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The concept of 'transcendence' in modern Western philosophy and in twentieth century Hindu thought

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ABSTRACT

'Transcendence' has been a key subject of Western philosophy of religion and history of ideas. The meaning of transcendence, however, has changed over time. The article looks at some perspectives offered by the nineteenth and the twentieth century Anglo-American and continental European philosophers of religion and presents their views in relation to the concept of transcendence formulated by the Bengali Hindu traditionalist Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati (1874–1937). The questions raised are what transcendence in the philosophy of religion is, how one can speak of it, and what its goal is. The paper points to parallels and differences in epistemology, ontology and practice. One difference is that the nineteenth and the twentieth century Western philosophy of religion tended to assume an ontological difference between self and transcendence inherited from personalities such as Søren Kierkegaard, but also to explore the concept of transcendence beyond the idea of a metaphysical God. Bhaktisiddhanta, whose foundational thought mirrors medieval Hindu philosophy of religion and the theistic schools of Vedānta, suggests that transcendence has a metaphysical and personal dimension that is to some degree ontologically similar to and directly knowable by the self. Bhaktisiddhanta's approach to transcendence differs from Kierkegaard's and other Western philosophers' and revolves around the idea of God as a transcendent person that can be directly known morphologically and ontologically through devotion. The article is a contribution to the history of ideas and the philosophy of religion in Eurasia and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati; continental philosophy; Gaudiya Vaishnavism; Hinduism; Søren Kierkegaard; phenomenology; transcendence; Vedānta

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INTRODUCTION

Exploring philosophies of religion is a tasking exercise that requires competence in several areas of thought. The flow of ideas of philosophers and intellectuals also tends to change over time, which renders the comparison of their core structures more difficult. Nonetheless, exploring philosophies of religion across regional domains may enrich our understanding of religion although it is essential to keep in mind differences in social, cultural, and historical contexts.

The present article explores a number of interpretations on the subject of transcendence from authors that can be broadly grouped under the umbrella of continental (European) and Anglo-American philosophy. At the end it will explore writings from the Hindu school of Bengal Vaishnavism represented by the intellectual Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati (1874–1937) and draw some preliminary conclusions.[1] The article does not claim to make justice to Western philosophy nor to Bengal Vaishnavism given their enormous complexity and intellectual history. It will nonetheless point to some examples that may be useful for comparison and for future research.

VARIETIES OF TRANSCENDENCE

At the outset it is important to point out that there are several approaches to the idea of 'transcendence'. Åke Sander for example distinguishes between several categories of transcendence related to human experience. The first one is consciousness transcendence (Swed. *medvetandetranscendens*) (T1) and refers to anything that is beyond the awareness of the subject. The immanent is in this case the subject's experience. The latter can be further divided in two subcategories: the intention and purpose behind an act (T1.1) and the genuine experience of performing the act (T1.2). A second category is sensory transcendence (*sinnestranscendens*) (T2), which refers to all that is transcendental to the subject's ordinary perception. Within this category it is important to distinguish between: (a) what is empirically transcendental in relation to ordinary sense perception due to the limitations of the subject at a particular time (T2.1); (b) what is in principle not possible to perceive through the senses (T2.2) since the source is beyond the range of human perception and human tools.

A third category is experience transcendence (*erfarenhetstranscendens*) (T3). According to Sander much of the strength and attraction of the 'typical' religious experience is that it gives access to a deeper, more cohesive and truthful reality. Those who had these experiences speak of entering the

[1] For a detailed account of Bhaktisiddhanta's life and thought see Sardella, 2013.

deepest recesses of being and the root of existence through an 'inner eye', and access a dimension of existence that humans are generally unaware of (Sander, 1988: I, 45). In the course of many religious experiences, the subject is said to witness the cradle of life itself, hidden in the deepest recesses of life (Sander, 1988: 28–31). Experience transcendence is an inner experience beyond ordinary awareness.

A fourth category is semantic transcendence (*semantisk transcendens*) (T4). It has two distinct subcategories: one that includes phenomena that cannot be semantically expressed due to lack of appropriate terms in a language domain (T4.1). The other consists of what in principle cannot be communicated through symbols since it is ineffable such as in the case of a religious experience of the divine (T4.2).

