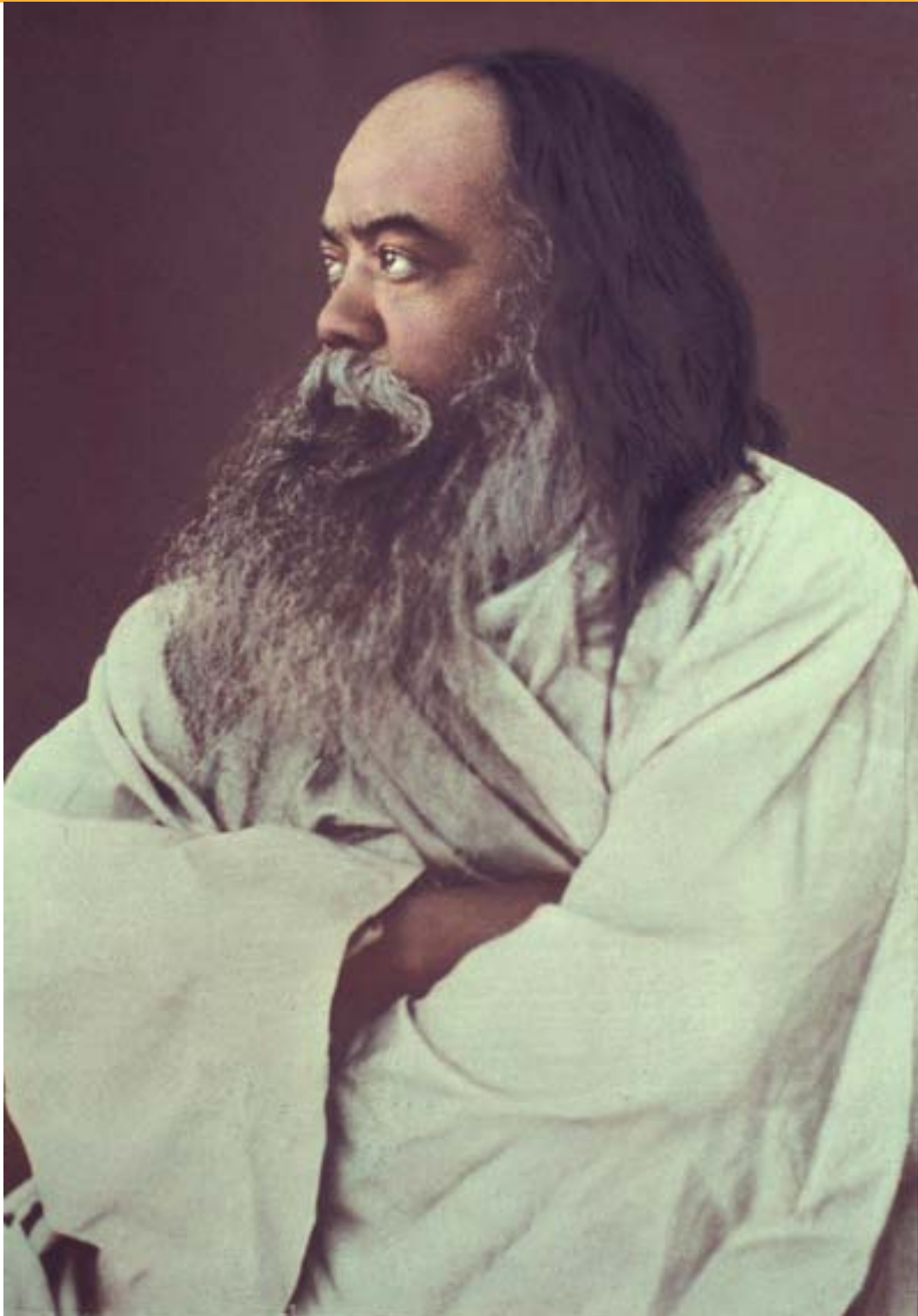




The Mt. Tron Mail

SPECIAL EDITION Debate

November 2025 * Mt. Tron University of Peace Foundation



Swami Sri Ananda Acharya (1881-1945) has been the subject of a public debate this autumn.

INTRODUCTION

This autumn the internet page **Religioner.no** and its **DirekteDebatt** has been the arena for a debate between Professor **Knut A. Jacobsen** and **Bjørn Pettersen** regarding **Swami Sri Ananda Acharya's** life and work.

Professor Knut A. Jacobsen published a new book this summer: *Hinduism in the World. Migrations and Global Presence*, in which a whole chapter is devoted to Swami Sri Ananda Acharya, presented as «... the First Indian Hindu Guru to Settle in Europe».

Jacobsen tries to give a broad presentation of Anandacharya in his diaspora-situation, with comparisons of life and teaching with his guru Sivanarayan and two of his known guru-brothers, based, apparently, on a reading of all the existing literature of, and about, Anandacharya, to which he frequently refers to throughout the chapter.

However, a closer look at all these quotations and the corresponding references, reveals serious errors of methodology, which, unfortunately, do not appear to be random.

That is because it is more than striking how one-sided and negative Anandacharya is presented, and how many curious presumptions and other weakly founded opinions form the basis of Jacobsen's conclusions.

As we have disclosed obvious errors in what is presented as serious research directed towards Anandacharya, and we therefore experience this as yet another injustice towards Anandacharya from the intellectuals of Norway, Bjørn has contributed a written counter-argument in the form of 35 concrete and numbered comments to various quotes from Jacobsen's book.

These have been published at **Religioner.no** in the form of a blog with attached, short debate contribution at **DirekteDebatt** at the same web page. This short contribution was very soon removed by the editors, but Jacobsen managed to give his reply before it completely disappeared.

Jacobsen just brushed aside Bjørn's criticism by claiming that Bjørn represents an “inside-perspective”, contrary to his own “outside-perspective”, so that Bjørn therefore, in his opinion, is religious with complexes of sanctity in regard to Anandacharya. But Jacobsen does not reply to a single one of Bjørn's 35 comments.

As Jacobsen still has not answered any of Bjørn's comments, nor replied at all to Bjørn's debate contribution in response to Jacobsen's arrogant dismissal, and especially since the editors of Religioner.no have edited his latest debate contribution beyond recognition, so much so as to make it incoherent, Bjørn has chosen to publish everything in this special edition of The Mt.Tron Mail. Bjørn's original, unedited, contribution is therefore published here.

At first Bjørn's 35 numbered comments appear in an article entitled “When science is not science”. Then comes a resume (to avoid any possible conflict of quotation and copyright) of Jacobsen's total dismissal of that article, and finally Bjørn's reply to this dismissal, which Jacobsen has chosen not to respond to. Everything from Religioner.no.

When science is not science

Comments in response to the chapter about Ananda Acharya in Knut A. Jacobsen's latest book Hinduism in the World

By Bjørn Pettersen

Knut A. Jacobsen, Professor, Study of Religion in the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion, University of Bergen, Norway, has recently published a book with the ambitious title «Hinduism in the World. Migrations and Global Presence». Chapter 2, «Spiritual Migration and the First Indian Hindu Guru to Settle in Europe», from page 29 to 70 – takes up altogether 41 pages of a 203 page book, so that quite a significant part has been dedicated to Anandacharya (1881-1945), the first Indian sannyasin to settle in Europe.

I have been concerned with Anandacharya for nearly 50 years, chair person in The Swami Sri Ananda Acharya Foundation for 40 years, and the author of the only coherent and complete biography of Anandacharya: Pettersen, Bjørn: Swami Sri Ananda Acharya. A forgotten Son of Mother India. His own story. A biography and anthology. Mt.Tron University of Peace 2019.

Judging from the numerous quotations and references he presents in his book, one might be forgiven for thinking that Jacobsen has read and consumed most of what has been written by and about Anandacharya. However, a closer look reveals many significant and serious errors and faults, quotations taken out of context, often a lack of references at all, as well as a great many misinterpretations and presumptions, presented in such negative contexts as sometimes to border on accusations.

