

The Jñāneśvarī

Place and Time of the Composition of the Jñāneśvarī

1. Jñāneśvara himself gives us the time and place of the composition of the Jñāneśvarī at the end of his work. He tells us that "in the domain of Mahārāshṭra, on the southern bank of the Godāvarī, there is a temple of Mahālayā or Mohinīrāja, famous through all the worlds, and the centre of the life-activity of the world. There Rāmachandra reigns, who is a descendant of Yādava lineage, the support of all arts and sciences, and a just ruler of the world. In his reign was the Gītā dressed in the attire of Marāṭhi by the disciple of Śri Nivṛittinātha who carries back his spiritual lineage to the God Maheśa. . . . This commentary was written by Jñāneśvara in the Śaka year 1212, Sachhidānanda Bābā having served as a devout amanuensis" (XVIII. 1803–1811). It seems from this that the Jñāneśvarī was written in the year 1290 A.D. Till about three hundred years later the Jñāneśvarī was handed down in MS. form from generation to generation of spiritual aspirants, thus necessitating many changes of reading, and even accretions to and omissions from the original. It was not till Ekanātha took up the work of preparing an authenticated and careful text of the Jñāneśvarī in the Śaka year 1512, corresponding to the year 1590 A.D., that the new era of the study of the Jñāneśvarī might be said to have dawned. Ekanatha tells us with full respect for the author and his work, that he undertook to prepare a correct text of the Jñāneśvarī, because, "even though the work was extremely accurate originally, still it had

become spoilt by changes of reading during the interim." It seems that Ekanātha did not tamper with the text at all. He only judiciously substituted correct readings here and there, and thus finally fashioned the work as we have it to-day. Anybody, who adds a verse to the text of the Jñāneśvarī, he says, would be thereby merely "placing a cocoanut-shell in a disc of nectar," implying thereby that nobody should be bold enough to add to the incomparable text of the Jñāneśvarī.

The Spiritual Lineage of Jñāneśvara

2. We also learn, from the epilogue to the Jñāneśvarī the spiritual lineage of Jñāneśvara. We cannot say that the account does not contain some mythological elements. Any spiritual lineage, which is carried back to a time where history and memory fail, is bound to suffer from such defects. We are told by Jñāneśvara that "While the spiritual secret was being imparted by Śaṅkara to Pārvatī once upon a time, it caught the ear of Matsyendranātha, who was lying hidden in the bosom of a great fish in the ocean. Matsyendranātha met the broken-limbed Chaurāṅginātha on the Saptasṛiṅga mountain, immediately upon which the latter became whole. Then, in order that he might enjoy undisturbed repose, Matsyendra-nātha gave to Gorakshanātha the power of spreading spiritual knowledge. From Gorakshanātha, the spiritual secret of Śaṅkara descended to Gainīnātha, who seeing that the world had come under the thralldom of evil, communicated it to Nivṛittinātha with this charge 'the spiritual secret, which has come down to us straight from the first teacher Śaṅkara, take thou this, and give succour to those who are afflicted with evil in this world.' Already compassionate as he was, with the super-added weight of this charge of his spiritual teacher, Nivṛittinātha was as much encouraged to action as a cloud during the rainy season; and then, even like the latter, poured forth the stream of spiritual wisdom with the intention of bringing

succour to the afflicted. Jñāneśvara was merely like a Chātaka bird catching a few drops of that gracious rain, which are herewith exhibited in the form of this commentary on the Bhagavadgītā" (XVIII. 1751–1763). It is noticeable that Jñāneśvara here gives an account of his spiritual lineage, bringing it down from the age of Śaṅkara through Matsyendranātha and Gorakshanātha to Gainīnātha and Nivṛittinātha, of whom latter he was the immediate disciple. This account could be confirmed by references in other parts of Jñāneśvara's writings, but coming as it does towards the end of his most important work, the Jñāneśvari, the present reference has a value absolutely beyond parallel.