The fifth and last category is metaphysical transcendence (*metafysisk transcendens*) (T5). Transcendence refers in this case to that which is beyond the external world. This category has also two subcategories. The first one is what is generally discussed in theology and philosophy of religion, *i.e.* a space or territory located beyond the physical cosmos explored by the natural sciences (T5.1). In this sense, transcendence refers to multiple worlds such as the Christian transcendental abode of God. The second subcategory (T5.2) is linked to the world of everyday experience, generally understood as 'paramount reality' (*vardagsvärlden*). Transcendence here refers to alternate states of consciousness, such as in the world of fantasy and imagination, in the world of dreams, or in the worlds of the schizophrenic and mentally ill. T5.2 is not based on a theory of multiple worlds like T5, but explores alternative patterns of experience within the ordinary life-world. This subcategory may include experiences of God if God is understood as immanent to the life-world (Sander, 1988: I, 31).

This article will have a certain focus on a history of ideas relating to the fifth category, albeit not exclusively.

TRANSCENDENCE IN CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

The word 'transcendence' from the Latin term *transcendere* (to move beyond) is generally juxtaposed to the word 'immanent' derived from *in-manere* (to stay within).[2] During the second half of the fifteenth century the distinction between transcendence and immanence became an important element of Christian theology. From what was thought to be God's perspective, immanence represented the Divine Trinity of God while transcendence referred to God's creation of the finite world expressed in terms of economy (*oikonomia*) or

[2] I would like to thank Professor Ola Sigurdsson and Professor Åke Sander from the University of Gothenburg for commenting on several sections of this article.

God's manifestation through creation, redemption, and consummation. From a human perspective immanence was the finite world, which presupposed the existence of an infinite creator and a transcendent God. The divine was not only transcendent in relation to the finite world but was also beyond the scope of reason. God was transcendent in both a metaphysical and epistemological sense.

By the early twentieth century, continental philosophy had reached a point where the concept of 'transcendence' had become disconnected from its earlier theological roots. The road, however, had been convoluted. Immanuel Kant had professed that only what can become an object of experience (the phenomena) may be known, while the *das Ding an sich* (the thing-in-itself, the *noumenon*) was transcendental. The latter, however, no longer referred to God's transcendence but to the conditions of possibility stemming from the *noumenon* as their cause. Hegel regarded history as an intrinsic part of the rational reality of God. Transcendence was an immanent object of reason and in that sense did not possess a metaphysical status distinct from the dialectical process of history. During the twentieth century, the concepts of 'transcendence' and 'immanence' were explored by German and French phenomenologists. Edmund Husserl distinguished between the intention — an integral aspect of the stream of consciousness — and the individual transcendental ego, who was beyond it. Martin Heidegger defined 'man' (as an ontological category) as a transcendent Being that strived to reach beyond the experience of objects in order to understand Being itself.

KIERKEGAARD

The question of defining the nature of transcendence, however, remained foundational and was addressed by the important nineteenth century philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard. In *Philosophical fragments* (*Philosophiske Smuler*) Kierkegaard under the pen name of Johannes Climacus argued that although a person may know who she is there was still a paradox that forced her into going beyond the known in search for an 'unknown', whom Kierkegaard labelled 'the god' (Kierkegaard, 1985: 37ff.). However, this passionate search for knowing the unknown could only bring to the limit of what was known but not beyond it. The only reasonable method for proving the nature and existence of God was what Kierkegaard, in this particular instance, wrote as 'just wait a little and I shall demonstrate it' (Kierkegaard, 1985: 43). It was never accomplished and always in the making. Simply put, a passionate, unfulfilled search for the god was the path to transcendence, according to Kierkegaard's view in this period (1844). Broadly speaking, Kierkegaard appeared to belong to the tradition that viewed the divine as ontologically different from individual

humans, although in other texts it is possible to discern a closeness and intimacy of spirit between the human and the 'unknown' realized in prayer. The differentiation between the human and divine sphere was based on a moral gap between the perfect ethical nature of God and the human sin against God, an ethical gap that had rendered an impossible task to speak of God in any positive way.

EPISTEMOLOGY

The rational evaluation of religious claims as true or false was another area of investigation in the twentieth century. Philosophical statements that claimed truth-value about the nature of God and transcendence became the object of rigorous historical and philosophical analysis. Logical positivism had maintained in the early decades of the century that scientific language was evidence--based, but the language and concepts of philosophy and theology were non--verifiable and thus cognitively meaningless. To address these statements, Dewi Zephaniah Phillips — whose thought is rooted in Anglo-American philosophy — found no faults in a language that spoke of God and a faith situated outside the realm of logic. Wittgenstein had suggested that talks of belief made only sense within the frame of a given discourse, a so-called 'language-game'. Phillips then suggested that the concepts of God and transcendence were different from other kinds of talks, both scientific and ordinary, since their epistemological object was outside the realm of reason. Therefore, according to Phillips, it made no sense to say that 'he [God] may or may not exist' (Phillips, 1995: 11).