Overall, one gets the impression that Jacobsen must have been pursuing a special agenda in writing this chapter about Anandacharya, or at least have been shaping it to satisfy his demands for fulfilling his hypothesis. In any case, the result is a one-sided, negative impression of Anandacharya which is not at all balanced as there is not a single positive thing mentioned about Anandacharya. This is in stark contrast to the view of Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, Professor Emerita, Study of Religion, at the University of Bergen, expressed (notwithstanding several factual errors and misapprehensions), in a much more balanced article about Anandacharya (Gilhus, Ingvild Sælid: Sri Ananda Acharya – en hindu i Norge. Kirke og kultur 1989 Vol. 94 Nr. 3, s. 225-235). In this article Gilhus mentions the review of Professor Sten Konow of Ramayana in Dagbladet 16.12.2022, in which she notes Konow's extremely condescending characterisation of Anandacharya, and at the same time presents a very interesting consideration of the differences of science and schooling in the East and in the West (my free translation from the Norwegian):

“Konow worked from strict, scientific, Western criteria and from that deprived Ananda's work any credit. He did not in any way emphasize that Ananda's initiative and contribution was the very foundation for a publication of Ramayana in Norway. For Ananda Ramayana was alive poetry, he was himself brought up with the epic and had heard it sung from early childhood. In his work with the translation he had, according to himself, made use of seven Indian editions and one European edition of the work. Konow's criticism is an example of how ethnocentric the Western ideal of science may function. It is an ideal which does not necessarily do justice to utterances with another foundation. On the contrary, it may imply a disparagement of them, as in this case where Western science was used to criticize the results of a well trained Indian's way of presenting a subject.”

It is, perhaps, exactly “Konow's spirit” which is here carried on by Jacobsen in his work on Anandacharya. But in addition there are several aspects of his way of presenting his material, which are hardly good science. The Norwegian intelligentsia of 1915 could not see beyond the absence of Western, scientific methodology and, unfortunately, in some quarters this may have persisted even to this day. Jacobsen is now trying to deal Anandacharya the final blow in the same way, but through resorting to unscientific methods himself, at the same time he becomes a victim of exactly that which he disdains – unscientific!

Bjørn Pettersen's COMMENTS responding to:

Knut A. Jacobsen:

HINDUISM IN THE WORLD

Migrations and Global Presence

Routledge, London and New York 2025

2 Spiritual Migration and the First Indian Hindu Guru to Settle in Europe p. 29
- The Earliest known Indian Hindu Guru to Settle in Europe p. 32

1)
His pre-samnyasin name was Surendranath Boral (also spelt Baral). p. 32

No. The correct way of writing will always be the way the holder of the name writes it, thus: 'Baral'. 'Boral' is an anglicizing of the name.

2)
He studied logic and philosophy, topics perhaps also suggested by the guru, and worked briefly at Maharaja's College in Burdwan (Bardhaman) as a teacher. p. 32

No. He occupied a professoriate and bore the title 'professor'.

3) *He travelled to Britain in 1912 but settled in Norway, first in Oslo, and then in 1917 he resided permanently in Alvdal, situated in a mountainous area in eastern Norway, in a place that seems to be based on the model of the Hindu asrama.*

But he himself called it a math, not asrama, and on several of the title pages of his books is written 'Gaurisankarmath' or 'Gaurisankar Math', as the place of publishing.

4) *Ananda Acharya stated that “every man who wishes to adopt Hinduism, no matter of what birth, should be given the sacred thread” (Ananda Acharya 1921b: 241), a statement that confirms his missionary impulse.* p. 32-33

This quote is from Kalkaram, a work of fiction, and is in no way a statement or a declaration which confirms his mission. If one reads Kalkaram carefully one will see that the epistolary correspondences between the various persons are often discussions where ideas first are being forwarded, only to be abandoned or modified later. In a way they are spontaneous thinking aloud in the moment, as letters often are, and can in no way be taken as statements or confirmations.

5)
According to his books and lectures, he seems to have been convinced of the superiority of India's philosophical teachings and spirituality over those of the West. He believed his mission was to introduce these superior teachings of an exceptional culture to the West and that hearing it directly from an Indian would add additional value to the existing European scholarship on Indian philosophy.

Here, and before in several places, assumptions about how Anandacharya may have felt, thought and believed are based on misunderstandings. Self-realized people like Anandacharya, with a long standing background in sadhana, do not have any superiority complex in relation to other people, cultures or nations. Nor do they consider themselves as missionaries of anything. Here, he is almost presented as a common, ordained missionary of Hinduism. Yes, he was born, raised and educated in Hindu culture and tradition, and yes, it was natural for him to communicate this to others, especially since the knowledge and understanding of this culture in the West at the time was often so-so.

And of course, this culture was superior to the one in the West, both in age and in content, which is soundly proven by the oldest known document in any Indo-European language – the Rig-Veda (with its extremely advanced art of poetry). Through Anandacharya there was the possibility of a most unique insight into this culture through a very unique authenticity, but lack of openness, prejudice and possibly also jealousy and a competitive instinct in academic circles, prevented it.

6) *His preaching and teachings are less systematic and critical and more poetic than Western Indological approaches.* p. 34

Of course! Men like Anandacharya with his background and specific characteristics are the source of all those texts which the Indologists studies and tries to understand only intellectually. Since these texts (Vedas, Upanishads, Epics, etc.) are not critical in the academic sense, and are indeed poetic and based on inspiration, naturally, it will also be like that when one of their own kind like Anandacharya portrays these very texts.

7) *He was criticized by Indologists, and in the final years of his life, he directed criticism at them, accusing “Orientalists” of having ruined his mission – a claim he made in 1945 shortly before he passed away.*⁷ p. 34

False. This is taken from a letter to his old friend and neighbour in Alvdal, Arne Mellesmo, which Einar Beer translated into Norwegian and first published in his Norwegian book 'Kosmiske Lysord. Hilsener og dikt' in 1956. The original of this quotation (in note 7 above), is nevertheless to be found in Life and Nirvana vol. 2, page 363: "The spread of Sanskrit learning, bringing the sacred literature of the ancient culture of India, the highest and most ancient culture in the world, to the Western countries, has been productive of the most beneficial results – though for selfish reasons many of the so-called orientalists endeavour to destroy its civilizing influence." How in the world does one manage to make this a claim on his part that the Orientalists had "ruined" his mission?! How objective and scientific is this?

8) *His attempt to blend the role of a Hindu missionary with that of an academian presenting academic knowledge proved problematic. His books were probably too poetical, fictional, romantic, and uncritical to be of interest to Indologists, but the relationship illustrates that European Indologists could claim greater authority and knowledge of Hindu religious texts than the Hindu missionary who wrote these books, which was probably not how Ananda Acharya had imagined his mission.*

p. 34

This appears almost childish! But this, I guess, takes us to the very heart of this concocted problem: Orientalists and Indologists are welcome to have ever more knowledge about and around all the Sanskrit texts, it is really not so important, but have they understood anything of their contents? Have they understood any of the messages these texts are trying to express and impart? Have they understood why at all these texts exist? Can they reproduce their contents in essence, without a single reference to any other secondary literature or other authors, on their own grounds and using only their own words? Because this was exactly what Anandacharya did when he spontaneously conveyed all of that extempore (without manuscript) to his audience during his philosophical lectures. So, where, in fact, truly lies that authority, whatever the European Indologists claimed?

9) Several people came to write translations of Sanskrit texts with his help – Ananda Acharya translated the text into English for them, and they rendered his English translations into Scandinavian languages (Arne Garborg for Ramayana⁸ and Johannes Hohlenberg for Bhagavadgita).⁹

This is totally wrong and presented against better knowledge. I have written in detail about this in my book “(Pettersen 2018)”: Both Garborg and Hohlenberg were invited by Anandacharya to Gaurisankarseter in Alvdal to translate his own works to New Norwegian and Danish respectively. This gross wrong-doing is also reflected in note 8 in which the conflict between Anandacharya and Garborg about “Ramakvædet” is reported: “The complaint was that Ananda Acharya was not mentioned on the book cover as one of the translators.” This is, consequently, completely wrong – Anandacharya wasn’t only one of the translators but the very author himself. If Anandacharya had not protested the publication and won his case, Garborg would have succeeded in stealing the Ramayana from him and he would have lost all rights to his own work. So here continues, even if in a more subtle way than by others earlier, the lie of the Garborg followers that it was Anandacharya who was the difficult party of the conflict, while Garborg, as the great, holy national icon, of course again passes free of any critical consideration.

