

## INTRODUCTION TO THE FIFTH EDITION

We at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Pune Kendra deem it a great privilege to bring out a new edition of the *Jnaneshwari* by the late Shri M.R. Yardi, who was the first Chairman of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Pune Kendra. He was a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service and served ably in high positions in the administration of the State and Union Governments and rendered yeoman service in every position he held. But his heart was not in the mundane matters of administration but in Sanskrit language and literature and India's philosophical heritage and on retirement, he devoted himself to studies and writings in these subjects. Of his various contributions, his English rendering of the *Jnaneshwari* must find a place of pride.

As Shri Yardi had observed in his preface to the first edition, the *Jnaneshwari* is a precious gem of the Marathi language. It is rightly acknowledged as the first and the greatest work in Marathi language. It has left an enduring impact on the Marathi mind and heart; over centuries, generations of Marathi people have been nourished and nurtured by the *Jnaneshwari*. Millions of ordinary and even illiterate people who cannot read or understand the *Jnaneshwari*, know about the great life, work and the message of *Shri Jnaneshwar*. With great devotion, each year in the month of *Ashadh*, hundreds of thousands of these devotees walk to Pandharpur (called *Ashadhi Wari*), the abode of *Lord Vitthal*, the deity whom Marathi people revere, with names of *Shri Jnaneshwar* and *Sant Tukaram* on their lips. Often many devotees from other parts of India and even from foreign countries join the '*Wari*'. Rare would be a soul who would not be touched by this ocean of devotion.

*Jnaneshwari* is called by *Shri Jnaneshwar* himself as '*Bhavarth Dipika*' i.e. light on the inner meaning of *Shrimad Bhagvat-Gita*, the great philosophical poem, which has guided many Indians about the basic purpose of life and served as a guide to one's performance of duty with detachment but also with devotion, concentration and efficiency. The *Gita* itself is terse and even austere in its composition. The *Jnaneshwari* is not just a literal translation of the *Gita*. It greatly amplifies and enriches the meaning of *Gita* with literary embellishments like '*Upama*' and '*Utpreksha*' (similes and metaphors) and '*Drishtant*' (illustration) as Shri Yardi has pointed out in the preface. In doing so, the *Jnaneshwari* reaches great literary and philosophical heights. *Shri Jnaneshwar* has enriched his work with his own original contributions which do not exist in the *Gita* text. To mention only two – the wonderful prayer '*Om Namoji Adya*' at the commencement of the *Jnaneshwari* and concluding '*Pasayadan*' with benediction and blessings for the entire living world, asking nothing for himself despite all the suffering in his own life.

When it is realised that *Shri Jnaneshwar* wrote his work before the young age of twenty-one when he took '*Sanjeevan Samadhi*' at Alandi, one recognises it as little short of a miracle. Such great literary feat has no parallel in world literature. Rightly did *Tukaram* and all those who followed him called him '*Dnaniyancha Raja Guru Maharaj*' (kings amongst the learned and the great teacher). How did *Shri Jnaneshwar* at a very young age acquire all this knowledge and articulate it with such clarity through his two great works, namely, '*Jnaneshwari*' and '*Amritanubhao*'? The only answer is in the words of *Shri Jnaneshwar* himself - '*Balpanichi Sarvadyata Vari Tayate*' - in childhood itself, he was blessed with comprehensive knowledge. In the entire annals of humanity, rarely has such a person been born or existed.

In spite of the great philosophical and literary heights which the *Jnaneshwari* has reached and the genius of the 'Young Immortal' who authored it, it is somewhat surprising that *Shri Jnaneshwar* and the *Jnaneshwari* are not known to many, especially the so called 'elite' in other parts of India – not to talk of rest of the world. The philosophical message of the *Jnaneshwari* conveyed by the term '*Vishwa-Swadharma*' ('*World Religion*') and his words '*He Vishvachi Majhe Ghara*' ('*This Entire World is my Abode*'), echoing India's ancient concept of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' ('*The Whole World is one Family*') should reach every continent of the world and should be written in letters of gold on the walls of United Nations, a world organisation established for world peace. Far too long, has the scourge of hatred and violence tarnished the world.

Smt. Rekha Rao, the late M.R. Yardi's daughter has taken great pains to bring out this revised edition with meticulous attention and sense of aesthetic. The pictures and illustrations which she and her husband Dr. Prakash Rao have taken at Alandi have greatly enriched the new edition. We thank them for their efforts which have been a labour of love.

We do hope that the new edition of the *Jnaneshwari* will be widely welcomed and will reach beyond the boundaries of Maharashtra in other states in India, as well as countries worldwide.

Pune  
30 November, 2011

**Dr. P.R. Dubhashi**  
Chairman, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,

## FOREWORD

*Shri Jnaneshwar*, the well-known saint of Maharashtra, was not only a realised soul but a gifted poet. At a very early age, he wrote his masterpiece, the *Jnaneshwari*, a commentary on the *Gita* in Marathi in exquisite poetry. He has explained the *Gita* not by recourse to rational arguments but by the profuse use of similes, metaphors and illustrations. Initiated into the *Natha Sampradaya* by his elder brother *Nivrattinatha*, disciple of *Gahininatha*, he assimilated, in his later life, the non-dual *jnana* of *Vedanta* and the pure *bhakti* of the *Bhagavata Dharma*. In his *Jnaneshwari*, he calls the *Gita* the literary image of Lord Krishna. Indeed one can say that his *Jnaneshwari* is the literary image of his knowledge and experience.

Like *Sri Shankaracharya*, he was an *advaita-vadin*, a non-duelist. He explains verse 9.12 of the *Gita* as follows:

“The Lord says, although I am formless, without limiting conditions, inactive, beyond the qualities, changeless and all-pervasive, ignorant people ascribe to Me form, limitations, actions, qualities, and a definite place. Although I am unmanifest, desireless and devoid of action and enjoyment, they think of Me as manifest, full of desires, agent and enjoyer. They impute to Me hands and feet, eyes and ears, caste and family, although I do not possess them. Even though I am self-existent, they make idols of Me and install them with proper rites of consecration, and though I am all-pervading, they invite Me with an invocation and bid farewell to Me with an immersion. They worship an idol as a form of divinity and later throw away the broken idol, as worthless. They thus impute to Me, human attributes.”

*Shri Jnaneshwar* says that true knowledge consists in knowing God in the non-dual form and that devotion should culminate in *Advaita bhakti*. The devotee should realise God as all-pervasive; and wherever he casts his eyes, he should see God therein. This shows that *Shri Jnaneshwar* had become a *Jnani-Bhakta* of the highest order as described in the *Gita* (verse 7.17).

Although he was born in a village, Alandi, about 20 Kms. from Pune, he is worshipped all over Maharashtra as *Mauli* (Mother) by a large number of devotees. The members of the *Warkari Sampradaya* have kept the lamp of devotion burning in Maharashtra. *Shri Jnaneshwar* says that every-one should perform his duty as a *yajna* and offer his or her actions as flowers at the feet of God. This message is as relevant today as seven hundred years ago, and deserves to be known not only in this country but also all over the world. In the meantime, the Marathi Language has undergone changes and even the Marathi speaking people today, find the *Jnaneshwari* unintelligible. So, a translation of *Jnaneshwari* in modern Marathi was also a need of the time. I am sure that the lucid translation of *Shri Yardi*, in modern Marathi, Hindi, and English will supply this long-felt want. This is a fitting tribute to a saint who regarded the whole world as his home ‘*he vishwachi majhe ghara*’. I congratulate the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for bringing out these books in the seventh centenary year of *Shri Jnaneshwar*.

9 February, 1991

Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad – 500029.

Swami Ranganathananda



## PREFACE

*Shri Jnaneshwar* was a great poet-saint of Maharashtra, who lived in the thirteenth century. He was born at Alandi, a town near Poona, in 1271 A.D. and took *Sanjivani Samadhi* when he was only twenty-two years old. As the sun sheds its light before it rises, he attained self-realisation in his young age. As stated by him, his intelligence matured as a result of the austerity of truthfulness practised by him in his former births. He wrote such excellent works as *Jnaneshwari*, *Amritanubhava*, *Changdeva-Pasashti* and devotional songs (*abhangas*). His commentary *Bhavarthadipika*, popularly known as *Jnaneshwari* is a precious gem of the Marathi language. In this work, he has explained an abstruse subject like the *Vedanta* in lucid words, by the use of appropriate similes, metaphors and illustrations. But many changes have taken place in the vocabulary and the style of Marathi language since then, as a result of which this work has become unintelligible to even the Marathi speaking people. An attempt has been made to translate it in prose, which is easy to understand, without disturbing its character as a dialogue. A translation of the *Gita* in Marathi in the same metre has been given, so that those who do not know Sanskrit will also understand the doctrine and Yoga of the *Gita*.

