An Indian Image of Man*

An Inquiry into a Change of Perspective in the Hindu World-view

INTRODUCTION

In his *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie* the renowned German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel made the following observation.

Dieses Hervortreten des Geistes hängt nach der geschichtlichen Seite damit zusammen, daß die politische Freiheit aufblüht; und die politische Freiheit, die Freiheit im Staate, hat da ihren Beginn, wo das Individuum sich als Individuum fühlt, wo das Subjekt sich als solches in der Allgemeinheit weiß, oder wo das Bewußtsein der Persönlichkeit, das Bewußtsein, in sich einen unendlichen Wert zu haben, zum Vorschein kommt,—indem ich mich für mich setze und slechtin für mich gelte. [...] Da fällt uns zuerst der Orient auf; [...] denn [...] der Geist geht wohl im Orient auf, aber das Verhältnis ist so, daß das Subjekt, die Individualität nicht Person ist, sondern als untergehend im Objektiven bestimmt ist. Das substantielle Verhältnis ist da das Herrschende. Die Substanz ist da teils als Übersinnliches, als Gedanke, teils auch mehr materiell vorgestellt. Das Verhältnis des Individuums, des Besonderen ist dann, daß er nur ein Negatives ist gegen das Substantielle. Das Höchste, wozu ein solches Individuum kommen kann, ist die ewige Seligkeit, welche nur ein Versinken in dieser Substanz, ein Vergehen des Bewußtseins, also Vernichtung des Subjekts und somit des Unterschieds zwischen Substanz und Subjekt ist. Das höchste Verhältnis ist so die Bewußtlosigkeit. Insofern nun die Individuen diese Seligkeit nicht erlangt haben, sondern noch irdisch existieren, so sind sie aus dieser Einheit des Substantiellen und Individuellen heraus; sie sind im Verhältnis, in der Bestimmung des Geistlosen, sie sind Substanzlose und—in Beziehung auf politische Freiheit—Rechtlose. Der Wille ist hier kein substantieller, sondern ein durch Willkür und Zufälligkeit der Natur (z.B. *durch Kasten*) bestimmter, – ein Wesen der innerlichen Bewußtlosigkeit.¹

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¹ Hegel 1940, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Vorlesungen 1825/26), 225 ff. In later lectures Hegel considerably modified his views, though he stuck to his own conviction that the determinism entailed by the birth within a distinct caste precludes true morality (Sittlichkeit). See Bakker 1994a, *Die indische Herausforderung*, below, pp. 28 f., pp. 40 f.

Though, admittedly, long as a quotation, this passage from Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* presents in a nutshell a central idea in modern European understanding of man: the concept of person or individuality and how it may account for the Western ethos as being apparently fundamentally different from the Indian. And when it is objected that the view quoted is an early nineteenth century one, and worse, one of Hegel, let me draw your attention to Marcel Mauss's treatment of the history of the notion of 'the person', in which he needs only one paragraph to explain that our notion of person, though it would not seem to have been completely absent from the ancient Indian mind, 'was dissolved (again) almost irrevocably': the 'self' (i.e. the ego) is according to one school of Indian thought ('Brahmanists') an 'illusory thing', to another, the Buddhists, a 'separable compound of *skandha*', the annihilation of which is to be sought.² What a sad world we must be prepared to arrive in when we pass through the customs at Delhi Airport!

M. Mauss's student, Louis Dumont, fully envisaged the intricacies and limitations of comparing the experience of existence ('Existenzerfahrung') in two entirely different socio-cultural contexts. At the outset of his *Homo Hierarchicus* Dumont warns the reader never to lose sight of an ambiguity in our notion of 'the individual': (1) 'l'agent empirique', (2) 'l'être de raison, le sujet normatif des institutions' (Dumont 1966, 22). Whereas the individual in the first sense is virtually co-existent with the human race, the second seems more peculiar to our society 'comme en font foi les valeurs d'égalité et de liberté, c'est une représentation idéelle et idéale que nous avons' (Dumont 1966, 22). To designate this second category we should employ, unlike Dumont, the word 'person' and use it as an operational definition of an individual who somehow conceives, or is supposed to conceive of himself, rightly or wrongly, as an (ethical) value *sui generis*, 'la mesure de toutes choses', and end in itself.³

As Dumont has argued, the idea of an individual as 'person' is an ideal and sociologically speaking an impossible one, since hierarchy appears to be 'une nécessité universelle'.⁴ It is not our intention to give an assessment of

2 Mauss 1980, 75 f. Cf. Sanderson 1985, 190 f.

3 Dumont 1966, 23. By taking this definition as our point of reference we align ourselves with the concept of person as current in post-Kantian Western philosophy, a tradition that is understood in Hubbeling's concept of 'person_c' and 'person_e' (Hubbeling 1990, 17 ff.). On the other hand, we refer to 'man' by the term 'individual', conceiving of him as characterised by selfconsciousness and/or will—that is without any implication of moral and aesthetic categories. To avoid misunderstanding, it may again be stated explicitly, that we consider these definitions 'operational', hence neither propositions concerning the 'real' nature of human beings can be derived from them, nor value judgements.

4 Dumont 1966, 300. For a critical evaluation see i.a. Burghart 1983, in particular with respect to Dumont's concept of the 'renouncer', which appears sociologically and religiously to be a more complex phenomenon. Though, undeniably, the ethos of the renouncer and the householder differ in several important aspects, I agree with Richard Burghart's view, developed in reaction to Dumont's simplifications, saying householders and renouncers operate through 'two different conceptual universes', that the latter is too much a theoretical construction. Burghart 1983, 650. Cf. Van der Veer 1986, 61–67.

Dumont's work, nor to focus on the caste system and its counterpart, 'renunciation' (*saṃnyāsa*), social institutions that, despite some modifications, seem to be giving way but slowly (cf. Dumont 1966, 289f.). In view of the overall religious setting which encompasses Indian society, we intend to give an appraisal of the traditional Hindu understanding of individual man by focusing on some religious currents that made their appearance in northern India from the 12th century onwards. From it we may gain an impression of whether Indian thought approximates and appraises our ideal of 'personhood' or develops its own categories.⁵

THE INDIAN UNDERSTANDING OF PERFECT MAN

To speak of Indian society and culture without unwarranted generalisations inevitably means limiting the scope of investigation to a particular milieu. Of the four main social and religious groups in North India—Muslims, Sikhs, Jainas, and Hindus—we shall chiefly be concerned with the last, though the Muslim impact cannot be ignored. Another complication lies in the fact that European influence since the 18th century has significantly altered the traditional world-view, which has led to new departures in Indian philosophy. We shall leave them aside as far as possible. Yet, we shall begin by presenting a contemporaneous instance of the 'empirical agent' in virtue of his being the 'raw material' or '*matière première principale de toute sociologie*' (Dumont 1966, 22). In order to minimize distortion caused by modern influences it is taken from a traditional, orthodox, and conservative Hindu milieu.

