the Uttara Mimamsa, thus tastefully brought up to date, was to become of great importance, almost leading to the elimination of the other Darshanas. Having lost its own critical apparatus, the Vedanta was to become purely speculative. Its apparent rationalism would attract thinkers in the Christian and Islamic world, with the result that it obtained a sort of exclusivity as representing philosophic thought in India” (32). This critical remark can be very well applied to Guénon, who was very close to the most conservative strain of Christianity (although he entertained reflections which should be historically considered heretical) and accepted the positively codified monotheism of Islam as a frame for his traditionalist project (even if the confluence of that dimension of Islam with Sufism was not so easy to harmonize). In fact, Guénon expressed a very hard judgement about all religions of immanence (animism, polytheism and even pantheism), calling them “clearly anti-metaphysic” (33), that is, not only unworthy of the epithet “traditional” but also decadent. For Daniélou, quite on the contrary, there is an undeniable complicity between radical emphasis on a non-manifested principle as the highest reality and a monotheistic conception on the religious level. Both of them deny the very concrete aspect of the divine, which is all-pervading and enables both rituals and beliefs as well as quite elaborate philosophical systems, including institutional organizations in terms of initiatic chains and the construction of a very powerful myth, that of the “immemorial origin” (which legitimizes transmission of the “secret”). Daniélou’s approach to traditional knowledge is therefore not at all based on a Gnostic scheme focused on exclusive patterns of distinction between light and darkness, good and evil, pure and impure, true and false, but rather on an inclusive one, creating internal hierarchies within an articulated whole in which nothing falls out of the divine fabric.

The last point brings us to the core of the problem: Tradition and the role of initiation. Daniélou’s idea of tradition differs from that of Guénon in many ways, even if Daniélou himself sometimes uses the term in a way that might indicate a certain proximity to Guénon’s traditionalism (like his homologation of Tradition with the term *sanātana dharma* (34)). The way Guénon uses the term and especially the implications of it point to a very problematic construction of origins. Following Guénon’s convictions, one is forced to believe in the existence of a golden age in which the later ideal of *jīvanmukta* [the liberated in life] was realized by nature and expanded through the whole tissue of society, or in a full realization of the pneumatic dimension of man even before the cosmogonic miracle of consciousness was born from the womb of Nature. This is why the coarsest version of Integral Traditionalism, with its concoction of human history, astrological ages and biblical cosmology, reminds us of grotesque religious theories such as the Creationism of Christian fundamentalists. The interesting aspect in Daniélou is that he affirms Tradition without establishing it as a dogma and without attempting to turn it into an obscurantist stronghold. His idea of tradition is very concrete and has two levels: the first is genetic transmission, which is a natural chain with a mechanism of selection; the other is spiritual or initiatic transmission, which aims at perpetuating the visions of the first seers throughout the generations. Tradition in this sense is called *paramparā* (35).

If *sanātana dharma* demands unity, *paramparā* implies diversity. As Daniélou himself indicates: “the seers’ perception must have occurred when the evolution of the species reached maturity, and when the human being became capable of playing the role of witness. Like a flower that blossoms in due season, perception of the world’s secrets appeared in the seer’s spirit when humankind reached maturity. We may note that, in actual fact, the seers’ perceptions took place simultaneously in various parts of the world, just as nowadays we find the same discoveries appearing at the same time on different continents. At some levels of knowledge, however, aptitude is not simultaneous among all variants of the species, since they are not all at the same level of evolution. The tradition of one group cannot therefore be transferred to another” (36). From this very perspective, which reconciles the notion of evolution in natural history with the tangential movement of cultural decline within the dominance-cycle of the human race, initiation is notably deflated with regard to the mysterious power it has in Guénon (37); it appears as a deconditioning instance to re-situate the “initiated” with regard to their own life and world-view, especially by introducing a new hierarchy of values and customs as well as a specific religious sense of belonging. For Daniélou, Tradition is a concept that bridges the gap between nature and culture and opens the former

to a dimension of divinity and infinity through a simultaneous sacralization of the latter. What the initiatic chain preserves and consolidates is the primordial vision of the structure of Nature in terms of universal laws (which is in fact the proper use of the expression *sanātana dharma*), but the origin of this vision is only relevant within the specific tradition being transmitted. The world-experience of an orthodox Brahmin is not the same as that of a Nepalese Shaman. The Aghoris' embrace of the pure and the impure as aspects of Shiva's body is the exact opposite of the religious *contemptum mundi* of the Gnostic. All these traditions base their transmission of knowledge on initiation, but knowledge is not related to the metaphysical Truth that Guénon deduces from Vedānta and affirms as a transcultural rule of thumb to attain enlightenment. From Daniélou's perspective, the divine fulguration emits different shades of colours, and Truth is not one, but manifold. Even if the One is the logical result of an exercise of thought in religious approximation, it cannot be affirmed as such, since no human being has the means of doing so. Each sage or spiritual master irradiates one shade of colour within the spectrum of divine manifestation, but the colour disappears the moment he opens the mouth and promulgates a positive truth, when it turns into a black-and-white picture. Within this aesthetic of the Spirit, there is room for critique (which Daniélou does sometimes with a vengeance), but ultimately no exclusion of any instance of the manifest world – even the most obscure aspects – as a potential site to re-enact the human effort toward harmony. This Tantric attitude is quite realistic and dissipates all esoteric fantasies about our race. Ultimately the human effort toward harmony is an attempt to balance the human tendency toward destruction, ever since our role in creation became preponderant.

There is no doubt that in Daniélou's eyes our modern Western world presents serious problems. The question is where the root of these problems lies, since an understanding of the root will determine the consequences to be drawn in terms of life attitude, projects and limitations. If we accept the theory of world-ages [*yuga-s*], Kali Yuga is the age of conflicts. This designation describes the complexity of the thread in which we live, but this thread is not only "modern society". Already in pre-Socratic Greece Heraclitus used an image that should be borne in mind: πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς ("conflict is the father and ruler of all things" (38)). Human experience is not qualitatively different from natural phenomena, in the sense that everything revolves around an economy of violence. Taken in a broad sense of the word, violence is an energy quantum that cannot be so easily and harmoniously channelled in a specific collective location,



*Alain Daniélou at the Labyrinth, Zagarolo.*

in other words: violence is the problem of individuated existence *in context*. Conflict is a result of patterned interaction, inasmuch as interaction presupposes a logic of energy channelling, and this logic never reaches an end-stage. Hindu cosmology, both in its mythical and its philosophical form, is a highly elaborated cultural device to deal with this problem, and what Daniélou took from that model of "cosmic history" is its potential for social cohesion and individual development. So the first thing to bear in mind is that Kali Yuga is not the modern age; its duration coincides with the very intricate temporal complex we profanely call "human history" (39). This broadening of the horizon shows that the cosmological viewpoint can be a solution to short-sighted perspectives in which anthropocentric ideas and acts of the individual appear to have the power to change the course of history, in other words: there is an "ideology" of Kali Yuga taking place in its last phase and incarnated in the human conviction that the key to natural and cosmic facts, events and rhythms does not lie in the human capacity to re-connect itself with them, but in a further alienation from that sphere. Guénon's equation is too radical and (in spite of his profound intuitions about modern alienation) mistaken with regard to a decisive point: Kali Yuga does not appear as the "age of conflicts", but – as Guénon himself translates – as the "dark age", that is, an age in which nothing good can come from the products of human reason. His condemnation of Western civilization *in toto* as anomalous, homologating the "decadent" (from the point of view of human action) with the "dark" (from the point of view

