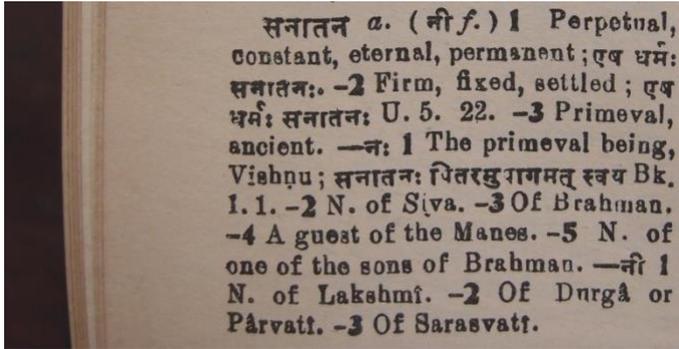


an itinerant exploration of perennial wisdom
artistic research plan and field notes 2006 - 2015

Sanātana Mood

a series of double journeys through South Asia: a contemplative walk through consciousness, imagination and memory - the 'inside world', and a participative exploration of everyday life on the road, in trains, at cultural events, in homes and schools, revisiting social and religious rituals - the 'outside world'. The 'border' between the inside and the outside journeys, its form, thickness and substance, its constituent layers, emerged as secondary areas of exploration. Field notes and reflections upon specific aspects of existence, in the world inside and around us, addressing direct and indirect allusions to *sanaatana* in it.



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walking as a praxis of slow sensing
watching as contemplation
writing as thinking

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The scope at the heart of this artistic research is to understand various contextual world visions contained in what is known as *sanaanata dharmā* in Vedic and Buddhist paradigms, and its relevance for today's East-West dialogue. I keep walking on multiple paths, switching among them, taking pictures and writing field notes. Translations of sections containing the notion *sanaatana* in ancient Vedic and Buddhist philosophical and religious texts (such as *Rigveda*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gīta* and *Dhammapada*) as well as Indian literature, dance, music and other oral traditions are used as input. The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* and other adjacent texts are indirectly informing the study. I keep seeking and seeing parallels to Western philosophical thought that address topics related to universal wisdom, such as by Henri Bergson, Aristotle and Socrates.



Varanasi, listening to darkness, 2015

At the beginning it was photography, then poetry, then the setting up of a center for artists in residence in Transylvania, then dance, performance, artistic research, dissemination as artistic practice. Over the years, I have produced more images and writings than I had the means to professionally process and disseminate. Drawing from archives - interviews, journals and images - I keep walking back and forth between my travels to India and my life in Europe, a double walk through encounters, field notes, images *and* on the road.



Varanasi, Burning Ghat, watching death, 2015

Does the outside carry the inside or does the inside create the outside?

Sanaatana as a central focus point has become the trigger and the vehicle of my work. The approach consists of a double journey: a contemplative walk through consciousness, imagination and memory - the '*inside world*', and a participative exploration through life on the road, in trains, at cultural events, in homes and schools, revisiting social and religious rituals - the '*outside world*'.



The Ganges and the Ghats in Varanasi, 2015

The 'border' between the inside and the outside journeys, its form, thickness and substance, its constituent layers, emerged as a secondary area of exploration. The intention is to reflect upon specific aspects of existence, in the world inside and around us, addressing direct and indirect allusions to *sanaatana* in it.



Himalaya, Helambu 2014

The process is a combination of explicit, structured procedures that can take place in formal, institutional settings and of intuitive, informal and implicit strategies, a rather personal exploration. Visual and audio recordings and research notes will be collected, analysed, deconstructed and re-composed, used as input for artistic creation and dissemination. It is an (ongoing) meditative, slow endeavour that alternates and mingles study with travel, research and artistic practice. Dissemination on the road is an integral part of the process and aims at generating new discussions within the contemporary East - West dialogue on consciousness.