Jñāneśvara's Respect for His Guru

3. Jñāneśvara is so much possessed by devotion to his Guru that he cannot but give vent to his feelings for his master from time to time. In the first Chapter, he speaks of his master as having enabled him to cross the ocean of existence; as when proper collyrium is administered to one's eyes, they are able to see anything whatsoever, and forthwith any hidden treasure; as when the wish-jewel has come to hand, our desires are all fulfilled; similarly in and through Nivṛittinātha, says Jñāneśvara, all his desires have been fulfilled. As when a tree is watered at the bottom, it goes out to the branches and the foliage; as when a man has taken a bath in the sea, he may be said to have bathed in all the holy waters of the world; as when nectar has once been enjoyed, all the flavours are forthwith enjoyed; similarly, when the Guru has been worshipped, all the desires become fulfilled (I. 22–27).

The Grace of the Guru Is Competent to All Things

4. Jñāneśvara tells us again in the sixth Chapter that what is difficult of comprehension even by intellect, one may be able to visualise by the light of the grace of

Nivṛittinātha. "That which the eye cannot see, he will be able to see without the eye, if only he gets super-consciousness; that which the alchemists vainly seek after, may be found even in iron, provided the Parisa comes to hand; similarly, where there is the grace of the Guru, what cannot be obtained?" asks Jñāneśvara. "He is rich with the infinite grace of his Guru" (VI. 32-35).

The Power of the Guru Is Indescribable

5. Moreover, Jñāneśvara tells us that he cannot adequately praise the greatness of the Guru. "Is it possible," he asks, "to add lustre to the sun? Is it possible to crown the Kalpataru with flowers? Is it possible to add a scent to camphor? How can the sandal tree be made more fragrant? How can nectar be re-dressed for meals? . . . How can one add a hue to the pearl? Or what is the propriety of giving a silver polish to gold? It is better that one should remain silent, and silently bow to the feet of his master" (X. 9-15).

Invocations to the Guru

6. That the Guru is the sole absorbing topic of Jñāneśvara's attention, may also be proved from the way in which he writes many a prologue to his various chapters addressed to the greatness of the Guru. Thus, for example, Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the Jñāneśvarī all begin with an invocation to the grace of the Guru. In the beginning of the twelfth Chapter we read how Jñāneśvara speaks of the gracious eye of his teacher, making poisonless the fangs of the serpent of sense. How is it possible, he asks, when the grace of the Guru comes down in floods, that the scorching heat of Samsāra may continue to burn one with grief? The grace of the Guru, like a true mother, rears up the spiritual aspirant on the lap of the Ādhāra Śakti, and swings him to and fro in the cradle of the heart;

like a true mother, again, the grace of the Guru waves lights of spiritual illumination before the aspirant, and puts on him the ornaments of spiritual gold. The grace of the Guru again rears him on the milk of the 17th Kala, sounds the toy of the Anahata Nāda, and puts him to sleep in ecstasy. A true lover of the Marāṭhi language as he was, Jñāneśvara finally calls upon the grace of his teacher to fill the domain of the Marāṭhi language with the crop of spiritual knowledge (XII. 1-19). In the beginning of the thirteenth Chapter Jñāneśvara speaks of the praise of his Guru as being the cause of the knowledge of all the sciences, and as so filling his own literary expression that even nectar might be eclipsed by its mellifluity (XIII. 1-5). In the beginning of the fourteenth Chapter he speaks of the vision of the Guru as eclipsing the appearance of the universe, and as making it appear only when it itself recedes in the background. As when the sun shines on the horizon, the moon fades away in the background, similarly when the Guru shines, all the sciences fade away. It is thus that the only adequate way of expressing one's appreciation of the greatness of the Guru is to submit in silence to the feet of the Guru, for the greatness of the Guru can never be adequately praised (XIV. 1-16). Similarly at the beginning of the fifteenth Chapter, Jñāneśvara speaks allegorically of the worship of his Guru. "Let me make my heart the seat for the Guru, and let me place upon it my Guru's feet. Let all my senses sing the chorus of unity, and throw upon the feet of the Guru a handful of flowers of praise. Let me apply to the feet of the Guru a fingerful of sandal ointment, made pure by the consideration of identity. Let me put upon his feet ornaments of spiritual gold. . . . Let me place upon them the eight-petalled flower of pure joy. Let me burn the essence of egoism, wave the lights of self-annihilation, and cling to the feet of the Guru with the feeling of absorption" (XV. 1-7).