10)
He had devoted disciples, and he did not live alone, although he praised seclusion and wrote that “Love of solitude is the beginning of wisdom” (Ananda Acharya 1971a: 193). Ananda Acharya thought that “the Yogin should live alone in an unapproachable place” (Ananda Acharya 1971a: 179) and believed that other human beings’ imaginary worlds interfered with his and complained that contact with other humans disturbed his peace (Ananda Acharya 1971a: 178-179, 190). p. 35

Is this supposed to be an example of him not living as he taught? And how has it been made into a complaint that contact with other humans disturbed his peace? None of the above mentioned quotations are autobiographical, but are advice for yogis and truth-seekers in general. And the last reference is in relation to the present author’s subjective inference from, and misunderstanding of, the same.

11)
“The well of unhappiness...” (etc.) (Ananda Acharya 1971a: 167) p. 35

Another example of selective quotation to support a pre-existing and erroneous view. This quote from Anandacharya’s Yoga of Conquest has been removed from its context in which he is discussing pathos and ethos, and the importance of making effort to be able to develop as a human being in this world. It is obvious that the author has been searching high and low to find a few lines in the middle of a piece of text, and then use it to fit in and to illustrate and justify his own misunderstood interpretation of how Anandacharya must have felt in his diaspora situation! Misunderstood interpretations and wrong assumptions are, unfortunately, widespread on all of page 36, and pages 37 and 38.

12)
His ideas about education and peace were utopian. p. 36

Of course! Is this a statement or a criticism? Utopian in relation to what? To a system of education and a culture that produces materialism and greed, alienation towards nature, and is now the cause of our starting to destroy the very basis of our own existence? I am myself educated in those methods which are here regarded as utopian, and I can verify that they are very real and practical and yield the desired result. Moreover, they have been tried and tested through thousands of years.

13)
The ways India is presented in his writings have often no empirical basis but are founded on spiritual fantasies and are probably influenced by Western Indophilia. p. 37

What are ‘spiritual fantasies’? What does it mean? I ask because it is an oxymoron: there is no fantasy in spirituality!

14)
He believes Hindu teachers journeyed to ancient Greece, because “it is known from remotest times Indian teachers have travelled to every possible part of the world” (Anand Acharya 1921b:145). p. 38

This is a common understanding and oral tradition among sannyasins, yogis and sadhus in India, and not only the understanding of Anandacharya, because they know about certain cases and that this happens from time to time. In our times people travel by aeroplanes and cover enormous distances in no time, but in India the tradition has been to go on foot, as did Shivapuri Baba, who walked around the Earth and met heads of state of many countries on the way. In England he became a close friend of Queen Victoria, and in Greece he met father Nikon at Athos. The pilgrimage started when he was 50 years of age and lasted for 35 years. He was born in Kerala in 1826, took sannyasa when he was 18 years of age and was known by his sannyasin name, Govindananda Bharati, during all of his trip around the world. Prior to that he had spent 30 years in isolation in the jungle where ultimately he became Self-Realized. During his extensive wanderings and pilgrimages all over India before his great walk around the globe, he also met with Sri Ramakrishna in Calcutta. He left his body in Shivapuri in Nepal in 1963, 137 years of age (Bennet, John G.: Long pilgrimage. The life and teaching of the Shivapuri Baba. Turnstone Books, London 1975).

- **Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma** p. 44

15)
Many hundred thousand started following this new teaching, and the introduction of the Brahma religion further en-

couraged the foundation of several socio-political organizations among the Bodos that had a great impact on the Bodo community (Basumatary and Daimary 2018.21 Maybe this was the kind of impact Anand Acharya had been hoping for when deciding to travel to Europe. The contrast between the impact of Ananda Acharya and Kalicharan on the societies in which they propagated their religion is anyhow striking. p. 47

Here, and several other places, there is an entirely concocted comparison between Anandacharya, his guru Sivanarayan and various brother disciples of Anandacharya. After the professoriate at Burdwan Anandacharya didn’t know what to do next. After a while he entered on a long pilgrimage on foot destined for Lake Manasarovar and Mt.Kailash in Tibet, but in a cave by the Ganges, close to to-days Rishikesh, he had a deep spiritual experience including a message to go to the West to teach “Shanti Veda”. It was this powerful experience that made him change his plans and turn back to his childhood home in Bengal, and from there to the West. His guru was then already dead. It was most unlikely that he knew what Kalicharan was doing in Assam, and there was as good as zero possibility that the two of them had any contact or knew each other. Of all the many thousands of disciples of Sivanarayan, Anandacharya was the only sannyasin. As Sivanarayan was illiterate and therefore didn’t write anything himself, one is, of course, left with the understanding and interpretation of these lay persons who have written about his teaching. How well have they understood the subject of their writings? I, myself, do not know the teachings of Sivanarayan, but it is with great wonderment I read here about the alleged huge emphasis on sun and moon and fire, and God as manifested light through these elements. Actually, I have never seen anything like that in any of Anandacharya’s books or texts. That the divine in certain connections may be perceived or described as ‘light’, may of course happen, and is common in a lot of spiritual literature of all types, but it is not at all anything Anandacharya has emphasized, so it is remarkable to see it here thus presented (and without any supporting concrete references for these claims). In the interview with Brooklyn Life in London in 1913, Anandacharya says: “My sole object is to teach that there is only one truth and one reality and that the consciousness of the eternal in humanity is that truth and that reality.” Only one that is Self-Realized can express this so simply and spontaneously (and nothing about sun, moon, fire or light!) (Pettersen, 2019 p. 96).

16)
The Ananda Acharya institution in Norway can be seen as another of these traditions founded by one of Sivanarayana Paramahamsa’s disciples. p. 47

No. Anandacharya did not form any type of institution in Norway, and in no way did he wish to carry on any certain teaching from his guru or anyone else. Self-Realized, naturally he was free from any such teaching, and free to interpret life and existence on account of his own spiritual experiences.

17)
An interesting contrast is that Kalicharan wanted the Bodos to give up pig rearing since it was associated with backwardness and impurity, while Ananda Acharya wrote a book on proper pig rearing in order to cause better treatment of pigs by pig farmers in Norway (Ananda Acharya 1926). p. 47

Yet another peculiar comparison between two guru brothers. Anandacharya wrote his ‘Prophetess Mudgaljani’ in 1926 about natural livestock farming and agriculture in Norway, as an answer to the request of his many dairymaid neighbours at the summer mountain farms at Tronsvangen in Alvdal. Surely, most of this must have been highly utopian to the academic circles at the time, but is a welcome contribution today – a hundred years later – to an ecological view on farming, which is now forcing its way forward on account of mismanagement and completely misjudged methods of farming all over the world during these hundred years.

- **Ananda Acharya and His Guru Sivanarayana Paramahamsa** p. 47

18)
Ananda Acharya did not belong to any traditional sampradaya, but he was nevertheless committed to a guru. The best approach for understanding him as a spiritual migrant is to connect him to his guru, Sivanarayana Paramahamsa. p. 47

My own guru, Swami Paramananda, said that, like him, Anandacharya belonged to the giri tradition. Otherwise, there is nothing in the life history of Anandacharya that directly binds him to his guru, Sivanarayan, neither in the case of his motivation for travelling to the West, nor his life here as a “spiritual migrant”, which here, by the way, becomes an ambiguous and misused expression.

19)
In several passages of Tattwajnanam, especially in its poetic sections, there are discernible signs of Sivanarayan’s teachings, such as in this poetical statement: “I dwell in Time and in the Pole-Star, I dwell in the Sun and in the all-pervading light” (Ananda Acharya 1921a:307). p. 49

More peculiar comparisons, and this time very wrong. This is not a ‘statement’ from Anandacharya’s side, but an extraction of the first lines in his translation from Sanskrit of the poem “The Self-Divine” from the Rig-Veda, as the writer should know very well. In this connection it is interesting to read Anandacharya’s own comments on this poem: “... its spiritual beauty and inner majesty can only be felt by those to whom life has already become transfigured into something of the heaven-world of eternity.»