Field notes, research notes (2006 – 2015)

Sanaatana is a Sanskrit word that denotes that which does not cease to be, that which is eternal, perpetual, permanent, everlasting and primeval. It is a rich notion that manifests in different realms of Indian heritage and can be tracked back to the *Bhavad Gita*. Throughout the course of history, religious, ethnic and political groups, aiming to be convincing and appealing for their followers, included such ancient notions in the name or description of their missions and dogmas. It is interesting to understand how such manoeuvres influenced the meaning associated today in religion, philosophy, politics and common language with the word *sanaatana*, in comparison with the meaning it initially had in the Vedic literature, and what was that precisely.

The Monier-Williams dictionary has:

Sanaatana: mf. n. eternal, perpetual, permanent, everlasting, primeval, ancient; m. N. of Brahma L.; a guest of deceased ancestors, one who must always be fed whenever he attends iraddhas L.; N. of a U...i (in MBh. and later 'a mind-born son of Brahma') TS.; of a king Buddh.; (with << Barman >> and << gosvamin >>) of two authors Cat.; pl. N. of partic. worlds Hariv.; f. N. of Durga Cat. [1141,2]; of Lakshmi or Sarasvati L."

This perennial wisdom is "the eternal religion behind all religions, this *Sanaatana Dharma*, the timeless tradition, wisdom uncreate, the same now that it ever was, and the same to be forevermore" (80), according to S. Radhakrishnan (*Fragments of a Confession*) as quoted by P. A. Schilpp (1952) in his book *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*.

"Whether the Supreme is regarded as undetermined or determined, this Siva should be known as eternal (*Sanaatanah*); undetermined He is, when viewed as different from the creation, and determined when he is everything", according to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's translation and comments on The Bhagavad Gita (24).

According to most Indologists, *Sanaatana Dharma* is the name that has represented Indic thought for thousands of years. It stands for the belief that certain rules are eternally true, beyond man-made constructs and convey a pure science of consciousness; a consciousness that is not merely that of the body or of the intellect, but of a supra-mental soul-state that exists within and beyond our existence. All existence, from vegetation and beasts to mankind, are subjects and objects of the eternal *Dharma*. This faith is also known as *Arya / Noble Dharma*, *Veda / Knowledge Dharma*, *Yoga / Union Dharma* or, simply, the *Dharma*. (*source*)

Similar notions of a cosmic order and universal wisdom exist in other religions and philosophical systems. The echo of *Dharma* in Buddhism is the *Dhamma*, in the Islamic / Persian Indo-Persian context may be the *Sufi* way. In Taoism the *Tao (Dao)* is a reference to the natural order of existence, often referred to as the 'eternally nameless'.

Sanaatana in the Bhagavad Gita

In the *Bhagavad Gita* with the commentary of Adi Shankaracarya, translated by Swami Gambhirananda (2000), several verses contain the word *sanataana*:

1.40 With the destruction of a family, its age-old (*sanaatanah*) traditions disappear. When family traditions are destroyed, vice takes hold of the family.

This verse refers to ancient, traditional family rites and duties as maintainers of the social order. The disappearing of these 'rites and duties' has corruption and ruining of the social structures as consequences.

2.24 It (the Self) cannot be cut, cannot be burned, cannot be moistened, and cannot be dried. It is eternal, omnipresent, constant, unmoving and everlasting (*sanaatana*).

For the understanding of this verse, we must have a look at the preceding ones, which describes the same (self) as eternal, using Sanskrit synonyms of *sanaatana*. For example:

2.20 The Soul is never born and never does it die. (...) It is unborn, eternal, constant, ancient. It is not killed (*na hanyate*) when the body is killed.

A next occurrence of *sanaatana* is found in chapter 4:

4.31 Those who eat the sacred food remaining after the sacrifice attain the eternal (*sanataam*) *Brahman*. This world ceases to exist for one who does not perform sacrifices.

