





Dr. Vasant Vishnu Shirvaikar was born in 1932 & did his MSc in Nuclear Physics from Wilson College, Bombay, Ph.D. in Physics from University of Bombay. Worked as research scientist in Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Bombay for 37 years and authored several research papers. He is a known authority on Dnyaneshwari. He is devotee of Shri Shankar Maharaj of Pune & with his blessings have published works on Dnyaneshwari, Yogiraj Shri Shankar Maharaj, & 'Amarvani' - English translation of a Hindi book by the Jain saint Amarmuni. Also published several articles on spiritual topics including a ten-part series on Datta-Parampara in the magazine Sai-Arpan published from Bombay. Now engaged in expanding the series as a book. Currently living in U.S.A.




Teachings

Of Dnyaneshwari
 (Chapter-Wise Summary)
 By
 V. V. Shirvaikar

Introduction
Gita and Dnyaneshwari

Gita, also known as Bhagvadgita, is one of the most widely read books, both in original Sanskrit and in translation. People of India read and recite it in the original Sanskrit as a religious text, while thousands read it, both in the original as well as in translation, for understanding the philosophy in it. Many spiritual seekers look at it as a guide.

Until the British settled in India in the early nineteenth century, almost all our Hindu religious literature was in Sanskrit and not accessible to common man. British not only spread the educational base to all segments of society, but also, fascinated by the oriental texts and the philosophy it contained, translated the texts into English. This new field of oriental philosophy attracted other European scholars who studied Sanskrit in order to be able to study the huge philosophical treasure contained in the Vedas, Puranas, Shastras, Darshanas etc. they translated them into English, German and French and opened the doors of knowledge to the whole world. That paradoxically included the Indians also, for the taboos imposed by religious codes like Smritis confined the reading of the above mentioned literature, especially the Vedas, only to male Brahmins, not even to their wives and daughters.

The opening of the scriptures to world public happened during the last century and half. Nevertheless, a little more than seven centuries ago, Nivruttinath, a yogi belonging to Nath Sect, saw the need for bringing the religious philosophy to common folk, the rustic farmers and artisans, who could barely read and write. He instructed his disciple Dnyananath (also

known as Dnyaneshwar) who was his younger brother, younger only by two years and in his teens at that time, to write a commentary on the Bhagvadgita in Marathi, the language of the common people of the state of Maharashtra. This commentary, originally named Bhavarthadeepika, came to be known as Dnyaneshwari after its author and became famous for obvious reasons. This composition is in Marathi verse and in Ovi (verse) style, suitable for melodious singing. Thus, while the British brought the religious knowledge by the force of their being the conquerors, these two great saints brought the essence of that knowledge, the contents of the Gita by virtue of their compassion. Since then, like Gita, Dnyaneshwari is being read and recited in thousands of households in Maharashtra, educated as well as uneducated. Like Gita, thousands study its philosophical contents, in original as well as in translation, for it is the easier way of understanding the philosophy of Gita.

About Dnyaneshwari

Gita has 700 verses (shlokas). Dnyaneshwar Maharaj explains each of the 700 shlokas of Gita elaborately, makes skilful use of similes² and metaphors pertaining to familiar natural phenomena and to the daily life, in order to enable the reader to grasp the difficult statements in Gita.

¹ Great Quotes: माझ्या मराठीची बोलु कौतुके परी अमरुताच्या पेजा जकि एसे अक्षरे रसकि मळिवीन!

Translation: I will bring great knowledge of Vedas, Upanishads, Shastras and Bhagvadgita from Sanskrit in my mother tongue Marathi and thus, uplift common poor people who know Marathi but do not know Sanskrit. (Dnyaneshwar regarded the spiritual elevation of all sectors of society as very important and stressed that caste should be based on qualities not birth.)

² a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by like or as (as in cheeks like roses) — compare

The total size of Dnyaneshwari is naturally quite big, viz. 9032 ovis.

Dnyaneshwar Maharaj began the commentary in the year 1287AD and finished it two and half years later in 1290AD. It was committed to written text by his disciple Sacchinanadbaba. Dnyaneshwar Maharaj was very young when the commentary was written, though he was already an accomplished Nath yogi. His guru and elder brother Nivruttinath was a disciple of Gahininath, one of the famous groups of the Nine Nath Yogis (Navnaths). There is a difference of opinion regarding the age of Dnyaneshwar Maharaj at the time of its writing. Some put it as twelve while others put it as twenty-one.

However, that aspect is irrelevant to us. We are interested in understanding the contents of the commentary.

During the two and half centuries after Dnyaneshwari was written, the text suffered many corruptions for two reasons. In old days, there was no printing technology and books had to be copied by hand. This introduced some errors. However, the worst reason for these errors was the despicable tendency of many poets to insert their own compositions. Fortunately, Saint Eknath (1533-1599AD) collected several copies of Dnyaneshwari and tried to recreate the original. We must thank Saint Eknath today for these efforts, which are gigantic when we consider the lack of communications and facilities available in those times. The copies we have today do differ from each other but only in a minor way.