William J. Wainwright put forward another argument, *i.e.* that participants in religious disputes do employ similar criteria in order to assess the merits of rivalling religious systems. Wainwright provided the example of theistic religions of transcendence such as Christianity and Hindu-Vaishnavism and concluded that a metaphysical system, including its language, discourse, and arguments, was often assessed by its opponents by its capacity to make sense of all available knowledge in competition with comparable, similar systems (Wainwright, 1995: 88). In this sense, language was meaningful as a cognitive, rational tool in order to assess competing religious domains and their ideas of transcendence.

As the twentieth century progressed it became increasingly important to acknowledge and address the existence of a plurality of religious systems that offer competing interpretations of transcendence. Anglo-American philosophers such as David Basinger attempted to find new epistemological tools. Basinger supported the British philosopher John Hick's theory of religious pluralism that viewed all religions as relative products of human efforts in relation to o n e transcendent, divine reality, and Alvin Plantinga's concept of religion as

properly basic and foundational, always true for its committed believers and practioners. Basinger's 'reformed epistemology' suggested that both views could be accommodated by responsibly taking possession of one's own faith and then by increasing one's respect and appreciation for other religious views.[3]

TRANSCENDENCE WITHIN THE REACH OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One key question still remains open: what is transcendence, with or without a capital 't'? Continental philosophy in the twentieth century took a step away from Anglo-American preoccupations for the epistemological question of the truth of the existence of God and religion discussed above. According to John Caputo the 'God' of Anglo-American philosophy of religion was still the God of the philosophers born of Enlightenment modes of thinking (Caputo, 2002: 2), that 'God' was declared dead by continental philosophers. The project of epistemology in continental philosophy gave way to an emphasis on how to existentially relate to transcendence. Examples of this existential turn are reflected in the 'unknown' of Kierkegaard mentioned earlier, but also in the 'impossible' of Jacques Derrida (Derrida, 1993) and the 'possibility' of Richard Kearney (Kearney, 2002). Increasing focus was placed on the human ability to address and respond to transcendence in a meaningful way. As a consequence, transcendence came more and more to be understood as an inherent and intrinsic part of human experience.

The French phenomenologist Emmanuel Lévinas, for example, viewed metaphysics and transcendence as man's (here again in an ontological sense) relation to an absolute Other, which referred to both the infinite that the word 'God' points to — beyond Being and human imagination — but also to the meeting face to face with a 'human' Other. The human Other, however, was

[3] Basinger proposed that a 'reformed epistemologist' did not have to surrender to a pluralistic view, since plausibility was highly subjective in religious discourse (Basinger, 1999: 366ff.). By confronting her religious understanding with competing ones, a reformed epistemologist could first truly possess and own her belief — beyond affiliation dictated by the cultural environment of one's place of birth — and secondly, she could increase her tolerance and respect for the discourses about transcendence presented by others. Plantinga has argued that a specific religion is properly basic and foundational, and does not have to be discussed within the frame of any other religious view, since it is the unique conceptual frame of reality for those who follow it (Plantinga, 1983: 76). Hick had argued — through a rational and comparative study of religion parallel to Wainwright's approach — that religions ultimately were a product of human culture and their historical, individual and epistemological context. Religions, however, dealt essentially with the same One, Formless, Undifferentiated, Transcendental Reality, a view that to some degree resembles the epistemological and ontological perspective of Hindu Advaita Vedānta (see Hick, 1982).

a Being who could not be reduced to any ontological 'sameness'. It was a meeting that eventually evoked a foundational ethical response, a profound sense of response-ability (Lévinas, 1998).

The issue of the gender of transcendence and its cultural ramifications has also received attention. According to Ellen T. Armour, religion in the context of the West has been based on a vertical relationship between a normative masculine subjectivity and his perfected mirror image, God (the Father, the Son) (Armour, 2002: 223). Luce Irigaray, evoking mystical images such as the rose and the abyss, has proposed a return to the immediacy of poetry and singing, a divine human way of being that allows appreciation for the rose, the joy of light and air as well as the pulse and rhythm of the seasons. But this according to Irigaray requires abandoning all projects and being reborn to the immediate presence of life and divinity beyond logic and language, risking one's cherished life in the process and allowing oneself to jump in the unknown abyss that allowed change and rebirth. This new B e i n g implied a reunion with life itself in all its components and a being in God that did not deny the important event of giving birth and the female identity of being a mother (Irigaray, 2002).