Nivṛittinātha, Identified with the Sun of Reality

7. Jñāneśvara is so full of respect for his teacher that he feels that any words of praise that may issue out of him would fall short of the description of the true greatness of Nivṛittinātha. A poor man is so filled with delight by looking at an ocean of nectar that he goes forth to make an offering to it of ordinary vegetables. In that case, what is to be appraised is not the offering of the vegetables itself, but the spirit with which they are offered. When little lights are waved before God, who is an ocean of light, we have only to take into account the spirit in which the lights are waved. A child plays in all manner of ways with its mother, but the mother takes into account only the spirit in which the child is playing. If a small brook carries water to a river, does the river throw it out, simply because it comes from a brook? "It is thus that I approach thee with words of praise," says Jñāneśvara to Nivṛittinātha, "and if they are inadequate, it behooves thee only to forgive their puerile simplicity" (XVI. 17-30).

The Humility of Jñāneśvara

8. Jñāneśvara is only too conscious of the fact that the work he has written is destined to be one of the greatest works of the world; and yet he never takes to himself the pride and the credit of its composition. We have already alluded to the fact that Jñāneśvara regards himself as a Chātaka bird, in whose up-turned opened bill, the cloud of Nivṛittinātha's grace sends down drops of rain. "If a man is fortunate," says Jñāneśvara, "even sand can be turned into gold. . . . If it pleases God, even pebbles, put into boiled water, may turn out to be well-prepared rice. When the Guru has accepted the disciple, the whole Samsāra becomes full of joy. . . . In this very wise, was my own ignorance turned to knowledge by the grace of Nivṛittinātha" (XV. 18-28). As Jñāneśvara is mindful of the grace of his Guru in the composition of his work, even

likewise is he only too cognisant of the fact that the other saints beside his own teacher have also had a share in its production. "If you teach a parrot," he says to the Saints, "will it not give out proper words at the right time? . . . This plant of spiritual wisdom has been sown by you, O Saints! It now behooves you to rear it up by your considerate attention; then, this plant will flower, and produce fruits of various kinds, and by your kindness, it will be a source of solace to the world. . . . Did not the plant-eating monkeys of the forest go forth to meet the hosts of the king of Laṅkā, simply because they were inspired by the Divine Power of Rāma? Was not Arjuna, though single-handed, able to conquer the vast hosts of his enemy by the power of Śrī Kṛishṇa?" (XI. 27-23.) Finally, Jñāneśvara tells us how he is merely treading the path which was first treaded by the great Vyāsa; how he has been merely putting in the language of Marāṭhi the great words of Vyāsa. "If God is pleased with the flowers of Vyāsa," asks Jñāneśvara, "would he refuse the little Dūrvās that I may offer to him? If large elephants come to the shores of an ocean, is a small swan prevented thereby from coming? . . . If the swan walks gracefully on earth, does it forbid any other creature from walking? . . . If the sky is mirrored in an ocean, could it be prevented from appearing in a small pond? . . . It is thus that I am trying to scent the path of Vyāsa, taking the help of the commentators on my journey. Moreover, am I not the disciple of Nivṛittinātha, asks Jñāneśvara, whose power fills the earth, and both animate and inanimate existence? Is it not by his power that the moon tranquils the earth by her nectar-like light? Does not his power fill the lustre of the Sun? That Nivṛittinātha inhabits my heart. It is thus that every new breath of mine is turning into a poem; or what is not the grace of the Guru competent to do?" (XVIII. 1708-1735.) Jñāneśvara feels himself to be merely an instrument in the hands of his Guru, to whose real authorship the whole of his work is due.