of cosmic determination), leads to his actively overlooking very important potentials for change and rediscovery of inner sources. This may not be so serious in the case of Guénon, since he lived in a period in which the signs from science itself to abandon the positivistic paradigm were not so evident, but it can be very serious in today's followers of Guénon who do not ask themselves how Guénon would think today, but rather apply without much reflection his maxims on modern decadence, ignoring every aspect of the world around. In this sense, Daniélou's observations on the compensatory logic of world cycles show another approach to the problem: "When the heritage of Traditional knowledge is debased, the human intellect seeks other means to penetrate the world's secrets. That is why, in our own time, when the prodigious knowledge of shamans, sorcerers, and sannyasis is tending to disappear, we find that astrophysicists or biologists rediscover certain fundamental principles of the nature of the world, such as the relativity of space and time, and the structures of life, which – although obtained with other methods – match the data given by the teaching of the rishis, the seers". And even further: "The direct view of structures provided by Yoga and the intellectual research of science are two methods aimed at a common goal [...]. Science and clairvoyance are two parallel branches of the same effort of knowledge and are not clearly separated" (40). According to Daniélou, we need a refined look at the very complex structure and dynamics of Kali Yuga in order to extract the antidote to our present ailments, since everything is contained in it. In this sense, Tradition is a thread to be followed in order to gain some clarity, but it has to be predicated in the plural. There are "traditions" pointing to different (though ultimately related) modes of experiencing a disentanglement from alienating structures and a binding instance toward an uninterrupted source of meaning for human existence. This plurality is also a kind of Labyrinth, though a one in which (as Daniélou pointed out) one does not get lost, but keeps redirecting itself in a permanent effort toward the centre.

#### IV. Conclusion: A Tradition for the Future?

Daniélou's observations on the positive aspects to be found in the evolution of human thought do not exonerate modern society from its irresponsibility regarding the transmission of knowledge, its tendency to potentiate alienation through technological networks based on a blind application of the idea of progress, and the increasing oblivion of the legacy of the past (41); they rather show the root of the problem in a much more differentiated manner. There is a point at which human behaviour, potentially capable of reflecting the divine aspect of Nature (42) in the sphere of culture, detaches itself from the fundamental awareness of its belonging to that cosmic thread and re-directs itself against the source and condition of the possibility of its own knowledge, actions and development. While the esoteric and spiritualist diagnosis consists of saying that materialism is the root of all evil (and ipso facto spiritualism the solution to it), a careful observation of cultural processes (including religion and all its derivations) shows that the problem consists of not understanding what matter really is.

There is no understanding of matter without a clear conception of space and time, of the parameters of Nature (its structure and dynamics) and its correlate in human experience: perception. Daniélou's polytheistic choice is not only related to a philosophy of freedom and integration of every aspect of the manifest world (with regard to which Perennialists are very sceptical and in general openly hostile), but also to a complex aesthetics of the Spirit that he develops in books like *Yoga: The Method of Re-Integration* (1948), *Hindu Polytheism* (1964), and *Shiva and Dionysos* (1976). Daniélou tries to show that the question is not that of pursuing the direction of the Spirit toward its heights and away from Nature, and he deems that drastic oppositions like reason vs. intellect, or spirit vs. psyche (all of them in some way a heritage of the Gnostic tradition) hide a paradoxical complicity, that the challenge is to recover the lost dimension of Nature with its sacred ambivalence. Human beings cannot achieve a transcendent Absolute by means of perception, but they can expand their perceptive field far beyond the possibilities inherited by the present stage of our collective situation. In this sense, polytheism is a religious attitude that finds transcendence in the immanence of Nature, extracting (like the alchemists) Spirit from Matter and not from any other abstract source of intellectual speculation cut off from the very source of life.

An exposition of what we might call Daniélou's Shivaitic aesthetics would demand very complex considerations and therefore another whole text, but Daniélou himself summarizes the main aspects of it and offers its corollary in very simple language: "Non-dogmatic, it allows everyone to find his own way. Ultimate reality being beyond man's understanding, the most contradictory theories or beliefs may be equally inadequate approaches to reality. Ecological (as we should say today), it sees man as part of a whole where trees, animals, men and spirits should live in harmony and mutual respect [...]. It leaves everyone free to find his own way of realization, human and spiritual, be it ascetic or erotic or both. It does not separate intellect and body, mind and matter, but sees the Universe as a living continuum" (43). These last words mark a drastic difference with regard to Guénon's metaphysics of Tradition: the divine is for Daniélou con-substantial with the manifest world, and there cannot be a drastic distinction between the essence and the existence of the universe (44). It is not human beings (not even the elite of sages and enlightened ones) who rule over the cosmos, but the forces of the cosmos always surpass (by far) all human capacity to control processes and experiences. If man attempts to detach pure intellectuality from the life-continuum, the resulting form of Śiva is śava [corpse], that is, Śiva detached from Śakti. Daniélou's attempt, which surely entails (like every human work) its own defects and imprecisions, has the immense value of shedding light on the question of Traditionalism and prevents its fascinating building of intuitions and ideas from becoming a cultural necropolis.

Notes:

- (1) For an understanding of the whole spectrum of this term, cf. Julius Evola, René Guénon e il Tradizionalismo Integrale, in: *Ricognizioni: Uomini e Problemi*, Roma 1985, pp. 205-213.
- (2) The following remark of Clinton Minnaar can help to summarize and simplify the question of denomination, at least for the purposes of this essay: "The perspective of the 'traditionalist' or 'perennialist' school of thought has variously been called the *philosophia perennis* (perennial philosophy), *sophia perennis* (perennial wisdom), or *religio perennis* (perennial religion). [...] What then is the perennial philosophy? It is both absolute Truth and infinite Presence. As absolute Truth it is the perennial wisdom (*sophia perennis*) that stands as the transcendent source of all the intrinsically orthodox religions of mankind" (Martin Lings, Clinton Minnaar (ed.). *The Underlying Religion*, Bloomington 2007, pp. xi-xii).
- (3) Alain Daniélou, *The Way to the Labyrinth: Memories of East and West*, New York 1987, p. 145.
- (4) For example, when Daniélou writes: "Tradition, even when it is entirely esoteric and hidden, remains indestructible and operational. Invisible initiates from far off inspire the forms of knowledge" (*Shiva and the Primordial Tradition*, Rochester: Vermont, 2007, p. 106, translation slightly modified to accord with the French original), or when he identifies sanātana dharma with an impersonal source of light (cf. Swami Karpātri, Alain Daniélou. *Le mystère du culte du linga*, Robion 1993, p. 18). In the words of John Savos, the expression sanātana dharma can be said to be a "signifier of amorphous homogeneity" (John Zavos. "Defending Hindu Tradition: sanatana dharma as a Symbol of Orthodoxy in Colonial India", in: *Religion* (2001), 31, pp. 109-123, here p. 109) inasmuch as it refers above all to a self-representation of Hinduism growing out of the encounter and (colonial) conflict with the West (cf. Wilhelm Halbfass. *India and Europe: An Essay in Philosophical Understanding*, Delhi 1990, p. 344). Daniélou's view of Tradition appears quite clearly in the following passage: "[...] in human society, in parallel with genetic transmission that perfects the physical body, the habitat of knowledge, a further, initiatic transmission takes place, thanks to which the visions of the seers of those early ages have been perpetuated through the generations. This transmission constitutes what is termed Tradition (*paramparā*)" (*Shiva and the Primordial Tradition*, p. 100).
- (5) Cf. Alain Daniélou. *The Way to the Labyrinth*, Chapter 19: A Hindu's View of the Western World, pp. 307-329.
- (6) Jacques Lacan. Joyce le symptôme. Conférence donnée à la Sorbonne au 16 juin 1975, in: *L'âne* 1982, N° 6.
- (7) According to Guénon, the incoherence lies in the absence of guiding principles, the highest of which is of a metaphysical nature and prevents empirical confusion not only of particular sciences but also of social organization: "Having suppressed pure intellectuality, each special (and contingent) domain is regarded as independent [...] everything is mixed up and confused in an inextricable chaos" (René Guénon, *Orient et Occident*, Paris 2006, p. 149).
- (8) With regard to Guénon's life-path, we have to point to the remarkably exhaustive, very well-documented and instructive reconstruction of his life and thought by David Bisson. *René Guénon: une politique de l'esprit*, Paris 2013.
- (9) Cf. René Guénon. *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, Paris 2009, p. 90.
- (10) René Guénon. *Le règne de la quantité et le signe des temps*, Paris 1972, p. 12.
- (11) The essential link between science and modern philosophy is expressed quite clearly by Guénon himself: "If we consider modern philosophy as a whole, we can say that, in general terms, its viewpoint does not prove to be essentially different from that of science" (René Guénon. *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, p. 124).
- (12) Cf. René Guénon. *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, pp. 95-96.
- (13) In this respect cf. Titus Burckhardt: "[...] ancient cosmogonies seem childish when one takes their symbolism literally – and this means not understanding them" (The Theory of Evolution, in: Martin Lings, Clinton Minnaar (ed.). *The Underlying Religion*, p. 55).
- (14) René Guénon. *Les états multiples de l'être*, Paris 2008, p. 9.

- (15) “Non-being is [...] more than being, or, in other terms, superior to being” (René Guénon. *Les états multiples de l'être*, p. 26).
- (16) Already at an early stage, in his article “Le Démiurge” (published by the review *Gnose* in 1909), Guénon writes quite clearly: “the non-manifest is superior to the manifest, of which it is the principle, since it potentially contains the whole of manifest being” (*La Gnose. Édition Intégrale 1909-1912*, Paris 2009, p. 9).
- (17) This is something Guénon himself was to criticize later on: “The problem with these so-called spiritualistic doctrines is that they are nothing other than materialism, only transposed onto another plane, since they want to apply to the domain of the spirit the methods employed by ordinary science to study the hylic world” (René Guénon, *Mélanges*, Paris 1990, p. 176).
- (18) Detailed information about this period can be found in David Bisson. René Guénon: *une politique de l'esprit*, especially pp. 30-31.
- (19) “Among the Greeks in particular, rites and symbols, which are the heritage of the most ancient and already forgotten traditions, lost their original meaning. The imagination of these eminently artistic people, whose expression followed the individual imagination of their poets, had veiled them almost out of recognition” (René Guénon. *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, p. 82).
- (20) Cf. René Guénon. *Orient et Occident*, chapitre II: la superstition de la science, pp. 41-73.
- (21) Julius Evola. *Il Cammino del Cinabro* (third revised and augmented edition). Roma 2014, pp. 330-331.
- (22) René Guénon. *Aperçus sur l'ésoterisme islamique et le Taoïsme*, Paris 1973, p. 14.
- (23) We refer to Sufism as a mystic dimension of Islam even if Guénon rejected the identification of Sufism with mysticism (Cf. *Aperçus sur l'ésoterisme islamique et le Taoïsme*, p. 24), and we do it for the following reason: Guénon's distinction is based on his wish to legitimate his transcendent metaphysics with the highest degree of knowledge, therefore any association with “irrationality” (like mystic experience) had to be eliminated. Apart from the fact that the etymological sense of the adjective “mystic” or the noun “mysticism” does not distinguish but rather homologates this word with the experience of initiation (since the Greek adjective *mystikós* is related to *mystés*: initiated), there are many examples of initiation within mystical doctrines. In India *trika* Shaivism and the *bhakti* philosophy of the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava tradition are two clear examples of this phenomenon.
- (24) René Guénon. *Aperçus sur l'ésoterisme islamique et le Taoïsme*, p. 38.
- (25) Cf. René Guénon. Le cinquième veda (originally published in *Études traditionnelles*, 1937), in: *Études sur l'hindouisme*, Paris 1989, pp. 87-94.
- (26) The reason is simple: “intellectual intuition” means direct access to the ultimate Truth, and that is something that Brahmanic orthodoxy cannot allow, since it would mean homologating the Brahmanic elite with any other group that might claim possession of a transcendent revelation. The problem with Guénon was that he tried to explain social and political reality out of metaphysical principles, and that is not possible if we consider reality as the complex (and contradictory) whole it is, in which the question of power unmasks the nature of metaphysical foundations.
- (27) David Bisson is quite right when he says that the initiatic sphere appears as the last pole of resistance against modernity (cf. David Bisson. *René Guénon: une politique de l'esprit*, p. 146).
- (28) “Guénon had a Hindu master (or perhaps more than one). It was impossible for us to get even the slightest precision on the identity of this person (or these persons). All we can say with certainty is that it was a representative of the school of Vedānta Adwaita” (Paul Chacornac. La vie simple de René Guénon, Paris 1958, p. 42).
- (29) Jean-Pierre Laurant. Tradition et Transmission. Guénon face à la critique historique, in: *Connaissance des Religions*, N° 69-70: *Vivre et transmettre la tradition*, Paris 2003, p. 159).
- (30) “Il est plus facile d'élever un temple que d'y faire descendre un objet de culte”. Samuel Beckett, *L'Innommable*.
- (31) Alain Daniélou. *The Myths and Gods of India*, Rochester: Vermont 1991, p. 5.
- (32) Alain Daniélou. *Shiva and the Primordial Tradition*, pp. 19-20.
- (33) René Guénon. *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, p. 261.
- (34) Cf. Swami Karpātri, Alain Daniélou. *Le mystère du culte du linga*, p. 31.
- (35) Alain Daniélou. *Shiva and the Primordial Tradition*, p. 100.
- (36) Alain Daniélou. *Shiva and the Primordial Tradition*, p. 101.
- (37) “Initiation is a way of integrating you into a system, that's all” (Swami Karpātri, Alain Daniélou. *Le mystère du culte du linga*, p. 25).
- (38) Hermann Diels, Walther Kranz (ed.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Berlin 1961, p. 162. Fragment 53.
- (39) That is, the period going from 3606 BCE to the present age and – following Puranic calculations – even further until 2442 CE. “The fourth age or ‘age of conflict’, Kali Yuga [...] lasts 5,046 years, and its dawn and twilight each lasts 504 years, totaling 6,048 years” (Alain Daniélou. *While the Gods Play*, Rochester: Vermont 1987, p. 198).
- (40) Alain Daniélou. *Shiva and the Primordial Tradition*, p. 105.
- (41) Cf. Alain Daniélou. *The Way to the Labyrinth*, p. 314.
- (42) Written in capitals to give it the sense of “creating matrix of the manifest world” (*prakṛti*).
- (43) Alain Daniélou. Letter to Michael Audy, December 7, 1977 (Daniélou Archive, Zagarolo). For a complete version of the letter with explanatory notes, see Adrián Navigante, Sarah Eichner. Alain Daniélou: Why I am Hindu, in: *Cahiers de la Fondation N° 7*, February/April 2015.
- (44) Cf. Alain de Benoist. *Comment peut-on être païen ?* Paris 1981, p. 46. Also very inspiring is the following comment (in the same book) on the indirectness of universal values in paganism as opposed to (Biblical) monotheism: “the thought of the Bible is totalising and all-subsuming. Going from the universal to the particular, it proceeds by deduction from a revealed absolute, instead of proceeding by induction from the lived experience. [...] [w]hereas the pagan discourse is a particularity that may achieve the universal through the particularity itself. [...] It is clear that, because of its very dynamics, the universalizing process of the Bible tends to reduce diversity, while the opposite process [of paganism] makes out of this diversity the basis of all kinds of knowledge” (*Ibidem*, p. 139)