Even though *Shri Jnaneshwar* was born in Maharashtra, he had the conviction that he belonged to the whole world, '*he vishwachi majhe ghara*'. In order that this work should be known everywhere, I have translated it in simple Hindi and English. It was my strong desire that these translations should be completed during this seventh centenary year of the composition of *Jnaneshwari* and this desire has been fulfilled by His grace.

The *Jnaneshwari*, like the *Gita*, is a superb philosophical poem. *Shri Jnaneshwar* declares that by his words, he will give form to the formless and make the senses enjoy what is beyond them. He says that his diction is such as will excel nectar with a wager. He states that he has used such words that they will lead to quarrels among the senses. The ears will have tongues to relish their savour. The tongue will say that the word is its object. The ears will wish to smell them. The eyes will say that the store of form has opened out for them. When a sentence becomes complete, the mind will go forward to embrace it. The devotees of *Jnaneshwar*, therefore, while appreciating the beauties of his poetry, are likely to miss its import, but since *Jnaneshwari* is a religious text, only those who will become introspective and experience it even in a small way, will achieve bliss. As *Shri Namdeva* has said, one should experience at least one *ovi*. But many of his devotees take pleasure in the literary merits of his work. It is, however, essential that after appreciating the poetry, one should try to understand his philosophy. One ought, therefore, to reflect over the thoughts expressed by *Shri Jnaneshwar*. It is hoped that this translation will make such reflection easy.

### Critical Edition of *Jnaneshwari*

The last volume of the Critical Edition of the *Mahabharata*, undertaken by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, was published in 1968. But it is a pity that even in the year 1990, we do not have a critical edition of the *Jnaneshwari*. The late Prof. S. N. Banahatti had made an attempt to bring out such an edition and had collected many printed and hand-written manuscripts for that purpose<sup>1</sup>. He published the critical edition of the twelfth chapter in 1967, giving the different

readings. But this work could not be finished due to his premature death.

Prof. Banahatti had sought the views of his scholar friends as to how he should set about this work. While most of them accepted the need of such an edition, there were two divergent views as to how it should be prepared. One view was that the oldest manuscript should be taken as the vulgate and the divergent readings in the other manuscripts should be recorded in notes on the same page. The other view was that a critical edition should be prepared by comparing and examining the divergent readings and by adopting those readings which are determined as the oldest, by the application of appropriate tests. The late Prof. V.S. Sukthankar, who was the first to undertake the work of bringing out a critical edition of the *Adiparva of Mahabharata*, has discussed what tests should be applied in his prolegomena to that *Parva*. As regards the first method, both V.K. Rajawade and S.V. Dandekar who belonged to the *Warkari* sect, claimed that the manuscripts secured by them were the oldest. There are two objections to adopting the first view. It is very difficult to decide which is the oldest manuscript as different opinions may be held on that matter. And even if it is possible to decide about the oldest manuscript, it will be a mistake to regard it as the original, unless one can settle that the author or his direct disciple wrote it.

Prof. Banahatti, after considering these two views, decided to bring out a critical edition and this was a proper decision. This is not the first time that such an attempt was made. The first critical editor of *Jnaneshwari* was *Saint Eknath of Paithan* (Aurangabad district). He says that he had determined the correct readings after collecting manuscripts and comparing them with one another. After him his contemporary *Bhaskar*, disciple of *Raghunath*, restored the *Jnaneshwari*, but his manuscript has not become available. It has a special importance as it was written within a period of thirty years after the death of *Shri Eknath*. After this in the seventeenth century, *Shri Gopalashramaswami* brought out his edition. He was a great devotee and had great veneration for *Shri Eknath*. He states that he has chosen the most ancient readings. It seems that he had collected a number of manuscripts and determined the readings. But he has not mentioned how many books he had collated or the different readings which he did not accept. So his edition too, cannot be called a critical edition.

Prof. Banahatti has determined four traditions of *Jnaneshwari*, 1. *Ekanatha*, 2. *Patangana*, 3. *Siddhanatha* and 4. *Barave*. At the end of the manuscripts of *Ekanathi* tradition, there are three to five *ovis*, which state that it is the edition prepared by *Saint Eknath*. The manuscript of *Patangana* traditions do not contain any outward indication. Prof. Banahatti has given this name to it, as three out of four manuscripts were recovered from the *Patangana* temple in *Beed* district. The *Siddhanatha* and *Barave* traditions have been named so, because these names are mentioned at the end of the manuscripts. Those manuscripts, which do not belong to any of these traditions, have been styled as independent.

It is not proper to classify the traditions on the basis of the names occurring at the end of the manuscripts (*Ms.*); for Prof. Banahatti himself states that the readings in the *Shaligram Ms.* and *Barave Ms.* agree with those of the *Mss.* in the *Ekanathi* tradition. The readings in the *Ashtekar Ms.*, *Tanjavar Barve Ms.* and *Bhandarkar No.2 Ms.* also agree mostly with the *Mss.* in the *Ekanatha* tradition. Therefore it would be reasonable to include the above three *Mss.* also in the *Ekanathi* tradition. Now there remain the *Vipra Ms.*, *Bharata Itihasa Sanshodhaka Mandala Kulkarni Ms.* of the *Siddhanath* tradition, the *Bhandarkar Ms. No. 1* and *Jalgiri Ms.* of the so-called independent tradition. About the *Kulkarni Ms.*, Prof. Banahatti says that many of its readings tally with those

of *Bhandarkar Ms. No. 1* or the *Patangana* tradition. The *Bhandarkar Ms. No. 1* contains a medley of readings from the *Mss* of *Ekanathi* tradition and other tradition. The readings in the *Jalgiri Ms.* agree with those of the *Ekanatha* tradition, but at many places, they agree with the *Patangana* tradition also. So these four *Mss.* too cannot be categorised as an independent tradition.

Thus it appears that there were only two independent traditions: 1. The *Ekanath* tradition and 2. The *Patangana* tradition. By a strange coincidence, the second tradition also was started by another *Ekanath*. As there was the famous *Saint Ekanath* at Paithan, at the same time there was a second *Ekanathswami* in Beed district in Marathawada. *Saint Ekanatha of Paithan* was a devotee of *Shri Datta*, while the *Ekanathswami* of Beed was a votary of *Shri Ganesha*. A second coincidence was that the name of *Ekanathswami's Guru* was also *Jani Janardana*. The place of *Jani Janardanaswami* in Beed is well known as *Patangana*. *Ekanathaswami* also took the pen name *Eka Janardani* and had authored many works. He had also written a commentary on the eleventh *skandha* of *Bhagavata* like *Saint Ekanath* of Paithan<sup>2</sup>. *Jani Janardanaswami* belonged to the *Natha Sampradaya* and so it is natural that his disciples regarded *Jnaneshwari* as their own. The three *Mss.* out of four which belong to the *Patangana* tradition, have internal similarity and its language looks more antiquated than that of *Ekanath Mss.* and seems to belong to the time of *Jnaneshwar*.

Thus there are two recessions of *Jnaneshwari*. In copying a *Ms.*, there occur unintentional changes, which are due to inadvertence, inattention or misunderstanding. But some changes are deliberate because of the changes in the language, the tendency to simplification or to make the language flowery or more attractive. If the changes which take place are accidental, then it becomes possible to discover the genuine readings by applying scientific tests. But it would not be wrong to state that in the *Ekanath Mss.* attempts seem to have been made to bring about the simplification and modernisation of the original readings. The *Ekanatha* manuscripts can, therefore, be utilised to determine the *Ms.* as edited by *Saint Ekanatha*. For this purpose, one can use the *Mss.* belonging to the *Paithan* tradition, and all the *Mss.*, which have a strong similarity to them, such as the *Shaligram Ms.*, the *Barave Ms. No.2*. It is necessary to determine the *Ms.* as edited by *Saint Ekanatha*, as his *Ms.* is accepted by all and is easily comprehensible to all.