Dnyaneshwari was meant for common public, most of whom could barely read. However, today, even a man well educated in Marathi finds it difficult to understand the original text, because Marathi language has changed considerably over the last seven hundred years. Many words do not have the same meaning they used to have in the days of Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. However, prose

Somehow, even though Dnyaneshwar Maharaj and his brethren suffered at the hands of Brahmins because their father had come back into family life after adopting Sanyas, and though he belonged to Nath Panth which does not believe in the caste system, none of them seems to have repudiated it, so deep has been its incursion into the Hindu psyche.

translations in Marathi, Hindi as well as English are available for an interested reader. There are also verse-for-verse versions composed in today's Marathi. A list of some published versions in prose and verse in Marathi and other languages is given elsewhere in this book.

Two Types Of Readers

Gita and Dnyaneshwari have two types of readers: the pious and the (intellectually) curious.

Pious readers

Gita is read and recited by thousands of people in India as part of the daily spiritual routine. Entire recitation may take couple of hours. Many read or recite Gita out of pious belief that it would add to their account of merit. It is their belief that contents of Gita are the advice given by Shri Krishna to Arjuna on the Kurukshetra battlefield when the latter refused to fight at the thought of the large scale destruction of his friends and relatives, many of them at his own hands. Shri Krishna is accepted by most people as the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, therefore the words in Gita are considered as words of God. We shall discuss these aspects later.

People who read or recite Gita piously are not always bothered about the meaning in depth of its contents, though some amount of philosophical principles definitely seep in and get well embedded in the mind due to the deep faith, slowly and surely.

Intellectual Readers

There is another class of people who read Gita to understand the philosophy presented therein. They may be pious or agnostic, but they are curious to understand what Gita, the book everyone talk about, contains. Often that curiosity turns into devotion. Gita itself talks about four types of devotees out of which the "curious" is one. Of course, that devotion need not necessarily be towards God in the image of Shri Krishna, but can be as the supreme entity described in Gita as Brahman or Parabrahman. Such readers are basically followers of the path of knowledge. It is

for such intellectually curious persons that summaries like the present ones are useful. Such intellectual class of persons belong to the modern educated set who wish to go beyond their professional duties to learn about their relationship with the Almighty, but have limited time for it. They may be engineers, businesspersons, business administrators, educators, lawyers and even politicians.

The above statements also apply equally to Dnyaneshwari, since it is a commentary on Gita.

Essence Of Gita/Dnyaneshwari

Let us now briefly see what advice Gita/Dnyaneshwari exudes.

According to Gita an individual should first be aware that he is not really his body but the soul residing in the body. When we say, "I have pain in my body", or "I work with my hands", it is intuitively implied that "I" is different from the body and there is an implication of ownership of the body by the individual who refers to himself as "I". Nevertheless, in spite of this intrinsic usage of separateness of the body from "I", an individual is not in the habit of considering himself as separate from the body. When we say that a particular individual has died it only means that the body has died but his real Self, the soul, which is imperishable, continues to exist. The soul subsequently is reborn as another individual in another body. The reborn individual has to again go through the cycle of birth-childhood-youth-old age-death. Every individual has to pass through thousands of such birth-death cycles. The place, conditions and the species in which he is reborn depends upon the Karmas or the aggregate of actions he did in his all earlier lifetimes. Good actions lead to rebirth in better conditions and sinful actions in conditions where he has to suffer.

A liberation (Moksha) from these cycles is the aim of spiritual efforts (Sadhana). A person working towards liberation is called a seeker (Sadhak). Sadhana leads the seeker to attain Self-realization i.e., realization that one's real Self is the Soul and not the body. Soul or the Self is the same as Brahman, the ultimate entity that pervades this universe and is the cause of its existence.

Self-realization cannot be achieved just by reading about it or by logical arguments. It has to be experienced through meditation; a state of mind in which all thoughts stop and the mind gets the awareness of the Divine i.e. the Soul or the Brahman.

Gita presents the seeker with four paths as follows:

Path of Knowledge in which a person contemplates on the relation between himself, God or Brahman, Universe etc. and through meditation on these experiences the Brahman.

Path of Action in which a person carries out his religious and social duties sincerely, but without any desire for the fruits of his actions. He offers the fruits to God, thus becoming a non-doer in spite of doing the actions. This attitude negates his Karmas, therefore, when all karmas are negated, he is not reborn.

Path of Yoga in which the seeker practices Yoga and meditation by which the Kundalini force is activated. This Kundalini force cleans the body and mind and leads to an experience of the Brahman and thus, liberation.

Path of Devotion (Bhakti) in which the

seeker becomes devoted to God his mind becomes free of all thought except of God and thus the seeker becomes one with Him and gets liberated. The seeker may, to start with, be interested in devotion with personal materialistic motives but in the end, devotion overrides all worldly desires.

The seeker chooses a path depending upon his own mental make-up. (See the discussion later). The four paths are not mutually exclusive. Every path is intermixed to some extent with the other three. Especially, the element of Bhakti or devotion is always present in the other three paths.

It is essential for a seeker to control the mind and the organs. Gita repeatedly stresses on the need to develop an attitude of detachment towards all worldly matters, of desirelessness, giving up of

ego and development of the sense of discrimination towards what is proper and improper. Spiritual progress is not possible without these.

While Gita states the Vedantic philosophy of Brahman and Maya it also discusses the Sankhya philosophy of the theory of creation of the universe, the hypothesis of Purusha and Prakriti as the creators of the universe and the constitution of the body including the mind and the intellect. Unlike Vedanta philosophy, Sankhya philosophy does not believe in a supreme God, but Gita synthesizes the two by proposing a Supreme Purusha that is above the Purusha and Prakriti duo.

