REVIEW

DIMENSIONS OF RENUNCIATION IN ADVAITA VEDĀNTA.

Kapil Tiwari
Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1977. Rs. 45.00.

Dr. Tiwari begins his work with the words, "This study dealing with the implications of renunciation in its personal and social dimensions is so all-embracing as to touch almost every popular spiritual conviction of the Indian mind and it overlaps almost every province of Indian philosophy" (p. viii). A rather grand claim one can scarecely expect to find wholly satisfied in a work whose substance is less than 150 pages.

But let us not be misled by this over-ambitious introduction, for this work is in fact an excellent study of an area capturing ever wider interest among scholars of the Hindu tradition, and serious seekers after truth in traditions more Eastern than Western — the area of *sannyāsa,* normally rendered "renunciation", and often couched in the *pravṛtti/nivṛtti* dichotomy. This latter distinction has often been claimed — a little too glibly, in my opinion — to hold the central conflict, or at least puzzle, early Vedic writings were designed to resolve. Such scholars as Madelaine Biardeau have been harping on this theme much of late. And whilst I believe most sociological "explanations" of the intentions of religious movements, and their writings, to be largely misguided, oddly ignoring the fact that such intentions are mainly *religious* and not *social* ones, there can be no doubt that these two themes *as such* — the way of "action in the world" (*pravṛtti*), and the supposedly converse way of "renounced withdrawal from the world" (*nivṛtti*) — are to be very much found in these early writings.

Part of the value of Kapil Tiwari's book is the way in which he endeavours to demonstrate, largely successfully in my view, the manner in which *true* renunciation, at least as expressed in late Advaita Vedānta, is far more a blending of these two ways than a doctrinaire espousal of one only. This happy blending can, I believe, also be found in a proper, or at least tenable reading of the early Vedas. There are reasons to believe that religious verities *cannot* "develop" ("progressive revelation" — an undoubted fact — notwithstanding).

On the demerit side of this work are Dr. Tiwari's occasional critical misconstruals of other traditions — most notably the Jain and Buddhist ones (*vide* pp. 5, 38, 55, 56 *et alia*), though occasionally also other *darśanas (vide* Sāṁkhya, p. 39) — in the cause of strengthening the adulation then thought appropriate (by contrast) for Advaita. Apart from the obvious fact that in speaking of Buddhism one must first answer the question "which Buddhism?", to speak of "the ultimate goal of Advaitic philosophy as representing a system of hopefulness" supposedly "in contradistinction to the nihilistic implications of Buddhism" (pp. 4–5), is either to ignore, or most grossly misconstrue Nāgārjuna and later Mahāyāna. Indeed, Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is precisely, and in part, an attack upon those Sarvāstivādins who tended towards nihilism, or at least who seemed to Nāgārjuna to do so. Living Buddhism of the Tibetan tradition — and, I would say, of most others — is

very far from "nihilistic". This is a shallow critique, much in the tradition of the still off-hand attack on Hinduism as "life-denying" — to which this very book is an excellent corrective.

Similar misguided volleys are levelled against Jainism (*vide* pp. 55, 56, *et al.*). To suggest in supposed criticism that "both of them (Jainism and Buddhism) recommend unconditional and categorical renunciation" (p. 54), is either to say what is anyway centrally true of all authentic religion — an absolute renunciation of the merely mundane as harbinger of salvation (or *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*) — or once more to oversimplify. The conculsion, "This spiritual attitude of 'isolated, exclusive, alone' lacks in social dimension what ('which' in the text is an obvious misprint) is fully brought out in the Vedāntic renunciation" (p. 55), is scarcely less doctrinaire. It is always unhelpful to denigrate other provenly authentic spiritual traditions in the name of one's own. It is also bound to prove false. Sageness and sainthood speak for themselves; and in many tongues. Only a spiritual genius, like Ramakrishna, is ever in a position to comprehend *another whole tradition* at its full, unmitigated depth. Academics are rarely spiritual geniuses; nor is the converse often true. Even Gandhiji had spots that were blind.

On the merit side, the book is dotted with a cluster of truly insightful passages, most of which simply contradict the above cavalier dismissals. "It is a distinctive mark of the mainstream of Indian thought that anything antagonistic to the philosophy of hopefulness was rejected in the long run. A philosophy of hopefulness was rejected in the long run. A philosophy or religion that fails to inspire a moral and spiritual quest could not flourish for a long time" (p. 58). And both Jainism and Buddhism have flourished for a long time.