But it is possible to prepare a critical edition of the original *Jnaneshwari* by examining the four *Mss.* of the *Patangana* tradition, the *Vipra Ms.*, the *Bharata Itihasa Sanshodhaka Mandala Kulkarni Ms.*, *Bhandarkar Ms. No. 1* and *Jalgiri Ms.* I fully endorse the wish which *Bhaskara* had expressed that the Maharashtrians should become disposed to undertake research into the original *ovis* of *Jnaneshwari* and make an attempt to reach the original *ovis*. I would suggest very humbly, that the *Jnanadeva Adhyasana* set up by the Poona University should undertake this work.

### **The Life of *Jnaneshwar***

As we have not got a critical Edition of the *Jnaneshwari*, it is sad to state that a historical biography of *Shri Jnaneshwar* is also not available. All the accounts of his life have been written on the basis of the three chapters in the *Namdeva Gatha* (collection of *Abhangas*), entitled *Adi*, *Tirthavali* and *Samadhi*. It is natural that the old biographers of *Shri Jnaneshwar* should take recourse to these chapters, which are imbued with his Divine character. *Mahipatabua*, a biographer of saints in the times of the *Peshwas* and *Niranjana Madhava*, the author of *Jnaneshwar – vijaya* (triumphs of *Shri Jnaneshwar*) have written about the life of *Shri Jnaneshwar* on the basis of these three chapters. The late *Shri Pangarkar* also has said in his introduction to his biography of *Shri Jnaneshwar*, that

he has made use of these three chapters. But the late Prof. S. V. Dandekar, though he belonged to the *Warkari* sect, has also given this traditional account without a critical examination of its authenticity.

Many scholars of *Jnaneshwari* such as Bhave, Pangarkar, Tulpule had suggested the possibility of interpolations in the *Namdeva Gatha*; but Shri R.C. Dhere, a well-known Marathi scholar, has established on the basis of the evidence collected by him, that the *Namdeva Gatha* contains, in addition to the hymns (*Abhangas*) of *Namdeva*, the contemporary of *Jnaneshwar*, the hymns written by his other namesakes such as *Vishnudas Nama* <sup>3</sup>. In the versified *Shukakhyana*, it is mentioned that this work was completed on the new moon day of the *Pausha* month in the *sanvatsara* named *Manmatha*. Although there is no mention of *Shalivahanashaka* in this, on the basis of the details given, *Pandit Panduranga Shastri* <sup>4</sup> and other scholars have established that this *Shukakhyana* was written in the fifteenth century. This *Gatha* also contains the biographical sketches of saints such as *Kabir*, *Mirabai*, *Narasi Mehta* and *Bhanudas* who belonged to the fifteenth century. In the biographical section of the *Gatha*, it is said that *Rajai*, the wife of *Namdev*, had complained to *Goddess Rukhmini*, that her husband was a professional highwayman. On the other hand, *Namdev*, who was the contemporary of *Jnaneshwar*, was a tailor by profession. It would therefore, not be wrong, if we conclude that the author of the three chapters was a different *Namdev*.

This conclusion also receives support from the internal evidence in these chapters. The *Tirthawali* contains a description of the pilgrimage, which was undertaken by *Shri Jnaneshwar* with *Saint Namdev*. But this description discusses only the spiritual practices to be undertaken by the seeker and does not give any details about the pilgrim centers visited by them. It is obvious, that since the *Tirthawali* was written by some later *Namadev*, he could not give any details. Chapters on *Tirthawali* and *Samadhi* contain descriptions that *Lord Panduranga* and *Goddess Rukhmini* had taken part in them. As these three chapters contain poetry, pious sentiments and miracles, it has become difficult to sift the truth.

The theory of legend formation, advanced by the anthropologists, also lends support to the statement that these chapters belong to a later period. The latter hold the view, that on the death of eminent personalities, they acquire a halo of mysticism, as a result of which, we have legends based on the events of their life. Such legends are found in the lives of almost all saints and if we leave the details, they are of similar nature. This life of *Shri Jnaneshwar* by *Namdev*, had undoubtedly a profound influence on the succession of biographies written thereafter. Therefore, I do not think, a study of these biographies will give any events in the life of *Shri Jnaneshwar*, which can be held as historically authentic. But if it is possible to collect stray references to his life scattered in the works of his contemporaries or of writers in the next two centuries and make a comparative study of them, then one may be able to obtain some definitive information about his life. If only such a research is undertaken, it may throw some light on the controversial points in his life. I would request the Pune University to undertake this research under the auspices of the *Jnaneshwar Adhyasana* by taking the help of research scholars in the field.

In the absence of such a critical edition, I have adopted the *Sartha Jnaneshwari* of the late Shri Nana Maharaj Sakhare, which is accepted by the majority of the *Warkaris*.



## Birth-date of Shri Jnaneshwar

Late Shri Bhingarkar and later Shri Pangarkar have fixed the dates of the three brothers and their sister as *Shalivahana Shaka* 1195, 1197, 1199 and 1201 on the basis of the hymns of *Janabai*, *Namdev*, *Visoba Khechara* and the author of *Jnaneshwar-vijaya*. But these hymns are not found in the books printed by the Indira Press, Chitrashala Press and Jagaddhitecchu Press. This would therefore, lead to the inference that these hymns were added later on. *Saint Janabai* has given in clear words, the *Shaka* years of births of the three brothers and their sister in her hymn as follows:

*In the Shalivahan Shaka eleven hundred ninety, Nivritti was born;  
Jnaneshwar came to birth in the Shaka year eleven hundred ninety-three;  
Sopana was born in the year eleven hundred ninety-six and Muktabai came  
to birth in the year eleven hundred ninety-nine. Jani says they surpassed all.*

Since *Saint Janabai* was a contemporary of *Shri Jnaneshwar*, her statement mentioned above is very important. But it has to be proved first that the hymn referred to above is her own and not interpolated later on. If the above date is correct, then *Shri Jnaneshwar* wrote the *Jnaneshwari* at the age of nineteen, which seems right.

### ***Jnanadeva and Jnaneshwar, were they two?***

The controversy whether *Jnanadeva* was the same as *Jnaneshwar*, or different from him, is an old one. The late *Shivram Eknath Bharade* wrote an article under the pen-name *Bharadvaja* in *Sudharaka* paper in 1898-99. According to *Bharade*, *Yogi Jnaneshwar* belonged to the *Nath* sect, was a devotee of *Shiva* and wrote the two books *Jnaneshwari* and *Amritanubhava*. *Jnanadeva*, the author of hymns (*abhangas*) was a devotee of *Vitthala* and an adherent of the *Bhagavata dharma*. The *abhangas* contain many Urdu words, which do not occur either in *Jnaneshwari* or *Amritanubhava*. But this argument does not seem reasonable for the following reasons. Had *Yogi Jnaneshwar* written the commentary on the *Gita*, then the author's name should have occurred therein as *Jnaneshwar*. But the author calls himself *Jnanadeva* all the time. However, at the end of *Bhavarthadipika*, his scribe *Sachchidanandababa* says that *Jnaneshwar* wrote this commentary in the *Shalivahana Shaka* twelve hundred and twelve. It is clear that this change has been made for metrical reasons. The *ovi* metre consists of four metrical feet, of which the first three must end in words which rhyme. But in the case of *Shri Jnanadeva*, this name was so appropriate, that it became current and his commentary on the *Gita* became famous as *Jnaneshwari*. But can we say that the author of *Jnaneshwari* was only a *Yogi*? If we see the description in the *Jnaneshwari* of the four kinds of devotees, in the seventh chapter, and the devotional love in the twelfth chapter and the devotion towards the *Guru* in the thirteenth chapter, it cannot be doubted that the author of *Jnaneshwari* was also a great devotee. S.V. Dandekar also states that quite a few scholars of *Jnanadeva's abhangas* deal with Yoga and they are so abstruse that it is difficult to determine their meaning<sup>5</sup>.