This entire universe is created by God, is sustained by God and finally will get destroyed and merge into God. Everything in this world, living or non-living, is not only pervaded by Him, but is Him. Thus God, who is called Brahman above, is in everything and even beyond that, He is everything.

It explains the aspects of body-soul relationships and guides on the attitudes and behavior necessary for success in the path of Self-realization. It further explains how a Self-realized person can finally become one with the Brahman or God. In Gita, that God is Shri Krishna.

It also discusses the existence of the three attributes Sattva, Raja and Tama in everything in the universe (except the Brahman), and how different proportions of these attributes decide the nature of every living and non-living object in the universe. Man's actions are also affected by the three attributes and Gita stresses on the need for the seekers to develop the Sattva attribute more.

It states how people who worship deities with selfish desires are distanced from God. They do not realize that the Supreme God is present in those deities who are as impermanent as themselves and it is really the Supreme God who fulfils their desires. What is needed to become one with God and thus attain liberation is not the rituals like fasting etc which merely punish the body, but love and devotion. A

What is needed to become one with God and thus attain liberation is not the rituals like fasting etc which merely punish the body, but love and devotion.

fruit, or even a leaf or merely a little water offered with love and devotion is accepted by God and takes the devotee to Him. Thus, by dispensing with elaborate rituals, which generally only higher caste men can perform, Gita opens the doors of spiritual uplift to all men and women irrespective of their caste, education, learning etc. This is the greatness of Gita.

Actually, it is not necessary to perform any specific spiritual practice at all. It is enough if a person leads a righteous life, does his duties, which come his way, and does them honestly, but always without any desire for the fruits of his actions. He should not keep an ego that it was he who did the action and offer all the fruits to God. This will clean his account of Karmas and thus he will not be reborn.

Gita is thus a guide for anyone who is about to tread the path to Self-realization and answers all his doubts about basic spiritual matters.

Diverse Interpretations

The first reading of Gita (generally a translation) leaves many a reader confused. Some of the reasons for this are: There are many reasons for this. A difficult subject of Self-realization has been explained in just 700 verses, without detailed explanations. Secondly, in the discussion of the different paths there is no clear delineation of the text. Jnanayoga and how one must follow it are not clearly explained. There is some vagueness and confusion about the scope of the terms yoga, Sankhya yoga, Jnanayoga, Buddhiyoga and Sanyas. Without auxiliary reading or explanatory comments by experts, many of the terms and statements are difficult to understand. Non-dualism has been introduced at the beginning through the concept of Brahman, but later the concept of Purusha and Prakriti, which implies dualism, has been presented so reader does not know which one should be accepted.

The reader feels need for explanations on many points which are available only in the translations which give explanatory notes. Commentaries written by eminent scholars are no doubt useful but most commentaries are partial to one or the other of the several paths mentioned in the Gita. For

example, Lokmanya Tilak is partial to the path of Action. Adi Shankara interprets Gita based on Advaita (non-dualism) philosophy, while Acharyas belonging to the Dvaita (dualism) dogma interpret it accordingly. Dnyaneshwar Maharaj supports Advaita (non-duality) philosophy of Adi Shankara. He is the first commentator to have given details about the path of Yoga but his inclination is towards the Path of Devotion, which supports dualism.

Need For Summary

Dnyaneshwari appears to be the best available commentary on Gita. For an intellectual reader its outdated language is not really a hurdle. A non-Marathi reader cannot read the original text anyway. He has to make do with a prose or verse translation. One of the problems is the voluminous text. Such a large text requires many sittings. It takes more than a week to read the text from end to end and that requires both time and a firm motivation.

But for a reader who wishes to study mainly the philosophy embodied in Dnyaneshwari, there is another hurdle. As mentioned earlier, Dnyaneshwar Maharaj has made use of many similes and examples in his commentary. Sometimes several different similes are used in succession to explain a statement. This no doubt makes Dnyaneshwari a beautiful poetry, but for a reader who is interested only in the train of philosophical arguments, it also becomes a major distraction. Today's reader is a well-read person conversant with many fields of knowledge. He does not need these similes, let alone multiple similes. A modern reader needs, unless he is set out to appreciate the poetry and not the philosophy, an edition with minimum number of similes and also of other material like praise of deities and saints.

This author was instructed by his Guru to make a short summary of Dnyaneshwari some years ago. When the author set out to make it, he was faced with this above mentioned distraction and opted first to make a translated version of Dnyaneshwari in English that gave only philosophical part of the text, retaining only

those similes that might aid the understanding. This reduced the volume of the text significantly to about two-thirds of the original, but made the text smoother.

Availability on the Internet

Author's friend Mr Dietrich Platthaus from Essen, Germany has translated the above in German and those are also available on the internet at the following sites:

www.dj0qo.de/dnyg/dnyentry.htm

www.dj0qo.de/amag/gag.htm

www.dj0qo.de/gurug/MAHARAJ.html

History vs. Belief

There are often contradictions between common beliefs and historical findings as with common beliefs and scientific facts. This is true about Mahabharata, authorship of Gita, position of Shri Krishna as an avatar in Mahabharata and as Bhagwan in the Gita etc.