Or — "The spiritual history of India indicates that whenever the power of the ideal of renunciation weakened and the pursuit of *Jñāna* and Ultimate Reality were undertaken in disregard of it, there has occurred a noticeable decline in philosophical thought as well as deterioration in the fabric of religion. And contrariwise, whenever the spirit of renunciation revived itself, the foundations were always (?) *Jñāna* and the discovery of its metaphysical ground. *I have, obviously in mind, the spread of the Mahāyāna Buddhism and the Vedānta*" (p. 66, italics mine). Which is true — both "Mahāyāna Buddhism and the (Advaita?) Vedānta" are now equally widespread. In which case, "Buddhism" is meant to mean "all Buddhism *but* Mahāyāna"? But even Theravāda has flourished "for a long time", and is no less widespread.

Yet this book in so many ways is a valuable contribution, from a scholar, pleasingly domiciled in the Antipodes, whose contribution will only grow. It is hoped that many scholars, Asian in origin and approach to religion, will venture "this side" to balance the overload of ones, Non-Asian in both. I pause to quibble only because it is almost *de rigeur* these days for respectability among scholars that any favourable apologetic for some tradition should contain a measure of onslaught upon another, or others. The Christian tradition with its exclusivist tendencies has always harboured this danger; and it is this tradition which has largely fashioned our norms of "scholarship".

Yet, we needn't give this danger *expression*: for only the truth matters, and its telling.

(I.K-W.)

KABIR: THE APOSTLE OF HINDU-MUSLIM UNITY

Muhammad Hedayetullah
(Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1977), Rs 60.00, xxix, 320 pp., bibliography, no index.

Of all the poets and religious leaders who had a part in the great outpouring of *bhakti* literature in northern India between the 14th and 17th centuries, perhaps the only one yet to have acquired truly international renown is Kabīr. That this should be so is by no means surprising, given Kabīr's hardheaded, no-nonsense approach to the spiritual and his merciless debunking of hypocrisy and cant. Poems infused with such an attitude have an immediate appeal that can bridge gaps of time and civilisation and can survive translation into alien tongues far better than either the more culture-bound works of Kabīr's contemporary compatriots or the more esoteric verses that form the bulk of Kabīr's own compositions. For the fact of the matter is that, aside from those straightforward passages attacking religious sham and pretense, Kabīr's thought is hard to systematise and difficult to interpret. Many have wrestled with the poetry of Kabīr, but only a few have managed to come off well. Unfortunately, the author of *Kabir: The Apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity,* through his poor handling of texts and his biased approach, has handicapped himself from the start.

When taking up a scholarly analysis of a writer one presumes that the analyser has taken into account all relevant primary sources. The reader will accordingly become suspicious when he discovers that in this study Hedayetullah has completely ignored the *Kabīr Granthāvalī,* one of the three published collections of Kabīr's poetry, and has confined himself to the remaining two collections, the *Bījak* and the assemblage of Kabīr's verses in the *Ādi Granth (Gurū Granth Sāhib)* of the Sikhs. This is in spite of the fact that the *Bījak* is generally held to be both later in date and more influenced by extraneous material than the other two texts. Nowhere does Hedayetullah give any explanation for his puzzling omission of the *Kabīr Granthāvalī.* This is not, however, the only lapse with regard to texts. One would expect that anyone writing in English on Kabīr's thought would himself translate the verses selected to illustrate that thought. Although Hedayetullah gives a brief survey of editions of the *Bījak* and says a bit about the *Ādi Granth* (pp. 133–141), none of the English renderings which he quotes from those sources seem to be his own. The identity of the translators of these quotations is difficult to determine, since Hedayetullah usually does not bother to provide the translator's name. After comparing a random sampling of his verses with those in Ahmad Shah's English translation of the *Bījak* (published in 1917) and with those in the English translations of the *Ādi Granth* of E. Trumpp (published in 1877) and M. A. Macauliffe (published in 1909 in six volumes under the title *The Sikh Religion),* it seems that he has generally relied on those three books for his translations. For example, except for minor changes in punctuation and spelling, English translations from the *Bījak* given by Hedayetullah on pages 169, 263, and 282 are identical with translations found on pages 135, 113, and 95 respectively in Ahmad Shah's book and the translations of verses from the

