CHAPTER VI

JNANADEVYA: A TRUE VAISHNAVYA MYSTIC OF MAHARASTHA
The Srimad Bhagavad Gita is a part of the great Indian epic Mahabharata and one of the best literatures pertaining to religion. It has been interpreted by different scholars in different ways. Jnanadava, better known as Jnanesvar (1271-1296), also wrote a lengthy commentary of the said scripture in the colloquial language of Maharashtra in the thirteenth Century for the benefit of the common masses of Maharashtra at the age of nineteen. His commentary was named Jnanesvari.

"The Jnanesvari, forms a transition in the development of devotional mysticism". 1 Jnanesvar has contributed the development north-Indian languages through his religious thought and process of writing literature in a simple style pressing highest thinking. "He firmly established the tradition of Marathi literature in which Bhakti, devotion, and Jnana, philosophy and scholarship, are admirably blended". 2

Hagiography of Jnanadava depicted his miserable worldly life, but he enjoyed high life of peaceful

2. Ibid p268, p306.
existence and devoted life to the cause of his fellow men by eradicating the orthodox social system in the mediæval India. Early years of Jnanadeva: Parents of Jnanadeva were devout souls. His father was Vittal-pantha, he had a natural inclination for higher spiritual life, left home for pilgrimage to kashi, where he embraced the monastic life, accepted the spiritual heritage of Ramananda without asking prior permission of his consort according to the Hindu law of socio-religious approach. His mother was also a religious minded lady with an undivided love to her husband, she waited much anxiously for the safety of her husband. She took up some religious 'Vratas' (some folk religious customs) used to live a single life of austerity. She chanted the name of the Lord of the universe and use to chant some hymns in the name of the Lord. She roamed the sacred pippal tree as a part of her vow in a regular manner surrendering to the will of the Lord. One day Ramananda, her husband's preceptor, a monk of great re-noun came to the village of her husband, Arandi and was accepted the shelter given Sidhopantha. Rakumabai suddenly went there and begged the saint the blessings from him without uttering something to bear her all sufferings of life which arose out of her separation from her husband. The Swami astonished at her humbleness
because of her frustration before his feet and with her signs of chastity. Swami Ramananda blessed her and said that she would be the mother of worthy and honest sons. Tears rolling down from her eyes and Rakumabai then unfolded her story of her woeful life. The mystic saint was in a mood of protest for injustice alone against her. Immediately after his return to the holy city of Benaras, he persuaded Vittalpantha to return back home and advised him to lead a life of a householder. Sapanpatha was his father-in-law of Vittalpantha, a village Kulkarmior the head man of the village and he also had no child to inherit his property. He was worried about the future prospect of her loving daughter, who was under his care after the dispense of her husband. Vittalpantha, one of the trusted devotees of Ramananda returned back to the house of his father-in-law at his advice. He finally determined to return back his ancestral home with his life to settle his household life against village Appegaon in Nasik. In course of time the prophecy of his preceptor came true, he was awarded with two worthy sons and a daughter. Jnanadeva was born as a second son of his parents in the year 1271. From his childhood he had a natural inclination for spiritual tuition. He used to pass much time with the different types of monastic.
discussions on religious thought, and could chant the hymns from the different scriptures particularly from the chest portions of the Vedas.

Vittalpantha ordained him with the Brahmanical rites at an early stage according to the rules of the scriptures in the then holy city of Nasik. But none of his kith and kins co-operated him in the socio-religious matter, virtually Vittalpantha was left ostracised including the members of his family. The religious rules of the Hindus framed a law for the sannyasins in rigid manners. The Sannyasi or a renouncer of the worldly life are not allowed again to householder life. There, a severe punishment was awaited for him, he should be burned alive in immolation, out of the rice-bran fire. But Ramananda used to take decision not only on the judgement of the Scriptures, but also with the beating sounds of heart. That was his religious prescription for the religious malady. Both the father and the mother of Jnanadeva were hard pressed with the environs. They died soon one after another. But their final departure from this world, they set out for a pilgrimage to Brahmayiri hill, with two sons Nivrittinatha and Jnanadeva with their daughter Muktabai.
Another mystic incident turned his life:

On the way to their pilgrimage round the Bramhagiri, all on a sudden a roaring tiger appeared to them from the forest in the late evening, because of the unprecedented situation members of the family became scattered. Elder brother of Jnanadeva, Nivrittinatha however, refuged to a cave of a yogi of the Natha School, Gohininatha and untraced by the other members of the family. The yogi allowed Nivrithinatha however to stay with him and opened the treasures of spiritualism also blissfully initiated him to attain the mystic life through the practice of yogi way of spirituality. After a week Nivrithinatha returned home and narrated his experience to his younger brother Jnanadeva. The yogin Gohinanatha was aware of the spiritual advancement of his recently initiated disciple Nivrithinatha allowed him to initiate his younger brother Jnanadeva to assist him in his spiritual aspiration to taste a higher spiritual life. The death of his father enhanced their intensity of social distraction and made their life burdensome. Rakumabai also felt worried about the future prospect of her beloved daughter giving her in marriage to a suitable groom. Two learned men named Hemarpatha and Bopadeva passed the religious law from Dharmasastras (Scriptures on religious
regulations) in favour of them and thus they redress much the grievances of the family of Nivrithinatha brothers and social injustice which oppressed them much. In this juncture their mother passed away peacefully from the worldly bindings.