I. METAPHYSICS

The Prakṛiti and the Purusha

9. The Jñāneśvarī, being essentially an expositional work, follows the metaphysical lines laid down in its prototype, the Bhagavadgītā. Now as the relation between the Prakṛiti and the Purusha forms one of the most important items of the metaphysics of the Bhagavadgītā, it has also formed one of the foundation-stones of the metaphysics of the Jñāneśvarī. Jñāneśvara reverts from time to time to the description of the Prakṛiti and the Purusha. In the ninth Chapter, he tells us how Ātman is the eternal Spectator while Prakṛiti is the uniform Actor. "It is said," says Jñāneśvara, "that a town is built by a king; but does it forthwith follow that the king has constructed it with his own hands? As the subjects of a town follow each his own profession, being all presided over by the king, similarly, the Prakṛiti does everything and stands in the background. When the full moon shines on the horizon, the ocean experiences a great flood; but does it follow from this that the moon is put to any trouble? A piece of iron moves merely on account of the vicinity of a magnet; but the magnet itself does not suffer action. . . . As a lamp, placed in a corner is the cause neither of action nor of non-action, similarly, I am the eternal spectator, while the beings follow each its own course" (IX. 110-129). In the thirteenth Chapter, Jñāneśvara again takes up the problem of the relation of the Prakṛiti and the Purusha, and exhibits it by means of a variety of images. The Purusha, when he informs the body, undergoes the appellation of a self-conscious being. This consciousness is displayed in the body from the very nails of the body to the hair of the head, and is the cause of the flowering of the mind and intellect, as the spring is the cause of flowering in the forest. . . . The king never knows his army, and yet simply by his order the army is able to overcome enemies. . . . By the simple presence of the Sun, all people go

about doing their actions; by simply looking at its young ones is the female tortoise able to nourish them; in a similar manner, the simple presence of the Ātman inside causes the movement of the inanimate body (XIII. 134–141). The thirteenth Chapter is the *locus classicus* of the description of the Prakṛiti and the Purusha. In the Bhagavadgītā, as in the Jñāneśvarī, the Prakṛiti and the Purusha, we are told, are both of them co-born and co-eternal. The Purusha is synonymous of existence, the Prakṛiti of action. The Purusha enjoys both happiness and sorrow, emerging from the good and the bad actions of the Prakṛiti. Un-nameable indeed is the companionship of the Prakṛiti and the Purusha; the female earns, and the male enjoys; the female never comes into contact with the male, and yet the female is able to produce. The Prakṛiti is bodiless, the Purusha is lame and older than the old. . . . The Prakṛiti takes on new shapes every moment, and is made up of form and qualities. She is able to move even the inanimate. . . . She is the mint of sound, the fount and source of all miraculous things; both generation and decay proceed from her; she is verily the infatuating agent; she is the being of the self-born being; she is the form of the formless; she is the quality of the quality-less, the eye of the eyeless, the ear of the earless, the feet of the feetless; in her, indeed, is all the maleness of the other hidden, as the moon is hidden in the darkness of the night; she exists in Him as milk in the udders of a cow, as fire in the wood, as a jewel-lamp inside a cover of cloth. The Purusha loses all his lustre as a vassal king, or as a diseased lion, or as one who is deliberately put to sleep and made to experience a dream; as the face can produce its other in the presence of a mirror, or as a pebble acquires redness in the presence of saffron, similarly does this unborn Purusha acquire the touch of qualities. He stands in the midst of the Prakṛiti as a piece of wood stands motionless in the midst of the Jui plant. . . . He stands like the Meru on the banks of the river of the Prakṛiti. He is mirrored inside

her, but does not move like her. Prakṛiti comes and goes; but he lives as he is. Hence is he the Eternal Ruler of the world (XIII. 958–1224). Finally, Jñāneśvara tells us that what the Sāmkhyas call Avyakta is the same as Prakṛiti. It is also what the Vedāntins call Māyā. Its nature is Ignorance—the self-forgetfulness of the Self. “The Prakṛiti is verily my house-wife. She is beginningless, and young, of unspeakable qualities. Her form is Not-Being. She is near to those who are sleeping, but away from those who are waking. When I sleep, she awakes; and by the enjoyment of my bare existence, she becomes big with creation. She produces a child from which come forth all the three worlds. . . . Brahmā is the morning of this child, Viṣṇu the mid-day, and Śaṅkara the evening. The child plays till the time of the great conflagration, and then it sleeps calmly, and wakes up again at the time of a new cycle” (XIV. 68–117).

