

Environmental and Ecological implications of Saint Jnanadeva's Philosophical Thoughts.

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Introduction: Jnanadeva is one of the earliest saints of Maharashtra belonging to 13th century. In 13th century at the early age of 16 he wrote a commentary on *Bhagvadgeeta* in Marathi language which is widely known as *Jnaneshvary*. *Geeta* has deep impact on Hindu culture. Jnanadeva Can not be just called the interpreter of the *Geeta*. He also presented his philosophical thoughts in other two treatises named *Amritanubhav* and *changadeva pasashti*. Jnanadeva composed the philosophical poems. Haripath is a set of poems which is recited every day even now days by many followers of him. His philosophical thoughts are widely appreciated by many scholars of philosophy even in modern times. Apart from his philosophical work, he also contributed to Maharashtrian culture to a large extends. A cult named *Varkary* is very famous and widely followed by maximum people in Maharashtra (a state in India). Jnanadeva gave philosophical base to this cult and he himself popularised it in his time since then the cult is dominant thread in Maharashtrian culture. More than seven hundred years people are following it. Popularity of this cult is growing day by day till the date. There are various other activities linked with these cults which are taking place every now and then in Maharashtrian society. Saint Namadeva, contemporary of Jnanadeva and follower of this cult spread his thoughts from Maharashtra to Punjab. Most of the saints of Maharashtra are belonged to *Varkary* cult and have sense of gratitude towards Jnanadeva for establishing this cult. *Varkary* is the

common name used to the followers of his thoughts. *Vary* means a visit to holy Place named Pandharpur out of devotion of Lord Vitthal. Millions of the people from Maharashtra and even from outside the Maharashtra gather in Pandharpur at least twice in a year as integral part of their path of devotion. This is enough to signify the cultural and philosophical authority of Jnanadeva at least in Maharashtra.

From sociological point of view the Varkary cult also has another important aspect. High dominance of the Dharma(religious social order) created many social problems all over India during medieval period. Saints led the first wave of the social reforms with reinterpreting the religious scriptures. Bhakti(devotion) got the relevance in this entire struggle. Through bhakti saints could establish the importance of the love and fraternity and through this they could prove the significance of the equality. Bhakti gave the philosophical and religious base tot the values of love, Brotherhood and equality. Earliest saint of Maharashtra, Saint Jnanadeva took support of Lord Pandurang for this entire struggle of social reform. Following his methodology many other saints also believed Pandurang as foundation of their reformist activities. In this reformist movement various new interpretations of scriptures and new thoughts came up with the help of which it can be investigated that how Jnanadeva looks at the nature.

Jnanadeva advocated monist philosophy following the line of thought of Advaita Vedanta. However, he does not merely imitate the Advaita philosopher i.e. Adi Shnakaracharya, Gaudapadacharya or any acharya from overall Vedanta tradition. He interpreted the meaning of *Geeta* with his own original approach which is certainly a huge contribution. This is enough to signify the Jnanadeva's

philosophical authority. Another important aspect of Jnanadeva's philosophical work is that the cult which he rejuvenated became the mainstream culture of people of Maharashtra.

Broader category or the framework that the paper is discussing:-

His framework of thought falls under the concept of Dharma and not western kind of concept of religion. However, he doesn't endorse the dharma like Mimansa Darshan or Manu Smrity are endorsing. His approach is devotional when he interprets *Geeta* and spiritual when he writes *Amritanubhav*. Both of these approaches cross the limitations of traditional set up of the dharma. While interpreting the *Geeta* -as he mentions that- he tries not to go beyond the intention of *Geeta*¹, and may be for that reason he emphasises on the importance of the *Varnashram dharma*. However, his approach towards dharma advocated in *Geeta* is not as strict as Adi Shankaracharya's approach. Had it not been the part of the philosophy of *Geeta* perhaps Jnanadeva would not have emphasised it. His intention is to develop the doctrine of Bhakti out of the philosophy of *Geeta*. This becomes evident in his other two texts.

Consequently, the broader framework of the paper also remains within the concept of Dharma. But it is not the strictly a reading of the orthodox Dharma. Jnanadeva tried to reinterpret the *Geeta* which is basic *Dharmik* (religious) text in his book called *Jnaneshvary*. The paper will deal with the basic thoughts of Jnanadeva appeared in this text. Jnanadeva's texts mentioned above are also taken into consideration for writing of this paper. Although, Jnanadeva gave foundation

to Varkary cult but paper will focus more on Jnanadevas philosophy and not on the *varkary* cult as such.