## A Note on Desire and Immanence in Non-Dualistic Śaivism

Linda Valle: MA Religious Studies and FIND Grantee 2015

### Preliminary Remarks

In the tradition of non-dualistic Śaivism the all-encompassing and dynamic nature of absolute consciousness is strictly related to the power of will (*icchā*), as its inner driving force. But how does this consciousness move? How can this movement be analyzed? And furthermore, what can the Śaiva notion of will/desire teach us regarding our experience of the multiplicity of the world?

Starting from these preliminary questions, I will try to approach the concept of absolute consciousness in the Śaiva tradition, showing how desire is involved in the plane of immanence.

### The play of consciousness

Linga from Northern India. The red streaks may indicate separation from the unity, thus desire and diversity.

Source: Philip Rawson.

Tantra: Le cult indien de l'extase, Paris 1973.

The philosophical core of non-dualistic Śaivism is the Pratyabhijñā (recognition) system (1), characterized by the idea that reality is a single, all-encompassing consciousness consisting of a synthesis of *prakāśa* (light) and *vimarśa* (reflective awareness/thought). The latter aspect is the *śakti* (power) through which consciousness realizes itself in a free act of self-awareness: Consciousness has as its essential nature reflective awareness (*pratyavamarśa*); it is the supreme Word (*parāvāc*) that arises freely. It is freedom in the absolute sense, the sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) of the supreme Self" (2). Two features of the reflective and dynamic character of consciousness are relevant here: its inner freedom (*svātantrya*) and its assimilation to *parāvāc*, the "supreme Word", i.e. the highest level of linguistic reality.

The concept of freedom in non-dualistic Śaivism reveals the nature of consciousness as a non-stopping act of will (*icchā*), which leads to creation and self-expression as well as a playful, autonomous enjoyment. *Svātantrya* is conceived as the very source of manifestation and, in an act of self-concealment, it brings into being even the multiplicity of inert objects. As Isabelle Ratié points out, "[it] is ultimately a game in which consciousness acts as if it were split into a variety of objects and subjects, just as children, while playing, remain aware that they are not really what they pretend to be. [...] Śiva is the Actor embodying the universe while remaining himself—and he remains himself precisely because his very nature is the freedom to exuberantly manifest himself in infinitely variegated forms, and to play at hiding his own powerful and unitary nature from himself while remaining aware of it." (3)



Linga from Northern India.  
The red streaks may indicate separation from the unity, thus desire and diversity.

Source: Philip Rawson.  
Tantra: Le cult indien de l'extase, Paris 1973.

The way in which absolute consciousness freely expresses itself is, first of all, a linguistic unfolding. As mentioned above, the *śakti* (power) is identified with *parā vāc*, the "supreme Word", in which resides the condition of possibility of every linguist as well as the cognitive act – for non-dualists, thought and language are fully identified. By virtue of its freedom, consciousness realizes itself through the extroversion of *parā vāc* on a succession of levels: "the inner content [...] which

appears in the consciousness of the highest Lord in an undifferentiated way because of its being the highest truth, is thought of in the *paśyantī* (“visionary” speech) stage in an indeterminate form (the *nirvikalpa* aspect) with a desire to put it in apportionment of letter, word, and sentence; it is posited with a sense of separateness in the *madhyamā* (“intermediate” speech) stage in a determinate form (i.e. in *savikalpa* form); it is finally expressed [...] in the *vaikharī* (“corporeal” speech) stage i.e. gross speech consisting of *māyīya* letter, word and sentence” (4). Therefore, the doctrine of the four levels of the Word shows how consciousness asserts itself as an absolute ‘I’ where the categories of subjectivity and objectivity are transcended, as well as the distinction between the word and the denoted object in ordinary language. However, this unity is not conceived as totally opposed to the multiplicity of the phenomenal world, but rather as encompassing it (5)..

### ***The three grammatical persons***

Describing the process of self-manifestation of the consciousness in the long commentary on the *Parātrimśikā*, Abhinavagupta refers to the triadic paradigms of Trika, one of the major Śaiva schools. In particular, the triad of metaphysical categories Śiva, Śakti and *nara* (man) finds its correspondence in the three grammatical persons I, you and he/she/it. Following the metaphysical principle of the interconnectedness of all things (*sarvātmakatva*) – since everything has as its ultimate nature consciousness itself- Abhinavagupta shows “the fluidity of the usage of the pronouns, as they are interconnected and flow one into the other” (6). Therefore, the triads are not static schemes but reflect consciousness as circulating movement.

In the Śaiva perspective, *nara* is what is “confined in itself”, the insentient being, the thing objectified. Nevertheless, the condition of the limited self, which lies in the *nara* stage, takes part in the circular movement of consciousness among the three persons: “Everything is an epitome of all. According to this universal principle, even the insentient third persons shedding their insentience to [share in] the use of second and first person, for instance, in “listen, O mountains”, the third person has been treated as second person, in “of mountains, I am Meru” the third person has been treated as first person. [...] The first person characteristic of Śiva, shedding its aspect of first person which is cit, also betakes to the aspect of the third person [...] or second person. In the following expressions, “Who am I?” “this one am I” [...] etc. the uninterrupted autonomy of I is subdued, and it is chiefly the separate “this one” that becomes predominant” (7). In this passage, as Bettina Bäumer points out, the usage of language shows how “the three persons flow and get merged into one another. This implies personal relationships even with things – again a common psychological phenomenon – and it implies objectifying the subjective and subjectifying the objective experience.” (8).

### ***The cuirasses of the individual self***

In the exposition of the ontological principles (*tattva*-s) that, according to the Śaiva scripture, constitute the entire cosmic manifestation, the so-called *kañcukas* (cuirasses) have a special role in the empirical experience of the individual soul (*aṇu*). The *kañcukas* represent the very core of the individual self corresponding to the limited, contracted form of the powers of absolute consciousness: “the two principal meanings of *kañcukas*, ‘cuirass, armour’ and ‘a kind of dress, bodice’ both fit the main function of these principles which is that of ‘covering, sheltering’ the individual soul destitute of its full powers because of maculation [...]” (9). Among the *kañcukas*, *rāga* (passion, attachment) and *vidyā* (impure knowledge) are particularly significant in understanding the modalities through which the individual self encounters the world and re-enacts the movement of consciousness as absolute Self.