The Mutable, the Immutable and the Transcendent

10. Jñāneśvara takes up also the problem of the Kshara, the Akshara and the Paramātman, like the problem of the Prakṛiti and the Puruṣa, from the Bhagavadgītā itself, which does not make very clear the distinction between the Kshara, the Akshara and the Paramātman. By Kshara is meant the Mutable, by Akshara the Immutable, and by Paramātman, somehow, the Being that transcends both. Now it is somewhat hard to understand in what sense the Transcendent Being could be distinguished from the Immutable; and yet Jñāneśvara closely follows the Bhagavadgītā in making a distinction between the Immutable and the Transcendent, and in making a Hegelian synthesis of the Mutable and the Immutable into the Transcendent. “In this world of Samsāra,” says Jñāneśvara, “there are two Beings, just as in the heavens reign only light and darkness; there is, however, a third Being who not suffering both these previous Beings, eats them

both. . . One is blind and lame, the other is well-formed in all his limbs, and the two have come into contact with each other simply because they have come to inhabit the same citadel" (XV. 471-477). "Of these the Mutable is Matter as well as Individual Spirit, the consciousness which is pent up inside the body. It is all that is small and great, moving and immovable, whatever is apprehended by mind and intellect; what takes on the elemental body; what appears as name and form; what suffers the reign of the qualities; . . . what we knew as the eight-fold Prakriti; what we saw to be divided thirty-six-fold; what we have immediately seen to be the Aśvattha tree; . . . what seems an image of itself, like that of a lion in a well which forthwith springs upon itself in anger; what thus creates the citadel of form, and goes to sleep in entire obliviscence of its nature, thinking 'the father is mine, the mother is mine, I am white or deformed, the children, wealth, and wife are all mine'; . . . what appears as the flicker of the moonlight in a moving stream, and what thus on account of its connection with the Upādhis appears momentary" (XV. 478-501). "The Akshara is what appears as the Meru in the midst of all the mountains; what is absolutely formless, as when the ocean dries up, there remain neither any waves nor any water; what appears as Ignorance when the world has set, and when the knowledge of Ātman has not yet been gained; what may be likened to the state of the moon without the slightest streak of light on the new-moon day; what psychologically corresponds to the state of deep sleep; as opposed to the Mutable Being that appears both in the wakeful and the dream states; . . . what may be regarded as the root of the tree of existence; what does not change, nor is destroyed, and what is thus the best" (XV. 502-524). "As opposed to both the Mutable and the Immutable is the Transcendent Being, in whom ignorance is sunk in Knowledge, and Knowledge extinguishes itself like fire; which appears as knowing without an object to be known; which is higher psychologically than the

wakeful, the dream, or even the deep-sleep consciousness; which transcends its own bounds like an ocean in floods, and which rolls together all rivulets and rivers as at the time of the final end; which is the scent as intermediate between the nose and the flower; which is Being; which is beyond both the seer and the seen; which is light without there being an object to be illumined; which is ruler without there being anything to be ruled; which is the sound of sound, the taste of taste, the joy of joy, the light of light, the void of voids; . . . which is like the Sun which does not appear either as night or as day" (XV. 526-556).

Body and Soul

11. When we strip our minds of all such metaphysical conceptions as those of the Prakṛiti and the Puruṣha, or of the Kshara and the Akshara, what remains of psychological value is the relation of the body and the soul; let us now see what Jñāneśvara says about this relation. The body to Jñāneśvara is simply a complex of the various elements. "As a chariot is called a chariot, because it is a complex of the various limbs of the chariot; as an army is called an army, because it is a complex of its various parts; as a sentence is simply a complex of letters; as a lamp is a complex of oil, wick, and fire; similarly the body is a complex of the thirty-six elements" (XIII. 151-156). "The Soul is as different from the body as the east from the west. The Soul is mirrored in the body as the sun in a lake. The body is subject to the influence of Karman, and rolls on the wheels of death and birth. It is like a piece of butter thrown in the fire of death. It lives for as short a span of time as the fly takes for lifting its wings. Throw it in fire, and it is reduced to ashes; give it to a dog, and it becomes carrion; if it escapes either of these alternatives, it is reduced merely to a mass of worms. On the other hand, the Ātman is pure and eternal and beginningless. He is the all, impartitionable, without any actions, neither short nor

long, neither appearance nor non-appearance, neither light nor non-light, neither full nor empty, neither form nor formless, neither joy nor joyless, neither one nor many, neither bound nor absolved. . . . As day follows night and night follows day on the sky, similarly body follows body on the background of this Ātman" (XIII. 1095–1124).