The 'Raw Material'

On one of my tours around the holy places of Ayodhyā accompanied by my aged host, a learned and devout brahmin who was held in high esteem by the local priesthood and monks, the city magistrates, and the populace alike, I spoke to him:

Pandit ji! One of the essential differences between us Europeans and you Indians is, it seems to me, that, suppose that we would believe that we were to be reborn on earth, we would be happy and rejoice at this good prospect, whereas you take quite the opposite stance, considering it a punishment from which one has to liberate oneself as soon as possible by subduing one's individuality or *karma*.

My guide fully disagreed with the view. He, convinced that he will come back on this earth, explained to me that the idea of being born again as a human being was attractive to him just as to me, since it would enable him to live

5 It cannot and should not be the aim of this paper to assess the Indian image of man in terms of 'true' and 'false', or 'inferior' of 'superior' with regard to our own notions. What we do aim is to point out some significant differences between the Hindu and our own cultural traditions in respect to the conception of the world and hence of man.

in and experience the proximity and love of god. For the ordinary Hindu of today god is experienced through his presence in certain landscapes, the temple and the heart. To this I may add what everyone knows who has visited Hindu temples, viz. that the atmosphere there is usually one of great joy and exuberance, which strengthens the individual and makes it worthwhile to be present in the flesh and in the company of fellow devotees. There can be little doubt that many a Hindu experiences a great measure of liberty and solidarity, though perhaps not equality, in the daily routine of his religion. To understand this ethos in its genesis we should consider the religious currents that informed it.

The Sufis

The extent to which Islam and the spread of Sufism influenced the patterns of religiosity in northern India is a matter of much debate and appears to be difficult to define. That this influence has been considerable, especially on the level of popular religion, cannot be denied but is too easily underestimated due to one-sided attention to the higher written expressions of Indian culture.⁶ Although the notion of 'direct influence' itself is opaque and mostly not explicitly defined we would subscribe to the view expressed by Charlotte Vaudeville who notes:

Even when the influence of Islam does not appear to have been direct, it certainly acted as a catalyst, helping to release and bring to the fore deep undercurrents which were already present in the lower strata of Indian society, as they reflected the culture of the masses and their own religious aspirations.⁷

We are even inclined to go one step further and maintain that the impact of Islam/Sufism, whether 'directly' or not, has been one of the main factors in effecting a significant change in the image of man in North India. The central notion of Sufism, viz. that of *fanā* or 'passing away' (i.e. evanescence of all awareness of an empirical ego and hence of that ego itself) as propounded by Abū Yazīd of Bisṭām (better known as Bāyazīd), although not entirely unknown to earlier Sufis,⁸ may or may not have been developed in the middle of the ninth century under the influence of Indian thought which had reached Bāyazīd via his teacher Abū 'Alī al-Sindī,⁹ yet when it was imported into India again by the Sufi holy men of the 13th and 14th centuries it bore the mark of Islamic monotheism. Mystic enrapture (*sukr*) of the kind that led Bāyazīd to exclaim: 'Glory be to me, how great my glory!' or 'I sloughed off my self

6 Gonda 1960–63 II, 102: 'Der direkte Einfluß des Islam auf den Hinduismus ist—von den nachher zu erwähnenden Erscheinungen abgesehen—sehr gering gewesen, jedenfalls beträchtlich geringer als die Veränderungen, die er selbst erfuhr.'

7 Vaudeville 1974, 118. Cf. Schimmel 1980, 38.

8 The Koran commentary ascribed to Dja 'far al-Sādik (d. AD 765) describes the phenomenon of *fanā* with reference to the passage of Moses in the burning bush. 'Next to [God] is no room for Moses.' Gramlich 1965–81 II, 330. Cf. Crollius 1978, 28 f.

9 Zaehner 1960, 93 ff. Cf. Gramlich 1965–81 II, 317.

as a snake sloughs off its skin: then I looked into my essence (or self) and lo! I was He!', or al-Husayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallādj's renowned heresy '*ana l-ḥakk*' ('I am the Truth (or God)'), though by no means completely alien to Sufism, appears, nevertheless, to have been an exception rather than the rule; it should, probably, not be interpreted in terms of complete identity of god and human soul.¹⁰ If, at all, a comparison with Indian mystic illumination is apposite, the Sufi experience should be compared with theistic schools within Hinduism rather than with monistic ones such as that of, e.g. Śaṅkara (cf. Crollius 1978, 89f.).

The theory of *fanā* was supplemented by the characteristic concept of *baqā* or 'continuance in god'. Admittedly, all individual features of the human soul are believed to be lost in the process of *fanā*, but the soul as such, as unconditioned receptacle in which and through which god reveals his own true nature remains essentially different from the divinity itself. In other words, it would be better to think of an inward transformation of the human individual when he enters into a supra-natural mode of subsistence which, however, is not fully detached from the ordinary conditioned (empirical) state, since the mystic falls back to it whenever his ecstasy ends (often thought necessary in order to fulfil the injunctions of the Koran). Hence there is no question of merger or total absorption in god or the absolute once and for all,¹¹ and theoretically it remains even possible that the mystic would be damned on the Day of Resurrection.

In this respect Islamic/Sufi eschatology differs fundamentally from the classical Hindu concept of *mokṣa* which designates an irreversible permanent state. Accordingly, for the Muslim the individual retains a value per se, as a means by which god steers the created world and a medium through which he sees or loves himself. The relationship of soul and god is mostly expressed in terms of love (*ishq*)—renunciation of the empirical ego (*nafs*), and turning towards god is conceived of as an act of love—and the human being appears as a vital element in the divine plan when Sufis answer the question as to the meaning of creation by referring to the words: 'I was a hidden treasure and I desired to

10 Nicholson 1963, 152 ff.; Rizvi 1978 I, 58; Gramlich 1965–1981 II, 321 ff.:

Aber es bleibt immer ein Letztes und Höchstes, für das man immer noch dableibt, dem man sich nicht entziehen kann, weil es niemals tiefer steht als der Entwerdende. Mag man auch für sonst nichts mehr da sein, für Gott ist man immer noch da. Ein radikales Zunichtwerden, das einem selbst vor Gott zu einem puren Nichts werden lässt—ein *fanā* u. *ʿanī llāh*, ist für den Sufi undenkbar.