20)
Ananda Acharya visualizes himself on a global mission for universal peace, which is fulfilled by preaching the Vedantic idea that there is only one common Self. This idea leads to practical politics and the conviction that “the construction of the future edifice of a world government of Peace and Happiness will inevitably lie in the hands of the Master-builder, the Vedantin (Ananda Acharya 1921a:ii). *The Vedantin is here probably a code for the Hindu, especially the upper caste form of Hinduism and Indian respectability.* p. 49

On what does this assertion rest? What does the writer know about how Anandacharya “visualizes” himself? Why is it so important to present Anandacharya as a Hindu missionary for Hinduism, who is on a global mission for universal peace? Here are the concluding words of Anandacharya in the direct continuation of the passage quote: «This is my counsel to the breakers-and-makers of world-peace.» This is his counsel – done, that’s it! To allege that ‘vedantin’ here is ‘probably a code for the Hindu’, and then especially the higher casts of Hinduism, is yet another fantasy and misunderstanding by the writer. A true Vedantin will never identify with either Hinduism or caste, or anything else artificially man-made in this world. Here, as in many other places in this exposition, Anandacharya is suspected of double mind. To accuse a Vedantin of being a missionary of Hinduism, would be frankly insulting. It would be the same as calling any one scientist a missionary of Western culture.

21)
The above quotation from Ananda Acharya is an interesting and clear statement of his mission, which, as he saw it, was to ultimately establish a new world order aligned with the visions of his guru Sivanarayana. In Ananda Acharya’s case, this new order would be a government based on the ideas of Vedanta. This is a clear statement of his belief in the superiority of Hinduism, which forms the basis of his mission. In this discourse, Vedanta seems to exemplify “Vedanta as a World Religion,” which was a “cultural nationalist discourse in India that aspired to global respectability” and made “claims for Indian religious or civilisational superiority” (Biswas 2023: 15). p. 49

This quotation is directly connected with the quote in 20) above. Again grand assumptions and fantasy about the statements and beliefs of Anandacharya, about his mission in the world and the superiority of Hinduism. Assertions about politics and personal ambitions are combined with a total lack of understanding of how men like Anandacharya think and live their lives.

22)
In Kalkaram, Ananda Acharya developed the idea of promoting world peace by means of a type of educational institution: p. 51

This is the well-known idea of the ‘University of Peace’. It was not developed in Kalkaram, and, to be clear, it is also not an inheritance or influence of his guru Sivanarayan. Anandacharya mentioned the idea both in Kalkaram and in Karlima Rani, which were both published in 1921, and where the words were put into the mouth of other, fictional characters. And the year after he told Einar Beer that the University of Peace would be coming “in a hundred years’ time”, which is now (Mt.Tron University of Peace is now a concrete project with a sanctioned regulation plan: www.tronuni.org). “From my earliest childhood this great idea used to come to my head – of how to lead all the nations together and bring peace permanently to this earth, this great idea which has never before entered into the head of any living man in the whole world’s history: How to bring all nations together into one bond of peace by establishing the great University of Peace. Wandering alone I used to think out every detail of this great plan. In England I never thought of it. It is only here on this great mountain that the plan again revealed itself to my brain. In London and elsewhere I often thought

I had forgotten something but could never find out what it was.” This quotation from Einar Beer’s notes from 1932 shows clearly that this idea was uniquely his own and not a influence of his guru. Nor was it any personal ambition or part of a purposeful Hindu mission from his side (Pettersen 2019, 245-248).

23)
Ananda Acharya repeatedly refers to yoga to justify his views and claims that yoga is a superior means of knowing to which he has access. He adds to his arguments such statements as “These things cannot be understood from the popular, un-Yogi standpoint” and “The real explanation can only be perceived when one attains perfection in Yoga” (Ananda Acharya 1922: 143). *References to yoga and yogins became a way of asserting truth and providing proof for his statements.* p. 52

Here both the page reference – 143 – and the year for the publication of the book – 1922 – are wrong, so that it is unclear where these references are taken from or if at all they stem from Anandacharya. Anyway, he may well have uttered this. On this page in this reference, Karlima Rani, among other things Anandacharya says: «No one who has not practised Yoga for twenty-four years can understand Yoga. Unscrupulous men have written books for purposes best known to themselves, but they have not understood, they have not lived what they have taught.» The quote above from Anandacharya is really very interesting in this connection because it shows, collated with the author’s outstandingly excessive allegations above, the immense distance in difference existing between one who only reads books about yoga, and then tries to describe these on the basis of his necessarily very limited understanding of yoga, and one who actually lives yoga and has done so his whole life. Yoga can never be understood by the reading of texts only – yoga is a physical, mental and spiritual exercise which can only be practiced regularly over time to gain insight and a suitable understanding of what it really is and implies. As a yogi and a sannyasin, Anandacharya had never any need to “justify” his views and claims or “asserting truth” or “providing proof for his statements” – his thoughts never circled around these petty things.

24)
The most important question for Sivanarayana seems to have been “Who is God?” to which he answered, “God is light,” and the same monotheistic idea of God as light was also adopted by Ananda Acharya. p. 52

It is, to say the least, sensational that vedantic gurus are supposed to promote something like this. Here, one has first to ask oneself: How reliable are the accounts or reproductions from Sivanarayan’s ordinary disciples? To what extent have they understood their guru’s message and teaching? In any case I know that Anandacharya never emphasized this, let alone presented it as his teaching. That one searches the works of Anandacharya only for finding the words ‘light’, ‘sun’, ‘moon’ and ‘fire’ in some vanishingly few places, in order then to claim that these are clear proofs that Anandacharya believed in this and taught it to others – this is absolutely incomprehensible.

25)
In Karlima Rani, there are 149 mentions of the word “Yogi,” 117 mentions of the word “Yoga” (266 when Yogi and Yoga are added together), and 68 mentions of the term “spiritual.” p. 52

And? What are these statistics good for? Are they meant to say anything at all about Anandacharya?

26)
Yoga is here a means for directing the mind towards a God, who is light: The yogi takes the help of many physical circumstances in order to successfully fixes [sic] his mind upon God. He sits straight, fixes his gaze between the eyebrows, eats less, gives up many physical activities and so on. But the physical aids are only to be regarded as means for directing the mind towards God. (Ananda Acharya 2009: 132) p. 54

“... towards a God, who is light”? And why the spelling mistake ‘fixes’ with a following [sic], when there is no such error in the original: “The Yogi takes help of many physical circumstances in order to successfully fix his mind upon God.” So while the reference is correct this time, here is yet another concocted error. Also, why quote from so many different editions of the same book?

27)
He considers yoga as samadhi: “Man is non-evil only when he is asleep There is no good in this world, in this life. The sole good is Yoga, to live in Yoga, in Samadhi, until this body leaves one” (Ananda Acharya 1971a: 230). *He teaches yoga*

as a kind of spiritual life focused on knowledge of the soul. This includes mental restraint, renunciation, solitude, and peace, but also “constant companionship of one who has entered into the state of Samadhi and, he adds, “A special and sacred place is also necessary, like the banks of the Ganges or the Himalayan caves” (Ananda Acharya 1971a: 230). For Ananda Acharya, yoga is a search for the soul, and he believed that the Indian tradition of yoga provided unparalleled guidance in this search.

p. 54

Gradually, it becomes difficult to relate the given references to the reproduced texts. For example is the reference **Ananda Acharya 1971a** stated to be *Yoga of Conquest*, 2nd rev ed. Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Institute, which was published in 1971, while the original was published in 1924. For the reproduced text above, this reference has twice been given the same page number – 230. But it is only in the last quote that this conforms to the presented text. Is the first reference an error, taken out of context from another source to fit here, or quite simply been invented? In any case, here is what is written on page 230 in the Hoshiarpur edition for November 16th, text piece number (321) (it would have been so much easier if the text piece number – which is the same in all the different editions – had been given): “ November 16th

No man can gain the faintest glimpse of the nature of the soul unless he enters into the state of Samadhi, for, in the states of wakefulness and dream, no other idea of the human personality can arise but the image of the body, which is simply a blending of the ideas of nationality, name, family, form and particular idiosyncrasies. It is difficult to bring the mind near the soul in normal consciousness; even in so-called trance nothing of the nature of the soul can reveal itself. When mediums speak of spirits they are simply speaking of what they cannot think and do not know. For attaining to knowledge of the soul it is necessary to give service to and have the constant companionship of one who has entered into the state of Samadhi. A special and sacred place is also necessary, like the banks of the Ganges or the Himalayan caves. The highest achievement of man is soul-seeing. (321)”

This is the whole piece as it is written in the book referred to and it takes up most of the page – there is nothing here of the first reference. So how does the author explain this? And that “the Indian tradition of yoga provided unparalleled guidance in this search”, was to him an empiric reality and not only something he believed in, just like so many other Indian teachers, both before him and after him.