Historians use all available means to discover historical truth. They analyze words and language and information given in various ancient texts, legends, archaeological findings, astronomy, geography and even modern scientific means to create the historical scenarios as best as possible. Some of these contradictions are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Mahabharata – who wrote it and when

Gita is a part of Bhishmaparva in the epic Mahabharata. People believe that Maharshi Vyas, who was alive during Pandava times, was the author of Mahabharata. He did write a short narration (about 24,000 Shlokas) of the conflict between Kauravas and Pandavas. He presented the war and the events preceding it as a family feud between Kauravas and Pandavas who were cousins. This was narrated by Rishi Vaishampayana couple of generations later during the snake sacrifice performed by King Janamejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna. This version was known as Bharata and had 21,262 Shlokas. This Bharata became Mahabharata after various writers made additions to it over the next ten centuries, increasing the size of the epic to more than three times.

Some people believe that the original version was named Jaya and had 8,800 Shlokas, but there is no support for this since this name is not mentioned anywhere in Mahabharata.

Writers who made the additions were: Suta (17,284 shlokas) and his son Sauti (26,728 shlokas) who were great puranics (mythological story tellers) of the fifth century BC. As late as in the second century BC one Harivanshakara added 9053 shlokas, mostly describing the life of Shri Krishna. The last addition, of 1369 shlokas, was made in the first century BC by an unknown person, mentioned today only as Parvasangrahakara, bringing the total size of the epic to 75595 shlokas.

In Bharata, Maharshi Vyasa did not take sides between Kauravas and Pandavas. He mentions impartially the unethical deeds of both. He even describes how the sky shone bright, gandharvas played music and gods from heaven showered flowers on Duryodhana when he announced that he had lived righteously and since he had died in a battle he will go to heaven while Shri Krishna and the Pandavas who had used dirty tricks to win the war will linger on this earth. He also tells how Shri Krishna justified the unethical stratagems to win the war on the basis of exigencies. It was Suta who introduced for the first time a partiality towards Pandavas making them the symbol of good and Kauravas the symbol of evil. He presented arguments to justify the dirty tricks by inventing stories of curses passed on Duryodhana and other Kauravas for unrighteous behavior. This transformed Mahabharata into a history of conflict between good and evil, something against the principle of impartial historical analysis.

The above information is given by Mr MRYardi, an eminent scholar, based upon the best available version edited in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) in Pune. Other versions of Mahabharata show it to be of about the same size. Orientalists have known for a long time that the above writers had made the additions. But it was only about two decades ago that Mr Yardi made a statistical analysis of the structure of the Shlokas of Mahabharata, which are in Anushtup metre. By this analysis Yardi could identify the different style structures of each of the above authors.

Thus, he was able to separate the additions made by each and chart the development of Mahabharata. Readers should refer to the original publications (Mahabharata – a synthesis by M.R.Yardi pub. by BORI, Pune. The same authors have added similarly to the original Valmiki Ramayana and that analysis done by Yardi has also been published by BORI).

The major contributor Sauti, who was also the author of Gita, lived in about 450BC i.e. a little later than Buddha. The large number of stories and discussions of topics like ethics and spiritual philosophy added by Suta and Sauti made Mahabharata virtually a spiritual encyclopaedia. It is natural that the socio-economic picture presented in these additions reflects the conditions prevailing in their age. For example, derogatory mention of Buddha Bhikshus is made in a story though neither Buddha nor his religion existed in Mahabharata times.

Authorship Of Gita

The real author of Gita is therefore Sauti who included it as part of the additions made by him, and not Maharshi Vyas as pious people believe. Next question is: Did the dialogue between Arjuna and Shri Krishna on the Kurukshetra battlefield on the first day of the Mahabharata war really occur?

Intellectuals do not agree that it did. First of all, it is inconceivable that such a long discourse, lasting two to three hours would have taken on the battlefield with the eager armies waiting on either side. Secondly, it was neither time nor place to go into the extensive details of spiritual philosophy. It is possible that Arjuna became sad and disheartened at the thought of the large-scale genocide that included his near friends and relatives. Nevertheless, for a person of Arjuna's intelligence a few words of advice should have been sufficient. Actually, part of the advice offered in the second chapter of Gita itself appears to be good enough to have made Arjuna go back to fighting.

Sauti obviously presented his composition on spiritual philosophy i.e. Gita, making skillful and convenient use of the Mahabharata war as the backdrop. Sauti tried to synthesise the

philosophies known in his time, namely the Vedanta, Sankhya, Yoga and Pancharatra (Bhakti or devotion) and presented a compatible mixture, in spite of the many mutual contradictions among those philosophies. The status of the Gita today shows he did produce a palatable mixture.

By Sauti's time Shri Krishna was already considered as a deity and an avatar of Vishnu (who was further identified with Narayana, the supreme deity of the Pancharatra system) while the war scenario was a convenient backdrop for the dialogue. It was natural for Sauti to present Shri Krishna as Bhagwan (God) and a personification of the Supreme Brahman (Parabrahman). Philosophical works are many but what makes Gita holy is that the advice, presented in first person, comes from the lips of Bhagwan Shri Krishna the Supreme Brahman.

Shri Krishna As Bhagwan

Does history support the claim that Shri Krishna was Bhagwan? In many places in Mahabharata, (i.e. those added by Sauti), Shri Krishna has been presented as the eighth avatar of Vishnu and that he as well as others were aware of his being an avatar. This has given rise to many ridiculous situations. But actually, in Mahabharata time Shri Krishna was not recognised as an avatar but only as a human being. During a dialogue with Bhishma regarding the glory of Lord Shiva, Shri Krishna refers to himself as a mere human being and therefore not in a position to know that great God who is the final goal of all good men. Shri Krishna, like Shri Rama, worshipped Shiva. Shri Krishna had propitiated Lord Shiva to obtain a boon of a son from Rukmini and again from another wife Jambavati.