It is important to find out the environmental and ecological implications of Jnanadeva's philosophy. Paper will try to reflect upon metaphysics, Karma and Bhakti of according to Jnanadeva based upon his text *Jnaneshvary* and *Amritanubhav* to find out his world view and life view. Paper touches upon some of the important epistemological stands also. In addition to this Jnanadeva's view on Karma and Bhakti is also taken into account to find out his understanding of man and nature relationship. This will cast light on the question whether Jnanadeva's thoughts are having any particular ecological approach like anthropocentrism, biocentrism or ecocentrism. Paper also tries to show whether new cosmology expected by some environmentalists to strengthen environmental ethics is possible out of the Jnanadeva's philosophy.

Universe centric (cosmocentric) Metaphysical expositions of Jnanadeva

Jnanadeva's metaphysical position signifies his ecological and environmental approach. As mentioned above, jnanadeva finds himself philosophically closer to the Advaita Vedanta tradition. Secondly, most of his metaphysical thoughts are exposed while interpreting *Geeta*. Hence, his metaphysical thoughts are influenced by Advaita tradition and philosophy of *Geeta*.

There are three major component in the thought of metaphysics of Jnanadeva i.e. Brahman, Jagat, Jiva. He accepts Brahman as the only real substance. Entire universe is just a manifestation of Brahman only. He goes further

and says that universe itself is Brahman. In short everything is Brahman. This idea of Brahman goes beyond the idea of mere imminence. One can reveal the Brahman in this world only. This position is adopted by him in both the text *Jnaneshvary* and *Amritanubhav*. His position may resemble to panpsychism or pantheism. If at all we want to call it we will have to say it *panbrahminism* that would simply mean that everything is Brahman. Jnanadeva considers Brahman as a material cause of the universe. This universe is not different in any way from Brahman.

Universe is divided into biotic and non biotic communities and both are nothing but Brahman. This can be said as Brahman centric metaphysics. However, this position is not certainly an anthropocentric position. Can it be ecocentric? No, Brahmancentrism cannot be equated with the ecocentrism. Ecology is a physical category. Brahman is metaphysical and spiritual category. It is the ultimate substance and it is to be revealed at the time of *Moksha* (realisation/salvation). However, Ecocentrism and Brahmancentrism have one thing in common that, both consider human being as a one entity among and not above many others. Only thing is that Jnanadeva places empirical world into Brahman and ecocentrism doesn't follow any such metaphysics. Giving equal status to non human world itself is remarkable insight provided by Jnanadeva's thoughts.

Can Jnanadeva's thought be biocentric? It may go closer to holistic biocentrism but certainly it is not individualistic biocentrism. First of all the acknowledgement biosphere by biocentrists is very much different from the acknowledgement of the same biosphere by Jnanadeva. Jnanadeva says that biosphere is just a virtual image of the Brahman, like for example there are images

of the Sun in the water.³ He emphasises that one should see the Brahman in anything on this planet. This is the way to get the realisation of the ultimate reality. This is the Brahman with whom we should become one. Ultimately it results in finding one with the nature surrounding us. This principle would definitely leads to the equal understanding of the nature. So, it is not only the biosphere which becomes important for Jnanadeva but entire cosmos is encompassed in his idea of Brahman. It is called Vaishvik God (universal God) by him.

Jnanadeva's thoughts go closer to these points. Jnanadeva gives the same ontological status to both human beings and non human beings. As mentioned above Jnanadeva acknowledges that human being is the member of the earth's community of lives. He also accepts the interdependence of the various elements of the earth when he talks about the evolution of the universe.⁵ (find the reference). Prakirty(material principle) is responsible for the origination of the universe especially material elements of the universe and Brahman is responsible for the conscious elements and human being is combination of both. All living organisms are equal on this ground. The interdependence is shown with the help of causal relation in the theory of evolution. This undermines the possibility of the superiority of human being.

The concept of realisation of oneness with Brahman is not anthropocentric in nature. It may gives impression that only human beings can have realisation of oneness with Brahman. Jnanadeva takes up the position that animals also can have realisation. (This is supported by Hindu mythological stories.) All animals are the Brahman most of them are ignorant of this reality. Any animal has potentiality to realise it. If Jnanadeva adopted the position that only human being can have

realisation then animals would have been pushed to the secondary status. Jnanadeva talks about the universe and cosmos. But simply this does not allow us to imply that is thoughts are cosmocentric. Jnanadeva accepts that the soul (atma) in all living being is the same. Only physical appearance is different based on their past karma. He advocates that every one should remember this truth and the same should be reflected in our behaviour.