Doctrine of Transmigration

12. The doctrine of transmigration, which Jñāneśvara teaches, is linked closely with the analysis of man's psychological qualities into the Sāttvika, the Rājasa, and the Tāmasa. The Soul of a man, in whom the Sattva quality is augmented, meets a different fortune after death from one in whom either the Rajas or the Tamas qualities are augmented. "What," asks Jñāneśvara, "happens when the Sattva quality is augmented? The intellect of such a man so fills his being that it oozes out of him as fragrance out of the lotus petals. Discrimination fills all his senses; his very hands and feet become endowed with vision; as the royal swan can discriminate between water and milk, even so the senses of such a man can discriminate between the good and the bad. What must not be heard, the ear itself refuses to hear; what must not be seen, the eye itself refuses to see; what must not be spoken, the tongue itself refuses to speak; as from before a flame darkness runs away, even so from him bad things run away; as in flood-time, a great river flows round about, even so his intellect transcends its own limits in the knowledge of the sciences; as on the full-moon day, the light of the moon spreads about, even so his intellect spreads about in knowledge; all his desires become centred in himself. A stop is put to his activities. His mind becomes disgusted with the objects of sense. When these qualities become augmented in a man, if he happens to meet his death at such a moment, . . . his new being becomes as full of the Sattva quality as the old, and he takes on a birth among

those who pursue knowledge for its own sake. When a king goes to a mountain, does his kingship forthwith diminish? Or when a lamp is taken over to a neighbouring village, does it for that matter cease to be a lamp?" (XIV. 205-222). "What happens when the Rajas quality predominates in a man? Such a man becomes over-occupied with his own work, and gives free reins to his senses, as a storm rolls hither and thither; his moral bonds become loosened as a sheep knows not the distinction between the good and the bad. Forthwith, such a man undertakes works which are unworthy of him. He takes into his head to build a great palace, or to perform a great *Aśvamedha* ceremony; to create new towns; to build new tanks; to foster large forests. . . . His desire gets such a mastery over him that he wishes to bring the whole world under his feet. When these qualities are augmented in a man, if he happens to meet death, he is bound to come over again to the human kind. Can a beggar, who lives in a king's palace, thereby become a king himself? An ox must needs feed on stumps, even though he might be carried in the procession of a great king. Such a man's action knows no bounds, and he must be always yoked to his work like an ox" (XIV. 227-243). "What happens when the Tamas quality predominates in a man? The mind of such a man becomes as full of darkness as the night on the new-moon day; he ceases to have any inspiration; thought has no place in his mind; his remembrance seems to have left him for good; indiscrimination fills him through and through; folly reigns supreme in his heart; he takes only to bad actions as the owl sees only at night; things which are shunned, he hugs to his heart; he becomes intoxicated without wine, raves without delirium, becomes infatuated like a madman without love; his mind seems to have taken leave of him, and yet he is not enjoying the super-conscious state. . . . At such a time, if a man were to meet his doom, he is bound to come over again in the Tamas world. The fire, which is flamed, may

be extinguished, but the flame continues as ever; . . . even so when Tamas is augmented, he becomes incarnate in a beast or a bird, a tree or a worm" (XIV. 244–266).

**Personal and Impersonal Immortality:
Re-incarnation an Illusion**

13. As opposed to this transmigrating process, lies the state of Absolution reached only by the select few who have gone beyond the realm of the Sattva, Rajas and Tamas qualities, and who, by their devotion, have reached identity with God even during this life. About such persons Jñāneśvara tells us that when they have gone to the End, they never return therefrom, as the rivers go to an Ocean from which they never return; as when a puppet of salt becomes wholly absorbed in a vessel of water when it is put inside it, similarly those, who have reached unitive life with God by their superior knowledge, never return again when they have departed from this life. Arjuna, with his inquiring spirit, asks Kṛishṇa at this stage of the argument of Jñāneśvara, "Do these, O God, reach personal, or impersonal, immortality? Granted that they become one with God, and that they never return, do they preserve their individuality or not? If they preserve a separate individuality, to say that they do not return is meaningless; for the bees that reach a flower never become the flower itself; and as the arrows after having reached the target come back again as arrows, even so may these individuals return from their final *habitat*. On the other hand, if there is no barrier between these individuals and God, what is the meaning of saying that these become merged in the other? For they are already identical with Him. How can a weapon turn its edge against itself? In this wise, beings which are identical with Thee, can never be said either to have merged in Thee or to have come back from Thee." To this objection Kṛishṇa replies by saying that the ways in which these individuals return and do not return may be said to be