### ***Jnaneshwar and Ramakrishna***

Although we do not get any biographical information in the *Jnaneshwari*, we get ample indications of his philosophical outlook and his spiritual experiences. The religious texts pertaining to Lord Krishna, Lord Buddha and Lord Jesus Christ were written long after their death. The last

*ovi* of *Jnaneshwari* says that *Sachchidanandababa* recorded the *Jnaneshwari*, as it was being uttered by *Shri Jnaneshwar*. *Shri Mahendra Gupta* took notes of the conversations which took place between *Shri Ramakrishna* and his disciples, devotees and visitors during the period 1882-85 AD. *Shri Gupta* was a close lay disciple of *Shri Ramakrishna*. He wrote *Kathamrita* in Bengali under the pen-name 'M'. Four volumes of this work were published in the life-time and the fifth volume was published within fifty years of the *Mahasamadhi* of *Shri Ramakrishna*. These volumes contain a genuine record of the conversations. We therefore get a definite information of the spiritual experiences undergone by *Shri Jnaneshwar* and *Shri Ramakrishna*.

There is a great similarity between the experiences of the two great saints. *Shri Ramakrishna* began his spiritual life as an ardent devotee of *Mother Kali*, received instructions of *tantra* methods from *yogini Bhairavi* and *Vedanta* from *Totapuri*. In the life of *Shri Jnaneshwar*, there was a beautiful fusion of *Sahajyoga* knowledge of *Vedanta* and the devotional love of *Bhagavata dharma*. But *Shri Jnaneshwar* had received this knowledge from only one teacher, *Shri Nivrittinath*. The Lord says that the '*jnani-bhakta* among the four kinds of devotees is very dear to Me'. Both *Shri Jnaneshwar* and *Shri Ramakrishna* were *jnani-bhaktas* as described in the *Shloka* 7.17 of the *Gita*.

### **Jnaneshwar and Shankaracharya**

At one time it was accepted by all that the philosophy of *Shri Jnaneshwar* was the same as that of *Shri Shankara*. The late *Jog Maharaj* also held the same view. Then *Pandit Pandurang Sharma* made an attempt to demonstrate that their doctrines were different. He advanced the view that the term (*bhashyakarante*) was in plural and so *Shri Jnaneshwar* had consulted not only *Shri Shankara*, but all the commentators. *Dr. S. D. Pendse* after comparing *Shankar-bhashya* and *Ramanuja-bhashya* with *Jnaneshwari* chapter by chapter has come to the conclusion that the *Bhashyakara* referred to by *Shri Jnaneshwar* (chap. 18, 1722) is *Shri Shankara* only<sup>6</sup>. But instead of making this comparison on the counts of similarities of expressions or the relations between the verses and between the chapters, one must make a comparative study of their views on philosophy and Yoga.

It is beyond doubt that *Shri Shankara* and *Shri Jnaneshwar* were both non-dualists. In the ninth chapter, *Shri Jnaneshwar* states 'the Supreme Self is formless, without limiting conditions, inactive, beyond the qualities, changeless, formless, all-pervasive, unmanifest and non-dual. But people ascribe form to the formless, formalities to one devoid of limiting condition, actions to the inactive, qualities to the qualityless and a location to the all-pervasive. They attribute manifestation to the unmanifest and desires to the desireless and speak of him as agent and experiencer though he is not so'. The Lord says, 'they ascribe to Me caste, though I am casteless and feet, hands, ears, eyes, lineage and habitation, though I do not possess any of these. Although I am self-existent, they make an idol of Me and consecrate it and although I pervade everything, they invoke Me and dismiss Me. Thus making an idol of Me, they worship it and when it breaks they throw it away. In fact they ascribe to Me, all the human qualities! Such is their false knowledge which comes in the way of true knowledge (*ovis* 155-170)'. Thus the doctrine of *Jnaneshwar* is different from the qualified monism, dualism and pure non-dualism, which held that the Supreme Self possesses auspicious attributes. In this regard, the philosophy of *Shri Jnaneshwar* is close to the monism of *Shri Shankara*.

But even though *Shri Shankara's* doctrine of *Brahman* as the reality (*Brahma Satyam*) was acceptable to *Shri Jnaneshwar*, it is doubtful, whether he accepted his doctrine of the unreality

of the world (*jagan mithya*). While talking of the Supreme Self, *Shri Jnaneshwar* employs such terms as Omni-present (*vishwarupa*), having the form of the Universe (*vishvakara*), Soul of the Universe (*vishvatman*), Lord of the Universe (*vishweshha*), existing in all forms (*vishvamurti*), pervader of the universe (*vishvavyapaka*) and the Lord of the goddess of wealth in the form of the universe. By the Will of this Supreme person, says *Shri Jnaneshwar*, the world comes into being (ch. 6 ovi 177). The Lord says, "The petals of the flower constitute the flower, and branches fruits etc. constitute the tree and this whole universe is the same form, as Myself (ch. 14, 177). So it is not that My devotee should realise Me after the world vanishes, but he should apprehend Me along with the world (14.380). Just as the rays of the Sun are not different from the Sun, so there is unity between God and the Universe." The devotion, which is offered to Him with the knowledge of this unity, is known as non-dual *bhakti*. When a person attains full knowledge as a *sthitaprajna* or a *jnani-bhakta*, he does not experience that the world is unreal. On the other hand, the *sthitaprajna* becomes one with the world after he renounces egoism and all sense-objects (2.267). The *Jnani-bhakta* becomes free from the notion of dualism and experiences that he has become one with the universe (12. 191).

*Shri Jnaneshwar* holds that even if the world is real, the world appearance is not real. Just as one has the false notion of a serpent in a necklace or of silver in the shell, so is this world appearance and it comes in the way of true knowledge (15.46). But it does not last before knowledge and at the beginning of the sixteenth chapter, *Shri Jnaneshwar* praises his preceptor as one who dispels this world appearance. But *Shri Jnaneshwar* did not accept the doctrine, that this world is the play of the Supreme (*chidvilasa*) like *Shri Ramanuja*, who regards the visible world too as real, being the play of the Supreme Person.

The *Shankara-bhashya* and *Jnaneshwari* also differ in their view as to which Yoga is considered more important in the *Gita*. *Shri Shankara* regards the Yoga of knowledge as primary, with both the Yoga of action and the Yoga of devotion, as subsidiary and supportive to it. He states that the seeker attains liberation in the following order - purification of the mind through *karmayoga*, *renunciation*, the way of knowledge, and self- realisation. In the opinion of *Shri Jnaneshwar* all the methods of Yoga are equally valid and one has to adopt the Yoga accordingly, to his aptitude. *Shri Jnaneshwar*, while commenting on the Yoga of meditation in the sixth chapter, has expounded the Yoga of *Kundalini* and extolled it as *pantharaja*, the best way. He has explained this Yoga in other chapters also. This view may not have been acceptable to *Shri Shankara*. Further, *Shri Jnaneshwar* says that the performance of one's duty is tantamount to *nitya-yajna* and if it is performed in a selfless spirit and with dedication to God, it leads to liberation independently. Further he says that in order to reach the lofty peak of liberation, devotion is an easy foot-path and that it is attained step by step (*kramayoga*) by performing one's duty, devotion to God, attainment of knowledge and non-dual devotion. In this way, the devotee becomes *jnani-bhakta*, who is most dear to God and becomes one with him. On the other hand, the other commentators of God hold, that liberation is achieved through devotion to a personal God and even after attainment of liberation, the devotee retains his individuality and lives in the presence of God. It is thus obvious, that *Shri Jnaneshwar* consulted the *Shankarabhashya* and not the other commentators. But he did not follow it blindly, but formed his own views about the message of the *Gita*.