Krishna's first Guru was Sandipani, but he later became a pupil of Ghora Angirasa from whom he learnt the Upanishadic philosophy (i.e. Upanishads composed up to those times. Many have been written much later, e.g. Chandogya Upanishad has been written between Shri Krishna's and Buddha's time). It is said that Shri Krishna was opposed to the priestly influence of the Vedic religion and preached the doctrines taught by Ghora Angirasa. In the teachings of the latter, man's life is compared to a sacrifice.

His going without comforts and in hardships are his initiation, his enjoyments are the breaking of the fast by milk, his virtues such as austerity, charity, uprightness, non-violence and truthfulness as the gifts (dakshina) given to the priests. The death is the final bath of purification. The final instructions from Ghora Angiras were: "You are indestructible, you are immovable, you are the essence of life." These teachings have found their way to the Gita.

Shri Krishna began to be considered as a deity and an avatar of Vishnu during the few centuries after his death (Shri Krishna died 36 years after the Mahabharata war, at the age of 108). The idea of an avatar seems to be a concept among the Vaishnavaites. This probably is consistent with the idea that out of the Trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, Vishnu has the role of the deity responsible for sustaining the universe and therefore save it from evil from time to time. But how, a worshipper of Shiva came to be recognized as an avatar of Vishnu?

If one looks at how the various deities gained and lost their importance over the centuries, an interesting picture is revealed. There were 33 Vedic deities, namely: 8 Vasus, 11 Rudras, 12 Adityas, Indra, Prajapati. Vishnu was only a minor deity, subordinate to Indra and hence also known as Upendra. Towards the end of the Vedic times, a few generations before the time of Shri Rama, the Vedic culture amalgamated with the local Indian culture. Shiva, the deity of the original inhabitants was accepted by the Aryans as the Supreme Entity and widely worshipped. This is how both Shri Rama and Shri Krishna became worshippers of Shiva the contemporary deity. As a parallel development, with the Aryans settling from nomadic economy to agricultural economy, there was no longer any need for the war-god Indra and he lost his importance. Aryans used to propitiate Indra in the Yajnas, but now they looked for a deity connected with vegetation and fertility, a need of those times, for propitiation. Their choice was Vishnu who was described in the Rigveda as innocuous and bountiful and a generous protector. This image, that of a sustainer survives even today.

Around Krishna's time, Narayana came to be worshipped as the Supreme God by certain clans,

among them was the Varshni clan to which Shri Krishna belonged. It has been suggested that this clan already considered Shri Krishna as their leader and thus had a Divine element in him. In this age, Pancharatra or Bhagwat Dharma gained prominence. This was a cult of devotion to Narayana later identified with Vishnu. Krishna died 36 years after the Mahabharata war, which experts put as having occurred in late eleventh century BC. (There is a tendency for many conservative groups find it more prestigious to push this age two thousand years earlier, despite the scientific analysis of all the available information). Shri Krishna who was greatly revered for his qualities as a great king, a warrior, a diplomat, a philosopher, a yogi, a family person and a friend came to be identified by Sauti's time as an avatar of Vishnu or Narayana. There is no doubt that he was fit to be named an avatar.

Who Is An Avatar?

It is common in spiritual circles to speak of avatars and incarnations. We also note that the concept of avatars is applied mostly to Vishnu. One does not speak as much about avatars of Shiva or of Mother Durga. Is it because the two great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and one of the largest Puranas the Bhagawat Purana, which have a strong hold on people of India, are predominantly Vaishnavite? Except for the yogis and followers of the path of knowledge, whose number is small, majority of the Hindu public may be considered to be inclined towards the path of devotion. The above three works have a big sway over their thinking and it is not surprising that the Vaishnavite concept of avatars of Vishnu has taken root in the minds of general public. Even traditionally, Shaivaite people concede to this concept. It is of course mentioned in most scriptures that it is a sin to consider Shiva as different from Vishnu, but strict Vaishnavaites, especially in Southern India consider even uttering the name of Shiva as Sin. But that is an extreme. For the most part, avatars of Vishnu are accepted by an average Hindu. They also believe in incarnations of saints, e.g. Saint Tukaram is considered as an incarnation of Saint Namdeo, a contemporary of Dnyaneshwar Maharaj.

But then what is an avatar? There are many people born with special gifts. Some are born

musicians, born mathematicians and born philosophers, while some are born with high spiritual status. Not all of them can be explained by genetics. One can only say that they carry these characteristics from past births i.e. they are incarnations of some highly gifted persons.

Nevertheless, an avatar is something different. In this context, Dr Radhakrishnan states in his introductory essay to Gita that the theory of avatar expresses the spiritual law requiring God to save man from evil. For this He must manifest Himself, whenever the forces of evil threaten society. By taking avatar it is God that descends into man, man does not rise to be God. That happens with a liberated soul. Man can become an instrument of divine life. The Divine Consciousness uses human life and body for Its purpose. An ordinary unrealized human consciousness does not have similar absolute control.