THE PLACE OF LOVE

The relevance of discussing the subject of transcendence is naturally related to its ultimate purpose. Whether ethical, existential or ontological, transcendence has often been dealt with as a foundational, underlying carrier of meaning. In many instances it has been explored as the ultimate goal of existence. One important feature of the study of transcendence in the twentieth century continental philosophy — with significant parallels in medieval and the twentieth century strands of Hindu *bhakti* (devotion) — is the concept of love.

John Caputo — who on this point mirrors the later writings of Derrida — argued for thinking of God as the 'becoming possible of the impossible'. Transcendence was impossible, something whose possibility humans did not and could not foresee because of it inaccessibility to the eye, ear, and mind (Caputo, 2001: 10). This absolute Other evoked a love which 'overpowers our powers, potencies, and possibilities, and exposes us to something impossible' (Caputo, 2001: 31). Transcendence, this impossible, made demands on humans, shaking them from the shackles of self-love, dragging them into service to others, and into something impossible to come in the future. In this relationship, according to Caputo, it was not important to know precisely what transcendence was. Especially so, since only then humans were forced to ask the question posed by Augustine: 'what do I love when I love my God?' (Caputo, 2001: 31). For Kearney the relationship between humans and God was part of a God-play that disclosed the loving power of Being

itself (Kearney, 2002: 106). By opening to this 'loving possible', humans could act to make the impossible a bit more possible, and assist God in fulfilling the potential of existence (Kearney, 2002: 111).

TRANSCENDENCE IN HINDUISM

Western philosophy of religion is an enormous fields of study and it would be meaningless to claim to cover its many currents and variety of perspectives through a few examples, even if only for the purpose of comparison. What has been stated above, however, covers ideas that had a vast impact in shaping the concept of transcendence and the discussion of its epistemology and ontology in Western philosophy of religion in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Indian philosophy of religion has a similar range of intellectual currents that have been explored through centuries of textual studies and commentaries and through formal and informal debates. Hindu philosophy counts six main orthodox philosophies (the *saddarśana*). For the sake of offering a parallel with a reasonable range of similarities and points of convergence this article will next explore the concept of transcendence within the philosophical schools of Vedānta in the theistic interpretations offered by Vaishnavism in Bengal — also known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Gaudiya Vaishnavism has a strong tradition of theistic philosophy of religion that in a number of areas can be compared to the philosophical reflections about the idea of a personal God found within Christianity and in the philosophy of religion in the West. In order to address a similar historical period, the article will explore the thought of a twentieth century representative of that school, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, who founded in Calcutta the Gaudiya Math and Mission in 1918.

The philosophical basis of Gaudiya Vaishnavism that Bhaktisiddhanta most frequently referred to was formulated during the Middle Ages by the theistic philosopher Jiva Gosvami (ca 1513–1598) and his brother Rupa (1489–1564). Their teachings where restated in the eighteenth century by Baladeva Vidyabhusana through a Sanskrit commentary to the *Vedānta Sūtra* — the latter being arguably the most widely studied philosophical treatise in Hinduism and the key text of Vedānta philosophy.[4]

Bhaktisiddhanta in his writings about Vedānta answers to three questions that have been extensively explored in Continental and Anglo-American philosophy, but he replies from a different cultural and intellectual perspective. Here I will summarize some of his ideas presented in two original booklets published from his institutions in Madras and Calcutta

[4] A translation with the original Sanskrit of the *Vedānta Sūtra*, along with a translation of Baladeva's Sanskrit commentary, is found in Chandra Vasu (Vasu, 1974).

(Bhaktisiddhanta, 1932; Bhaktisiddhanta, 1933) and in an edition of his collected works in English (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1989). His replies — here presented following a similar order as in the case of Western philosophy discussed above — do not represent the entire range of Hindu thought on the subject, although they do reflect a good amount of traditional and medieval ideas particularly in relation to Vedānta. They may be regarded as a point of departure in order to stimulate an informed conversation across different philosophical and religious domains.

The questions posed in the following section are: 1) What is the foundational nature of transcendence? 2) What is the relationship between the self and transcendence? 3) What is the ultimate goal?