### **Natha Cult**

*Shri Jnaneshwar* has mentioned briefly his cult (*Sampradaya*) at the end of *Jnaneshwari* (18.1750-

61): In very ancient times, *Shri Shankara*, the slayer of demon *Tripura*, whispered in the ears of goddess *Parvati* the secret knowledge on the shore of the *Milky Sea*. *Vishnu* who was in the stomach of a fish, heard it and attained knowledge and as *Matsyendranath*, he imparted it to *Goraksanath*, who in turn bestowed it upon *Gahininath* and that knowledge came down from *Gahininath* to *Nivrittinath* and from *Nivrittinath* to me, fulfilling our desires". When this *Natha* cult arose, there were many *Tantra* cults such as *Shakta*, *Kapalika*, *Bauddha Tantra* etc. All these cults arose out of the *Shaiva* scriptures (*agamas*) and claimed their origin from *Lord Shiva*, the *Primal Guru* (*Adinatha*). *Matsyendranatha* was the first human *Guru* of the *Natha* tradition and was a prophet of the *Kaula* sect. It is not possible to explain fully, the nature of the philosophy of the *Shaiva* scriptures, what changes were wrought in it by the *Kaula* sect, and how the *Natha Sampradaya* originated from the latter. But we must take into account the permanent impressions, which the *Natha* sect left on the mind of *Shri Jnaneshwar*.

*Shaivagama* holds that the ultimate truth is *Adinath Shiva*. He is self-illuminated, known to himself only, infinite and imperishable and has *Shakti* as his mate. Like *Sankhya's prakriti*, this *Shakti* is the cause of the origination, continuance and dissolution of the world. She is ever active and she becomes manifest or remains in an unmanifest form. But unlike *Sankhya's prakriti*, she is not independent of God and is not unconscious, but has a conscious form. Prima facie, therefore, this *Shaiva* doctrine appears to be based on dualism. There is a mention in the *Shantiparva* of *Mahabharata* (337.59) that *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Pancaratra*, *Veda* and *Pashupat* hold differing view. While commenting upon the *Brahma-sutra* (2.2.37), *Shri Shankara* states, that according to the *Maheshwaras*, *Pashupati Shiva* is the instrumental cause of the world. If this is correct, we have to admit that the *Shaiva* doctrine is based on dualism. According to the *Akulavira-Tantra*, there are two classes of *Kaulas*, the *Kritaka* and *Sahajas*. Of these, the *Kritakas* were dualists, while the *Sahajas* accepted the unity of God and the devotee. One may safely infer from this, that the *Shaivoites* were originally dualists, but some of them were converted to monism, after adopting the *Kaula* creed. In the *Shaiva* worship, the important elements are initiation through a *mantra*, worship of *Shiva* and *Shakti* and devotion to the preceptor. It is not possible to say what was the original form of this worship. Perhaps it consisted of the worship of *Shiva* in the form of the *phallus (linga)* and the worship of *Shakti* in the form of a mystical diagram on a copper plate (*yantra*). We do not have definite information whether this worship included the practice of *Yoga*; but since the *Hathayogapradipika* of *Svatmarama* mentions both *Matsyendranath* and *Gorakshanatha*, it is possible that *Matsyendranath* included it in the *Kaula* sect. But it is certain, that devotion to *Lord Shiva* and to the *Guru* formed two important elements in the *Shaiva* sects. In the *Vedas* and *Brahmanas*, first *Indra* and then *Vishnu* held the pre-eminent position among the gods and the *Lord Shiva* came to be identified with *Brahman* only in the *Shvetashvatara*, which is a later *Upanishad*. They also insisted upon reverence and obedience to the *Guru*, but it is doubtful, whether they included in this devotion, the worship of the sandals of the *Guru* and rendering service to him, as described by *Shri Jnaneshwar* in the thirteenth chapter of the *Jnaneshwari* (ovis 341-344).

As mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, *Shaivagama* and the *Vedas* held different doctrines. But later, there was an attempt to bring about a reconciliation between the two. In the *Shvetashvataropanishad* it is stated, that *Shiva* is the same as *Brahman* and *Maya* is his Divine power *devatmashakti*. On the other hand, *Lord Shiva* says in the *Kularnavatantra*<sup>7</sup> (2.10) that he has churned the sea of the *Agamas* and the *Vedas* and brought out the *Kuladharmas*. He further says that *Shiva* is essentially the Supreme *Brahman* (1.7) without qualities. The Existence-Consciousness-Bliss and

the individual Selves are his parts, like sparks of fire (1.8-9). It is further stated in the same *Tantra* (1.108), that *Lord Shiva* has proclaimed *monism (advaita)* and so the *Kaula-jnana-nirnaya*<sup>8</sup> holds that *Shiva* is non-different from his *Shakti*.

*There is no Shiva without Shakti, no Shakti without Shiva (1 7.8-9).*

As *Shakti* creates the whole world, she is known as *Kula*; *Shiva* who is inactive and without family or lineage is *akula*. As *Bhaskara*, who is an adept in this *Tantra* says, *Shiva-Shakti-Samarasyam Kaulam* i.e., *Kaula* - is oneness between these two. So this *Kaula Shastra* is based on non-dualism and knowledge is said to be impossible for the ritualists who perform sacrifices or the ascetics who mortify their bodies, to attain liberation. Further, after declaring non-dualism, it states that liberation is attained only through knowledge, and this knowledge is acquired from the mouth of the *Guru* (1.108). It will thus be seen, that there is great similarity between *Kaula* and *Vedanta*.

### ***Kaula and Yoga***

In the *Kaula* sect there was greater emphasis on physical and mental discipline, rather than on outward ritual practices. Their discipline included Yoga and meditation. This subject is dealt with in the fourteenth chapter of *Kaula-jnana-nirnaya*. However, the exact method of Yoga is not indicated; but still the experiences and the *yogic* powers (*siddhis*) acquired through the Yoga, are clearly mentioned. For instance, the *yogi* experiences tremours in his hands, feet and head and hears different sounds in the course of his *yogic* practice. He acquires such powers as rising above the ground, mastery in poetry, the knowledge of past and future, cheating of time, the power to assume different forms, absence of wrinkles and grey hair and power to roam in the sky. The *Yoginitantra* of *Matsyendranath* mentions many subtle powers, the power to see a distant thing and entry into another's body. But the ultimate aim of Yoga, was to attain the state of mindlessness (*unmani avastha*). The *Kaula-jnana-niryana* further states, that the mind enters the *Khechhari* centre (*brahmarandra*) and drinks nectar (*ovi* 93). Moreover *Svatmarama* in his *Hathayoga*, makes a prominent mention of *Matsyendranath* and *Gorakshanatha* as proficient in *Hathayoga*, from which it appears that the *Kundalini Yoga* was already incorporated in the *Kaula* path. But it also included devotion, which it has inherited from *Shaivagama*. It is stated in the third chapter, that one should discard images made of stone, wood or clay and mentally worship the *shiva-linga* with flowers in the form of non-injury, sense-restraint, compassion, devotional love, forgiveness, absence of anger, meditation and knowledge. It is, therefore, incorrect to hold that *Shri Jnaneshwar* introduced devotion for the first time in *Natha Sampradaya*.

### ***Kaula and the Five M's***

The *Kularnavatantra* mentions the *Kaula sadhana* thus: *bhogayogatmakam kaulam* (2.23). If one desists from sensual enjoyments, it causes disturbance of the mind, which results in the interruption of spiritual practice. The enjoyment of sensual pleasures with restraint does not disrupt the spiritual practices and facilitates Yoga, *bhogo yogayate sakshat* (2.24). The *Kaula-jnana-nirnaya* discusses the so-called five *M's* (*madya, maccha, mamsa, mudra* and *maithuna*) namely wine, fish, meat, mudra and sex, which formed an essential part of *Kaula* practice. But it is stipulated that one should make an offering of the meat and wine to *Shakti* before partaking of it. The sex is to be enjoyed with restraint for procreation, after remembering *Shakti*. The *Kaulas* therefore, believe that the enjoyment of these five *M's* after making them pure and consecrated becomes an aid to Yoga. But it was found that it is difficult to practise such restraint. *Matsyendranath* himself had

become enamoured of a *yogini* and was living with her and there is a legend that he had to be rescued by *Gorakshanath*. The *Kaula* sect adopted by *Matsyendranath* was known as *Yogini-Kaulamata*. As this sect was dominated by the *yoginis*, there were sexual excesses of which, two incidents are mentioned in *Leela-charitra* of *Chakradhara*<sup>9</sup> - according to one *Kahnapada*, a disciple of *Jalandhara* died after sexual intercourse with a *yogini* named *Bahudi*, in which he tried to demonstrate his full control over seminal discharge (*urdhva-retavastha*). In the other, a *yogini* by name *Kamakhya* is reported to have gone to *Changdeva Raul* after hearing his fame and demanded intercourse with him. As a result of her insistent demand, *Changdeva* was forced to commit suicide. Because of such excesses, *Gorakshanath* laid great emphasis on the observance of dispassion.

