



Sant Dnyaneshwar

Sant Dnyaneshwar (Marathi pronunciation: [\[ɖɳjaːneʋər\]](#)), also referred to as **Dnyaneshwar**, **Dnyanadeva**, **Dnyandev** or **Mauli** or **Dnyaneshwar Vitthal Kulkarni** (1275–1296),^{[2][3]} was a 13th-century [Indian Marathi saint](#), poet, philosopher and [yogi](#) of the [Nath](#) and [Varkari](#) tradition. In his short life of 21 years, he authored *[Dnyaneshwari](#)* (a commentary on the *[Bhagavad Gita](#)*) and *[Amrutanubhav](#)*.^[4] These are the oldest surviving literary works in the Marathi language, and considered to be milestones in [Marathi literature](#).^[5] Sant Dnyaneshwar's ideas reflect the non-dualistic [Advaita Vedanta](#) philosophy and an emphasis on Yoga and bhakti towards [Vithoba](#), an incarnation of Lord [Vishnu](#).^[6] His legacy inspired saint-poets such as [Eknath](#) and [Tukaram](#), and he is one of the founders of the Varkari ([Vithoba-Krishna](#)) [Bhakti](#) movement tradition of [Hinduism](#) in Maharashtra.^{[7][8]} Dnyaneshwar undertook [samadhi](#) at [Alandi](#) in 1296 by entombing himself in an underground chamber.

Biography

Dnyaneshwar was born in 1275 (on the auspicious day of Krishna Janmashtami) in a [Marathi-speaking Deshastha Brahmin](#) family in Apegaon village on the banks of [Godavari](#) river near [Paithan](#) in Maharashtra during the reign of the [Yadava](#) king [Ramadevarava](#).^{[9][10][11]} The kingdom with its capital [Devagiri](#) enjoyed relative peace and stability, and the king was a patron of literature and arts.^{[12][13]}

Biographical details of Sant Dnyaneshwar's life are preserved in the writings of his disciples, Satyamalanath and Sachchidanand.^[14] The various traditions give conflicting accounts of details of Dnyaneshwar's life. The date of composition of his work *Dnyaneshwari* (1290 CE), however is undisputed.^{[15][11]} According to the more accepted tradition on Dnyaneshwar's life, he was born in 1275 CE and he attained samadhi in 1296 CE.^[16] Other sources state he was born in 1271 CE.^{[17][18]}

Life

The biographical details of Dnyaneshwar's short life of about 21 years are contested and its authenticity is in doubt. The available accounts are filled with hagiographic legends and miracles he performed, such as his ability to make a buffalo sing the Vedas and humble a yogi by riding a moving wall.^{[17][19]}

According to the accounts that have survived, Dnyaneshwar's father Vitthalapant was the [kulkarni](#) (hereditary accountant, usually [Brahmin](#), who maintained land and tax records in villages)^[20] of a village called Apegaon on the banks of the [Godavari River](#) in Maharashtra, a profession he had inherited from his ancestors.^[21] He married Rakhumabai, the daughter of the Kulkarni of [Alandi](#). Even as a householder, Vitthalapant longed for spiritual learning.^[22] His disillusionment with life grew as a result of the death of his father and because he had no children from his marriage. Eventually, with his wife's consent, he renounced worldly life and left for [Kashi](#) to become a [sannyasin](#) (renunciate).^[21] According to another version of these events Dnyaneshwar's father Vitthalapant came from a long line of teachers of the [Nath](#) yogi sect and being deeply religious, he went on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. There he met a [guru](#) (spiritual teacher), decided to renounce without his wife's consent.^[23]

Vitthalapant was initiated by his spiritual teacher, Ramashrama (according to abhanga of Saint Namdeva), in Kashi. When Ramashrama Swami visited Alan-di and met Rukminibai by chance, he blessed her saying, “*May you lead a happy married life.*” With tears in her eyes, Rukmini said that it was not possible since her husband had gone away to Kashi and become a sanyasin. On finding out that her husband was none other than his disciple Vitthalapant, Swami, on returning to Kashi, reprimanded Vitthalapant and sent him back to Alandi. At Alandi, he rejoined his wife and again

became a householder.^{[24][25][26]} After Vitthalapant returned to his wife and settled down in Alandi, Rakhumabai gave birth to four children—[Nivruttinath](#) (1273 CE), Dnyaneshwar (1275 CE), [Sopan](#) (1277 CE) and [Muktabai](#) (1279 CE).^[27]

Orthodox Brahmins of the day saw a renunciate returning to his life as a householder as heresy.^[28] Dnyaneshwar and his brothers were denied the right to have the [sacred thread ceremony](#) for the full admission to the Brahmin caste.^{[6][29]} According to Pawar, this meant excommunication from the Brahmin caste.^[6]

Vitthalapant eventually left the town for [Nashik](#) with his family. One day while performing his daily rituals, Vitthalapant came face to face with a tiger. Vitthalapant and three of his four children escaped, but Nivruttinath became separated from the family and hid in a cave. While hiding in the cave he met Gahaninath, who initiated Nivruttinath into the wisdom of the [Nath](#) yogis.^{[30][31]} Later, Vitthalapant returned to Alandi and asked the [Brahmins](#) to suggest a means of atonement for his sins; they suggested giving up his life as penance. Vitthalapant and his wife gave up their lives, within a year of each other by jumping into the [Indrayani river](#) in the hope their children might be able to lead lives free of persecution.^[30] Other sources and local folk tradition claim that the parents committed suicide by jumping in the [Indrayani River](#).^[32] Another version of the legend states that Vitthalapant, the father threw himself into [Ganges River](#) to expiate his sin.^[29]