11 Cf. the doctrine of Abu ʿl-Ḳāsim al-Djunayd of Baghdad summarized by Zaehner 1960 152:

The relationship between God and the *rūh*, or higher soul, is an eternal one in which God is *mustawī*, 'absolutely predominant' and *mustaṭhir*—he appropriates each elected soul to himself in a manner that is peculiar and individual to each and every soul so elected. In mystical experience this relationship will be revealed to the soul in a flash of intuition in which it not only realizes that it has its being outside time, but that it has forever a unique relationship with God. When the vision passes the soul suffers bitter anguish...

be known; therefore I created the creation in order that I might be known.’¹²

It is necessary to distinguish explicitly the spirit expressed in this Tradition from the idea underlying the conception of the world as illusion (*māyā*) or play (*līlā*) of god as taught by Śaṅkara or Rāmānuja respectively. Though in neither conception the individual is an end in itself, the Muslim’s view attaches a greater significance to the individual human being by accrediting him with a certain measure of responsibility for the course of history, which is conceived of as linear, heading towards the Last Judgment,¹³ thus opposing the predominantly anti-historical Hindu view which conceives of time as a cyclic process which conforms to an immutable law and tends to render all idiosyncratic effort as futile and transient. It is evident that the Muslim world-view fosters a more dynamic attitude towards the environment (Entwistle 1985, 6, 10).

The doctrine of divine love (*‘ishq*), on the other hand, referring to an emotional experience that enables the mystic to approach god personally, with or without his help (and this question has divided the Viśiṣṭādvaita of Rāmānuja into two schools), though sometimes believed to be of Christian origin (Nicholson 1963, 10 f.), is one of the central ideas of Sufism that concurs so much with the Hindu conception of (emotional) *bhakti* that it may account partly for the successful accommodation of Sufism in India.

Notwithstanding that it shared, besides some ritualistic practices that we shall note below, asceticism, mysticism, and several religious ideas with theistic currents in medieval Hinduism, the entry of Islam in India, even when mediated by its main vehicle, i.e. Sufi holy men, meant the introduction of another system of belief, that is to say another image of man, which was *sui generis* in spite of the fact that it had imbibed many elements from neighbouring religions. Its specificity finds expression in the relationship that is thought to exist between man and god, and it may be best illustrated by the way the figure of the prophet as the perfect man, the archetype, came to be considered in Sufism.

In discussing the theological differences between the figure of Christ and of Muḥammad with regard to the concept of personality, Nicholson observed:

Allah is the Creator, and though the metaphor of ‘creation’, which implies His transcendence, is often exchanged for ‘emanation’, which implies His immanence, yet all beings, including Mohammed himself are on one side of their nature His

12 Nicholson 1963, 80: *Ḥadīth kudsī*.

13 Cf. Böwering 1980, 165 f., describing the tradition of Sahl Al-Tustarī:

Tustarī’s range of mystical ideas depicts man as being driven in his inner dynamics to his ultimate destiny, described by the events of the Day of Resurrection. This post-existential Day, beyond the phenomenal existence of man in the world of creation, introduces man to his final and lasting state in the eternal presence of the Transcendent, and opens up for him the life of paradise, gratified by the bliss of theophanic encounter. [...] The theophany, as the perpetual self-manifestation of the divine Reality, thus transfigures man through its irradiation, transforms him through its illumination, and brings his life of ultimate destiny and final glory to fulfilment.

Cf. *op. cit.* 264 f.

creatures, His slaves, absolutely inferior to Him. And Allah in His essence is One. In His essence there can be no interplay of personality. The Islamic conception of plurality in the Divine Unity signifies not the relation of persons within that Unity, but the relations existing between the Unity and the manifold aspects in which it reveals itself. All these aspects are reflected in the Perfect Man, who may therefore be considered as the personified Idea in and through whom the Divine nature makes itself known. While the Christian doctrine expresses 'the realisation of human personality as characterised by and consummated in the indwelling reality of the Spirit of Christ, which is God', in Mohammedan theology the main stress falls on Revelation.¹⁴

We may add that in Hindu theology as reflected in Sanskrit literature up to the time of the introduction of Islam in India the main emphasis fell on merging into god.¹⁵

The expansion of Sufism in India was largely due to the order of the Čishti. Although there had been earlier contacts, the actual history of Sufism in South Asia started with the arrival in AD 1161 of Khwādja Mu'in al-Dīn Čishti (d. 1236) in Lahore and the subsequent foundation of his *khānqāh* (monastery) in Ajmer (1194). The *khānqāhs* became the centres through which Sufism diffused. It was probably the most organised form of religion extant in northern India in the 13th century and as such may have had an impact on the evolution of monasticism within rival Hindu sects (see below p.12). The Čishti order obtained its expansive character as a result of the policy of Shaykh Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā (d. 1325), the third in (spiritual) descent of Mu'in al-Dīn, whose *khānqāh* was in Delhi and who ordained that the apprentices (*murīds*) of a *shaykh*, or head of the *khānqāh*, as soon as they were given the status of *khalīfa* (spiritual successor), had to move together with their own disciples to another city, generally their native place, in order to found a new centre.¹⁶

As a matter of course the Sufi orders did not meet with the same impediments from the government as their Hindu counterparts, but the individualistic attitude of the Sufis on the one hand, and their continuous suspiciousness in the eyes of the *‘ulamā* on the other, largely prevented the majority of them from engaging in politics. Up to the time of Muḥammad b. Tughluq, the middle of the 14th century, they remained generally aloof from political power and of-

14 Nicholson 1964, 95.

15 This may be illustrated by examples taken from two texts, the *Bhagavadgītā* (14.27; 6.20–27; 12.9–10; 11.54; 6.31) and the *Agastyasamhitā* (23.46; 20.24; 20.29–32; 5.38–39; 19.23–24). Both teach primarily the doctrine of devotion to a personal god (Kṛṣṇa/Rāma), yet acknowledge two methods (*yoga*) of reaching him: worship of a god who loves his devotees for whose sake he has descended to earth, and meditation on the absolute divinity. Though both texts declare that the method of devotional service and activity (*bhakti*) is to be preferred in the present circumstances, the ultimate state attained by both methods is more or less the same, viz. union, that is submersion into the divine. The *Bhagavadgītā* stands at the beginning of devotional Hinduism, the *Agastyasamhitā* concludes, as it were, the pre-Muslim era of North India.

16 Muejeb 1967, 138; Schimmel 1980, 26f; cf. En.Is. II, 51.

ten criticised officials or even the sultan,¹⁷ whereas the egalitarianism of Islam made the Sufi movement the first one to defy the caste system, on principle.