### ***Gorakshanath and Natha Sampradaya***

It thus appears that the *Natha Sampradaya* had inherited its philosophical tenets from the *Kaula* sect. *Matsyendranath* seems to have played a major role in the formulation of the *Kaula* doctrines. So his mention by *Shri Jnaneshwar* as the first human preceptor of *Natha Sampradaya* is proper. *Gorakshanath* his disciple has included in the spiritual discipline to be followed by a *yogi* the following items - purity of the body and the mind, distaste for all ostentatious rituals, dedication to knowledge along with disgust for the consumption of meat and wine and dispassion. Out of these, the first four items formed part of the *Kaula* path, but *Gorakshanath* discarded the last two items and placed great emphasis on Yoga and dispassion. It is for this reason, that *Shri Jnaneshwar* has called him the lake of lotus-creeper in the form of Yoga and the conquering hero of sense-objects (18.1755). *Gorakshanath* was a great organizer and propagandist who spread the *Natha Sampradaya* all over India. He had Hindus as well as Muslims among his devotees. He had especial sympathy for the down-trodden and showed them the path of self-development. His work in this regard deserves special mention.

### ***Jnaneshwar and the Gita***

How did *Jnaneshwar* who had taken initiation in the *Nath* cult turn to the *Gita*? No definite view can be given on this. *Shri Tagare* says as follows: It is stated in the *Mahabharata* that *Shri Krishna*, who wished to propitiate *Lord Shiva* for a boon of a son to his wife *Jambavati*, had gone to *Upamanyu* and had learnt from him the *Shaivite* way of worship (*Anushasanaparva*, 14, 18). Thus *Shri Krishna* was a disciple of *Upamanyu*, initiated in the *Pashupata* sect, and this gave rise to the faith, that the *Bhagavad-Gita* was a *Shaiva* text<sup>10</sup>. *Shaivites Vasugupta* and *Abhinavagupta* had written commentaries on the *Gita*. But this legend has been added later on, and it is obvious that the theme of the *Gita* is *Upanishadic* knowledge. Although the *Bhagavad-Gita* has brought about a synthesis of *Vedanta* with *Sankhya*, *Yoga* and *Pancaratra*, I did not find any such synthesis with *Pashupat*<sup>11</sup>. *Shri Jnaneshwar* says in the tenth chapter (*ovi* 19), that his *Guru* commanded him to explain the knowledge of *Brahman* in the form of the *Gita*, in the *Ovi* form. He further adds, that he wrote his commentary in order to destroy the poverty of thought and reveal the knowledge of *Brahman*. The *Kaula* worshipper gave equal respect to *Lord Vishnu* as to *Lord Shiva* and both *Gahininath* and *Nivorittinatha* were devotees of *Lord Krishna*. In the *Kularnavatanttra* it is laid down that on the *Janmashtami* (the birthday of *Lord Krishna*), *Kaulas* should offer special worship to *Lord Krishna* (10.7). Perhaps the *Shaivites* were attracted to the *Gita* as it dealt with devotion. Thus in turning to the *Gita*, *Shri Jnaneshwar* was following this tradition. Even after he imbibed the *brahmavidya* of the *Gita*, he carried over his interest in *Kundalini Yoga* and devotion to *Guru*, which find an abundant mention in the *Jnaneshwari*.

## Jnaneshwari and Kundalini Yoga

The *Natha Sampradaya* holds that this non-dual *Shiva* principle has permeated the world and so whatever there is in the universe (*brahmanda*) is also in the body (*pinda*). The *Shakti* lies dormant in the form of *Kundalini* in the *Muladhara* center in the human body and *Shiva* abides in the *Sahasrara* center in the head. With the aid of the purification of the *nadis*, postures, *bandhas* and breathing exercises, the *Sushumna* passage opens out and the *Kundalini* wakes up and rushes up to meet *Shiva* in the *Brahmarandhra*. When she embraces *Shiva* in the *Sahasrara* center, the *yogi* attains the state of emancipation. When this *kundalini* wakes up and goes up the *Sushumna nadi* after piercing the centers, then the lake of moon's nectar becomes tilted and the nectar falls into the mouth of *Kundalini*. *Shri Jnaneshwar* has given a very fascinating account of the changes which take place in the body of the *yogi*. In this way *Shri Jnaneshwar* has described with the intensity of his experience, the knowledge of the traditional *yogic* process, which he had received in the *Natha Sampradaya*. In the chapter six, he has said very clearly, that this is a secret of the *Natha* sect. He was therefore, fully aware that this Yoga was not taught in the *Gita*, for he states (*ovis* 291, 292) that *Shri Krishna* had made a casual reference to this secret of the *Natha* sect and that he has elaborated this before the audience. From this it is evident that *Shri Jnaneshwar* has not only written a commentary on the *Gita*, but has also incorporated his own experiences in it. By including the *Kundalini* Yoga in the *Jnaneshwari* and extolling it as the great path (*pantharaja*), he has accorded to it the same status, as that of the *Dhyana* Yoga in the *Gita*.

### Devotion to Guru

In *Kaulamata* and *Natha Sampradaya*, devotion to *Guru* has special importance. The *Kularnavatantra* has devoted one full chapter as to how a disciple should worship his *Guru*. It is stated there, that the sacred sandals (*paduka*) of the *Guru* form his ornaments; the remembrance of his name is his *japa*; to carry out his commands is his duty; and service to the *Guru* is his worship. The *Gita* mentions service to the *Guru*, as one of the characteristics of a *jnani*, by one word, *acharyopasana*, but *Shri Jnaneshwar* has explained it in as many as ninety *ovis*. Practically at the beginning of every chapter, he has made obeisance to the *Guru* and has sung his praise. In the *Natha Sampradaya*, special stress has been laid on initiation (*diksha*) and on transference of power (*shaktipata*), by the *Guru* to the disciple. It is said, that no *mantra* becomes fruitful unless the disciple hears it from the mouth of the *Guru*. Transference of power is especially important in the awakening of the *Kundalini*. The *Kundalini* becomes awakened very quickly by the touch of the *Guru*. This transference of power is mentioned in the *Jnaneshwari*. In the eighteenth chapter *Shri Jnaneshwar* states, "I was experiencing the dream in the form of the universe, in sleep in the form of ignorance, but the *Guru* patted my head and awakened me" (*Ovi* 403). He adds further, "In order to grant what the Lord could not give through words, the Lord hugged Arjuna and then the Lord made Arjuna like himself, without obliterating the duality between the *guru* and the disciple."

*'the two hearts mingled and what was in the heart of the Guru was transferred to the heart of the disciple'.*

This is not a mere imagination of a poet. In the life of *Shri Ramakrishna* (pp. 376-377), we find a description of the state of *Narendra* (*Swami Vivekananda*) when *Shri Ramakrishna* touched him with his foot. *Narendra* said: "Anyway, enquiring of many people, I reached Dakshineswar at last and went directly to the Master's room. I saw him sitting alone, merged in himself, on

the small bedstead placed near the bigger one. There was no one with him. No sooner had he seen me, than he called me joyfully to him and made me sit on one end of the bedstead. I sat down and found him in a strange mood. He spoke indistinctly something to himself, looked steadfastly at me and was slowly coming towards me. I thought another scene of lunacy was going to be enacted. Scarcely had I thought so, when he came to me and placed his right foot on my body, and immediately I had a wonderful experience. I saw with my eyes open, that all the things of the room together with the walls were rapidly whirling and receding into an unknown region and my 'I-ness' together with the whole universe was as it were, going to vanish in the all-devouring great Void. I was then overwhelmed with a terrible fear; I had known that the destruction of 'I-ness' was death and that death was before me, very near at hand. Unable to control myself, I cried out loudly and said, ' Ah! What is it you have done to me? I have my parents, you know'. Giving out a hoarse laugh to hear those words of mine and touching my breast with his hand, he said, 'Let it then cease now; it need not be done all at once; it will come to pass in due course'. I was amazed to see that extraordinary experience of mine vanish as quickly as it had come when he touched me in that manner and said those words. I came to the normal state and saw things inside and outside the room standing still as before<sup>12</sup>."

