



## 2. ESOTERISM AND EXOTERISM

In the article “Religion and *Dharma*” we have described the main points of difference between the two concepts. However there is another aspect that sharply divides the Western Religions and the *Hindū Dharma*.

In *Hindū Dharma* at every social and intellectual level it is well known what is *mokṣa*, the fourth and supreme aim (*puruṣārtha*) of human life. And no *Hindū* ignores that *mokṣa* means Liberation from *samsāra*.

Nevertheless, during the life, everyone is free to stay in a less advanced *puruṣārtha*, choosing among *kāma*, *artha* and *dharma*.

In this case *Hindūs* can spend a pleasant life on the earth and aspire to reach a *loka* after death enjoying the positive results of their good deeds (*pūnya*); and, at the end of this process, they can obtain a good rebirth. To get these aims, one has simply to follow the rituals of his family tradition.

If someone wants to act more effectively purifying his mind and his whole individuality, he will approach a *Guru* in order to obtain initiation (*dīkṣā*). From this moment the traditional family rituals acquire a greater effectiveness for him. Also the instruments of *sādhana* (*yantra*, *mantra*, *upāsana*) imparted by the *Guru* will act producing his inner progress. In this way his interior path can become a preparation for the search of *mokṣa*.

This broad view of Hinduism has never been valid in western traditions. Even the ancient pre-Christian Religions, namely the Greek and Roman, even if in many aspects so similar to the *Sanātana Dharma*, were differently structured.

Religion in Western Countries has always concerned only the familiar and social cult. Moreover the purpose of Religion is to give the ritual instruments to avoid hell and to reach the celestial abodes after death. Religion domain is limited to this.

If someone wished to obtain initiation (*dīkṣā*), he had to overcome Religion boundaries and to enter into a different domain. This was defined esoterism, from the ancient Greek word ἐσώτερος (read *esòteros*) whose meaning is “facing inward”. The field of initiation is esoterism, the field of Religion is exoterism, whose meaning is “facing outward”, ἐξώτερος (read *exòteros*).

Actually, in ancient Greece and Rome, there were famous sanctuaries (like *maṭhas* and *āśramas* in India) dedicated to the initiations called *Mysteria*, where it was possible to approach a *guru* (*mystagòs*). The entrance in those sanctuaries was forbidden to any profane i.e. exoterist. From this atmosphere of secrecy and discretion derives the modern meaning of “mystery”<sup>1</sup>. Rituals, *mantras* and symbols of the ancient *Mysteria* were hidden, and nowadays we have rare literary information only through some initiate who had violated the secret. In our next articles we will better explain the *Mysteria*.

When Christianity supplanted ancient Greek-Roman Olympian Religion, the esoteric transmission (*paramparā*) continued under a new Christian religious form<sup>2</sup>. As we will see later, Christianity has been divided in Greek Orthodox Church and Latin Catholic Church. The first one maintained an

<sup>1</sup> In India it is possible to find some similar conduct only in certain tantric circles of the left hand (*vāmācāra mārga*).

<sup>2</sup> Obviously, in this formal adaptation also other initiatory streams of esoteric domain continued: among them the most important has been the Jewish Essene Qabbalistic initiation, transmitted by Jesus Christ himself. But Christianized Roman Empire also preserved some *paramparās* proceeding from other traditions flourishing in the Imperial domains: as Hermetism, an initiatory path of Egyptian origin, and more intellectual initiations of Celtic origin. We will return to the subject in next articles.





attitude of respect and devotion towards esoterism. And till now Ortodox monasteries have preserved a *sādhana* whose name is Hesychasm, ἡσυχασμός (read hesychasmòs), “interior peace”.

On the contrary, Catholic Church, after having respected the esoteric domain<sup>3</sup> for many centuries, has changed her behavior. She forgot that the spiritual field of initiation is different, and begun to consider the esoterism as a rival sect. This lack of understanding of Catholic Church compelled the various initiatory organizations (*sampradāya*) to more secrecy in order to defend themselves from the suspicion of heresy<sup>4</sup>. In the late Middle Ages the Church began a real persecution against the initiates, considered as heretics, anti-Christians and even servants of devil. In 1313 A. D. the King of France, with the consent of the Pope, Head of the Catholic Church, gave the order to arrest and burn alive the Templar Knights, the warrior caste defenders of Western *sampradāyas*. In a few decades almost all Western initiations disappeared. Since that period Roman Church remained only as an exoteric religious structure, like a fruit without seed, like a mask without face. This absence of *dīkṣā* and of its concept is an anomaly that *Hindū* authorities have to know in order to understand the reasons of Western Christian deviation.

On this subject and its consequences we will return several times.

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<sup>3</sup> If Catholicism inherited the ancient Greek terms exoterism and esoterism, the other two Western Religions employ their own words: in Judaism *datt* is exoterism and *qabbalah*, esoterism; in Islam *shari'a* is exoterism and Sufism (*tasawwuf*), esoterism.

<sup>4</sup> Similarly in modern Islam, the unstoppable fundamentalism spread is provoking hard persecution of Sufism.