In order that the Sufi *shaykh* could sustain his authority, against the *‘ulamā’* on the one hand and the people on the other, the possession of *karāma*, supernatural power, became essential (Mujeeb 1967, 118). It appears that by the second half of the 14th century Sufism was firmly established. By that time succession to the *shaykh* was becoming hereditary and the *khānqāh* evolved into an institution of vested interests (Mujeeb 1967, 162). A debate with Hinduism ensued. As far as metaphysics was concerned, Indian Sufism accepted on the whole the doctrine of the immanence of god, or ‘unity of phenomena’ (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*).¹⁸ The austerity tended to slacken and the status of the *shaykh* was increasingly seen in terms of divine grace or favour rather than of self-discipline. The esteem in which he was held gradually began to assume enormous proportions like that of his Hindu counterpart, the *guru*. In sum, Sufism became integrated in the course of development of North Indian society and religion as a whole in which it remained a dynamic factor.¹⁹

This is not the place to deal with the forms of popular syncretistic religion that ensued on the periphery of Islam among the lower strata of society where large groups had nominally embraced the new faith and that made, for instance, the cult of saints (*pīr/shaykh*) and tombs ubiquitous.²⁰ There are two Sufi practices of great consequence that deserve to be noted: *dhikr* and *ṣamā’*.

Among the traditional orders that were established in India the Čishti order was the only one that accepted *ṣamā’* (‘audition’), i.e. listening to song and music, as a legitimate (not contrary to the *shar‘a*) means to pursue spiritual aims. Music seems to have been able to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims more than anything else, and its acceptance by the Čishtīs greatly contributed to their success.²¹ Early Indian Sufi literature (14th century) provides ample evidence of the ecstasies evoked by Hindi songs and refrains, and the tradition mentioned by Vaudeville that Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn ‘is supposed to have said that God himself had spoken to him in the *purbi* (‘Eastern’, i.e. Avadhī?) language!’ is to be seen in this light.²² The prestige attached to *ṣamā’* was no Indian innovation but goes back to the early days of Sufism as it was often seen as homologous with *fanā’* itself (Nicholson 1963, 59 ff.).

Of all the observances the Sufis brought with them into India none found such fertile soil as *dhikr* (‘recollection’), which involves the practice of repeating the

17 Mujeeb 1967, 139 ff.; cf. En.Is. II, 51.

18 Mujeeb 1967, 289; McGregor 1984, 23; Schimmel 1980, 23, 41 f.

19 Mujeeb 1967, 290.

20 See Crooke 1926 I, 201 ff.; Ahmad 1964, 155 ff.; Herklots 1975, *passim*.

21 Mujeeb 1967, 167: ‘By the time of Shaikh Gēsū-darāz (d. 1422) Indian music had been studied and Hindi devotional songs had come to occupy a very significant position in the *ṣamā’*.’ Cf. McGregor 1984, 23 f.; Schimmel 1980, 14, 24.

22 Vaudeville 1974, 90; cf. McGregor 1984, 26 f.; Lawrence 1978, 31 f.; Mujeeb 1967, 167 f.

name of god or some religious formula like, e.g. *lā ilāha illā ʿllāh* ('there is no god but Allah'). Like the concept of *ishk*, the practice of *dhikr* is sometimes thought to derive from Christian origins,²³ but in Sufism it became the main means of concentrating. Communion with god (or interiorization of god) evolves from uninterrupted (mechanical) repetition of the syllables that constitute his Name, which is gradually spiritualized.²⁴ The practice resembles the one known in Hinduism as *nāmajapa* or *nāmakīrtana*. It can hardly be a coincidence that the cult of the Name, as *inter alios* promulgated by the Sants (see below), was so fervently adopted in that part of India and in that very period that witnessed the introduction and establishment of Sufism.

From all that has been said it ensues that the greatest impact was felt on the popular level. Sufism largely contributed to the (religious) emancipation of the lower strata of society and it was there that it found its most competent rivals. Already the first Sufis to settle in India are reported to have been forced to measure their *karāma* against the *siddhi* (occult power) of the Yogis.²⁵ Both parties frequently claim to have won over the champions of the other to their own creed (Vaudeville 1974, 94).

The appearance of 'Warrior Sufis', on the other hand, may shed a more grim light on their relationship with the Yogis.²⁶ It does not seem improbable that the Sufi *faḳīrs* imparted a stiff dose of Islamic self-assertiveness and militantism to their Hindu counterparts.

The Yogis

The frequent mention of Yogis in medieval Indian texts refers to a rather ill-defined group of practitioners of *yoga* which may range from itinerant charlatans, conjurers, and wonder-workers of all sorts to sincere ascetics who through rigorous self-discipline endeavoured to transcend the human condition, to attain a state of complete autonomy by defying the laws of nature. In many cases they would not have belonged to any particular school or organisation, and attempts to unite the various and often legendary traditions of individual adepts into one framework, like that of the 84 *siddhas* or of the 9 *nāths*, were certainly made in retrospect. The Yogis of the 13th and 14th centuries were the heirs of a rich and long tradition of uncompromising experiments with human physiological and psychological processes. Physiological exploration of the human body had led to a system of discipline that is usually designated as Haṭhayoga.

23 Nicholson 1963, 10; En.Is. II, 223 f.

24 Gramlich 1976 II, 379: 'Der Dīkr kann eine rein äusserliche und mechanische Repetition eines Namens Gottes sein. In dieser Form ist er kein mystisches Phänomen. Aber er ist seinem Wesen nach dazu angelegt, in mystische Sphären überzugreifen.' For a description of this process see *op. cit.* 378 ff.

25 Shaykh Safī al-Dīn of Uch (Bahawalpur distr. Pakistan), middle of the 11th century, is said to have defeated a Yogi in a super-natural contest (Rizvi 1978 I, III f.), and similar stories are told of later Sufi *shaykhs*, as for instance Khwādja Muʿīn al-Dīn (Rizvi *op. cit.* 117; cf. Vaudeville 1974, 94) and many others (Mujeeb 1967, 165).

26 Eaton 1978, 19 ff.; cf. Farquhar 1925, 440 f.

In addition to the movement that sought complete control over mind and body by means of self-restraint, there had evolved a school of alchemy (*rasāyana*) which developed proto-chemical theories with respect to the effect of chemical compounds (in particular of mercury, *rasa*) on the human body. Its aim was to immunize the body, to prevent its decay and to facilitate yogic techniques.