### **Yoga and Knowledge**

Then *Shri Jnaneshwar* must have soon realised like *Shankaracharya*, that the Yoga does not become complete without knowledge. While commenting on the *Brahmasutra* II 1.3, *Shankaracharya* states that one does not enjoy the bliss of *Brahman* through *Sankhya* knowledge and the practice of Yoga. In the *Amritanubhava* (727), *Shri Jnaneshwar* calls the *yogi* 'the moon in the day-time' i.e. the *yogi* becomes as lustreless as the moon before the sun of knowledge. One recollects here the legend of *yogi Changdeva*. *Changdeva* was a great *yogi*, who had taken initiation from *yogini Muktabai*, disciple of *Gorakshanath*. He had practiced Yoga over many years and had attained many miraculous powers, which had enhanced his ego. When *Shri Jnaneshwar* received a blank letter from him, his sister *Muktabai* aptly remarked that *Changdeva* had remained blank in respect of knowledge. It was, therefore, natural that *Changdeva* should shed his pride before the Lord of knowledge. But this is the *Upanishadic* knowledge, not the knowledge acceptable to the *Shaivites*. *Shri Jnaneshwar* has disclosed only the knowledge of the Self in his three books, *Jnaneshwari*, *Amritanubhava* and *Changadevapasashti*<sup>13</sup>.

### **The Prince among Jnanis**

*Shri Jnaneshwar* had undoubtedly become *sthitaprajna* and *jnani* after practicing the path of knowledge. The *Gita* states that tranquility abides in a *sthitaprajna* (2.70). Even if all the currents of the rivers become swollen and join the sea, the latter does not become disturbed and remains serene. *Shri Jnaneshwar* had attained such serenity to the fullest extent. Although the *Brahmins* persecuted the three brothers and sister as being offsprings of a monk, he has praised them as gods on earth, the fountainhead of all sacred lores and austerities incarnate. Among the characteristics of a man of wisdom, in the thirteenth chapter, the first and the chief is *amanitva*, non-arrogance. Humility, *Shri Jnaneshwar* says, if a person casts off all vanity of being great, forgets his learning and becomes humble, then know that he has attained knowledge of *Brahman*. *Shri Jnaneshwar* was fully conscious that he had written an excellent commentary on the *Gita*; but in all humility he gives all credit to his *guru Nivrittinatha*. All the characteristics of a *jnani* mentioned in the *Gita* apply to him thoroughly. He who has attained knowledge does not see any distinction in all beings.



As he has discarded egoism, he does not discriminate between a mosquito, an elephant, a cow and a dog (*Gita* 5.18). But compared to an elephant, a cow or a dog, a he-buffalo is a brainless creature. But when *Shri Jnaneshwar*, along with his brothers and sister, had gone to *Paithan* to obtain a certificate of expiation, somebody had asked him mischievously whether the he-buffalo that was passing by the road had a soul, he had without a moment's thought asserted that the soul which abides in a human being is also in the he-buffalo. This seems to have given rise to the legend that he had made the he-buffalo chant the *Vedic* hymns. *Shri Tukaram* has, therefore, appropriately praised *Jnaneshwar* as the prince among *jnanis*.

### Devotional Love

The devotion in the *Gita* is mostly based on meditation, but there is a reference to devotional love in it. The Lord states in the tenth chapter, that he gives *buddhiyoga* to those who worship him with love (verse 10). Further in the eleventh and the twelfth chapters, the Lord tells Arjuna to work for him (*matkarmakrit*, 55) or be devoted to work for him (*matkarmaparama*, 10). *Shri Shankara* interprets this as 'one should perform his works with dedication to God'. But *Abhinavagupta* takes *matkarma* as *Bhagavata Dharma*, consisting of worship, austerities, scriptural study, sacrificial rites etc. *Madhusudana* goes a step further and identifies *matkarma* as *Bhagavata Dharma* of nine-fold devotion, consisting of hearing, singing praise etc. But the word *Bhagavata* does not occur in the Critical Edition of *Mahabharata*. So the *Bhagavata Dharma* seems to have germinated from these sayings in the *Gita* and spread in North India, before the second century B.C. *Shri Jnaneshwar*, however, knew the *Bhagavata Purana*, to which, he refers in chapter eighteen (*Ovi* 1132). According to some scholars, he has taken more than half his illustrations from the *Bhagavata*. Many of the references to *Pauranic* stories in the *Jnaneshwari* belong to the *Bhagavata Purana*. *Shri Jnaneshwar* mentions nine-fold devotion in *adhyaya* six (*Ovi* 127), where he says that Arjuna was the chief deity of the eighth kind of devotion, named friendship.

*Shri Jnaneshwar* has given a marvelous description of the *kirtana bhakti* in the ninth chapter (*Ovi* 97-112). Such devotees, he says, sing songs of God's praise and dance with the joy of devotion. They have made all talk of atonement redundant, as there is not a trace of sin left in them. They take my name as *Krishna*, *Vishnu*, *Hari*, *Govinda* and spend their time in discussion over the nature of Self. By loudly singing the name of god, they have given a healing touch to the miseries of the world and filled it with the bliss of Self. Hardly, if ever, a soul reaches *Vaikunth* (the abode of *Vishnu*), but these devotees have turned this world itself into *Vaikunth*. The Lord says that he may not be found in *Vaikunth* or the region of the sun and he may even pass by the minds of *yogis*, but he is sure to be found where his devotees sing his praise aloud. To utter the name of God even once by mouth, is the reward earned by rendering service to him in thousands of years; yet the same name ever dances on their tongue. One cannot compare them with the sun, the moon or the cloud, as the sun sets, the moon is full only at times and the cloud becomes empty after a while. But the knowledge of these devotees never sets, they are always full of devotion, and they flood this world with the knowledge of the Self.

### *Jnanadeva* and *Namdeva*

This will show that *Shri Jnaneshwar* was not unacquainted with devotional love. But he must have come to know its tender intensity only after he met *Shri Namdeva*. It is not known how and where they first met. Both of them were great in their own way. *Shri Namdeva* must have

become dazzled by the knowledge and devotion of *Shri Jnaneshwar* based on non-dualism, while the latter must have been greatly impressed by the intense devotional love and the depth of feeling of *Shri Namdeva* for *Vitthala*. In chapter ten, *Shri Jnaneshwar* has given a beautiful description of what two devotees do, when they meet. They must have conversed with each other and danced with joy in the fullness of knowledge and devotion. They must have exchanged their experiences and shared their knowledge and devotion with each other. Just as when the water in two lakes shoots up, the waves of one mingle with the waves of the other, so the ripples of their mirth must have mingled together. They must have spent days and nights in singing the praise of God and in discussions on the Self. Their meeting bore two results, *Namdeva* realised that devotion remains incomplete without Self-knowledge and went to *Visoba Khechar* to take initiation. *Shri Jnaneshwar* on his part became a devotee of *Vitthal* and turned to devotional love (*madhurabhakti*).

### Non-dual Devotion

The usual nature of devotion is such that the devotee ascribes the human attributes to God and worships God with form. Or else he attributes Divine qualities to an extraordinary and remarkable person and worships him, as an incarnation of God. The *Gita* says that some devotees worship God to obtain relief from misery or with the desire of wealth or with the desire of knowledge. But the devotee of the fourth kind worships God without entertaining any desire in his mind. It is generally believed that devotion is not possible unless there is duality between God and the devotee. The devotion in the school of *Shri Madhwa* is openly of dual form. But even though the schools of *Shri Ramanuja* or *Shri Vallabha* are non-dualistic in a sense, their devotion too is based on a distinction between God and the devotee, as they believe that a liberated soul does not become one with God, but retains his individuality and enjoys independent life in the proximity of God. But *Shri Jnaneshwar* regards such devotion based on distinction between God and the devotee as unchaste and parochial. He says in the fourteenth chapter, that it is not that one should attain God-realisation after the dissolution of the world, but that one should try to apprehend God along with the world. If God is worshipped with the knowledge that he has pervaded this whole universe, it becomes chaste, non-dual devotion (*Ovis* 379, 80). Even if there are waves in the sea, they are all water. So the *jnani-bhakta* sees God in the universe and worships him with the intensity of devotion, He says, whatever creature one meets, one should regard it as God; such is the nature of non-dual devotion. At the end of the twelfth chapter, the *Gita* mentions the characteristics of a *jnani-bhakta*, starting with 'without hatred towards any being'. This characteristic exactly describes him as he did not even hate the wicked persons. He has prayed to God in his last prayer (*Pasayadana*) not to destroy them but to destroy their wickedness. Another characteristic of a *jnani-bhakta* is that he is not troubled by the world nor does he trouble the world. In the thirteenth chapter, while commenting on non-violence, he has stated that a *jnani* takes great care that he does not trample any creature and cause harm to it, as God is immanent in it. It can be shown that he possessed all the characteristics of a *jnani-bhakta*.