The sacrifices mentioned in the preceding verses are: action performed without selfishness but as duty, having the food regulated, living in austerity, practicing yoga, acquiring knowledge and so on. Later on, knowledge itself is seen as a (greater) sacrifice, that brings a higher understanding.

7.10 O Partha, know Me as the eternal (*sanaatanam*) seed of all beings. I am the intellect of the intelligent; I am the courage of the courageous.

The word *buddhi* is used for intellect, intelligence, the power of discrimination of the mind. Furthermore:

8.20 But beyond this Unmanifested is yet another eternal (*sanaatana*) unmanifest existence that does not perish when all beings are destroyed.

11.18 You are the Imperishable, the Supreme Being to be known. You are the most perfect repository of this Universe. You are the Protector of the *Dharma*. You are the eternal (*sanaatana*) Person. This is my belief.

15.7 It is verily a part of Mine, which, becoming an eternal (*sanaatanah*) individual soul in the region of living beings, draws to itself the five senses and the mind (the sixth), abiding in Nature.

Sanaatana in the Vedas

In an article *Rta, Yajna and Dhamma*¹, Ravi Ravindra (2004) tells the story of a *rishi* called *Dirghatamas* and his alleged statements in *Rigveda* about the relationship between the I (*aham*) and the cosmos (*idam*): "I know not clearly whether I am the same as this cosmos: a mystery I am, yet, conceived in mind I wonder". One verse later *Dirghatamas* says "When the first-born principle of *rta* entered in me, then of this *vak* I obtained a portion". *Rta* is translated here as water, sacrifice, truth, cosmic law, governing the universe. *Vak* stands for the first born of *rta*. *Satya* stands for truth. *Satya* and *rta* are born from *tapas* and they are twins, coeternal.

Discussing absolute knowledge, Ravindra points at the highest sacrifice according to Veda, namely the "... sacrifice of the mind (*citta*) for the sake of *purusa*, the only true seer. This *purusa* is not your or mine, is the pure power of seeing". The seer, the seen and the seeing are all one: *purusa*. This state is called *kaivalya* = of aloneness, not in the sense of separation, but simply because there is no other (*purusa* is only).

Another chapter of the same book states that *rta* "is like a wave pattern and *satya* like a particle pattern. Together they are one reality: *rta* is the flow of time and *satya* the expansion of space; they are mutually transformable and mutually dependent. Together they ensure a proper balance between change and continuity, going for eternity in a dynamic way. Even a small imbalance leads to chaos (disorder) and disaster".

Dhamma in Buddhist traditions

In the *Dhammapada: The Path of Perfection* (1973), there seems to be one single occurrence of the word *sanantano*, which is the Pali equivalent of *sanaatana*, in verse 5:

"*Na hi verena verani sammantidha kudacanam averena ca sammanti. Esa dhammo sanantano*".

This translates roughly as "Hatred never ceases through hatreds in this world; through kindness only it ceases. This is an eternal law". Other translations and interpretations of the Pali word *averena* (translated here as kindness) make the scope for further investigation.

The Pali-English dictionary has:

Sanantana: for *sanaatana*, old: (cp *paratana*) lat: *seneo*, *sennex*, (senile), *senatus*. Primeval, of old, forever, eternal.

In the book *Concepts of Buddhism* (1937), dr. Bimala Churn Law dedicates chapter ten to *dhamma*, comparing its Buddhist and Vedic connotations. Law recalls the work of Rhys Davis, who claims that the word *dhamma* has undergone much more elaboration in Buddhist compared to Brahmanic thought; an important note is made here (60): the word *dharma* 'occurs only ten times in the three Vedas'. These ten occurrences will be investigated in detail later on in this study. According to Law, the word *dhamma* has been used in Pali language with four meanings: (1) *guna* i.e. quality, property, characteristic, (2) *densanaa* i.e. discourse, instruction, (3) *pariyatti* or scriptures and (4) *nissata-nijjivaa-dhamma* or mental states or phenomena without