- **Ananda Acharya’s Understanding of His Mission, Derived from His Writings** p. 58

28)

Ananda Acharya’s books, although apparently admired by his few disciples, did not always receive good reviews from Orientalist scholars. An interesting interpretation of Hinduism is presented in a review of one of Acharya’s books, Indledning til indisk filosofi (“Introduction to Indian philosophy”) in the leading Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet (22 april 1916). Written by a prominent intellectual, it exemplifies a critical attitude (Mjøen 1916). The review praises the book as interesting because it is “authentic,” meaning that the author is an Indian guru, but his style of writing, as well as his preference for Indian yoga over Western science, invites a negative response from the reviewer. The reviewer writes that he felt nauseated when reading the book, and he contrasts Ananda Acharya’s mistaken approach and views with an Indological book about the Buddha that was written by Edvard Lehmann, a well-known historian of religions at Copenhagen University. Lehmann’s book, according to the reviewer, contains everything that Ananda Acharya’s book lacks, including objectivity and a historical-critical approach. The review illustrates how authority on Indian religions, in accordance with the views of several Norwegian intellectuals but also reflective of international trends in Indology and the history of religions, was removed from contemporary teachers of Hinduism and assigned to European research institutions. These research institutions’ interpretations of ancient religious texts were thought to represent the ultimate authority on Hindu doctrines. The review illustrates a critical attitude in which the India of the past represented the truth, while the India of the present represented untruth, and Indians were perceived as incapable of representing their own traditions, as they personified the India of the present. This view was associated with the ideology of colonialism. Anand Acharya’s spiritual migration can be seen as an effort to reverse this ideology.

p. 59

Here we are at the very core of this case, i.e. why Anandacharya was never recognized in the academic circles in Norway. Fully ignorant about the cultural background of a sannyasin, the Orientalists, Indologists, historians of religion and all of the intellectual elite, expected that Anandacharya, as a philosopher with an academic footing, would have embraced the Western methods and completely rejected all of the traditional Indian. What ignorance, what naivety! As a Self-Realized yogi and sannyasin – who for many years, since childhood, had practiced his *sadhana*, i.e. sincerely and conscientiously exercising the most central “Hindu doctrines”, physically, mentally and spiritually – he had certainly not any reason to embrace anything that is only an intellectual (mental) exercise, at the expense of something that is much more thorough and actually scientific: In *jñāna yoga* **absolute objectivity** is required, something that is

never possible in traditional, Western science as the influence of the individual will always be noticeable. It is really impossible for a Western educated scientist, by following the methods of modern science, to fully root out his or her influence on the result. That is, perhaps, not the goal after all, as goal and means by and large are material. Another thing is that those ‘truths’ found through material science, will always be relative – because the material in itself is relative and because one therefore necessarily are constantly finding new truths which reject the old ones. About this process there is no end, so that it will be practical to discern between ‘phenomenal truths’ and ‘noumenal truths’, i.e. truths that do not change but are constant and ‘eternal’ in its nature.

But the latter truth can in no way be understood unless it is practiced through *sadhana*, because it is an inner and personal process, which focuses on the very observer itself after that the observation has become perfect. Besides, it is naive to think that authority on anything that is highly spiritual and free, and which requires insight through practical, self-experienced knowledge, can be removed from a vibrant living tradition of rishis, yogis, sadhus, sannyasins and gurus, who have been highly vigorous and who have constantly renewed and adapted themselves in unbroken lines through thousands of years, to a formal, institutionalized environment where premises and methods of learning are in diametrical opposition to those premises that were required for producing those subjects of study of which they claim authority. Isn’t that arrogance and disrespect?

- **Conclusion** p. 60

29)

Ananda Acharya presents India as superior in every way to all other nations. He seems to consider himself superior because he is an Indian, while the Europeans he addresses in his writings are sometimes perceived as childlike.

p. 60

Isn’t this statement childish enough? No references given here, but still he finds it is possible to present such fanciful allegations.

30)

Engaging the help of Indophiles or hoping to create Indophiles seems central to Ananda Acharya’s mission. His disciples remained steadfast Indophiles who promoted India as a superior civilization and the guru as a superhuman beyond human scrutiny (see the writings of his main disciple Einar Beer and Beer’s disciple Bjørn Pettersen).

p. 60-61

What is wrong about indophilia? Here it seems that there is something wrong with indophilia and that indophiles – lovers of India – should rather not exist. Is it wrong to look up to Indian culture and tradition?

To the assertion that “ ... the guru as a superhuman beyond human scrutiny”, one can only say that it requires a realized being to understand another realized being. Only a horse can understand another horse – there may be written countless treatises on the horse, but as human beings we are nonetheless unable to really familiarize ourselves with how a horse thinks and feels and experiences this life. And to the amount of knowledge that we humans can absorb (to quote an oral tradition from Anandacharya): “A bookworm may eat up all the books in the British Library and still remain a bookworm.”

Finally, I – Bjørn Pettersen – am not, nor have I ever been, a disciple of Einar Beer. It is almost a crass insult to assert something like that – the statement is completely false and fully unfounded. How can a professor of Oriental studies make assumptions and unfounded statements in this way?

31)

However, in his first lectures on Indian philosophy, Ananda Acharya does not spend much time on the philosophical system called yoga but simply states that it is part of Samkhya philosophy. Ananda Acharya’s focus on yoga was therefore perhaps a response to the interest of his Western devotees and his audience. People who contacted him were interested in yoga and asked him to teach them (Pettersen 2018), so ...

p. 62

Or perhaps not! More presumptions. Einar Beer heard and experienced Anandacharya for the very first time at the first philosophical lecture at the University of Oslo in the spring of 1915. He participated in all the lectures during all of spring. When he got acquainted with Anandacharya and became his friend during this time, Beer asked him for advice to be able to lead a spiritual life and Anandacharya then wrote down for him the eight steps of Classical Yoga (asthanga yoga). Anandacharya had himself practiced this in India, in particular during his youth. So it was natural for him to teach this independently of any trend in the West. Otherwise, only one concrete instance is known when a person contacted him explicitly for learning yoga, and that was the Iclander who set off the eighteen lectures on yoga which later became the book ‘Karlíma Rani’. To refer to me when the author wishes to convey a statement that people came to Anandacharya to learn yoga, as if this was a widespread phenomenon, is totally wrong, as I have never uttered anything like that.

32)
Ananda Acharya’s texts reflect the impact of his diaspora situation, as he was writing for people he thought knew very little about India. He exaggerates and romanticizes to such a great extent that his India seems no longer to be a geographical place or a sociological reality, but a sort of spiritual utopia (Figure 2.2). p. 62

Is this statement not also extremely exaggerated?! In any case, ‘Figure 2.2’ which covers all of the next page (63), is not, as said to be, Anandacharya’s “samadhisthana”. What is depicted there is “The Memorial on Mt.Tron”, which is a memorial stone over Anandacharya and also the Foundation Stone to the Mt.Tron University of Peace, for which this location has been regulated. Anandacharya’s samadhi is also on Mt.Tron, but about three kilometres to the north-east of this memorial.

33)
After some years, Ananda Acharya appeared to have suffered increasingly from confusion, and he became involved in a surprising number of controversies (Pettersen 2018). p. 64

Inaccurate. There was no “increasing confusion” which Anandacharya appeared to have “suffered” from, but a phenomenon not unusual among spiritual truth-seekers, namely a certain identity interruption during a certain time. And in this case he had no guru who was able to help him out. As for the presence of various types of controversies, they were present all of his life and not only towards the end.