In the centuries under discussion a group of wandering Yogis appeared on the scene who cultivated the 'sciences' of Haṭhayoga and Rasāyana, and considered themselves to be the descendants of the semi-mythological preceptors Macchendranāth and Gorakhnāth. These so-called Nāth Yogis or Gorakhnāthīs stood outside the pale of orthodoxy and must have enjoyed great popularity. Nothing is known about the earliest form of their organisation, but the oldest centres or monasteries (*maṭhas*) may date from the 14th century.²⁷ They were not the first sect within Saivism to be organized into monastic orders,²⁸ yet their organising may have found a stimulus in their Sufi antagonists, as has been suggested above.²⁹

Reason why attention is paid to the Nāth Yogis in the present context is that they represent an influential and significant popular phenomenon that contributed largely to the image of the perfect man in the eyes of the common people. The Nāth Yogis embody the belief that the individual human being, irrespective of caste, can attain perfection in this body, here and now. As inheritors of the alchemic tradition, the Yogis tend to identify the supra-natural or 'divine body' (*divyadeha*), which is attained in the highest state of perfection (i.e. when identity with Śiva is realised), and the natural body that is transmuted to perfection by yoga (*siddhadeha*). In this connexion they subscribe to the position expressed in the alchemic text *Rasārṇava* (1.8-9):

Release during life-time (*jīvanmukti*), i.e. realisation of one's identity with Śiva, is attained by him whose body is no longer subject to decay and death, O Great Goddess. Even for gods this is a precious thing (*durlabha*). But release (*mokṣa*) that is accompanied by the break-up of the body, that kind of release is useless, for, O Goddess, even a donkey is liberated when his body falls apart.

27 Briggs 1938, 86; Unbescheid 1980, 197; cf. White 1996.

28 Cf. the Pāśupata (Bakker 2007; below, pp. 527 ff.), the Dasnāmī (Sarkar 1958) and Kālāmukha orders (Lorenzen 1972, 103 f.).

29 The abbots (*mahant*) of the Gorakhnāth monasteries, for instance, are frequently called *pīrs* (Briggs 1938, 8; Vaudeville 1974, 95). Ghurye 1953, 157 makes some interesting remarks:

First, the most important centres of the Nāthapanthīs are situated in predominantly Muslim localities. [...] Second, the partiality of the Nāthapanthīs for the goddess Hingalaj on the Makran Coast (see Bakker & Entwistle 1983, 73-85) must have brought them in close contact with Muslim population. Third, we know it from history that the Nāthapanthīs had repeated trouble with the Muslims. The temple of Gorakhnātha at Gorakhpur is known to have been destroyed by the Muslims twice or thrice, the Nāthapanthīs having rebuilt it every time. The daily course of life that is lived at Nāthapanthī centres, typically in the past, approximates the life of the Muslim Pir.

Accordingly, the Nāth Yogis claim, by means of iatro-chemical methods and yogic techniques, i.e. through a course of bodily perfection (*kāyasādhana*), to be able to rejuvenate the body, to make it immutable, and consequently to postpone death *ad libitum*. If he wishes, the Yogi may, at a certain point, decide to dematerialize his body and to assume a divine body. The divine body (*divyadeha*), which can be obtained within the material frame, although it is considered to be nothing else than Śiva's own nature (*śivatādātmya*), is paradoxically, accredited with some individuality of the empirical Yogi.³⁰ Thus the (divine) bodies of the great preceptors, as e.g. Gorakhnāth, are 'believed to be eternally present in order to assist the yoga aspirants in their pursuit, which, again, recalls the notion of the Bodhisattva and may testify to a Buddhist background (notably the Sahajiyā school of Vajrayāna) of the Nāth cult.³¹ Unlike the Buddhists, however, the Yogis believe in the immortality of the body (*kāyasiddhi*) and, consequently, are concerned with physiological and psycho-chemical processes rather than with the psychological intricacies of meditation (Das Gupta 1969, 247 f.).

The Yogi adepts consider themselves, and are considered, as individuals who have succeeded in transmuting their bodies, and thus to have won over time and death. They have gained perfect control over their nervous system, including the autonomic nervous system, and by so doing have attained the status of perfect man as well as of 'perfect instructor' (*sadguru*); in other words, they are conceived of as true gods on earth. The sturdy and austere character of the Yogis accounts for the many (occult) powers ascribed to them. Like their modern congeners, the adepts of body-culture, they inspired awe and veneration in the general public, and often would not have desisted from using their bodily prowess to lend force to their cause. The Nāth Yogis were the first Hindu sect that took to arms, possibly in imitation of their Sufi brethren.³²

The Sants

The cultural forces, exemplified by Yogis and Sufis, which manifested themselves in northern India during the 13th and following centuries, the tendency to reassess the position of the individual in the socio-religious context and to make a stand against orthodoxy in favour of the religious sentiments of the masses,

30 The paradox between the retained individuality in the state of *jīvanmukti* and the simultaneous realisation of Śiva-hood may be and is explained away by postulating a second ultimate state of release (*parāmukti*). This state is described as *sahaja*, i.e. 'natural', in which the all-encompassing form of the Yogi manifests itself. See Das Gupta 1969, 169, 220 f.

31 Cf. Das Gupta 1969, 220, 253; McGregor 1984, 21.

32 Lorenzen 1978, 68. There is a spurious verse in the *Kabīr Bījak* in which a Yogi carrying arms is criticised (Lorenzen *op. cit.* 61). The earliest hard testimony to Yogis behaving as warrior ascetics seems to be the armed clash between Yogis and Nāgas of the Dasnāmī order that was witnessed by the emperor Akbar in AD 1567 (Lorenzen 1978, 68 f.; Pinch 2006, 28 ff.; below, p. 63).

the spirit that fostered egalitarianism in defiance of the caste system—this crucial shift in the Indian cultural pattern reached its acme in the movement of the Sants. The Sants, i.e. the saints, are the pivot of cultural developments in northern India during the period under consideration (the 14th to 16th centuries). For the first time the lower classes, cotton-printers, weavers, cobblers, barbers, and butchers raised their voices, and soon the country resounded with their devotional vernacular poetry, which rapidly attained to an astonishingly sophisticated level. We may conceive of the Sant movement as the first successful reaction of the indigenous genius against the foreign domination to which it had become exposed.