¹ Article published in the volume *Rta: The Cosmic Order*, edited by M. Khanna, IGNC, 2004.

involving the notion of ego or entity. Law recalls the code of Manu according to which *dharma* is that 'which is cultivated by the learned ... who are always free from hatred and passion, and which is (at the same time) readily respondent to by the heart' (62). As regard to man's inner world, he considers 'conscience' and 'duty' to be closer equivalents of *dhamma*. It is 'the urge of this sense that makes a man truly moral', he claims, in a manner similar to Bergson naming good sense 'a sense in itself', the root of an inner "*passion profonde pour la justice*". In the realm of contemporary materialist-rationalism philosophic thought and cognitive science, David Chalmers² makes a revolutionary proposition by positing consciousness as 'one of the fundamentals' of existence, next to time, space and matter.

Examining the occurrence of *dhamma* in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Law proposes that *satya*, *rta* and *dhamma* are all in conformity with each other, *dhamma* being used for practice, duty or conduct, whereas *rta* refers to cosmic order and *satya* stands for truth. He later addresses the two vectors of 'principle of righteousness': one is imposed from outside, and one is an inner urge that 'flows spontaneously from within'. This brings us back to the *Dirghatamas* of *Rigveda* who said, "When the first born principle of *rta* entered in me, then of this *vak* I obtained a portion". In this context, *rta*, *satya* and *dhamma* stand for truth, order and eternal principle. We recall one of the meanings of *sanaatana* (as attribute of the *dharma*) to be 'mind-born son of Brahma'. Considering the fourth sense of *dhamma* (mental state) mentioned by Law, we can hear in the words of *Dirghatamas* a statement that strongly resembles the proposition recently made by David Chalmers, namely to postulate 'consciousness' as a fundamental constituent of existence. The Vedic sage intuitively affirmed that if human life is an instance of cosmic existence, in the largest sense of the word, it perhaps naturally inherits its fundamental, intrinsic properties, such as *rta*, *satya* and *dharma*.

Henri Bergson on good sense and right action

In his speech *Good Sense and Classical Studies*³, translated by Melisa McMahon (2002) in *Mélanges*, Bergson explores the nature and the role of good sense in its relation to society through education. As Worms (2008) notes in his critical introduction of the French text, the questions evoked by Bergson in his early speeches are the key issues at the core of his entire work, and will be fully answered only in his last book.

Bergson suggests that good sense is a combination of an active disposition of the intellect - wakefulness - and a certain disposition of the soul - the faculty to be profoundly moved for the good - which he calls moral force. Through his exposition, he firstly enumerates the bodily senses and their role in guiding us in the *material milieu*, according to our own conveniences and needs. From this perspective, the senses are pragmatic and 'turned towards life'. Secondly, he posits good sense as a 'sense in its own way', its role being to help us foresee (*prévoir*) and empower the will for taking the right action in a given set of conditions and options, enabling us to navigate the *social milieu*. Similarly, according to *Katha Upanishad* and *Bhagavat Gita*, mind (*mana*) is considered the "sixth sense", the agent responsible for discrimination (*viveka*). For Bergson, the right action is that which leads to the 'greatest amount of attainable good', fostering social progress. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Krishna* speaks of *karma yoga*, the path of action, as a superior path; he describes right action as being guided by a higher principle of justice, and void of any desire for personal rewards.

Bergson considers good sense to be a natural disposition 'embodied in the just man'. In relation to education, he advocates wisdom to be of a higher significance compared to an encyclopaedic repository of acquired information, and the result we should aim at, as the fruit of education. Knowledge that we 'store as ready-made ideas', is nothing but the 'inert residue of intellectual work', and the greatest danger to a state of constant wakefulness and continuous adaptation to changing situations - the attributes of a 'free mind' and of 'a soul master of itself', he claims, insisting on the need to 'sacrifice the opinions we had made for

² *How do you explain Consciousness*, TED Talk, July 2014.