34)
During the last years of his life, he seemed to have missed India and Bengal very much. Understanding him as a migrant living in the diaspora and isolated in a small mountain village can explain some features of this development. During the first 15 years, he was an energetic Hindu missionary, but in the last 15 years, he appeared more like an Indian in exile in a foreign country. The absence of a Hindu diaspora at the time meant that he met few, if any, other Indians during his 30 years in Norway. He seemed determined to keep his Indian culture relevant, revealing a sense of nostalgia and romantic longing for India in his writings. p. 64

Further assumptions about how Anandacharya must have been feeling in his situation. As long as one doesn’t possess a pure mind oneself, as applies to about 99 % of the population anywhere at any time, it is, in fact, totally impossible to understand how such a mind works. But it is mainly a result of sadhana, and it can be put to the test by anyone who wants to do it. Men like Anandacharya are actually not like other humans – their mind is totally different. They live a very spontaneous life and feel ‘at home’ wherever they go or live, and therefore there is no ‘homesickness’.

35)
His adhikara, that is, his claim to authority, was based on being Indian, on having academic knowledge of Indian philosophy, and on being a samnyasin disciple of a guru. The way Ananda Acharya was idealized as a guru by Western devotees (which is best exemplified in the hagiographical material that has been produced by his Norwegian devotees Einar Beer and Bjørn Pettersen) probably influenced his teachings, and perhaps also the expectation that he should teach yoga because he was an Indian. He stated that “These things cannot be understood from the popular, un-Yogi standpoint” and “The real explanation can only be perceived when one attains perfection in Yoga” (Ananda Acharya 2009: 143). The concept of yoga here functions for epistemological purposes and positions Ananda Acharya as superior to his visitors and disciples, who had different access to reality. p. 64

Anandacharya had, on his own part, no “claim” to authority – this is absolutely misunderstood in relation to what a sannyasin ritual implies – and there was never any question about *adhikara* from his side. This, together with the allegation that an ‘idealizing’ of him as a guru from his Western devotees would have influenced his teaching, bears witness to a total lack of experience of how the relation between a spiritual mentor and pupil actually works. For the rest, the comment will be like 34) above. One cannot come to the right conclusions about the real contents of anything of spiritual character only by reading and collating texts – the intellect actually cannot grasp anything of this. It goes without saying that the mental (including the intellect) cannot conceive anything of the spiritual, just as much as the physical cannot conceive anything of the mental. We have to use our mental faculties to perceive and comprehend anything of the physical world. The consequence of this is that the mental world is superior to the physical world. But the mental world depends entirely on the spiritual world, which therefore again is superior to the mental world.

What is meant by “the spiritual world”? Every single night, while absorbed into deep, dreamless sleep, it is the spir-

itual world working. But this state of being is completely unconscious and therefore there is no memory or any kind of reference in this state – the mind being totally inactive. This essential, deep sleep (*sushupti*), which we all have and need for physical survival and which lasts for about two to two and a half hours every night, is nonetheless the cause of our deep ignorance about ourselves, exactly because this state is unconscious. And therefore the Indian rishis have invented ‘conscious sleep’ or meditation (*dhyana*) to lighten up and remove this darkness of unconsciousness and ignorance.

By only observing neutrally our own mind with all of its contents with our awake consciousness over time, without assessing its contents or at all involving in any of it, but only being a perfect, passive witness, while at the same time keeping the company of a spiritual guide who has walked the path to the very end, the mind will gradually become ‘pure’ or spontaneous. When the mind is completely pure it will become passive, and a passive mind will eventually be transcended (*turiya*) and the result will be (a fourth) an entirely different state of consciousness, which is consciousness in Itself, devoid of any attributes or condition, and completely different from the three states that everybody experiences every day: namely conscious (*jagrata*, as in wakefulness); subconscious (*swapna*, as in dream-sleep); and unconscious (*sushupti*, as in deep sleep). It is this state which is sometimes called “super-conscious” (*nirvikalpa samadhi*), which is self-supporting and only depends on itself, while all the other states of consciousness entirely depend on this one.

When this happens to a human individual it realizes, and it is this which is called ‘Self-Realization’ or ‘God-Realization’. Those who are realized therefore have a natural advantage over everybody else, exactly because they, contrary to all others, know themselves or the Self. Then there is no more crisis of identity – our identity being the main aspect of the spiritual world of human existence (three levels of human life: spiritual, mental and material; or unconscious, subconscious and conscious; or sleep, dream and awake).

It is the Self that is realized, not the ego. The Self is realized at the expense of the ego (body-mind identity), which thereby vanishes. Therefore there is no danger of self-assertion, superiority-complex, jealousy, small-mindedness or any of the other narrow-minded and prejudiced attitudes which are common with most people. With those individuals who have realized the Self, the directly opposite characteristics are striking, like unity, universality, humanity, self-sacrifice, etc. All those human or super-human ideals which we can read about in holy scriptures have been made living through these individuals. Actually, it is such realized humans who are the original sources of those ideals written down in texts that are studied by scientists, who end up evaluating them as ‘utopian’ or ‘fanciful’. But everything spiritual is natural, practical and can well be subjected to consideration, even if there is a constant challenge for expression through words or other physical media.

CONCLUSION

Knut A. Jacobsen has, apparently, made a critical examination of most of available literature by and about Anandacharya, especially in relation to his diaspora situation. To understand Anandacharya as a “spiritual migrant”, he maintains that the best approach is to connect him to his guru, Sivanarayan, who has thereby also been subjected to critical studies (18).

Obviously, for Jacobsen the most important findings of his study to be put forward are the following:
i - that Anandacharya was a Hindu missionary in the West, convinced about the superiority of Hindu culture over the Western culture (4, 5, 8, 20, 21);
ii - that there is a great degree of accordance between the teaching of Anandacharya and his guru – a teaching that partly is made to look doubtful or weird (16, 18, 19, 21, 24);
iii - and that Anandacharya’s mission, by and large, doesn’t hold good for anything at all (6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 23, 28, 29, 32, 34, 35).

It is with great wonderment that one reads Jacobsen’s selection of quotations from Anandacharya, with related comments and considerations, because absolutely everything is rendered negatively – even extremely negatively – and nothing positive is included about Anandacharya. The way all of this is made to look is very strange – as if the author is strongly against everything about India and Indian culture. In any case, the whole of this chapter about Anandacharya appears as a biased character assassination of a man and his work. And it is quite clear that the conflict from 1915 still has a deep sting (28), as it seems important to the author to strew salt in that open wound (7).

Moreover, a number of cases of inaccuracy and plain factual errors appear throughout (1, 2, 3, 9, 19, 26, 27, 32), which makes one wonder how (and why) they occur. In any case they contribute to the overall negative impression. Not only because time and again there is lack of conformity between the author’s statements and the references given (19, 23,

27), but also because of the numerous misinterpretations (see below) and the strongly negative statements, it looks almost as if the author has calculated that most of the readers do not care to check references or that immediate checking of sources will be deterred or simply will not happen when they are not readily available.

In addition to this, most of the contents are, unfortunately, misinterpreted or misunderstood by Jacobsen in that he presents statements and allegations which are only based on assumptions and weakly founded opinions (4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 19, 20, 21, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35). More cases can be mentioned, but all in all one has to question Jacobsen’s motivation for writing the way he does, which is absolutely critical, but which hardly can be characterized as objective and neutral.

Moreover, it is with surprise that one observes such lack of understanding and knowledge about the life of a sannyasin, which here is disclosed by Jacobsen. Doesn’t it mean anything how a truth-seeker with Hindu background in India lives his life and searches for his truth? Is it not interesting for Western academia only because he doesn’t utilize Western methods? Haven’t the religious scriptures of the East – which Orientalists, Indologists and historians of religions in the West study – resulted from the same kind of methods which even today are practiced by the truth-seekers of the East? Doesn’t it mean anything? – are these scriptures regarded as valueless?