different from each other. If we see with a discerning eye, says Kṛishṇa, then there is seen to be an absolute identity between the individuals and God. If, on the other hand, we look in a cursory way, it seems as if they are different also. It seems Kṛishṇa is here making a distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal points of view. The waves of an ocean seem different from the body of the ocean, and yet again are identical with it. The ornaments of gold seem different from gold, and yet are identical with it. Thus it happens that from the point of view of knowledge, these individuals are identical with God; it is the point of view of ignorance which regards them as different (XV. 317-334). From this point of view it is only a step to regard reincarnation an illusion, and Jñāneśvara in a passage boldly takes up the gauntlet. "It is the human point of view which tells us," he says, "that the Ātman leaves the body, and takes away along with itself the whole company of the senses, . . . as the setting Sun carries with him the visions of people, or as wind carries away the fragrance. . . . It is really the standpoint of indiscrimination which enables one to say so. That the Ātman can re-incarnate, or can enjoy the objects of sense, or can depart from the body, is verily the standpoint of ignorance. . . . If a man is able to see his own reflection in a mirror, does it follow that the man did not exist previously before looking at the mirror? Or if the mirror is taken away and the image disappears, does it follow that the man himself ceases to be? Even likewise we must remember that the Ātman is always Ātman, and the body the body. Those, who have got the vision of discrimination, see the Ātman in this manner. If the sky with all its stars is mirrored in an ocean, the eye of discrimination regards it merely as a reflection, and not as having fallen bodily into the ocean from above. If a pond is filled and is dried up, the Sun remains as he was; even so when body comes and goes, the Ātman remains identical with himself. He is neither increased nor decreased; he is neither

the cause of action nor the cause of non-action; such verily is the vision of those who have known the Self" (XV. 361–390).

Description of the Aśvattha Tree

14. Like the Prakṛiti and the Puruṣa, and the Kshara and the Akshara, the Aśvattha itself figures largely in the Jñāneśvarī as in the Bhagavadgītā. Jñāneśvara is at his best in his description of this Tree of Existence. He gives a long description of this tree in its various aspects, and it behooves us to dwell a little at length upon its description. "The purpose of the description of the Aśvattha," says Jñāneśvara, "is to convince the readers of the unreality of this tree of existence, and thus to fill them with utter dispassion. This tree is entirely unlike other trees, which have all of them roots going downwards and branches wending upwards. It is wonderful, says Jñāneśvara, that this tree grows downwards. This tree fills all that exists, and all that does not exist, as the whole sky is filled with water at the time of the great End. There is neither any fruit of this tree, nor any taster of it; neither any flower nor any smeller of it; its root goes upwards, and yet it is impossible to uproot it" (XV. 46–65). Jñāneśvara then proceeds to explain what its upward root is, and how it germinates. "The upward root of the tree is that Absolute Existence, which is sound without being heard; which is fragrance without being scented; which is joy without being experienced. What is behind it, is before it; what is before it, is behind it; which, itself unseen, sees without there being any object to be seen; . . . which is knowledge without being either knower or known . . . which is neither product nor cause; which is neither second nor single; which is alone and to itself" (XV. 72–79).

How the Root Germinates

15. The power by which this root germinates is described by Jñāneśvara as Māyā, which emerges from

Absolute Existence. "What is called Māyā is merely a synonym of non-existence. It is like the description of the children of a barren woman; it is neither being nor not-being, and will not bear reflection for a moment; it is the chest of different elements; it is the sky on which the world-cloud appears; it is a folded cloth of various forms; it is the seed of the tree of existence; it is the curtain on which appears Samsāra; it is the torch of aberrated knowledge; . . . it is as when a man may go to sound sleep in himself; it is like the black soot on a lustrous lamp; it is like the false awakening of a lover in his dream by his young beloved, who coaxes him and fills him with passion; . . . it is the ignorance of self about self; it is the sleep of ignorance, as contrasted with the dream and the wakeful states" (XV. 80-90).