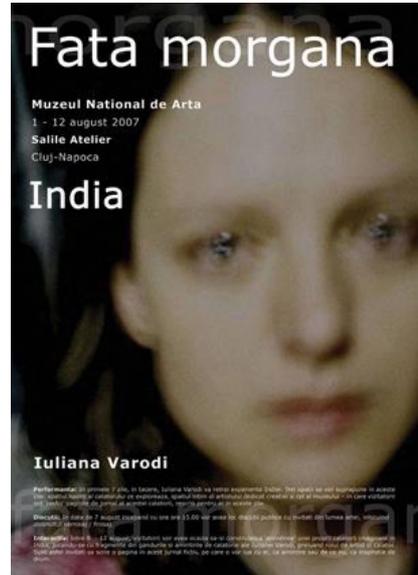
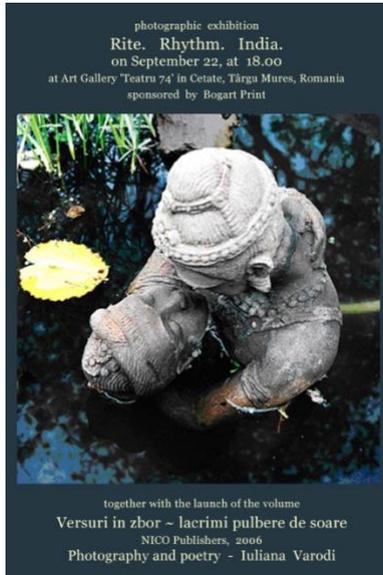
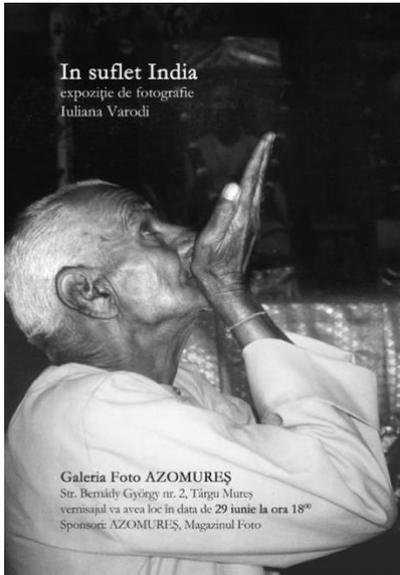
³ *Le Bon sens et les études classiques* was a speech given in French by Henri Bergson at Sorbonne in 1895.

ourselves' in order to 'take each problem as new and do it for the honour of new effort'. As Ravindra (2004) concludes, according to Rigveda, the highest form of sacrifice is the 'sacrifice of the mind (*citta*) for the sake of the pure power of seeing (*purusa*)'. A similar statement is made in the *Bhagavad Gita* by Krishna, when in his teachings to Arjuna he posits sacrifice of knowledge at a higher level of significance than sacrifice of material goods.

Art Projects

Exhibitions and art projects triggered by insights produced during the first phase of the project:

- 2010 *Reality and The I, post-master artistic research* hosted by apass.be, Antwerp, Belgium
- 2008 *Not Here Not There*, art residency (dance) at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Paris
- 2007 morisena, a centre for artists in residency was inspired by love for traveling and encounters
Hitchhiking to Transylvania (video, international collaboration) and
TransyMusic (music and collaborative performance) were produced in this context.
- 2007 *Fata Morgana India* – performance, National Art Museum of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
- 2006 *Rite. Rhythm. India.* – exhibition of photography, Teatru74, Tirgu-Mures, Romania
- 2006 *Versuri in zbor, lacrimi pulbere de soare* - poetry, Ed NICO, Tirgu-Mures, Romania
- 2004 *Whitin Soul India* – exhibition of photography, Galeria Azomures, Tirgu-Mures, Romania.



<http://iulianavarodi.com/sanatan.htm>

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Note: This text is a draft; citations and sources may lack in precision, accurate references and correct translation.