1. The nature of Transcendence

In *The Vedanta: Its morphology and ontology* — based on a lecture delivered on August 27, 1933 — Bhaktisiddhanta situates the key concern of Vedānta firmly within the realm of transcendence and metaphysics:

> The Vedanta deals with a theme beyond the finite views of phenomena. The subjects dealt with in that particular philosophy is not confined to any part of material space, and definite span of time or any object of sensuous perception made up of any substance of this Universe (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1933: 6).

According to Bhaktisiddhanta in his interpretation of Vedānta matter (*māyā*) constitutes the external, physical energy — ontologically separated from the inner self (*ātman*) — and is by nature finite and temporary (*asat*). The self on the contrary is situated in transcendence as *brahman* and is constitutionally eternal (*sat*) (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1989: 265). It is, in other words, not created *ex nihilo* as in Christian thought. The metaphysical, individual self and divine transcendence share the same spiritual nature (*brahman*) but are different in size. A personal, transcendent God is the causal, formal, effective, and material source of the world. For the individual, the 'absolute infinitesimal', the infinite limitless God is 'unknown' in the sense that a complete understanding is not possible due to the self's infinitesimal size (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1933: 9). However, since both share the same transcendent nature, a minute degree of knowledge (*cit*) is possible for the self, if she agrees by her free will to open up for God's divine call. This knowledge can be achieved through a process or practice (*sādhana*) that ultimately allows access to transcendence. That practice is meditation through sacred sound.

In a way that is both inclusive and pluralistic, God is simultaneously and inconceivably (*acintya*) understood as the non-differentiated One (*brahman*),

the all-pervading individualised presence next to each individual *ātman* (the *paramātma*), the supreme transcendent personality (*bhagavan*) as well as the root of the physical world. About this paradox, Bhaktisiddhanta tells that:

> [...] both the transcendental manifestation as well as the transformable mundane manifestation are simultaneously incorporated in the Absolute and differ from Himself like the rays of the sun and the glowing disc [...]. The analogy is drawn from the sun. The spirit, the glowing disc, the emanated rays and the penumbra are the four aspects concerning the sun and [are] inseparable from the existence of the sun. So the manifested world has association with the integral position of the Absolute (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1933: 32–33).

All the different physical and metaphysical aspects are regarded as real but each requires a different epistemological method and approach to the nature of reality. Differentiated aspects of transcendence are ultimately non-contradictory (*bheda-abheda*, simultaneously one and different) since they deal with different aspects of the same immense universal reality but also depend epistemologically on the limitations posed by the viewer's focus and individual approach to the study of reality. Of all various aspects of transcendence, the transcendental personality is viewed as the most complete. This approach to pluralism and religious diversity differs from Hick's understanding of oneness, since different interpretations of transcendence are regarded as real in Bhaktisiddhanta's view, and not simply as a product of human culture and religious history. Different views of transcendence, however, need to be placed in a scale from more to less complete according to their philosophical depth, level of authority and source of revelation.

2. Relationship

The relationship between the self and God is viewed as one of loving service (*bhakti*). The self who is temporarily embodied in a biological and mental machine (the body and mind) is in actuality a transcendent servant of transcendence. An often quoted metaphor is that the hand gets no nourishment simply by grasping food, but by offering that food to the mouth the hand also receives strength from the stomach, which provides nourishment to the whole body. In a similar way the transcendent self as a minute particle of *brahman* — the transcendent metaphysical totality and the root cause of all physical and mental phenomena — gets its strength from ultimate transcendence. Through service the self becomes fulfilled and shares in the profuse 'givenness' (*prasāda*) of transcendence. This service develops into a relationship that may take different forms according to the individual self's desire. It may manifest as a relationship as consort, parent, friend, servant, or as neutral:

> The Consort Absolute will wait for the consort servitor. The parent servitor will meet the Child Absolute, the object of his or her only engagement. The eternal friend servitor will regain his position as such. The personal attendant servitors will meet their Master and offer their confidential services, for sheer love. The confidential service offered by the neutral entity will indirectly be directed to the Absolute without any cognizance on the part of the unalloyed individual spirit (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1933: 31).

Bhaktisiddhanta tells that the focus on transcendent sound is the key for approaching transcendence and overcoming the confusion that arises by contact with the physical world:

> The last aphorism of the Vedanta Sutras tends to the impressions that sound will bring us to the Region wherefrom a return journey along the path of knowledge is not possible. It goes to show a process leading to the transcendence [...]. By the constant chanting of the Transcendental Name the aim of spiritual aspiration will be fulfilled and no other process can remedy the evil of accepting the undeserving position of a worldly enjoyer (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1933: 27).