One may ask, how can one who had become one with God through devotion based on non-dualism turn to devotion of God with form? *Shri Jnaneshwar* has given a reply to this question in chapter twelve. The Lord says, "even though a person has become a *yogi* by practicing the means of *Karmayoga* externally and of *Dhyanayoga* internally, he attains intense love for my form with attributes. O Arjuna, he alone is a devotee, a *yogi* and a liberated soul. I am so fond of him as though he is my beloved and I the husband. He is dearer to me than my own Self. This simile

too is inadequate to express the relation between us. The account of my true devotee is a magical formula (*mantra*) which infatuates the mind. One should not say such things, but I had to say them because of my love for you. When the subject of my devotee is broached, my affection for him doubly increases (*ovis* 155-60); just as the devotee feels an attraction for me, I too have a 'passion' for him (ch. 18, *Ovi* 1349)." What the nature of this love is, is seen in the *Varuna* hymn of sage *Vasistha* in *Rgveda* (8.86). Dr. R.N. Dandekar says, that the devotee feels 'an irresistible urge to establish a personal communion with God' and 'an acute sense of alienation when he thinks that for some reason God has deserted him'<sup>14</sup>. The devotee sometimes thinks that god has forsaken him and feels an acute agony of separation. This is known in western books of devotion, as the 'night of darkness'. *Shri Jnaneshwar* has described the pangs of separation in his *Abhangas* on *Gaulani* (cowherdresses) and *Virahini* (a wife suffering the pangs of separation from her husband). If the erotic language of these songs shocks us, it is entirely our fault, not of *Shri Jnaneshwar*. The devotional love (*prema-bhakti*) of *Shri Jnaneshwar* is flawless. The excesses which took place in the *Pushtimarga* of *Shri Vallabha* or the *Chaitanya Sampradaya*, did not take place in Maharashtra. This is because *Shri Jnaneshwar* laid the foundation of the *Bhagavata Dharma* on the secure basis of knowledge (*Jnana*) and dispassion (*vairagya*).

*Shri Ramanuja* holds that no one can attain liberation without *prapatti* or complete self-surrender to God, without which one cannot gain the grace of God. It is not necessary for him to perform actions or Yoga! Aurobindo Ghosh also held the same view. Dr. Ranade has quoted a beautiful passage, which succinctly explains his viewpoint in this regard.

"The *Gita* is not a book of ethics but of spiritual life. It teaches not human but Divine action; not the disinterested performance of duties but the following of the Divine Will; not a performance of social duties, but the abandonment of all standards of duty (*sarvadharmas*), to take refuge in the Supreme alone; not social service but the action of the god-possessed, the Master-men and as a sacrifice to Him, who stands behind man and Nature (Essays on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 43)<sup>15</sup>".

I do not think this view would have been acceptable to *Shri Jnaneshwar*. On the contrary, he states in the eighteenth chapter, that one should worship God through performance of one's duty. According to him one should place his actions like flowers, at the feet of God. Later he says that his recital (*kirtana*) of *Dharma* has been a success. It must be remembered here that *Shri Jnaneshwar* takes *Dharma* in the sense of duty, which has fallen to one's lot on account of one's qualities and actions. In his last prayer also, he prays to God to let the sense of duty dawn upon the world.

### ***Jnaneshwar and the Warkari Order***

After *Shri Jnaneshwar* met *Namdeva*, he came to know the other great *Warkari* saints also. In the pilgrimage which he had undertaken with *Shri Namdeva*, *Warkari* saints such as *Sena Nhavi*, *Savata Mali*, *Narahari Sonar*, *Gora Kumbhar*, *Chokha Mahar* and *Warkaris* must have accompanied him. These *Warkari* saints performed their duties with dedication and worshipped *Lord Vitthala* with devotional love, according to the *Bhagavata Dharma*. How they found spiritual meaning in their every-day life, will be evident from the following passages.

*As a barber, I shall give a dressing (lit. haircut) to men. I shall explain the purpose of life (clean the armpits) and pare the nails of desire and anger - Sena Nhavi*

*Onions, radish and vegetables, these are my Vithabai (Vitthal) - Savata Mali*

*O God, I am your goldsmith and carry on the business of your name; I blow the bellows of Jiva and Shiva and beat the gold (taking the name of God) day and night. - Narhari Sonar*

All these saints were impressed by *Shri Jnaneshwar* and took refuge at his feet. *Shri Jnaneshwar*, who had taken initiation of the *Natha* sect, is not known as a *Siddhayogi*, but he became the *Mauli* (mother) of the *Warkaris* and all devotees. Even after the lapse of seven centuries, devotees of *Shri Jnaneshwar* swarm to Alandi at the time of *Ashadhi Ekadashi*, when the *palanquin* containing the *padukas* of *Shri Jnaneshwar* is taken to Pandharpur, two hundred seventy kms from Alandi; *Warkaris* and hundreds of thousands of devotees tread this distance in rain and sun, singing the *Haripatha*. On the occasion of the *Kartiki Ekadashi* a fair is held at Alandi, where his devotees flock in lakhs. I bow to that *Jnaneshwar Mauli* a hundred times and offer this flower-petal in the form of this work, at his feet.



### **Acknowledgements**

At the end, I have to acknowledge the assistance received in the printing and publication of the first edition of this work. I thank Shri V. L. Manjul, librarian of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute for readily making books available to me. I thank Shri Vilas Pawgi and Kumari Deepa Shah of the Sadhana Typing Room for typing the manuscript carefully. I am grateful to Shri Sujit Patwardhan of the Mudra Press for completing the printing in a record time neatly. Last but not the least, I thank Shri S. Ramakrishna, Executive Secretary of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for agreeing to publish this work under the auspices of the Bhavan.

Pune, 3rd March 1991

**M. R. Yardi**

### **Preface to the Second Edition**

This second edition has been brought out at the pressing demand of devotees of *Shri Jnaneshwar*. I thank Shri Y. A. Dhaigude for helping me in proof-reading and Shri Rajendra Palkar for preparing the picture of *Shri Jnaneshwar* on the front cover. I am grateful to Shri Vitthal Likhite of the Maharashtra Mudranshala Printing Press for a neat print of this book. It gives me great satisfaction that this second edition is being published in the seventh centenary year of the *samadhi* day of *Shri Jnaneshwar*.

Pune, 1995

**M. R. Yardi**

## Acknowledgement to the Fifth Edition

The Yardi family wishes to thank Dr. P.R. Dubhashi and Prof. Nandkumar Kakirde of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for their assistance and encouragement in bringing out this fifth edition and specially acknowledge Dr. Dubhashi for writing an introduction for this edition. We would like to thank Dr. Prashant A. Suru, Chief Trustee, Shri Jnaneshwar Sansthan, Alandi for his assistance. Mr. V.R. Nigudkar of Prakash Mudranalaya was very helpful in collaborating with the new layout and printing and we thank him for his diligence in meeting the timelines. We thank Mr. Anant Kshirsagar of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan who helped with word processing of the manuscript. We are grateful to Daily Sakal, Pune for allowing us to use the photograph of *Ashadi Wari* at Dive Ghat.

This special edition contains photographs of the places associated with *Shri Jnaneshwar* and also included is a glimpse into the (centuries old) annual pilgrimage ('Ashadi Wari') when hundreds of thousands devotees and 'Warkari's' walk some 270 kms from Alandi to Pandharpur carrying the 'paduka's' of *Shri Jnaneshwar*. It is our hope that this will give the reader a sense of time and place without detracting from the glory of the work.

Pune, 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2011

## Notes

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