

William Cenkner

A Tradition of Teachers: Sankara and the Jagadgurus Today.

Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983. pp. xiv + 210, Price: Rs. 100/-

This is a well-written book on a very important aspect of Hindu tradition of teaching and spiritual realization. The author, Dr Cenkner who has done a good deal of research in India, had earlier authored another important work: *The Hindu Personality in Education: Tagore, Gandhi, Aurobindo*. In the present volume Cenkner with his thorough knowledge of the literary sources, and a good personal acquaintance of the five Sankaracarya *maths* and a number of eminent living Sankaracaryas and gurus (see the list on p. xi f.), makes a serious attempt to understand the uniqueness of the Indian guru and the guru-*siṣya* relationship, as it is found in one—perhaps the most representative and normative—of the classical traditions of Hindu life: the Sankara *sampradāya*.

In Hinduism, more than in most religious teaching traditions, the guru has been “esteemed as a catalyst of experience and expression of religious life.” The Hindu figure of sanctity is fundamentally a teacher. The guru-*siṣya* relationship in Hinduism is the didactic locale, where not only guidance is given for study and knowledge imparted, but where through guidance and imparting of knowledge, spiritual transformation is initiated and consummated; where *jnana* leads the disciple to *atma sakshatkara* (self-realization) and *Brahma-sakshatkara* (God-realization).

In part one, after an introductory chapter on Vedic and Upanishadic roots of the teacher tradition in India, Sankaracarya’s (Adi Sankara’s) reconceptualization of the guru tradition, and the teaching heritage he bequeathed to his successors, are analysed. With Sankaracarya and his heirs the teacher tradition became institutionalized and gave rise to four or five seats of learning (*Vidyapithas/Maths*) in different parts of the country. These seats are headed by the successors of Adi Sankara and are recognized as ‘Sankaracaryas’. The high esteem in which these *acaryas* or Jagadgurus are held by all sections of the Hindu faithful, and the contribution they have made to classical education and the preservation of the Sankara heritage, are examined in the second part. A select bibliography, an excellent glossary and an index, enhance the quality and usefulness of the book.