These metaphysical views of Jnanadeva are found primarily in his text *Amritanubhava*. Those thoughts are also found in *Jnaneshvary*. But *Jnaneshvary* is commentary on *Geeta* and Jnanadeva finds himself a follower of the Advaita Vedanta system. It becomes highly intriguing that what is his position about *Mayavada*. *Mayavada* doesn't accept the existence of the empirical world. It says that the world is just an illusion. In the presence of *Mayavada*, it is just impossible to talk anything about the nature of environment. Because according to this doctrine it is useless to talk about those thing which are illusion and which hasn't come into existence. Jnanadeva while explaining the nature of reality of the world uses *Mayavada* doctrine for some times. When he takes up position *mayavada* of then there is no possibility of the implication of any pro-environmental philosophy. It says that everything apart from Brahman is an illusion (*Brahman satya jagan mithya*). It is a flip side of the principle - everything is Brahman. (*sarvam khalvidam Brahman*). For the person, who realises the original nature of the Brahman, meaning of above two opposite principle is the same only. However, for environmentalist first one does not provide any hope whereas second one gives good insight for developing new cosmology to sustain the environmental ethics. Jnanadeva's position is the position of spiritual master. Secondly, if it is already mentioned in the *Geeta* he has to comment on it positively. One thing is sure that,

Jnanadeva does not insist only on the *Mayavada* to reveal the true nature of Brahman. He says to know and to experience or reveal the true nature of Brahman is important, insistence on a particular way is secondary. If someone experiences the Brahman in external world then there is no need to negate the world through the *Manyavada*. Adi Shankaracharya insists on *Mayavada* even in his commentary on *Geeta*. Jnanadeva accepts it as one way to achieve the realisation but not the only way. This is the special contribution of his own in the interpretation of *Geeta*. This positive outlook towards external world itself gives the possibility of development of environmental ethics from his philosophical thoughts. (9 refernce). He elaborates this position in his philosophical text *Amritanubhava*. There he refutes the existence of *ajnan* with various arguments. *Ajnan* is responsible for negating the external world.(9refe0).

1) Jnanadeva's life view:-

Jnanadeva talks about Jiva- the conscious element- in his metaphysical philosophy. Most of Indian systems of philosophies consider the world full of miseries. Jnanadeva does not think world as inherently miserable. (Ref: dandekar). He says that the world is as blissful as the Brahman. Brahman has three essential characteristic features one is *sat*(being), *chit*(conscious), *anand*(bliss). Because the world being the manifestation of the Brahman is having the same essential characteristic feature. The very source of the misery is human mind itself. Because of impurities of the minds, men and women fall in the trap of misery. Man's attachment with fruits of his actions and sensual pleasure is the mechanism if the misery. Once this attachment is removed man finds original bliss from within. Here also Jnanadeva perceived the external world positively. Man tries to exploit

the natural resources in order to find pleasure but external measure for finding out the pleasure is not the solution at all.

Attachment of sensual pleasure and fruits of actions comes from the misapprehension of the self. This misapprehension consists of *ahamkara* or ego. (ref: ch.9,shlok:3,ovi:62)*Ahamkara* gives rise to lust, greed for material possession, and luxury, hatred, envy of others and basically dualistic understanding of the reality. It disconnects the self from the Brahman. The instrumental value of the external world emerged from this kind of ego. The worldview of the person having the ego becomes highly self centric. Ego becomes an end and everything else becomes means. For Jnanadeva running behind the sensual pleasure is suicidal. (ch.3, schlk.34, ovi212) Sensual pleasure is the result of *ahamkara*. If we follow the framework of environmental ethics then one important root cause of the anthropocentrism and instrumental value of nature is this *ahamkara*. If we want to have non anthropocentric ethics then it is inevitable to curb *ahamkara*. Jnanadeva insists on eradicating the *ahamkara* for spiritual reason. He shows the path of *Vairagya* for cessation of *Ahamkara*. According to Jnanadeva this is threshold of the journey towards realization of Brahman. But this eradication will also produce the result of controlling greed and lust which ultimately will give rise to less consumption and less exploitation of the natural resources. This is the win- win situation for nature and human being. One thing is sure that this type of the anti ego activism will not give rise to intrinsic value of nature. But this does not strengthen the instrumental value also. This type of life view will definitely curb the catastrophic effect of human actions on the environment and ecology.