Ādi Granth on pages 186 (second quotation) and 201 are borrowed from Trumpp's translation, pages 480 and 681 respectively; the *Ādi Granth* verse quoted on p. 240 is the same as the translation found on pp. 171–2 of volume 6 of Macauliffe's book. Other sources used by Hedayetullah are the outmoded studies of Westcott (*Kabīr and the Kabīr Panth,* 1907) and Keay (*The Religious Life of India: Kabīr and his Followers,* 1931). Although he is in agreement with current scholarly opinion when he says that "the original Hindi text of which Tagore's hundred poems [with reference to R. Tagore's *One Hundred Poems of Kabir,* 1915] is a translation is probably not a collection of authentic poems of Kabīr, except for some lines and phrases", he is nevertheless willing on pages 202 and 203 to use a poem from Tagore's collection as an example of Kabīr's thought.

Although Heyadetullah's book was published in 1977 and the preface is dated July of that year, he makes no reference at all to such outstanding recent studies of Kabir as C. Vaudeville's *Kabīr* (Oxford, 1974), W. Dwyer's [Viliyam Dvayar] *Kabīr kī Bhaktī Bhāvanā* (New Delhi, 1976), W. H. McLeod's *Gurū Nānak & the Sikh Religion* in which there is a short but lucid account of Kabīr's thought, and the collection of essays entitled *Kabīr* edited by Vijayendra Snātak (Delhi, 1965).

In making his examination of Kabīr, instead of attempting to assess the evidence with as few preconceptions as possible, Hedayetullah has followed the very hazardous practice of beginning with a conviction — in this case that "Kabīr tried to bind the Hindus and the Muslims together with a single religio-social rope and thereby resolve the historical tension between them" (p. xxiii) — and proceeding to fit the evidence to the conviction. It is accurate enough to say that Kabīr gave equally short shrift to the external show and selfpride of both the Hindu and Muslim religious establishments, but to the best of my knowledge in no verse, including those cited in this book, has Kabīr stated that his motive in making such *exposés* was to draw Hindus and Muslims together. Nevertheless, throughout the first 131 pages of the book in which a survey is made of the development of *Ṣūfism* and *bhakti* the author strains to link those two traditions so that Kabīr, who no doubt partook of both streams of thought, can be presented as a synthesiser of Hinduism and Islam. Such an attempt gives rise to a number of distortions as when on p. 55 it is said that "These Ṣūfī ideas of love for God and absolute surrender to God's mercy, which corresponds to Sanskrit *Prapatti,* came to be the foundation on which the Southern School of post-Rāmānuja Vaiṣnava *Bhakti* stood." and on p. 73 "only under the new impetus given by the Ṣūfīs, who profess a religion supremely catholic and liberal in character, did the *bhakti* movements become a religious movement of the masses and hence come to be called a democratic religion." It would be very difficult indeed to prove either that *ṣūfī* ideas underlie south Indian *bhakti* or that they were necessary to make the Hindu *bhakti* movement a mass phenomenon and the author of this book has definitely not given such proof.

The last portion of the book (pp. 132–302) is taken up with a discussion of Kabīr's life and thought. As his source for Kabīr's life the author has made the peculiar decision to "summarise the account given by Dr. Evelyn Underhill in her introduction to Rabindranath Tagore's *One Hundred Poems of Kabīr*" even though Dr. Underhill has never been considered an authority on Kabīr. In making this summary Hedayetullah, who puts more emphasis than most scholars on the reliability of some of the legends about Kabīr's life, says (p.

153) "Kabīr's story is surrounded by legends. Some of these emanate from a Hindu, some from a Muslim source" while Dr. Underhill (p. x of the Tagore translation) actually says "Kabīr's story is surrounded by contradictory legends, on none of which reliance can be placed. Some of these emanate from a Hindu, some from a Mohammedan source". In other words it would be very dangerous to try to refer to the legends about Kabīr's life in order to derive an insight, as this author does, into Kabīr's thought.

K. R. Barz
Australian National University

CORRECTION

In RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS Vol. 1 No. 2 (October 1978), on p. 2, line 32, please read: "brother-in-law" for 'brother'.