Anyhow, there are enormous (diametrically opposed) differences in the way of acquiring knowledge in the East and in the West, something that Anandacharya pointed out in the prospect to his first lecture on Indian philosophy in Stockholm in 1916. There he explained the fundamental differences in thought, “which philosophers, academians and other intellectuals in the West have a particular difficulty in understanding and accepting:

For three reasons it is infinitely difficult, if not impossible, to understand the true standpoint of the Hindu only with the help of literature, and without the assistance of oral teaching: because

- 1) much of the interpretation has not yet been reduced to writing;
- 2) the understanding of the philosophical truths depends on sadhana, i.e. simple living and high thinking; and
- 3) Hindu-philosophical terms do not correspond to the European in meaning.

General predispositions of the Hindu mind in contrast with those of the European mind: the first positively confirms the possibility of directly experiencing the final truths – which the latter categorically denies.” (Pettersen, Bjørn: In Search of Truth. My experiences with Swami Paramananda. Autobiography of a yogi in the West. Mt.Tron University of Peace 2024. Pages 321-322).

Is Jacobsen not aware of this or attached any significance to it? If one does not understand, it is, at least, unscientific not to be open for trying to understand, but only look down upon or even reject it. In the quote from Anandacharya above it is worth noticing that he says “much of the interpretation has not yet been reduced to writing”. By this is meant that tradition which is still oral, which in volume is, perhaps, just as enormous as the one which has been “reduced” to writing. And the word ‘reduced’ here says everything about how much emphasis the Indians have given the oral tradition and how much is lost when committed to writing. So this means that in the West – where everything is based on texts and reading – one simply does not have the complete grounds for interpreting and considering the totality of the Indian tradition. Then how can the Westerners claim authority in the understanding of this tradition when they don’t even have access to half of it?

The East and the West need each other, and all affected, both in Western and Eastern Academia, should be the first to start to build bridges between these two hemispheres. Anandacharya’s life and work in both places, has been a beautiful and an important contribution in that respect.

Resume of Professor Jacobsen’s answer to Bjørn’s comments

“Religious people do not always like the perspective of the science of religions”

“There may be a big gap between what historians of religion find out, and the understanding religious or spiritual groups have about themselves and their history. At Direktedebatt.no we find such an example.”

“In the science of religion we like to distinguish between outside- and inside-perspectives. It is not uncommon that adherents of a religious or spiritual doctrine do not recognize themselves in the descriptions of the science of religions – but, of course, the opposite may also be the case. Sometimes they may dislike the way they are presented because it can be felt as threatening for the sanctity. Inside- and outside-perspectives often form two totally different discourses, and there may be a big distance between what the historians of religion find out and the understanding religious or spiritual groups have about themselves and their history.”

This is how Jacobsen opens his debate contribution and goes on by relating an incident when he visited the Punjabi University in Patiala, Punjab, in connection to his research on Sikhism, and was denied access to the Sikh’s holy history dealing with everything before 1708, i.e. from the birth of Guru Nanak (1469) to Guru Gobind Sing’s death, as this was holy history which none should touch. “A specific inside-perspective had made the premises for knowledge about the gurus of Sikhism, also in a university context. Typically, it is often hagiographical presentations which dominates presentations about them. Bjørn Pettersen’s mention about a few pages of chapter 2 in my book *Hinduism in the World* (Routledge 2025) at Direktedebatt.no seems to be a similar example.”

Thereafter Jacobsen continues to tell about his book *Hinduism in the World* and the increasing worldwide presence of Hinduism, including “about the Shakta-Hinduism in Europe; about Hindu missionary work and Hindu nationalism; together with a chapter on Hindu-gurus who have migrated to spread their teachings outside of India, a phenomenon which in the book is called ‘spiritual migration’.” He also presents what he claims to be less known examples in the study of Hinduism in the World.

In the chapter on “spiritual migration” he writes about Anandacharya’s guru Shivrinarayana Paramahansa (1840?-1909), who had several known disciples, among others Mohini Mohan Chatterjee (1858 – 1936), and Gurudev Kalicharan (1860-1938), who founded a new religion, Brahma Dharm. “Earlier no one has written about Mohini Mohan Chatterjee, Gurudev Kalicharan and Ananda Acharya as disciples of the same guru. I think nobody has been thinking the thought that in a way they belonged together. Yet, they were gurbhais, guru brothers, i.e. disciples of the same guru. This widens the understanding of Ananda Acharya. Shivrinarayana Paramahansa in many ways had an unusual teaching.”

“In the book I use knowledge about Shivrinarayana Paramahansa and the brother disciples to say something about Ananda Acharya’s Bengali background which is not already known. Ananda Acharya was the first Hindu Guru to settle in Europe.” Jacobsen here continues by giving examples of Ananda Acharya’s connection to his guru based on the fact that he dedicated several of his earlier books to him.

“In Hinduism to be a disciple of a guru is both a serious commitment and a way of having legitimacy. I have studied Ananda Acharya’s many texts. I have also read the little which has been written about him by experts. Where his guru, or even that he had a guru is not mentioned, and he is presented as an Advaita Vedantin, nearly like Vivekananda. But I cannot make sense of such a presentation. Ananda Acharya didn’t belong to any traditional Hindu sampradaya. I therefore tried to find out from where his teaching may have originated. Shivrinarayana Paramahansa is a part of this picture. There are many similarities. But, of course, there were other influences also. As, in the book, I interpret Ananda Acharya within the frame of Hinduism’s world expansion, I am interested in the view of India that he passes on and why.”

Bjørn’s original, unedited answer to Jacobsen’s contribution

“The inheritance after Ananda Acharya was administered by Einar Beer (1887–1982), who was his main disciple, and thereafter by Bjørn Pettersen, who was close to Einar Beer. Unfortunately, it is a fact that even though the disciples perceive the guru Ananda Acharya as divine, for most others he is just an ordinary person, and in the science of religion we study him as such and put possible statements of faith in parenthesis.”

Here Jacobsen continues by talking about the inheritance after Anandacharya, about how it is complex and how in 1928 Anandacharya said that his real name was Tatagatha Amogasiddhi Maitreyya Buddha; about Einar Beer as an incarnation of Sariputra; that Anandacharya put less weight on this in the later years of his life, and that the tradition after him does not deny this part of the history but views it as an aberration; that the ties to Hinduism are dominant. Jacobsen concludes his debate contribution thus:

“With his inside-perspective on the case and as a listener Pettersen of course has the right to believe in what he likes and stick to his own hagiographical presentation. But critical research on religion shall not just repeat hagiographies or be a mouthpiece for the followers, but try to understand broader historical connections and social and cultural influences and causes. It is, as already mentioned, not unusual that adherents of a religious or spiritual doctrine don’t recognise themselves in the descriptions of the science of religion. Therefore they may sometimes dislike how they are presented in critical studies of religion, because their own inside-perspective is so different.”

(NOTE: Translated from Norwegian into English by Bjørn Pettersen).

Scientists do not always like that others criticize them and demonstrate errors and cheating

It is interesting to note that scientists sometimes try to explain away errors and cheating in their own research, by turning the attention to the personal characteristics of the critic, instead of addressing the concrete criticism. At Direktedebatt.no we are just witnessing such a case.

Instead of addressing a single one of my 35 numbered comments in my blog text (linked from the debate contribution) here at Religioner.no, Professor Knut A. Jacobsen clearly tries to explain away my whole debate contribution by pointing to the division between the so-called outside- and inside-perspectives in the science of religion, in which he maintain that I am religious and have notions in relation to the sanctity of Anandacharya, so that I therefore do not like his presentation. Apart from the fact that many will consider this as a domineering technique, it is, in fact, completely irrelevant in this connection, because in none of the 35 comments will one find anything that supports his claim that my arguments are based on religious notions or are restrained by conceptions of holiness.

Unscientific methodology

I only wish for seriousness and honesty in the presentation of Anandacharya – if it comes from an outside-perspective or an inside-perspective doesn’t really matter. Therefore: May Jacobsen be so kind as to explain what made him write the following statement on page 49 in his book Hinduism in the World?:

In several passages of Tattwajnanam, especially in its poetic sections, there are discernible signs of Sivanarayan’s teachings, such as in this poetical statement: “I dwell in Time and in the Pole-Star, I dwell in the Sun and in the all-pervading light” (Ananda Acharya 1921a:307).