The Aśvattha, the Type of Unreality

16. Thus we see that the Aśvattha to Jñāneśvara is the type of unreality. The reason why it is called the Aśvattha, is that it does not stand for the morrow. "As a cloud may assume various colours in a moment, or as a flash of lightning has no duration, as water does not cling to a lotus leaf, or as an afflicted man's mind is full of change, similarly does this Aśvattha tree change from moment to moment. . . . People do not see the coming into being and the passing away of this tree of existence, and hence they falsely call it eternal. . . . As cycle succeeds cycle, or as a piece of bamboo succeeds another, or as a part of sugarcandy succeeds another part, as the year that goes is the cause of the year to come, as the water flows past and another quantum of water comes to take its place, similarly this tree of existence, though really non-existent, is yet vainly called real. As many things may take place within the twinkling of an eye; as a wave is really unstationary; as a single eye of the crow moves from socket to socket; . . . as a ring, which is made to whirl on the ground, seems as if to have stuck to it on account of its great speed; as a

beacon-light which is moved in a circular direction appears like a wheel; even likewise, does this tree of existence come and go, and yet people call it eternal. It is only he who contemplates its infinite speed and knows it to be momentary, . . . it is only such a man that may be regarded as having known the Real" (XV. 110–141).

The Knowledge of Unreality Is the Cause of Its Destruction

17. "If the question be asked, 'What it is that ultimately lops off this tree of existence?—a tree whose root is placed in the Eternal, and whose branches move down in the world of men,—what it is that puts an end to this vast tree of existence?' the answer is simple: to know that it is unreal is to be able to destroy it altogether. A child may be frightened by a pseudo-demon; but does the demon exist for the matter of it? Can one really throw down the castle in the air? Is it possible to break the horn of a hare? Can we pluck the flowers in the skies? The tree itself is unreal; why then should we trouble about rooting it up? It is like the infinite progeny of a barren woman. What is the use of talking about dream-things to a man who is awake? . . . Can one rear crops on the waters of a mirage? The tree itself is unreal, and to know that it is unreal is sufficient to destroy it" (XV. 210–223).

The Origin, the Being, and the End of the Tree of Existence

18. "And people vainly say that this tree has a beginning, an existence, and an end. Really speaking, it has neither come into being, nor does it exist, nor has it really an end. Can we cast the horoscope of the child of a barren woman? Can blueness be predicated about the surface of the sky? Can one really pluck the flowers in the skies? The tree has neither any beginning nor any end. What appears to exist is equally unreal. A river has its source on a mountain, and moves on towards an ocean; but this

tree of existence is not like a real river. It is like a vain mirage, which appears, but which does not exist. It is like a rainbow which appears to be of many colours, but in which the colours really do not exist; it has really neither any beginning, nor any end, nor any existence. . . . This tree can be cut down only by self-knowledge. To go on lopping off the branches of this tree is a vain pursuit. We should lop off its very root by true knowledge. What is the use of collecting sticks for killing a rope-serpent? Why apply balm to a dream-wound? The tree of Ignorance can be lopped off only by Knowledge" (XV. 224-254).

A Devout Meditation on God Enables One to Cross the Flood of Māyā

19. In a sustained metaphor, Jñāneśvara describes how it is possible for a spiritual aspirant to cross the flood of unreality. The stream of Māyā issuing out of the mountain of Brahman first shapes itself in the form of the elements. Then on account of the heavy showers of the qualities, the stream experiences a flood and carries off streamlets of restrained virtues. In that flood there are whirlpools of hate and circles of jealousy. In it, huge fishes in the shape of errors swim to and fro. On the island of sexual enjoyment are thrown over waves of passion, and there many creatures appear to have come together. There are scarcely any pathways through that great water; and it seems impossible that the flood may ever be crossed. "Is it not wonderful," asks Jñāneśvara, "that every attempt that is made for crossing this flood becomes only a hindrance in the path of crossing it? Those, who are dependent upon their own intellects, try to swim over this flood, and no trace of them remains. Those who are given to over-self-consciousness, sink in the abyss of pride. Those, who try to cross this flood by means of the knowledge of the Vedas, hug to their heart huge pieces of stone, and go entirely into the mouth of the whale of arrogance. Those, who clasp the chest of sacrifice, go only into the