As a matter of fact, the Sant movement was deeply influenced by Islamic attitudes. Its uncompromising monotheism and devotion towards one transcendent god, its rejection of idol worship, and its refusal to attach much significance to caste distinctions are not conceivable without the incitement of Islam. These concessions went so far that the Sant movement can hardly be considered as pertaining to Hinduism in the traditional sense. In fact its exponents were individualists who rejected the traditional precepts and practices of Islam and Hinduism alike and who created a cultural synthesis that stood on its own. They were zealots, hankering for God, and they harnessed their lives in order to contact Him. Socially they were neither wandering ascetics nor settled monks or householders. The orthodox division of the four stages of life did not concern them. They were unorganized and exalted laymen, who renounced as much of their social and religious duties as possible in order to devote themselves to singing the Name of god. Their world-view was basically puritanical and in several respects they resembled the protestant movement of the 16th century Europe. Their enthusiasm may have inspired the masses, but the following they attracted became organized only after their death. This was the case, for instance, with Kabīr who, more than any of his contemporaries, embodied the Sant movement.

Kabīr, a weaver of Islamized stock (*julāhā*), active in the mid 15th century, promulgated devotion to an unqualified (*nirguṇa*) ultimate being that reveals itself graciously to the devotee through its Name. The Name of god, mostly RĀMA,³³ is the mystical scheme that connects the ineffable being with those who love him (it?). By repeating the Name of god the devotee becomes imbued with it, unites with god.³⁴ Though the god of the Sants can hardly be called personal, the relationship between god and soul is, paradoxically, described in terms of love (*prema-bhakti*). It may be clear how much this movement owed to Sufism. Not only the doctrine of love and grace as the medium between this and

³³ See below, p. 466.

³⁴ Kabīr, quoted in Tulpule 1984, 143:

Repeating 'Thou, Thou', I became Thou;
in me, no 'I' remained.
Offering myself unto Thy Name,
wherever I look, Thou art.

the transcendent realm, but especially the only ritual acknowledged to celebrate god, the repetition (*japa*) and singing (*bhajan*) of his Name, in solitude or in communal sessions (*saṃkīrtana*), are in harmony with Sufi conceptions.

We would be mistaken, however, if we attributed the spread of this type of devotion exclusively to Sufism. Its success is as much, or probably more, due to ideas that had already emanated within Hinduism itself.³⁵ The foundations of emotional devotionism (*bhakti*) were laid in South India in the second half of the first millennium of our era, and northern India was on the verge of embracing this new form of religion, when the course of history took a new turn with the Muslim invasions. The belief in the efficacy of sound in the process of religious emancipation is an old all-Indian phenomenon (see below, p. 543), which had its theoretical basis in the 'Platonic' theory of the eternity of phonic archetypes constituting, as it were, a realm of 'phonic ideas' which underlies the phenomenal reality (*śabdabrahman*). This conception was common property of Yogis, Sants, and Bhaktas alike. I have shown elsewhere (Bakker 1986 I, 72, 78) that this doctrine of sound was reformulated in a devotional framework in North India during the 12th century and that the repetition (*japa*) of god's Name (RĀMA) was already recognized as a means of release a century before the Sants declared it to be the only one.³⁶

The rise of the cult of the Name appears to be characteristic of religious developments in northern India where, initially, Muslim authority had prevented the growing stream of devotionism from taking shape in the sensuous 'materiality' of idol worship and temple cult. Here, as contrasted with southern India, the resources of popular religiosity, explored by the emancipating forces at work, were primarily led into individualistic and non-visual aesthetic channels. Gatherings where the ordinary devotee could participate in recitation and singing the praise of god, where he could indulge himself in music and songs in his mother tongue, and where the gap between god and votary was bridged, not only by the enrapture provoked by these performances, but also by the proximity of god-men who were not separated by hieratic distance—these experiences were new departures which would inform Hinduism in the following centuries and would put the Name of god on the tongue of the masses (cf. Vaudeville 1974, 54).

All authors who have dealt with the Sants, and especially Vaudeville (1974, 120), have pointed out how much this movement was indebted to the Yogis.

35 Cf. Ahmad 1964, 142:

Thus, most of the ideas underlying all varieties of the Bhakti movement such as religion of love, monotheism, revolt against the formalism of orthodoxy and the basic principles of egalitarianism are of Hindu origin. They were brought into relief by Muslim example, stimulus, and challenge.

36 This theoretical background explains the schematic function attributed to the Name of god by the Sants. The Name is a sort of cosmic force or *mantra* that can be appropriated by the devotee rather than a sign that conveys god's personality. It embodies the quintessence of his being, but this quintessence is devoid of personality (*nirguṇa*).

Although Vaudeville exaggerates the Yogis' contribution, since much that she ascribes to Nāth influences may actually be attributed to the common stock of esoteric occultism developed in Vaiṣṇava Saṃhitās, Śaiva Āgamas, and Śākta Tantras, the important point to note is that the Sants shared with the Yogis this anti-brahmanical individualistic self-asserting ethos. Unquestionably, the verses of the Sant poets generally contain a stronger moral and social emphasis than those of the Yogis, yet also in the teachings of the former one would look in vain for a philosophy that establishes the ethical value of the individual per se. Kabīr's god, despite being conceived of as the 'perfect instructor' (*sadguru*), a concept borrowed from the Yogis, is no person and hence no ethical substance. The greatness of Kabīr lies in his waywardness, in his courage to break with conventional codes, in the superb manner in which he interprets the deepest religious sentiments of the ordinary people. As the greatest of the Sant poets, the personality of Kabīr epitomizes the self-esteem of the lower castes whose exalted voice he was.

The Bhaktas

However, there was a more down to earth, pedestrian strand in this outburst of devotion. It seems, a priori, very unlikely that the majority of devotees, who since time immemorial had approached god through an idol, i.e. who had worshipped his visual manifestations (*saguṇa*), would give up the habits under the influence of such ecstasies like Kabīr. The Sant owed his popularity to his charisma, to the fact that he was recognized as the embodiment of perfect man, but this does not imply that his followers shared his view of the absolute. Moreover, it could well be that many of the Sants themselves were in reality more closely affiliated to Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* as the doctrine of *nirguṇa* would suggest. There seems to be sufficient evidence for the view expressed by me earlier (Bakker 1986 I, 123) that, from their inception, the Sant movement and the cult of the Name were in constant touch with Vaiṣṇava religion from which they partly derived and into which sections of them would eventually be reabsorbed. This view receives support from Friedhelm Hardy's observations, which led him to infer: 'that a simplistic usage of terms like *nirguṇa*, *sant*, *advaita* etc. creates lines of demarcation which, by using a different type of conceptual framework, reveal themselves as artificial' (Hardy 1983b, 149).