Coming to the avatars of Vishnu, he is said to have taken a number of avatars, from fish to man. Common man is familiar only with ten of his avatars, but some scriptures quote twenty-four. Among his principal avatars in human form are: Narasimha (half man-half lion), Vamana, Parshurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and a future predicted avatar Kalki. His other avatars include the Rishis: Sanatkumar (the mind son of Brahmadeo), Narada (a Divine Rishi and a son of Brahmadeo), Kapil (known for Sankhya philosophy), Rishabha and Vyasa, the kings Prithu and Balaram (Krishna's elder brother) and the great avadhut Dattatreya.

Actually, Buddhists do not like Buddha to be designated an avatar because that degrades Buddha whom they consider as the Supreme Entity. Jains consider Rishabha as the founder of their religion and put him in the same class. Kalki avatar is a pure fantasy. He is supposed to come riding a horse from the northeast to save mankind from the evil. But, why a horse in the days of technologically advanced vehicles? Perhaps by the time the avatar takes place the days of technology will be over and we return to the primitive days due to depletion of resources, but evil will continue to come and go. But it is more likely that when these avatars were conceived,

there was no concept of technological advancement.

Gita itself suggests that Divine element is present in whatever is best in the universe and that includes kings, great warriors, leaders and thinkers. Even though the Divine power uses the human frame to save mankind from the evil, people may not recognize this in that person's lifetime. This is realized much later, sometimes centuries later. The person is then recognized as an avatar and then all sorts of imaginary legends are woven around the now recognized avatar.

Philosophy Shri Krishna Knew

Now, a person cannot write about so many philosophies without close familiarity with them. So who was that person? It does not seem to be Sauti who was a Puranic. Yardi gives the following arguments to suggest that the originator of the synthesis was Shri Krishna himself. His arguments are as follows:

The additions made by Suta and Sauti contain an unusually large number of stories related to the clan of Bhrigus, descendents of Rishi Bhrigu of Vedic times. Shri Krishna comes under that lineage by virtue of his being a descendant of King Yadu. (Starting from Yadu, Shri Krishna is the 30th in line). Yadu was the son Yayati married to Devayani, daughter of Shukracharya (also known as Ushanas) the grandson of Rishi Bhrigu. Shukracharya was the chief priest of the Asuras. Bhrigu clan continued to have an influence over many centuries. Bhrigus must have held Shri Krishna in high regard because of his Bhrigu lineage (via Devayani) and decided to preserve his philosophical teachings.

It has already been mentioned that Shri Krishna studied Vedanta under Ghora Angiras. He himself belonged to the Varshni clan that practiced Pancharatra system that lays stress on the path of devotion. He already knew Vedas but did not like the ritualistic aspect of the Vedas and the influence of the priests from those. Shri Krishna's life is evidently that of a Karmayogi. Thus he was a right teacher who could synthesize these philosophies into one common guide. Shaunaka Muni, himself a Bhargava, must hav

known about these teachings and prevailed upon Sauti, whom he met during the twelve year yajna session conducted by him in the Naimisha forest, to incorporate them in the Mahabharata. Thus, though the scene depicted by Sauti about Shri Krishna advising Arjuna on the battlefield is a fiction written to fit the text, the philosophy itself is what Shri Krishna had learnt partly from Ghora Angiras. Shri Krishna by that time was already being worshipped as a deity and was a legendary figure. Thus, even though the contents of the Gita may not be the actual words of Shri Krishna, there is no doubt that, it was the philosophy he knew in his lifetime. It was therefore natural that since Shri Krishna was considered as an avatar of Vishnu, he was given the role of Bhagwan, the Supreme Brahman.

Is Gita A Vaishnavite Text?

Most people, not only in India but also abroad, have high respect and admiration for Gita. However, it has detractors too. E. Easwaran, in his book "Am I a Hindu", written for the America-born Hindu children of Indian origin, remarks that many Shaivaites, especially in south India, feel that Shiva has been given a secondary position in the various Vaishnavite texts like Bhagavat Purana and Bhagvadgita. In these texts, the ultimate principle or Brahman is identified with Vishnu and not with Shiva. In the Shaivaite texts, it is the other way round. Many Shaivaites in southern India shun Gita as avidly as the Vaishnavites shun anything connected with Lord Shiva. That is unfortunate because it has been strictly mentioned in the scriptures that he who considers Shiva and Vishnu as different is a sinner. Sadgurus like Shri Saibaba, Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot, and Shri Shankar Maharaj etc. and the Nath Panthi yogis never bothered about even religion of their disciples, leave alone their caste or creed. This narrow mindedness is peculiar to the disciples who do not really understand the universality of the Brahman that their Guru taught them.

There is no doubt that Sauti has presented Shri Krishna as Bhagwan and as Brahman, the ultimate Entity to whom everybody must surrender for salvation. It is possible that he did this under pressure from Shaunaka Muni who was a Bhargava and wanted to give importance to Shri Krishna who

also was connected to Bhargava lineage as mentioned in the previous section. It is true that present version of Mahabharata, Ramayana as well as many Puranas (e.g. Bhagwat and Markandeya) appear to depict Vishnu (Narayana) as the ultimate Principle, equivalent to Vedantic Brahman. His avatars, particularly Krishna and Shri Rama are not considered different from Narayana or Vishnu. However, if one thinks carefully, very few statements in Gita are specific to Shri Krishna as a Vaishnavite deity though it does depict him as personification of the Absolute. It would not be difficult to convert Gita to Shaivaite style e.g., presenting it as a traditional dialogue between Shiva and Parvati as is done in Guru-Gita and many other texts. Shri Krishna was a king, related to the Pandavas and Kauravas and thus conveniently fitted the plot of Mahabharata. Lord Shiva on the other hand is a recluse living on the crematory grounds far away from the splendor of the kings. Also, Shiva is not credited with many avatars as Vishnu has been. Thus, it was natural and convenient for Sauti to choose Krishna in the role of the propounder of the Gita by creating a scenario of Arjuna's despondency on the battlefield.