Jnanadeva also says that all creatures of the earth are nothing but just different limbs of the Brahman. According to him not only all animals but the material which is their food is also Brahman. (ch.7, slk.8, 9, 13, ovi.39, 66,133) It is not only human being that is Brahman but all other creatures are also the same. This provides the base for the equal status of human and non human animal. This will then definitely strengthen the position of animal rights. The understanding of different limbs of Brahman is organicist understanding of the reality. Interconnection and interdependence of the various elements of the nature and dependence of human beings on other can easily be supported by this type of metaphysical notion of universe. His commentary on the concept of universe as a big tree (*sansar vriksha*) (ref: ch. 15, ovi: 47). All elements of the universe are nothing but different parts of this tree. From chapter fifteen of *Geeta* is also a evidence of his acknowledging the interconnectedness of all elements of universe. Jnanadeva also makes explicit this point of organic world in the eleventh chapter of *Geeta* while discussing the *Vishvarup Darshan*. He says that the genesis of entire universe is the Brahman (*ishvar*) only. (ch.11, ovi: 23)

The actual intention behind the concept of universe as a tree is to show the momentary feature of the world so that man will detach himself from the feeling of the ownership of external world so that he can find the way to permanent bliss turning towards the Brahman. The idea behind *Vishvarup Darshan* is to show everything emerges from Brahman and goes back to Brahman. This metaphysics gives insight into the oneness of the cosmos not neglecting but acknowledging its diversity. One can easily see the real substance in all elements of the cosmos. One does not need to deny the existence of it.

Jnanadeva mentions in *Jnaneshvary* that human being is the creation of the *Prakrity* which is the power of Brahman. He does not say that human being is created by God. Body of man is created by *prakrity* and soul is eternal this is combined with the help of the *prakrity*. The hierarchical notion of universe is avoided here by following the non-creationist approach towards universe. Non-creationist approach defies the direct emphasis on creator of the universe. Jnanadeva rather focuses on the process of the creation which he calls evolution of *Prakrity*. *Prakrity* might appear different in concept but in reality according to Jnanadeva everything is Brahman.

Jnanadeva's view on Jagata (Empirical world):- Material world is called *Jagata*. Jnanadeva says that it is also a manifestation of Brahman. According to him *Jagata* is also created out of the Brahman's power *Maya*. Here also he maintains the non-creationist position that Brahman is not creator of any element. But due to this he doesn't say that material world hasn't emerged at all and material world is just an illusion. He says that actual illusion is the discrimination between *Jagata* and Brahman. If one sees the Brahman then that is the real knowledge which will lead him to ultimate bliss. This leads to say that abiotic element of the universe is also having the same status as the biotic elements are having. This is basically the *aishvarya yoga* of the *Geeta*. Many other interpreters of the like Adi Shankaracharya interpret this doctrine like all other than Brahman is just an illusion.

This position of Jnanadeva can be stretched to say that for the better ecosystem both biotic and abiotic elements are equally important, and from the

philosophy of Jnanadeva we can easily get the base to give equal status to all types of the constituents of the universe.

The ultimate value, Jnanadeva finds, in the realizing the Brahman. Man is the manifestation of the Brahman. This picture clearly indicates that there is no ground for human being on which he can have central place in the universe. He is neither the source of values nor a dominant and superior animal. Secondly, this metaphysics will not allow developing the anthropocentrism which is serious about environmental problems and advocates the proper utilization of the natural resources. The reason is that Jnanadeva gives priority to minimizing the number of needs through *Vairagya* and striving for the realization. That is why the Jnanadeva's metaphysics will also not share anything with the debate of sustainable development. But it provides alternative solution indirectly by bringing human being equal to all other non- human entity and systematically prescribing the control on greed for wealth and consumption. It also signifies the holistic approach towards the universe by showing all is Brahman. In this way Jnanadeva discusses his views through the commentary on *Geeta* and *Amritanubhava*.

Karma and Bhakti:-

Jnanadeva discusses issues regarding the Karma and Bhakti only in his text *Jnaneshvary*. We can find some environmentally relevant principle in his thoughts. Karma and Bhakti doctrine is the famous doctrine of *Geeta*. Jnanadeva's interpretation of Karma is different from Adi Shankaracharya's interpretation. Jnanadeva finds karma is obligatory to *Jnani* as well as *Ajnani*. Till the end of life everyone is subscribed to the law of the karma. Shankarachrya says that only

Ajnani is supposed to perform it. *Jnani* is supposed to renounce all types of the karma. From the ecological point of view Jnanadeva's position is more relevant. Any creature has to follow his natural actions in order to keep the network of the organisms. Till the moment one possesses the body means till the moment one is alive he cannot simply be free from performance of karma.(ch.3, slk.5,ovi.54-63) Extreme ascetism is avoided by Jnanadeva in karma thoughts. If all human beings give up their works then that might reduce consumption level but ecologically it is not compatible with the ecological law of the nature.