Experience of everyday life is always driven by the mutual interconnection of *vidyā* and *rāga*. *Vidyā*, knowledge, can be seen as the instrumental support leading the realization of action but every action is always moved by a form of intentionality, a desire of fulfilment. However, as Raffaele Torella points out, “*Rāga* is not the craving for objects but what lies behind it. [...] It is not pleasure which directly moves *rāga* [...] but it is *rāga* which creates pleasure with respect to the particular object it turns to” (10). *Vidyā* and *rāga* are essentially the contracted reflection of the power of consciousness *jñāna* (knowledge) and *icchā* (will) and, consequently, albeit in a limited way, they enable the human being to experience the movement of the absolute self.

**The experience of immanence**

The concepts of non-dualistic Śaivism here briefly described allow a preliminary consideration regarding the status of the individual self and its action in the world. In the realm of difference and multiplicity, the subject experiences its own limitation first of all in its encounter with the inert object. The dichotomy of subject and object leads to an experience of fragmentation in the perception of reality, where the object remains silent, a mute statue among the ruins of a forgotten unity.



*Cosmic egg, fertilized and divided in regions and streams of energy.*

*Source: Philip Rawson, ibidem.*

Nevertheless, the individual subject is always called to immerse itself in experience, to open its boundaries and, by virtue of its own desire (*rāga*), to make room for the other. This tension is always driven by the pervading movement of consciousness which cannot be fixed within the limits of a subject and an object of experience – as the doctrine of the three grammatical persons shows. The self-concealment of consciousness, a play that moves from a desiring force (*icchā*), always leaves its remains in the depths of the things it manifests: “Interiority, when taken as identity with consciousness, constitutes the background of all manifestation, including that of difference” (11)

Notes:

- (1) For an introduction to the Pratyabhijñā system and the non-dualistic Śaiva schools, see: Alexis Sanderson, Śaivism and the Tantric Tradition, in: Stewart R. Sutherland (ed.), *The World's Religions*, London 1988, pp. 660-704. See also Patricia Obermeier, Aesthetics in the Non-Dualistic Śaivism of Kaśmīr, in: *Cahiers de la Fondation: Indialogues*, 9, 2016, pp. 12-20.
- (2) Raffaele Torella (ed.) *The Īśvaraṇḍābhijñānārikā of Utpaladeva with the Author's Vṛtti. Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, Roma: Serie Orientale Roma, 71, IsMEO, 1991, p. 120.
- (3) Isabelle Ratié, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta on the Freedom of Consciousness, in: Jonardon Ganeri (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy*, Oxford 2016, p. 16.
- (4) Jaideva Singh (trans.) *Parātrīśikā-Vivaraṇa. The Secret of Tantric Mysticism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988, p.15.
- (5) On the four levels of the Word see also André Padoux, *Vāc, the Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, pp. 166-222.
- (6) Bettina Bäumer, *Abhinavagupta's Hermeneutics of the Absolute. Anuttaraprakriyā. An Interpretation of his Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa*, Delhi: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2011, p.102.
- (7) Jaideva Singh, op. cit., p.72.
- (8) Bettina Bäumer, op. cit., p.107.
- (9) Raffaele Torella, The «kañcukas» in the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Tantric Tradition: a few considerations between Theology and Grammar, in: Gerard Oberhammer (ed.), *Studies in Hinduism: Miscellanea to the Phenomenon of Tantras*, Wien 1998, p. 57.
- (10) Ib. pp. 64-65.
- (11) “L'intériorité, comprise comme l'identité avec la conscience, constitue le «fond» (bhitti) de toute manifestation – y compris celle de la différence”. Isabelle Ratié, *Le Soi et l'Autre. Identité, différence et altérité dans la philosophie de la Pratyabhijñā*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011, p. 659.

## The Self and the Earth: A Note on the Image of *Kun* and its Place in the *Book of Changes (Yijing)*

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This English text is a simplified version of the lecture given by Sarah Eichner in German at Zagarolo during the Seminar "Dimensions of the Self in East and West" (from 20 to 22 July 2016) within the framework of the joint-project between FIND and the C. G. Jung Institute "Carl Gustav Jung and the East".



Character for *Kun* (Earth).

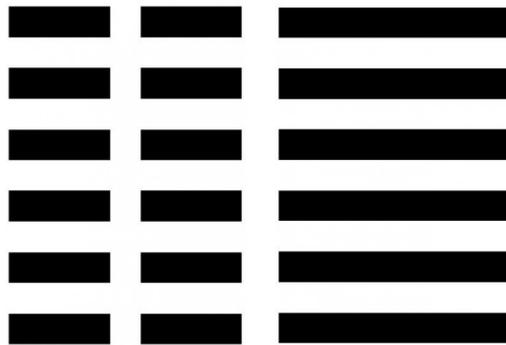
### 1. Introduction

In the most ancient work of the Chinese tradition, the *Book of Changes (Yijing)*, one sign deserves special attention: *Kun*, since it is a key-element that can reveal a hidden context (within and outside the work). According to Chinese tradition, *Kun* is the second sign of the *Yijing*, the first being *Qian* (translated as "heaven"). These signs are not only the first two numerical appearances in the book. In the traditional interpretation, the first two signs, with their own dynamics and their relation to each other, are considered the origin of the other 62 signs composing the *Yijing*.

Any understanding of *Kun* and its constitutive relationship with *Qian* requires a knowledge of the architecture of the *Yijing* and its different layers of meaning. To begin with, the *Yijing* should not be taken as a unit. One should rather distinguish a first layer consisting of figures or signs, which were originally related to the process of oracle consultation and oracle cult in the context of ancestor worship. This is followed by a second layer based on aphorisms, that is, an old form of orally transmitted poetry and various mythic tales, and by a third layer made of commentaries providing a rather metaphysical context. Generally speaking, our present understanding of the *Yijing* is influenced by the extensive commentary called *The Ten Wings*. Although the commentaries are meant to explain the first layers of the *Yijing*, there are unsurmountable differences between them, since they were established as part of the text at a later point in history than the core-text of the *Yijing*. The early layers preserved mythic motifs beside their sacrificial function, and the roots of these mythic elements can be traced back to even earlier periods with a different religious context. None of this is really taken into account in the commentaries and their own mode of interpretation, which rather refers to a stage of speculative thought, uses complex figures and presupposes them for a full understanding of the work. According to the most important commentary on the *Yijing*, the so-called *Great Commentary*, the *Book of Changes* mirrors the cosmos and its forces and principles. In this sense, the term *Yi* (change) refers not only to the changes of the line images, but also to the changes of heaven and earth (where "earth" is conceived as the whole of nature or cosmos).