About Caste system

It hurts a modern reader to read the statement in Shloka 4.13 from Shri Krishna as Bhagwan that he was the creator of the caste system. How can God, supposed to be impartial to all, create a caste system, which anyway is practiced only in India, a small portion of this vast earth? We can only say that it was the system practiced in India in those times and naturally had to be incorporated. The caste system has made inroads into every phase of life in India and even the word swadharma is defined as the performance of righteous duties as per the individual's caste. This definition is carried over in Dnyaneshwari also. Somehow, even though Dnyaneshwar Maharaj and his brethren suffered at the hands of Brahmins because their father had come back into family life after adopting Sanyas, and though he belonged to Nath Panth which does not believe in the caste system, none of them seems to have repudiated it, so deep has been its incursion into the Hindu psyche.

The caste system got a temporary knock from Buddhism. Many subsequent sects like the

Nath and the Mahanubhava did not bother about the caste system or even religion. But that was only temporary.

The caste system of Mahabharata days defined duties for each caste (See the main text) but it also permitted a person of lower caste to enter a higher caste through performing of deeds of religious merit. The dialogue between Shiva and Parvati presented in the original Bharata shows the attitude of those days. Shiva says, "With the aid of meritorious deeds, Oh Goddess, a person who is born in a lower caste, say a Shudra, may become a Brahmin, when he becomes well-versed in the Vedic lore and is cleaned of all stains. On the other hand, a Brahmin who is wicked and does not observe his dharma falls from his status of a Brahmin and becomes a Shudra. If pious nature and righteous deeds are seen in a Shudra, he should be considered a Brahmin. Neither birth nor purificatory rites nor learning nor humility can be regarded as grounds for conferring the status of a Brahmin on anyone. In this matter the conduct of a person is the sole test." But over the passage of time this was forgotten. Saints like Chokha Mela, outcast in his times, were tortured. So was Saint Tukaram, a vaishya.

Even today, there is no significant improvement on this front even after five decades of independence, modern education and exposure to other parts of earth and other religions that do not practice caste system.

History Irrelevant To Spiritual Path

The above discussion of historical facts, many of which are contrary to common beliefs, raises a question. Are historical truths relevant to a seeker who is after the spiritual truths? Here again we may take the help of history itself to answer this point.

Consider the character of Radha. Tremendous amount of folklore has been composed about the love between Radha and Krishna. Even sects came to be formed with this as predominant theme over the last few centuries. Radha is worshipped along with Shri Krishna in many temples especially in the northern part of India and by foreign-based sects like ISKCON. But Radha is neither mentioned in Mahabharata (450BC), nor in Harivansha (2nd

century BC) nor in Bhagwat Purana of around the same era. First mention of Radha in the mythological texts is said to have been made in 900AD. Historians think that Radha is not a historical figure but a poetical fictional character. But hundreds of persons have achieved Self-realization through the feelings of this love. Saint Meera considered herself to be a reborn Gopi and described in her compositions her memories of Gokul and Brindavan days with Krishna. Her unification with Shri Krishna at Dwarka temple is legendary.

It does not matter if Shiva is an Aryan God or Non-Aryan, he has responded to the devotion of all. The power of devotion, if we have to believe the legends regarding several devotees is very strong. It is because of this devotion that Shri Krishna worked as a domestic servant under the name Shrikhandya with Saint Eknath (16th century); came in the form of Sena the royal barber to shave the Muslim king to prevent the latter's wrath falling on the real Sena because he did not attend the king on time, being busy welcoming some saints; came as Vithu to pay the compensation for grains distributed to the poor during a drought by the great devotee Damaji of Mangalwedhe and thus saved him from the wrath of the Muslim king. It is because of that devotion that Saint Tulsidas conversed with Shri Rama and Hanuman, and Ramakrishna Paramahansa talked with Mother Kali. It is probably for this reason that Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, himself a Nath Yogi, became inclined to the Bhakti path. The stress in Dnyaneshwari is evidently on this path.

Historical facts are thus totally unimportant to a spiritual seeker. What he needs is just a symbol, real or imaginary, as a representation of the Divine for devotion and worship. It may be a crude stone, an idol or an animal or a human being such as a Guru. The devotional love brings Divine power in them. God is said to appear before the devotee in the form he worships Him, it may be a stone or an animal or a normal human being or a human form with many hands and heads.

Historical facts are no doubt interesting but only from an intellectual point of view. As spiritual literature tells, Divine is beyond the intellect. It starts where the intellect ends. On the other

hand, historical facts are needed to reign in blind beliefs often misused by the unscrupulous that are plenty in the spiritual field. The historical presentation above should be seen with this attitude.

Use Of The Term Yoga

In Gita, the term "yoga" has been used frequently with different implications. Popularly, the term Yoga is used for Hathayoga, which is a system of control of the body through certain body postures together with Pranayama or breath control. However there are many other systems of Yoga techniques in which one meditates sitting in a single posture e.g., of Padmasana (or lotus posture) or Sahajasana (or easy posture also known as half-lotus posture), concentrating on a point in between the eyebrows and sometimes on breath, as prescribed by one's teacher.