This is presented by Jacobsen as if it is a poem and a “statement” from Anandacharya himself, which is supposed to connect him to his guru’s teaching, while it is clear from the context that it is a poem by the woman Vak, from the Rig-Veda, which Anandacharya translated from Sanskrit and gave the title “The Self-Divine” (see my comment no. 19).

May Jacobsen also be so good as to shed light on why he has used the following quotation from Anandacharya on page 35 in his book to describe an alleged miserable condition in Anandacharya’s own diaspora situation?:

The well of unhappiness attracts and repels the soul of memory. Emotions, once wounded, never heal – a million ages stand witness to the gaping sore. No ordinary man can build up again himself what has once been broken. Only by Yoga can man learn to build. (Ananda Acharya 1971a: 167)

This quote by Anandacharya from Yoga of Conquest has, in fact, been taken out of a context in which he talks about pathos and ethos, and the necessity of making effort to be able to develop as a human being in this world, and is in no way autobiographical. Can this be called good and serious research? Unfortunately, there are many – too many – similar examples which I have pointed out concretely (see especially my comments no. 4, 7, 10, 11, 20, 21, and 30), which clearly shows that Jacobsen often has only been searching for certain words in the texts of Anandacharya to underline his special hypotheses. And this becomes really wrong when these words or sentences are removed from their context, or when he presents claims that are not based on quotes at all. I want to request the reader to read my comments and to make his own opinion.

Are speculations research?

There are also a lot of assumptions and guesses: “... *seems to be* ...”, “... *he believed that* ...”, “... *which was probably not how Anandacharya had imagined his mission*”, “... *probably influenced...*”, “*Maybe this was the kind of impact Anand Acharya had been hoping for* ...”, “*Ananda Acharya visualizes himself* ...”, etc. – such expressions appear in the majority of the quotations I have commented on. Here, to Anandacharya is ascribed opinions, beliefs, suppositions, hopes, envisions, imaginations, etc., which are the author’s sheer speculations for which there is no concrete basis. What is Jacobsen’s answer to this?

Research on Anandacharya is welcome

Jacobsen completely misses the mark when he compares my attitude towards Anandacharya with the Sikhs’ attitude towards their own early history. We are now making a “Baral-Museum” here at Tronsvangen in Alvdal where all will be opened up for research. Why is Jacobsen so biased about me? Even if we have had a little communication on e-mail through the years we have never met or been introduced to one another, so he does not know me. Why does Jacobsen think that my life is ruled by religious dogma in which something is ‘holy’ and untouchable? Why does he think that I am thinking of Anandacharya as ‘holy’? That I have written a biography about Anandacharya, which he calls a ‘hagiography’, is owing to the fact that I, in the name of righteousness, wanted to give justice to a man whose whole life was a sacrifice for others, but who, to a great extent, became a victim of bullying by an elite who misused their power, their position and their status to tarnish, slander and hurt him through a variety of different ways. A typical example is that mentioned (in my comments) regarding Professor and Indologist Sten Konow’s review in Dagbladet 16.12.1922 in which his strongly condescending characterisation of Anandacharya is completely out of proportion and resembles more personal hate than a fair and just review. Luckily, Anandacharya was surrounded by good neighbours and friends in Alvdal and all of Nord-Østerdalen, who cherished a deep love and respect for him for as long as he lived.

Why hasn’t Jacobsen anything to say about this – wasn’t it interesting enough for him in the description of Anandacharya’s diaspora situation? It is really very unique, not to say ‘unlikely’, that an Indian guru comes and settles down in a small village in the mountains of Norway in the first half of the 20th Century and becomes popular among the inhabitants! In my biography (Mt.Tron University of Peace 2018) I have endeavoured to collect as many autobiographical texts by him as possible, supplied with texts and notes from his closest disciples, and at the same time tried to say as little as possible myself – not more than what has been necessary for the continuation and flow in the material – exactly for the reason of enhancing their own story in their own words to as great an extent as possible. I certainly do not expect that the science of religion or any other science shall comply with it, but then, at least, they will have an example to follow if they should ever yield to anything as scientifically heterodox as to try to understand a little about the human and person, Anandacharya, if that would be found as interesting.

Legitimate research?

It sounds fine when Jacobsen holds that research on religion shall “... *try to understand broader historical connections and social and cultural influences and causes.*” In his research it appears as if Jacobsen is very eager to find similarities between Anandacharya, his guru and the guru-brothers – so much so that, as a whole, it seems quite fabricated. For what has he actually found? Overall, it appears very conspicuous that Jacobsen entirely one-sidedly presents Anandacharya in a negative light in his book. I would very much like to hear Jacobsen say something about this.

Earlier great personalities and well-known academics have, in various ways, given their approval to Anandacharya and his work. Foremost was India’s famous President and philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), who referred to Anandacharya in his own works and who communicated with Einar Beer in the 1960s (Beer was also invited to his presidential office when Beer visited India in 1968; Acharya Vishva Bandhu (1897-1973), who started Vishveshwaranand Vedic Research Institute and re-published all of the most important books by Anandacharya; Italy’s greatest orientalist Guiseppe Tucci (1894-1984); and the very well-known German Indologist Georg Feurstein (1947-2012), who worked in the USA and was a big admirer of Anandacharya and a personal friend of mine.

My original comments to Knut Jacobsen’s book ‘Hinduism in the World’ can be read here:

<https://baral.religioner.no/uncategorized/nar-vitenskap-ikke-er-vitenskap/>

CONCLUSION 17.11.2025

When historians of religion conduct a flimsy, literary search to satisfy a certain hypothesis and call it research, and also make naked character assassinations of historical persons in the name of science, and thereafter try to brush off unbiased criticism, then how valuable is their research?

Jacobsen’s book “Hinduism in the World”

As Jacobsen does not respond to my concrete criticism, I have to infer that either he hasn’t got anything sensible for his defence, or he chooses to sustain his ‘top-down’-attitude and thinks that this is too far below his standing for response. In both cases I am free to elaborate on and to concretize my arguments:

I - It is completely clear that Jacobsen, in very many of his quotes from Anandacharya’s books, has just been searching for certain words and sentences which correspond with his hypotheses, but which have been taken completely out of context and therefore used wrongly with subsequent erroneous conclusions (see my comments no. 4, 7, 10, 11 and 19 as the most obvious). In addition there are several of Jacobsen’s claims that are not founded at all (24, 29, 30, 31).

II - It is also quite clear that Jacobsen bases much of his “research” on assumptions and weakly founded opinions, which actually doesn’t say anything about anything, and therefore are completely valueless for everybody else except for himself (5, 8, 10, 15, 20, 21, 31, 34, 35).

III - The conclusions Jacobsen draws in his plain eagerness to find grounds for his hypothesis about accordance between Anandacharya and his guru (together with guru-brothers), proves invented and lacks adequate substructure (15, 16, 19, 21, 24).

IV - Overall, Anandacharya’s life and work in the Western World is only unbalanced and negatively presented, which is very striking and definitely not balanced or neutral, not to say objective. As long as Jacobsen doesn’t comment on any of this, it will fuel speculation about his motive for the “research”.

Jacobsen’s debate contribution

Also, Jacobsen hasn’t answered my last debate contribution, which was an answer to his (only) contribution. In his debate contribution, «Religious people do not always like the perspective of the science of religions», we can establish the following:

1) Jacobsen again builds his argumentation on prejudice, assumptions and weakly founded opinions, and this time about Bjørn Pettersen.

2) He fails to give any reply to Bjørn’s unbiased criticism of his own book, but instead chooses to characterize Bjørn as a person, which, by the way, is a well known bullying technique.

3) He dismisses Bjørn’s contribution and directs attention away from what is the cause of the debate, namely the criticism of his research.

4) He takes for granted that a so-called ‘inside-perspective’ has to include religiosity and qualms about holiness.

Back to “Hinduism in the World”:

When Jacobsen assumes that Anandacharya hopes or believes or imagines something, doesn’t he then move away from his pronounced ‘outside-perspective’ and into the ‘inside-perspective’, as he tries to imagine Anandacharya’s mental world?

And how will that be possible when the starting point and the framing belongs to the ‘outside-perspective’? Then one has to do this on the premises of the ‘inside-perspective’, something that I have tried to say something about through my comments on Jacobsen’s book.