3. The goal

The goal of transcendence is pure love (*prema*), for which a distinction need to be made between the self and the ultimate person:

> The different readings of the Vedanta under true guidance will give us the result that Personality of Godhead is not approached by identifying oneself with the transcendental Effulgence (Brahma) [*brahman*] coming out from the transcendental Body of the Absolute and that the all-engrossing features (Paramatma or Universal Godhead) are but a part of the Absolute in Whom a freed soul dose not merge (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1933: 31–32).

According to Bhaktisiddhanta the aim of Vedānta is transcendental love (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1932: 9). *Vedānta Sūtra* states that the goal of transcendence and being is found in divine sports and pastimes (*līlā*), which Bhaktisiddhanta reads as the enjoyment of the personal manifestation of transcendence — the supreme personality — with his loving servants. These pastimes are permeated by ever-expanding, transcendental love. According to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, the ultimate form (*rūpa*) of transcendence has perennial, non-physical morphological manifestations, one in a male form named Krishna and one in a female form named Radha. Radha is the morphologic embodiment of the female transcendent potency (*śakti*). The two aspects of transcendence in male and female forms are never separated, but constitute one reality with two equally important functions. Their love for one another represents the highest level of

transcendental love. All selves are in a transcendent sense 'females' since they are emanations from the ultimate potent and potency. They are also eternally subordinated to and depending on it. In the material world, transcendent love can be awakened by constant, active remembrance of and service to the call of transcendence. Bhaktisiddhanta concluded that reason (*buddhi*) and philosophy (*jñāna*) ultimately failed to understand transcendence and had to be themselves transcended by 'direct' knowledge (*vijñāna*) in relation to transcendence awakened by the sound vibration of God's transcendent names (*śabda brahman*). This process was meant to evoke the presence of God (Bhaktisiddhanta, 1933: 27).

Bhaktisiddhanta spells out a mainstream reading of the idea of transcendence in terms of Hindu philosophy of religion, which is particularly influential among the traditionalist schools of *bhakti yoga* of Vaishnavism and Shaivism. It is nonetheless important to point out that the genealogy of the nineteenth and twentieth century Hinduism is extremely variegated and pluralistic. Perhaps the most influential current of philosophical thought among intellectuals and middle-class Hindus in the late nineteenth and twentieth century was advaita Vedānta, a monistic, idealist interpretation of Vedānta that views transcendence (*brahman*) as a unified metaphysical reality non--different ontologically from the self. In the stage of liberation (*mukti*) the self loses its individual identity and merges in the infinite essence of *brahman*. Advaitic thought envisions the world as temporary and as an illusion although it is also an inconceivable creation of *brahman*. Advaita Vedānta has generated strong activist movements for social, political and cultural emancipation during the late colonial and postcolonial period. It was propagated both in India and in the West by personalities such as Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), and former president of India Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975).

CONCLUDING WORDS

In the ninetieth and twentieth century, Western philosophy of religion and the Hindu schools of Vedānta were among the intellectual streams that paid considerable attention to the concept of transcendence. A general, foundational difference in relation to talks of 'God' — with or without capital 'g' — is that Western approaches to transcendence — perhaps due to their intellectual links with Christian thought — have tended to view transcendence as sharply differentiated from the human sphere — such as in the case of Kant and Kierkegaard. The schools of Vedānta, on the other hand, here represented by Bhaktisiddhanta, have stressed that transcendence is knowable by humans on the conscious level of the metaphysical self through various practices of meditation

and yoga. The most widely practiced yoga method within Hinduism is bhakti to a personal deity, whose identity is variously understood.

An important parallel between Western and Indic philosophy of religion is that although both traditions of thought approach the nature of the body, the mind and the self in different terms, they have emphasized at certain stages the ultimate importance of personal love in relation to transcendence, be it towards a divine being or the human/transcendent Other. Another interesting parallel is that in both domains the idea of a personal God has played a significant role.

The schools of Vedānta have been for over a millennium the most influential in India, and their firm foundation in transcendence speaks a different language to the philosophy of religion compared to the philosophical traditions of the West. Nonetheless, it is possible to see parallels, points of contact and proximity, particularly in terms of the ontology and epistemology of transcendence, as well as the concept of transcendent love.

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