The soil on which an emotional type of *bhakti* directed either to Kṛṣṇa or to Rāma could grow was prepared before the Muslim conquest. The germs of devotion towards Rāma were still couched in an intellectual and ritualistic framework peculiar to the Pāñcarātra tradition, but remarkable concessions to popular demand were already made. The *Agastyaśaṃhitā* (12th century), for instance, acknowledged the singing of god's Name, RĀMA, and the 'remembering' (*smaraṇa*) of his exploits as suitable methods, open to everyone, for realizing god (Bakker 1986 I, 67 ff.). Somehow the pedantic and hieratic 'higher' Hinduism of the North interacted with the more personal, emotional forms of Visnuism of the South, but exactly how this process operated remains

largely unsolved. The growth of the *bhakti* movement during the 13th to 15th centuries is eclipsed by that of the Sants.

This is not the place to dwell at length on the early forms of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* that evolved in South India. A most significant contribution to its understanding was made by Friedhelm Hardy (Hardy 1983a). From it we learn that the earliest Vaiṣṇava mystics, the Ālvārs, started from anthropocentric premises. A positive world-view rooted in the self-awareness of the individual as a psychosomatic being combined with aesthetic sensibility. From it arose the aestheticizing attitude towards the natural environment which was employed 'to visualize and savour' human emotions (Hardy 1983a, 444). Mystic experiences were expressed by means of symbols derived from sensuous experiences and sexual imagery was used to express and evoke intensity of emotions. The awareness of the limitations of the human condition turned god into a distant beloved, which made feelings of separation (*viraha*) the emotional cornerstone of this type of *bhakti*. The relationship between god and Bhakta was basically an interpersonal one. But though god as another, as 'you', is fundamentally different from the ego, he, being as Kṛṣṇa the personification of beauty and love, allows a meeting halfway through his incarnations 'in a variety of concrete forms available to the I's senses and emotions: in the temple *vigrahas* (i.e. images), and similarly in poetry and in the heart.' (Hardy 1983a, 443; cf. below, p. 551).

The main vehicle in which the emotional and sensuous *bhakti* of the Ālvārs was exported to the North was the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (9th century/early 10th century). It conveyed a religious attitude that was basically anthropocentric, maintaining 'the validity of the whole person (body, senses, emotions, mind)' (Hardy 1983a, 553). Intrinsically related to this self-awareness is the conception of an absolute being that is avowedly personal, endowed with qualities such as love, grace, beauty, and compassion. In later centuries poems deriving themes and inspiration from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* began to circulate in northern India. It would seem that in particular Bengal, where a Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā cult developed by integrating elements of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* and 'tantric' *sādhana* (the latter we already encountered while discussing the Nāth Yogis),³⁷ played an important role in the transmission of the spirit of southern devotion into the northern realm.

Another, indirect, channel through which the *bhakti* movement was infused into upper India was the Viśiṣṭādvaita and kindred schools. From the 10th century onwards learned brahmins of the South, trained in Vedantic philosophy, were engaged in coming to grips with popular devotion which tended to undermine their position. By far the greatest figure that emerged from this encounter was Rāmānuja (late 11th century). Rāmānuja succeeded better than anyone before or after him in coming to terms with *bhakti*—on the one hand by transforming the abstract absolute of Advaita into a personal god

37 For reasons of space this interesting cult should presently be passed over. The reader is referred to Dimock 1966; Das Gupta 1969; S.K. De 1961.

endowed with (ethical) qualities who contains the world and the souls within him (*advaita*), yet remains distinct from them (*viśiṣṭa*), thus leaving scope for a personal relationship between god and man, the latter's liberation being ultimately dependent on the former's grace (*prasāda*)—on the other hand by reformulating *bhakti* in intellectual terms, thus providing it with a theological basis that made it eventually acceptable for the brahmins of the North. The order in which Rāmānuja's followers were organized, the Śrīsaṃpradāya, seems only to have slowly penetrated into the North, but other southern Ācāryas, founders of orders (*saṃpradāyas*), like Nimbārka (12th century?) and Madhva (13th century) also contributed to the (organized) spread of *bhakti* all over India.³⁸

In this context an idea propounded by Hardy seems to me to have a particular relevance. He points out that inherent in the *bhakti* experience of separation (*viraha*) is the urge to overcome the spatial and temporal distance from god: 'a *bhakti* that defined itself by reference to space and time began to use space and time to "materialize" itself' (Hardy 1983b, 144). The spatial interval was crossed when the southern Bhaktas moved northwards and recovered the putative sites where Kṛṣṇa's amorous adventures had taken place according to the texts. In this way the mythical spatial realm elaborated in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* was reified in Vṛndāvana and its surroundings, Vraja, and one of India's most important pilgrimage centres sprang into existence.

But something more happened. As we have seen, the North with its growing individualism was well prepared to receive the subjective emotionalism of the South and so the ecstatic cult of the Name was easily harmonized with the sensuality of southern devotion as soon as the political situation had stabilized and the socio-religious atmosphere became less tense.³⁹ But the northern attitude of not being satisfied with halfway solutions, the unquestioned belief that the individual could ultimately transcend his limitations and unite with god—be it in his own immortalized body as aspired to by the Yogis, or in a spiritual state of total merger as aimed at by the Sants and, to some extent, by the Sufis—this disposition contrived a means of crossing the 'temporal' separation as well. The tendency of the Ālvārs to substitute aesthetic experience for spiritual illumination was brought to its logical conclusion. A trend to identify *bhukti* (enjoying the world of the senses) and *mukti* (release from the pangs of the human condition) could already be indicated in the *Agastyasaṃhitā* (Bakker 1986 I, 74), and a similar thought was expressed in the *Rasārṇava* quoted above (p. 12). The social and religious condition that had evolved in northern India in the 15th and 16th centuries was ripe for a theory which proclaimed that, although Viṣṇu's *avatāra* as Kṛṣṇa in Vraja had happened a long time ago, his subtle presence in the places of dalliance (*līlā*) had not vanished at all. To experience

38 Apart from the Vaiṣṇava orders the Śaiva Dasnāmī order seems also to have contributed to diffusion of Viṣṇu *bhakti* in the North. See Hardy 1974; cf. De 1961, 23 ff.