Next mystic experience of Jnanadeva:

Immediately after the above event Nivrithinatha and Jnanadeva on one occasion set out on a journey with their tiny sister Muktabai from Paitner to Arandhi and they halted for the night in the Nevas monastery. The elderly prior of the monastery Swami Sachidananda was then on death-bed. Jnanadeva moved at this matter, touched him with a pity and prayed to the protector of the universe for the cure of ailment of the saint, the old saint regained his normal physical condition. But Nivrithinatha brother and preceptor of Jnanadeva about the misuse of mystical power and advised him that such powers obstruct the spiritual progress of an aspirant. 'Nivrithinatha urged him to exercise that rare gift in writing a commentary on the Gita so that the whole humanity might benefit by his special gift'.

3. (The) Saints of India - Swami Tattavananda, Calcutta, n. d. p 145
Philosophy of Jnanadeva:

Jnanadeva was initiated by Nivrithinatha not according to the philosophical ideas of Natha school, but he was initiated in the name of Krsna with ideas of the Vainavite ideals. Jnanadeva contributed an intermingled thought which touched the philosophical ideas of Sankaracarya. Sankaracarya said without realisation of Supreme Brahman one can't deny the existence of this transitory world. Jnanadeva propagated the devotional approach in this juncture of transactioned period in the life of a worshipper of the Almighty. In practical sense he introduced the devotionalism (Bhaktivad) in his monistic philosophy. He preached non-violence of vaisnavism in the different places of Maharashtra to awake sense of morality among his countrymen. Srikrsna said in the Srimad Bhagavad:

Patram puspam phalam toyam yo me bhakta praajchati
Tadaham bhakti pahritamasnami praajatmanah

Canto IX verse 9

'I receive gracefully the leaf, flower, fruit and water with full of devotion offered me by any one with purified mind.' Generally other interpreter of this verse
took the meaning of the word Asnami', I receive, but Jnanadeva meant it 'I devour it'. Jnanadeva explained the verse in lucid style and said, 'I (representative of the universal Godhood) wish to get the devotion. I receive all things which my devotees offered me with purity and devotion'. In another verse of the ninth canto in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita; He said:

Satatam Kirtayanto mam yatanatascha ddirahabratah
Namasyantoscha mam bhakta nitya yukta upasate //
Canto IX, verse 14.

General meaning of the above verse is 'Some one recites my name with an intensive devotion, some one praises me attributing qualities by personifying me. Some one retains the laws of morality in a strictest manner, some one bows down his head with reverence and some constantly absorbs their mind in meditating me. Such were their ways of worshipping me'.

But Jnanadeva mystically interprets the verse according his philosophical ideas of life. He explained the verse. In an estating mood of dancing and chanting
the name of the Lord, destroys even the slightest touch of sin from the heart of a devout soul dedicated to the Lord of the universe. The reciting name of the Lord removes the sorrows from the earth, a few of the elevated persons from the spiritual angle are allowed to go the Vaikuntha (abode of the supreme Lord), but constant repetition of his name transforms this world a Vaikuntha. Here Jnanadeva's ideals were entered into the domain of Sufism. Jnanadeva the Indian people how the use of the path of devotionalism (Bhaktiyoga) even in the case of monistic approach of worshipping the Lord of universe. He also warned the people in the time of explaining the verses of the different approaches of calling God as it has explained by the Lord Krishna in the anhmad Bhagavad Gita, particularly in missing the exposition of Bhakti (devotionalism) in the name of his preceptor Nivritthinatha. He also depicted the social examples to explain the verses of the Gita to teach lessons to the common masses of the country. His love for the Lord of the universe finally transformed into the love of living being for the sake of humanity.
Jnanadeva and his literary contribution:

Jnanadeva passed away at the early age of twenty-two. But then he had completed the composition of the commentary of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, the Jnaneswar it was completed in the year 1290 at Navas 'one of the greatest mystical works in the world' 5. It is also a monumental works in Marathi. His another work is Amritamubhava, which is a work based on the Siva sutras. He also enriched Marathi language by writing the enormously devotional verses, which is generally called 'Abhanga'. He dealt with his all works as synthesis of knowledge and devotion, of Jnana and Bhakti. All of his works are the part of cultural advancement in the mediaeval history of Maharashtra. According to R. D. Ranade, the author of unique work of 'Mysticism in Maharashtra' wrote that 'Jnanadeva laid the foundation of the religion of love, Namadev and other sadhakas (religious practitioners) build the temple on it and more famous Tukaram shone as the crest of the temple, subsequent ages came to slake their thirst'. 6. He depicted in his Abhangas the pangs of separation from the creator of the universe, his feelings proved his intensity of love and devotion. He saw everywhere the glory of supreme Brahma. He was able to depicted his realisation

5. Meditation and spiritual life - Swami Yatiswananda
through creative art of aesthetic in his literary work. His thought of spiritualism created an uproar in Maharashtra among the orthodox men of the society. Many followers of Jnanadeva raised their social position through influence of Bhaktidharma or the religion of devotionalism from the lower strata of the Maharastrian society. Gora Kumbhar or the potter of Teradhokhi was one of his worthy followers, whose social position was not high. He also changed the heart of an aged Hotayogi of Natha school, Changadeva into a real spiritual standard, even he was not much above than in his teens. His magnetic personality made its influence felt on all who came in contact with him and through he influenced the spirit of age.