However, in Gita, the term Yoga is used with different implied meanings. For example, title of each chapter is described as yoga. The first chapter is named "Arjuna-Vishada-yoga" which literally means "Yoga of Arjuna's despondency".

The term Yoga is derived from the root yuj, which means "to harness or to yoke". It is also used to mean (1) to join or to unite, (2) to concentrate the mind and intellect. Yoga would therefore imply combining i.e. uniting the actions of the body and of the mind (meditation, attitude etc.) to attain a goal, which, to spiritual seekers, is the Self-realization. It is often used to mean the union of the individual soul or consciousness with the Cosmic spirit or Brahman through the process of meditation. In the Gita, the term Yoga is used more liberally to mean a system of approach towards liberation or Self-realization, which is the same as the union with the Brahman. This is how the terms Jnyanayoga (or the Yoga of Knowledge) and Karmayoga (or the Yoga of Action) have been used. Reader should understand the implied meaning from the context to avoid confusion.

Note For Readers

Gita/Dnyaneshwari is usually presented either piously as a divine work or intellectually as a philosophy. In the former case readers strongly believe Shri Krishna as an avatar of Vishnu and

they also believe the events referred to in the Puranas as real. The intellectual type of reader usually is indifferent to these. In this presentation, I have maintained a historical bias as mentioned in the earlier paragraphs. In addition, references made to Puranic events are also explained in historical terms. E.g., there is a reference in Ch 4 to Vivaswan whom some Puranas present as sun-God but who is actually Rishi Kashyap's son also according to some other Puranas. This approach should not hurt the pious readers who should really be indifferent to history, but it would be of interest to the intellectual class for whom Gita/Dnyaneshwari are real guides.

Though the philosophical text begins in the second chapter, a brief background of the war is presented in the first chapter. Secondly, many tracts of discussion are presented as bulleted text for easier and logical grasp. Ovi numbers are not given because some text has been shuffled to make the presentation cogent. Being a summary, there is no detailed discussion but it is believed that with the above mode of presentation it will not be needed. Where necessary however notes have been inserted in brackets. We request the reader to bear with this mode.

Both, Shri Krishna and Arjuna have been mentioned by various names in Gita. But here they have been mentioned only as Shri Krishna and Arjuna throughout.



It is intended therefore to present these teachings of Dnyaneshwari as chapter-wise summaries starting with the second chapter where the philosophical text in the Gita or Dnyaneshwari really starts. The points made in the Dnyaneshwari will be presented where possible in an itemized fashion in order to make the reading easier.

To be continued.....

Bibliography

1. Adhyatmashastra by Dr J. B. Athavale and Dr (Mrs) K. J. Athavale, Indian Society for Clinical Hypnosis and Research, Sion, Bombay 400022. (1987), (In Marathi)

2. The Bhagvadgita (English translation and notes) by Dr S. Radhakrishnan, Harper Collins India Ltd, (1993),
3. The Bhagvadgita as a Synthesis, by M. R. Yardi, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Inst, Pune. (1991) 376pp.
4. Dnyaneshwari by Balkrishna A. Bhide, Keshav Bhikaji Dhavale, Girgaon Bombay 400004. (Contains Gita, Corresponding Ovis by Dnyaneshwar Maharaj, and Marathi prose translation)
5. Dnyaneshwari by Keshavmaharaj Deshmukh, Santkripa Prakashan. Pune 411030, (1981), 80p (In Marathi)
6. Dnyaneshwari by M. R. Yardi, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Pune. (in Marathi) (1991) 625pp. (Also available in Hindi and English)
7. Sri Jnyaneshwari (Vol I-III) by Swami Umanand Saraswati, Pub. Sri Kusumeshwari Prakashan, Mumbai 400093. (1980) (in three volumes)
8. The Jnyaneshwari (Vol 1-3) by R.S. Lokapur, Pub: Impression Publishing House, Belgaum 590002 (1995).
9. Mahabharata, Its Genesis and Growth, a Statistical Study, by M. R. Yardi, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Inst, Pune. (1986). 254pp.
10. Ramayana, Its Origin and growth a Statistical Study, by M. R. Yardi, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Inst, Pune. (1994). 302pp.
11. Shri Sant Eknath by G. N. Dandekar, Majestic Prakashan, Girgaon, Bombay 400004. (1974), 85pp (In Marathi)
12. Shri Sant Dnyaneshwar by G. N. Dandekar, Majestic Prakashan, Girgaon, Bombay 400004. (1974), 91pp (In Marathi)
13. True Experiences by Swami Krishnanand, Pub. Krishnanand Publication Committee, Shanti Sshram, Bhadran, Dist Ananad, Gujrat. (1991)
14. A Brief History of Time by Stephen W. Hawking, Pub: Bantam Press UK 1988. 212pp.
15. The Holy science by Swami Shri Yuktेशwar Giri, Pub: Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles. California (1977) 78pp


www.saptarishisastrology.com


Devotees A Superior Yogi

Shri Krishna replied, The devotees whose faith, pushed by the strength of the past achievement, steadily increases with devotion like a river rising during the rainy season, in whose heart love upsurges, who concentrate their attention on me day and night and offer themselves completely to me are the ones I consider as superior yogis. (12:36-39).