Dnyaneshwar and his siblings were accepted by and initiated into the Nath Hindu live tradition to which their parents already belonged, where the three brothers and the sister Muktabai all became celebrated yogis and Bhakti poets.^[29]

Travel and demise

After Dnyaneshwar had written *Amrutanubhav*, the siblings visited [Pandharpur](#) where they met Namdev, who became a close friend of Dnyaneshwar. Dnyaneshwar and Namadev embarked on a pilgrimage to various holy centers across India where they initiated many people into the Varkari sect.^[33] Dnyaneshwar's devotional compositions called [Abhangas](#) are believed to have been formulated during this period.^[34] On their return to Pandharpur, Dnyaneshwar and Namadev were honored with a feast in which, according to Bahirat, many contemporary saints such as "Goroba the potter, Sanvata the gardener, Chokhoba the untouchable and Parisa Bhagwat the Brahmin" participated.^[35] Some scholars accept the traditional view that Namdev and Dnyaneshwar were contemporaries; however, others such as W. B. Patwardhan, R. G. Bhandarkar and R. Bharadvaj disagree with this view and date Namdev to the late 14th century instead.^[36]

After the feast, Dnyaneshwar desired to go into [sanjeevan samadhi](#),^[35] a practice to voluntarily leave one's mortal body after entering into a deep meditative state, as practiced in Ashtanga Yoga of ancient India.^[37] Preparations for the Sanjeevan Samadhi were made by Namdev's sons.^[35] Regarding Sanjeevan Samadhi, Dnyaneshwar himself had emphatically talked about the relationship between higher awareness and light or pure energy.^[38] On the 13th day of the dark half of the [Kartik](#) month of the [Hindu Calendar](#), in Alandi, Dnyaneshwar, who was then twenty-one years old, entered into *Sanjeevan samadhi*.^[33] His [samadhi](#) lies in the Siddhesvara Temple complex in Alandi.^[39] Namdev and other bystanders grieved his death. According to tradition, Dnyaneshwar was brought back to life to meet Namdev when the latter prayed to [Vithoba](#) for his return. Dallmayr writes that this testifies to "the immortality of genuine friendship and companionship of noble and loving hearts".^[35] Many Varkari devotees believe that Dnyaneshwar is still alive.^{[40][41]}

Miracles

The siblings Muktabai, Sopan, Dnyaneshwar and Nivruttinath seated on the flying wall greet Changdev seated on a tiger. In the centre, Changdev bows to Dnyaneshwar.

There are a few stories about miracles came to be associated with Dnyaneshwar's life,^[42] one of which was the revival of his disciple Sachchidanand's corpse.^[43] Fred Dallmyr summarizes one of these legends as follows from the [hagiography](#) by Mahipati:^[44] At age 12, Dnyaneshwar with his impoverished and outcaste siblings, went to Paithan to plead mercy from Paithan priests. There, they were insulted and ridiculed. As the children were suffering the bullying, on a nearby road was a man who was violently lashing an old buffalo, and the injured animal collapsed in tears. Dnyaneshwar asked the buffalo owner to stop out of concern for the animal. The priests ridiculed him for being more concerned about a beast and unconcerned about the teachings of the Vedas. Dnyaneshwar retorted that the Vedas themselves held all life to be sacred and a manifestation of the [Brahman](#).^[a] The outraged priests pointed out that his logic implied that beasts should be able to learn the Vedas as well. An undeterred Dnyaneshwar then placed his hand on the buffalo's forehead and it started reciting a Vedic verse in a deep voice.^[44] According to [Fred Dallmayr](#), one may not be concerned whether this story accurately reflects Dnyaneshwar's biography, the story does have symbolic significance in the same manner as the story about Jesus in Jerusalem in Matthew 3:9.^[44]

In another miracle, Dnyaneshwar was challenged by [Changdev](#), an accomplished yogi who rode on a tiger with his magical powers, to replicate this feat. Dnyaneshwar humbled Changdev by riding on a moving wall.^{[46][47][b]} Dnyaneshwar's advice to Changdev was given in 65 verses called the *Changdev Pasasthi*.^[49] Changdev became a disciple of Dnyaneshwar's sister Muktabai.^[50]

Writings

According to [B. P. Bahirat](#), Dnyaneshwar was the first known philosopher who wrote in the [Marathi language](#).^[51] At about age 16, he composed [Dnyaneshwari](#) in the year 1290,^{[30][52]} a commentary on [Bhagavad Gita](#) which later became a fundamental text of the [Varkari](#) sect.^[53] His words were recorded by Sacchidananda, who agreed to become Dnyaneshwar's [amanuensis](#).^[31] *Dnyaneshwari* was written using the [Ovi](#); a [metre](#), which was first used to compose women's songs in Maharashtra, of four lines where the first three or the first and third lines rhyme and the fourth line has a sharp and short ending.^[54] According to W. B. Patwardhan, a scholar on Dnyaneshwar, with Dnyaneshwar the *ovi* "trips, it gallops, it dances, it whirls, it ambles, it trots, it runs, it takes long leaps or short jumps, it halts or sweeps along, it evolves a hundred and one graces at the master's command".^[55] In *Dnyaneshwari*, at last he wrote "Pasaayadana" in which he prayed everything for others and all humanity and nothing for himself. Saint Dnyaneshwar himself believed that "The whole world has one soul- या विश्वाचा आत्मा एक आहे".