39 Outstanding exponents of the blending are e.g. Caitanya and Tulsī Dās. Cf. Bakker 1986 I, 124.

his presence and to participate in his eternal sports only required the special eye and disposition of the Bhakta. The state of auto-suggestion pursued by the devotees allows them to perceive in the impoverished copses, pointed out to them by local pandits, the luxuriant forests in which Kṛṣṇa sported. The holy sites were no longer seen as 'souvenirs' of a far past, but as actually imbued with divine presence. The whole sacred complex of Vṛndāvana, like the city of Ayodhyā for the Rāma Bhakta (Bakker 1986 I, 139 ff.), turned by the end of the 16th century into a 'mega-avatāra' of the realm of myth. Sacred sites became conceived of as true replicas of paradise and god's eternal *līlās* as being enacted simultaneously on two planes, unmanifest (*aprakāṣa*), i.e. in heaven, and manifest (*prakāṣa*), i.e. cognizable in the phenomenal world. The Bhakta needed only to cultivate this hyper-sensitivity, this faculty to envisage, through the profane, the underlying divine aesthetic quality in order to realize communion with god.

In order to explain this possibility of transcendental rapture, poetic aesthetic theory was reformulated in a theological context of *bhaktirasa* (De 1961, 166 ff.). God himself and his divine retinue are the containers of sublime emotions (*rasa*) that are pursued by the Bhaktas. The soteriological effect of the earthly holy places is due to their underlying divine beauty which, when perceived by the eye of the Bhakta, evokes in him the very emotions that identify him with the archetypal divine actors. In his phantasy the devotee plays the role of one of god's intimates.

In this way something of a revolution was accomplished in the Indian world-view as represented in more literate forms of so-called higher Hinduism. Instead of seeking release from this world the Bhakta plunges into it. Instead of hoping to reach heaven and not to be born again the Bhakta intensifies his earthly experience and hopes to prolong it in a subsequent life. The ideal Bhakta transcends the limitations of the human condition, which are invigorated by the laws and rules of caste and society. Hence the *bhakti* movement contributed largely to the ideal that emerged in the first half of the second millennium, according to which each individual, irrespective of caste, could attain to and participate in the divine, not in a nebulous hereafter, but here and now. At the same time it led the masses safely back into the fold of Hinduism. In this respect the *bhakti* movement that manifested itself throughout northern India in the 16th and 17th centuries may be seen as a successful restoration. But the background from which this movement emanated, the religious compound of Sufis, Yogis, Sants, and popular religion had effected a lasting change of perspective. *Mokṣa*, release, became something that should preferably be experienced in this world. As we have seen, this new ethos was anticipated by the Ālvārs (cf. Hardy 1983a, 484, 430, 448 ff.), and in several Sanskrit texts datable before the Muslim period, but its full growth only took place in 16th century North India. It is here, where the vernacular tended to fuse with the Great Sanskrit Tradition, that in an outburst of devotional poetry lyrics such as the following could be produced.

WHAT shall I do, once I have arrived in *Vaikuṇṭha* (Paradise), where there is no banyan where *Kṛṣṇa* plays the flute, no *Yamunā* river, no mountain *Govardhan*, [or] cow of *Nanda*?

WHERE there are none of those bowers, creepers, and trees, and no gentle fragrant wind blows, no cuckoo, peacock, or swan sings; what is the joy of living there?

WHERE *Kṛṣṇa* does not place the flute on his lip and fill it with sound; no thought, word, or deed gives rise to the thrill and rapture of love, my friend!

WHERE there is no earthly *Vṛndāvana*, father *Nanda*, [or] mother *Yaśodā*,

Govinda says: ‘abandonning the Lord and the joy of *Nanda*’s homestead (i.e. *Braj*): living there (i.e. *Vaikuṇṭha*) [would be] a misfortune!’⁴⁰

This brings us back to the pandit of *Ayodhyā*, i.e. the ‘raw material’. It has become evident that the attitude towards life assumed by this devout brahmin adheres to the Hindu tradition that culminated in the 16th century. For him, as a sincere *Bhakta*, experiencing the proximity of god consists in cultivating the emotions that are evoked in the practice of worship and in participating in god’s divine play as enacted every day in his temples and the landscape of his holy sites.

EPILOGUE

Let us return to our initial question with respect to the concept of ‘person’ in the traditional Indian context. Despite the value attached to each individual soul, to the concrete human being of flesh and blood as the ultimate medium through which the divine play (*līlā*) is enacted, we are reluctant to designate the self-perception of the ideal *Bhakta* in terms of ‘personhood’ in the Western sense as defined at the outset. In fact, North-Indian *bhakti* has removed itself from the ‘humanist’ or anthropocentric world-view of the *Ālvārs* in inverse proportion to its ambition to attain union with god. In this respect it is indifferent as to whether union is pursued by means of aesthetics or *yoga*. What makes an

40 A poem (Pada 574) ascribed to *Govindasvāmī* and datable in the 16th century. Another version of the same poem is found in *Paramānanda-Sāgara* (Pada 1371). Cf. the famous poem of *Raskhān* quoted in Entwistle 1987, 71:

SHOULD I be a man, then let me, *Raskhān*, mingle there with the herdsmen of *Gokul*.
IF as a beast, then how should I live but ever grazing among the cows of *Nanda*?
IF a stone, then one of the very hill that he made an umbrella for *Braj* against the torrents of *Indra*.
IF as a bird, then let me dwell for ever in the boughs of a *kadamba* on the banks of the *Yamunā*.

individual in traditional Hindu culture a 'person' is not so much his supposed intrinsic human capacity to act as a morally autonomous being within social ramifications,⁴¹ as his realisation of an inner autonomy, i.e. of his potential capacity to transcend his natural as well as social definiteness by appropriating a system of religious symbols; in other words, his acknowledgement as a person in the Hindu context rather depends on the measure in which he succeeds in manifesting himself as enacting or personifying these symbols, or, to formulate it differently, his personhood, rather than something given, is something that can be acquired by degrees.

To give an example, the Bhakta, for instance, aspires to emancipation by evoking an emotional state (*bhāva*) that is traditionally ascribed to one of the archetypes affiliated with god. Thus he may identify himself with the milkmaids (*gopīs*) who develop their erotic feelings for Kṛṣṇa (*mādhurya-rasa*), or, he may assimilate to Hanumat, the servant of Rāma, in order to experience god's proximity through sentiments of service and submission (*dāsya-rasa*). By integrating his religious and social life as much as possible his endeavour and zeal may be translated into social esteem and prestige.

A central category in this process is the notion of an eternal self or soul essential to each human being, which forms part of the divine and which only awaits emancipation. Partly, the degree of this emancipation is thought to be represented by caste. However, the institution of renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) as well as the context of popular devotional religion offer alternative symbol-systems, which may lead man up the rungs of Jacob's ladder within this life. All this amounts to what is already almost an intellectual cliché, viz. that, rather than promoting the ideal of Homo Aequalis, traditional Hindu culture fosters man as a Homo Hierarchicus.

41 For the development of ethical thought in Neo-hinduism under Western influence see especially Hacker 1978.