Following this interpretation, we can say that in *Qian* and *Kun* the images of the highest and most comprehensive powers of the cosmos are concentrated. The *Great Commentary* identifies these powers with heaven and earth, and different types of god-images are associated with them. *Qian* and *Kun* reproduce proto-religious and mythic symbols

that were originally thought to be emblems of beings (gods, ancestors and even animals). The power of these beings was thought to express itself in the events taking place in the world. It is necessary to make this difference because *Qian* and *Kun* are ultimately not quite identical with heaven and earth.



*Pattern of Kun (Earth). Pattern of Qian (Heaven).*

## 2. *Qian* and *Kun* from the perspective of the Commentaries

In the texts of the early exegetic tradition, the potency of *Qian* is translated as “powerful”. The main connotations of the movement of heaven are strength, dominance and compelling force, so *Qian* is to be understood as “the reign of heaven”. For its part, *Kun* is characterized as fertile (literally “thick”) and also as expanding, receptive, and yielding (*shun*). In fact, the yielding quality or submissiveness appears as *Kun*’s main connotation, and which is why it is generally conceived as “the yielding/submissive earth”. The connection of the earth with the submissive and yielding is based on the interpretation of its sign as forces of nature and its position in the resulting process of (pro-)creation. *Qian* as the force of heaven, whose main quality is strong potency, is identified with the role of the father, whereas *Kun* as the force of the earth, whose main qualities are obedience and procreation, adopts the mother role. In the co-called *Judgements* (part of the canonical commentary of the *Yijing* as well as the earliest text of the *Ten Wings*), it says: “Great was the first-born of the stud (phallus), of which the ten thousand things avail themselves of for their begin. [...] The first-born of the kingdom of the earth (vulva) extends itself wide; the ten thousand things avail themselves of it for their birth. Thereupon the kingdom of the earth should be conceived by yielding to the will of heaven. The fertility of the earth carries all beings” (1).

According to this passage, the yielding character of the earth is related to its fertility. The earth receives the semen of heaven as its impulse and carries it to its maturity. This pattern can also be seen in the figures: *Kun*’s hexagram consists of six broken lines and symbolizes the vagina and its movement of opening and closing; whereas *Qian* (heaven), consists of six unbroken or hard lines and symbolizes the penis and its swelling and shrinking movement. The cosmologic representation of *Qian* and *Kun* as stud and groove (or in other passages as bolt and padlock) and its metaphoric structure of opening and closing, are undoubtedly taken from the movement of the sexual organs. The *Great Commentary* uses the image of the gate in order to express the function involved: “Aren’t *Qian* and *Kun* the gateway of changes?”. The idea behind it is that the multiplicity of things can be traced back to a cosmogonic sexual act of *Qian* and *Kun*.

Within this complementarity of heaven and earth there is a clear naturalized hierarchy leading to a submission of the earth under heaven to the benefit of cosmic generativity. The earth provides the fertile soil for the reproduction of the heavenly lineage, which guarantees the foundation and continuation of its powers. The earth is, as mother of all beings, a place of origin and of growth. The impregnation of earth by heaven is reflected in the image of the “quake”, that is, in the form of the

thunderbolt striking the soil. “the vibrating power of heaven is fertile for the earth, as such is the power of the sovereign for the regions”. In the *Wenyan commentary* an interpretation of this very sign can be read: “great and true is the stud! Having become stiff, he acts powerfully. When he hits the middle, he is straight, and semen can be drilled onwards”. The expression “hit the middle” means penetration of the vagina during the sexual act, but it is also related to the foundation of a reign (as the place of domination), during which the sovereign marks a point from which the land will be extended and territorially divided. The motif of extension of the land into the four cardinal points and the eight regions is to be found in the aphorisms on *Kun*, but they become further clarified when one considers the cosmologic view of the earth, according to which it is conceived as rectangular.

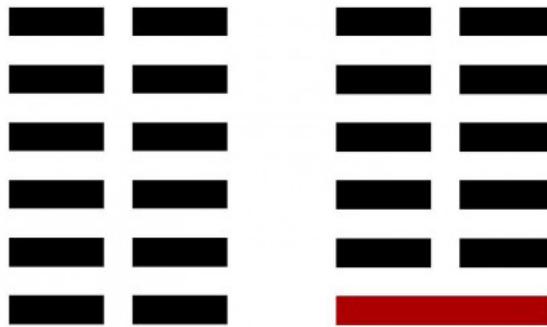
The domination of the earth by heaven corresponds to the foundation and domination of a reign by the sovereign. This appears quite clearly in the *Wenyan commentary* on *Kun*: “If the earth region becomes soft, it can be shaped. If the stiffness is quenched, the capability (or power of the earth region) expands. Afterward a sovereign is given to the earth, and this is in conformity with the law. The kingdom of the earth entails the ten thousand beings and lets their power shine. How obedient is the path of the earth! It receives heaven, so that the ten thousand things can realize themselves”. The way of the earth, its *Dao*, is therefore submission, and it limits itself to obeying and following. It opens itself to the power of heaven, that is, it accepts it as ruler. *Shun*, the quality of submission, is related to the notion of measure and adaptation. The earth gives birth to the ten thousand things and heaven rules over them. The earth follows heaven in the succession of the seasons and the fullness and beauty of the manifested world: “Even if the Yin principle contains the beautiful, the latter is only present in order to pay service to the king. Do not dare to realize this principle alone! The quality of a wife, submission, belongs to the earth’s *Dao*”. This *Dao* knows no realization in itself; just as earth as the yin force has to follow heaven as the yang force, so too must the wife submit to her husband and the subjects to the ruler.

This logic of subordination and the reduction of the earth to the submissive quality provide the basis for the establishment of a patriarchal system of domination, in which the feminine occupies a lower position. This pattern is already to be found in the early tradition of the *Yijing* and attains a systematic (and topographic) formulation in the *Great Commentary*: “Heaven is eminent, earth is humble. In this way heaven and earth are fixed. The low-lying and the high standing are spread out, high and low are positioned. The course of heaven brings the masculine to completion, the course of earth brings the feminine to completion”. At this point it is clear that the asymmetry between heaven and earth is built upon a spatial arrangement of territory that makes it easily translatable in social terms. There is no doubt that the judgement “heaven above, earth below” is not only descriptive, but rather a value-judgement. (“heaven is high, earth is low”). However, it appears as a mirror of the cosmos, whereas the value judgement establishes a social order. Between both moments there is perfect continuity. The eminent corresponds to heaven (*Yang*) and the humble to earth (*Yin*): all beings rise from the humble to the eminent; the order of the 64 hexagrams reflects this hierarchical structure.

The question arises as to what extent *Kun*, in the form of earth being subordinated heaven, does justice to the actual role and function of *Kun* in the *Yijing*. The natural image of the earth refers to the fertility of *Kun*, to its unlimited capacity to conceive. From a structural point of view the sign symbolizes its limitless openness, something that goes beyond every attempt at delimitation. This openness is radical, that is, it lies at the root of being, and *Kun* has therefore to be taken as beginning and end of each manifestation of form, not only in the sense of a previous place of origin, but rather in the sense of a permanent site of cosmic transformation. *Kun* appears as the gate to life and death.

The idea of submission is deduced from *Kun*’s capacity of conceiving without distinction, that is, from its being limitlessly open with regard to what takes form in its womb: the manifoldness of being. The cycle of life in its totality can be accomplished in this way. Only inasmuch as *Kun* remains devoid of delimitation and form can it offer emplacement for the plurality of living beings. *Kun* enables the event of being and provides the conditions for their emplacement. This function demands the essential emptiness of *Kun* and constitutes its ethical power and force.