Jnanadeva tells the art of doing the karma, following the message of *Geeta* that follow the karma but so not expect any result. Everyone has to follow this principle. Prima facie it looks like deontological principle. But vitality of the detached action is dependent upon its consequences on man. It purifies the mind that is why according to Jnanadeva it is moral action. 'The action that purifies the mind is moral' is the criterion used by Jnanadeva to decide the morality of an action. But there can also be the question that why this criterion is accepted. The reason is that it leads to the realization of Brahman. So, ultimate criterion of morality becomes that, 'that action is moral which directly or indirectly leads to the realization of Brahman -true nature of the reality'. This criterion morality can establish above mentioned metaphysics where there is better hope for environment ethics.

Jnanadeva also insists on *svadharma* as a way of doing of karma. To follow *svadharma* means to follow the *varnashramdharma*. Code of conduct according to *varnashramdharma* does not have any helpful implication to environment. It is basically based upon the distribution of work among the members of the society.

Jnanadeva expects different type of organic society through the doctrine of *varnashramdharma*. He wanted to bring the peace and happiness in the society by giving the right to knowledge to all irrespective to gender and caste differences. peacefull society can be created on the basis of the equality and fraternity in the society. This imply the less competitive exploitation of the nature.

Second doctrine much discussed by Jnanadeva in his text *Jnaneshvary* is the doctrine of bhakti-devotion. Jnanadeva explains the nature of bhakta and bhakti in *Jnaneshvary*: “ ...world is manifestation of the pure consciousness (Brahman). Ubiquitous pure consciousness never makes discrimination on any basis with anyone. It considers all animal, living and non living things equal. The Earth never knows to sustain only the best things and destroy the worst things. (It indiscriminately serves every organism.). Water never thinks to serve fresh water to cow and poisonous water to tiger. (Like above all these examples of the equality) he, (bhakta-devotee) with the sense of integrity and intimacy, has friendship with all creatures of the earth. He never has the discriminatory attitude. In case of benevolence and forgiveness he is like earth.”(ch.12, slk.13, ovi.144-15-). This explicitly signifies that practicing bhakti means nothing but feeling of oneness with universe. Jnanadeva derives various virtues from the nature to teach discipline at many places in *Jnaneshvary*. Bhakti is a state of realization of Brahman in this Universe. Actually Jnanadeva assimilates his world-view (metaphysics) with life view in his interpretation of bhakti. Jnanadeva explains the nature of the reality in his metaphysical thoughts and advocates the way to realize this reality in his doctrine of bhakti. Profound love for all the constituents of the universe is the essential feature of this bhakti. Today what highly required is the love and compassion to non human world. Ethics influences the behavior and thoughts of

human being but love to all will definitely bring about the sense of universe as one family. This sense of universe as one family is a big hope for curing the problems of the society and simultaneously curing the environmental and ecological problems. The *ahamkar* which is pictured above as evil even for nature can be eradicated with the help of bhakti. Bhakti is to serve and love the Brahman. Brahman is present in the universe moreover Brahman and universe has the identical relation. So to love Brahman is to love the universe.

In the end of *Jnaneshvary* he prays the cosmic god for the betterment of the entire universe. It is widely known as *Pasayadan*. Here he wishes the betterment of all creatures of the universe. He considers entire universe as one family. His idea of the universe is symbiotic in nature.

Conclusion:

Ultimately Jnanadeva advocate the concept of universe as one family. His approach towards social and natural plurality is positive. Today world is in the advance phase of the globalization. This globalization is means to increase the economical profit. Sense of love is restricted only to the wealth and sense of compassion is just missing in the present form of globalization. Globalization is riding on the maxim: 'maximum profit of selected few' and movements like occupy wall-street are proofs of this. It is based upon 'fair competition' which is always won only by all unfair means. It marginalizes maximum possible population and provides all types of security to very few. This all happen successfully through the exploitation of natural resources by exploitation of human

resources. Jnanadeva's concept of universe as one family is based on love for all. Sense of equality of all is considered highest spiritual quality by him.