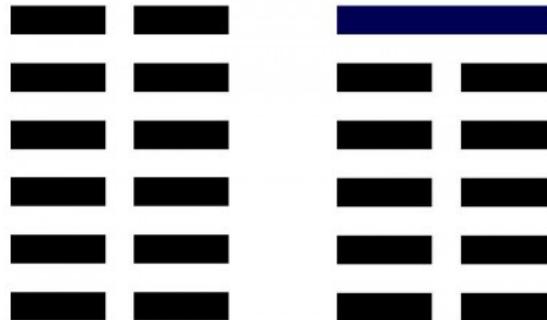
Through the empty openness of *Kun* the whole tissue of life and being take place and shape. *Kun* provides a place for the living and the dead and feeds them. That is why it is the empty middle of a permanent transformation process. The *Yijing* shows this very clearly in the combination of the sign of *Kun* with that of the Return (24 = *Fu*) and the Ending (23 = *Po*). The structure of the sign *Kun* shows pure permeability. This means that *Kun* isn't in itself visible, it does not have the solid consistency of being in time and space. *Kun* is a dynamic flow that provides the framework for the whole process of emergence and decay, rising and dissolution.



*Sign 2, Kun (Earth) and Sign 24, The Return.*

In the passage from *Kun*'s sign to the sign of the Return (*Fu*), a process can be seen from inconsistency and invisibility to consistency and solidity. A proto-form arises, which is *Kun*'s first level of change and relates to the light of heaven (unbroken line below), that is, forms becoming solid. The turning point is the return of the light, of the form within the process of permanent change, out of which beings will find their place in an ordered multiplicity. In this sense, *Qian* is located within *Kun*'s process of change and can be seen as the first result (or "son") of the original and all-encompassing process of change belonging to *Kun* (or mother). The heaven does not introduce any purpose in the process of change. It is rather part of a greater and broader dynamics that is carried and nurtured by *Kun*.

The last stage of change in *Kun* is symbolized in the figure of the Ending (*Po*), or death. But death is here conceived as the dissolution of appearing forms. Human beings (like any other being) need a certain degree of solidity in order to hang on to life. The whole process of identity formation is related to this basic fact, and within the context of the *Yijing* the main factor for this is *Qian* (heaven). Therefore the identification of human beings with the principle of heaven reveals itself in the first place as an attachment to the self-affirmation of appearing forms, and as an extension, the non-acceptance of the dynamics of *Kun*. Such a situation is expressed in *Kun*'s upper level of change, in which the return to the womb of the earth (symbolized in the dissolution of the last *yang* line, that is, the death of the individual being) meets resistance and struggle. However, if *Kun* is recognized as the main factor of changes, life and death appear only as modifications of the appearing forms and not of being itself. In other words: from the point of view of being, there is no death but only transformation: "The cosmic gate is now open, now closed. Beings flow out of it, beings flow back into it. This is called change". According to tradition and following the logic of complementarity, autumn and winter (within the cycle of each year) correspond to the earth, but that shows only one side of its spectrum: decay, dissolution, death. *Kun* does not only take life away, but also gives life: not only is the site of death, but also that of birth and change.



*Sign 2, Kun (Earth) and Sign 23, The Ending.*

### 3. Conclusion

Even if *Kun* cannot be exclusively identified with the earth, it is also true that it has a close relationship with the symbolism of the earth in myth and cult. If the earth needs to be detached from its subordinative association with heaven, it is because its spectre is originally much broader and entails a certain power and sovereignty of its own – something that is limited and hidden behind its inclusion in a polarity structure. But what does this word “originally” refer to? What can this originality be if one takes into account the relationship between the conception of the earth and the role of the feminine in human history? According to historian David Keightley, one should say that “from at least Late Neolithic until the Late Shang, the political and economic status of most women in China [...] was inferior to that of most men” (2). The role of earth (as submissive and yielding) in the exegetic tradition of the *Yijing* bears witness to the accuracy of this observation. In spite of the fact that mythic and ritualist elements referring to the status and function of the feminine point in opposite direction, they are on the other hand fragmentary, over-layered and distorted. Apart from this, their language is cryptic and must be deciphered, but there is no doubt that myths have a central role in the discovery of *another history*. In this other – forgotten or repressed – history, the feminine appears as relevant for a proper understanding not only of the origin of the world and human beings, but also of the origin of consciousness. The perspective of Analytical Psychology is in this sense very useful, especially the way Erich Neumann structurally describes the history of the human race from a matriarchal stage ruled by the archetype of the Great Mother to the constitution of a patriarchal order in which the forces of the origin are buried in the deepest layers of the unconscious. Even if a structural description may not coincide with the factual development of mankind in sociological or historical terms, it contributes to grasping the contradictory forces at work in the development of consciousness not only on the individual but also on the collective level. This psychological perspective turns out to be very plausible for the analysis of the figure and the symbolic aspect of *Kun* in the *Yijing*. Considering the primordial character of the psychological proto-situation, not only in the history of the individual psyche, but also in the development of consciousness on a collective level, one could say that *Qian* stems from *Kun*, because there is no such proto-situation in the differentiated stage of the (patriarchal) dominance of heaven over earth. The proto-situation introduces a turning point, a break with the historical temporality inasmuch as archetypal forces are at work that cannot be measured as entities in time and space and do not obey the rules organizing the world of the conscious ego. However, the proto-situation is still a situation, that is, an organized whole, but this organization does not result from the type of determination we are used to dealing with and cannot be located in the chronological order of the outside world. Within such order there is already a division of heaven and earth and an asymmetrical distribution of power and forces: heaven/masculinity/light vs. earth/femininity/darkness, that is, the rational, virtuous, orderly and superior vs. the irrational, vicious, chaotic and inferior. Such a structural schema explains the identification of the mother earth only with its negative aspect: the menacing collective power of the unconscious. Such determination is not a mirror of the real, but rather a

projection of the patriarchal consciousness at a stage of early development, the purpose of which is to affirm itself through its unilateral construction of the world. On this level there is no difference between East and West. The negative aspect of the earth also plays a key role in the way *Kun* was interpreted throughout the formation process of the canon of the *Yijing*. The reason for the unilateral view is the fear of a confrontation with the power and the dynamics of *Kun* – which ultimately coincide with the original experience of religion: religion as the binding and overwhelming force of nature experienced by individual beings, a numinous experience of origins. If human beings are capable of facing this challenge and letting themselves be carried by this immediate experience (instead of imposing dogmas and fixed codes of belief), the intuition of the earth may show them that the only “wholeness” to be experienced is that of the elementary situation of being bound to the immanence of the natural roots of the world. According to the polarity heaven-earth, there is a “beyond” (identified with heaven) which is valued over the elementary stage of life (identified with earth). From the archetypal point of view it is the earth that comes first as an ambivalent whole and opening, carrying everything (including heaven as “first son”) in its womb and turning that life-potential into manifestation. The challenge for today’s individual is not to leave what has been transmitted unquestioned, but to discover the real value of the immemorial in the midst of constructions, manipulations and distortions that characterize every human process, even when part of that process involves dealing with fields and forces outside the human range of experience (like those of the whole cosmos, permeating all beings and ruling over life and death). The new century brings the task for human beings to delve into the matriarchal mystery of life and experience the changes without any dual scheme aiming at transparency, elevation or purity (all symbolical forms of power), but only at a true reconciliation with nature after millennia of battling against it.

Notes:

(1) All quotations from the *Yijing* are the result of my comparison of different versions, the most important of which are the following: 1. Rainald Simon’s bilingual and annotated edition (Chinese-German) *Yijing: Buch der Wandlungen*, Stuttgart 2014, 2. Denis Schilling’s German translation with commentary: *Yijing, Das Buch der Wandlungen*, Frankfurt 2009, and 3. Richard John Lynn’s English version: *The Classic of Changes, A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi*, New York 1994.

(2) David Keightley. “At the Beginning: The Status of Women in Neolithic and Shang China”, in: *NAN NÜ*, Volume 1, Issue 1, 1999, pp. 1-63, quotation from p. 1.

## The Butterfly

Alain Daniélou

Translation from the French by Lewis Thompson

*This text, a longer version of which appeared for the first time in the volume *Les fous de Dieu: Contes gangétiques* (Buchet/Chastel, 1975) was written by Alain Daniélou during his stay in Benares in the 1940s. Lewis Thompson translated a shorter version of the tale, unpublished until the present issue of the Cahiers de la Fondation.*

*For more on relations between the poet Lewis Thompson and Alain Daniélou, see Adrián Navigante's article "Lewis Thompson and Alain Daniélou: Poetry, Music and Levels of Perception", in: *FIND Indialogues N°5 September/October 2014*.*

When his uncle had gone, Shyam began cautiously to examine the house where he would have to live – a little peasant house, poor and dirty, its sunny front covered with climbing plants. It hung upon the steep slope which lower down became a precipice. Far away, at the bottom, impossible to reach, you could make out a thin serpentine of shining water. The road to the village passed above the house, and higher still began the forest – mingled pines and sombre oak, with a sprinkling of bluish cedar trees. Under the thick jasmine that covered the southern front, three



*Boy with a Tray at Bull Temple.*

Shyam went up and crouched respectfully before the master from whom he was to learn. He was a crumpled, shrivelled up old man, shivering a little in the old cotton wrap he gathered about his shoulders. Shyam touched the floor with his hands, carrying to his forehead the dust of the master's feet. He gazed in silence at this stunted old man, in appearance and expression no different from the other village priests. And yet this humble and decrepit body harboured, people said, an invisible light, unfathomed knowledge. No one knew from what mysterious sages, in his far-off youth, he had managed to obtain and bring back from the plains the key of secret texts: his brilliant interpretation of them had made him famous.

Day after day Shyam gave himself to the strict life of a novice. He rose well before dawn, the ritual ablutions, study and serving the master gave him little respite. It was a hard life, mean and harsh after the comfort of his father's house.

For several hours, in the middle of the day, the master went up into the women's apartments to eat and rest. Shyam was not admitted there, so he was free to wander by himself in the still woods where only the crickets were strumming. At the top of the slope he found a grassy glade full of mossy hillocks. He thought they must cover the ruins of a legendary temple, the country's glory long ago. The master told him that centuries before its priests were famous for a wonderful knowledge which had now been lost. "The people here", he said, "will never go into this glade or even utter the name of the forest, for they believe it is haunted." Shyam asked no further questions for fear of being forbidden to go there.

From the first moment he had felt strangely at ease among the ruins and often returned there secretly. As soon as he sank down in the tall grass he was filled with a delightful calm, a sense of comfort and happiness like that he had felt as a child, resting his sleepy head upon his mother's knees.

In the quiet of the glade there came to him strange ideas, unexpected impulses, that led him to gestures whose meaning he did not know which yet he felt he had to make. In this way he got the habit of taking off his clothes, as if they were impure slough of an inferior world: wearing only the silver chain about his hips and a slender gold necklace, he would prostrate himself in the grass, stretched out, his forehead to the ground, as pilgrims do when they sight the sacred place that is the goal of all their journeying. Then he would sit, legs crossed, feet resting on his thighs, like the naked holy men

you see at festivals. Torso erect, he would listen, then, eyes closed, to the strange murmur of the leaves and the grass, the secret shrilling of insects.

It seemed that all the grasshoppers in the world assembled in that glade. There were big and small ones, green and grey, plain brown and streaked. It seemed to Shyam that in their monotonous rhythm they were repeating long poems in an unknown tongue. Perhaps they were the disciples of the ancient sages, changed into grasshoppers, vainly repeating the secrets they had learned. He did not really believe it, yet this idea turned in his head and he was always attentively polite towards the grasshoppers and careful not to hurt them.

One day he fell asleep in the grass and saw in a dream, near a great temple carved with stone images, a tall bearded old man who gazed at him with deep centre-less black eyes, so strangely soft. He seemed to speak, but no sound reached the ears of Shyam: in his effort to hear he woke. As he opened his eyes he saw on his left arm near his face a big butterfly marked with red, yellow, white. You might have said that with its long black probe it was busily writing. It seemed to Shyam that he could almost read what this great butterfly was writing on his arm. For a long time, astonished, he watched it work, at first on his arms, then on his knees, his chest, his brow. Suddenly an ant-bite made him start and the butterfly flew away

That night Shyam could not sleep: strange words were wandering in his head, a huge temple stood before him, an old man smiling, an immense butterfly; and innumerable grasshoppers were swarming in the shadow everywhere around. In the morning he felt feverish and it was trembling, with his head confused, that he came to the master for the day's lesson – feeling sure that he would not be able to remember anything and prepared to submit to tiresome reproaches, the humiliation of being punished.

Mechanically, his mind far away, he began to recite the beginning of the interminable sacred poem of which he had to learn the whole by heart. He knew from the start where he would begin to get confused. Fortunately the first difficult passage went off without a hitch, then the second, then – then it seemed that Shyam would never stop. The long stream of verses seemed to flow without effort from his lips, his articulation became precise and sonorous, his voice grew large and strong. Suddenly the meaning of the words lit up in him! Shyam was surprised and moved at the prodigious richness, the wonderful purity till now unknown to him.

The old master, a strange anxious expression on his wrinkled face, was listening with clasped hands. His eyes were closed, it seemed that tears were softly running down his cheek. Unmarked by both, long hours passed by in strange communion.

Then suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, Shyam broke off. "Devadeve Maheshana Pahi Mam Sharangatam ... agatam ... agatam ..." (O God of gods, Ruler Supreme, protect me, for I come to Thee for shelter). The charm was suddenly broken, snapped.

"But go on, then, go on": the old man's voice was shaken, full of anxiety. Shyam scarcely heard. His mind exhausted, reeling, he said without thinking, not knowing why: "And then ... the butterfly flew away."

There was a long silence, then the master said gently: "Shyam, you must never mention the secret of the wise man in the glade. You have nothing more to learn from me. Go down to the plains and look for him who waits for you. God keep you, child. Good bye." He got up older, leaner, more bent than ever. He gave Shyam his blessing and then, without looking at him, climbed stiffly to the upper rooms.

Shyam never saw him again. Next day he sent out alone, with no possessions, on the road into the plains, on a wonderful quest, sure to attain his goal..



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