

Dnyaneshwar

Sant Dnyaneshwar, also known as Jnaneshwar, Jnanadeva, Dnyandev, Mauli, or Dnyaneshwar Vitthal Kulkarni, was born in 1275 and passed away in 1296, was an Indian Marathi saint, poet, thinker, and yogi who belonged to the Varkari and Nath Shaiva traditions. He wrote Amrutanubhav and Dnyaneshwari during his brief 21-year life. Dnyaneshwari is a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. These are the earliest surviving Marathi works of literature and are regarded as important pieces of Marathi literature. The non-dualistic Advaita Vedanta theology and stress on yoga and bhakti regarding Vithoba, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, are reflected in Sant Dnyaneshwar's ideas. He is one of the pioneers of the Varkari (Vithoba - Krishna) Bhakti cult tradition of Hinduism in Maharashtra, and his legacy influenced saint-poets like Eknath and Tukaram. In 1296, Dnyaneshwar committed samadhi in Alandi by burying himself in a chamber beneath the ground.

About Dnyaneshwar

During the time of the Yadava monarch Ramadevarava, Dnyaneshwar was born in 1275 (on the auspicious day of Krishna Janmashtami) into a Marathi-speaking Deshastha Brahman family in Apegaon hamlet on the banks of the Godavari river close to Paithan in Maharashtra. The kingdom with Devagiri as its capital was relatively peaceful and stable, and the king was a supporter of the arts and literature. The writings of Sant Dnyaneshwar's students Satyamalanath and Sachchidanand contain biographical information about his life. There are divergent stories of Dnyaneshwar's life in various traditions. However, there is no questioning the fact that his work Dnyaneshwari was created in 1290 CE. The more widely recognised version of Dnyaneshwar's life story is that he was born in 1275 CE and attained samadhi in 1296 CE. He was born in 1271 CE, according to other sources.

Life of Dnyaneshwar

The veracity of the biographical information on Dnyaneshwar's brief life of approximately 21 years is disputed. His hagiographic legends and miracles, like his capacity to make a buffalo recite the Vedas and degrade a yogi by riding a moving wall, are abundant in the accounts that are readily available. The accounts that have been survived, state that Dnyaneshwar's father Vitthalapant was a Kulkarni (hereditary accountant, typically Brahmin, who kept land and tax records in villages) in the Maharashtrian village of Apegaon on the banks of the Godavari River. This occupation was one he had inherited from his forefathers. The Kulkarni of Alandi's daughter, Rakhumabai, was his wife.

Vitthalapant yearned for spiritual education even as a householder. Because of the passing of his father and the fact that he was married but had no children, he became increasingly disenchanted with life. He eventually decided to give up his worldly life and relocate to Kashi to become a sannyasin (renunciate) with the approval of his wife. Another account of these events claims that Dnyaneshwar's father Vitthalapant was a very pious man who hailed from a long line of Nath yogi teachers and made a journey to Varanasi.

He found a guru (spiritual instructor) there and made the decision to renounce without consulting his wife. His spiritual guide Rama Sharma, also known as Ramananda, Nrisimhashrama, Ramadvaya, and Shripad in different accounts, initiated Vitthalapant as a sannyasin. Rama Sharma ordered Vitthalapant to return to his wife and carry out his responsibilities as a householder after learning that Vitthalapant had abandoned his family to become a monk. Rakhumabai conceived four children: Nivruttinath (1273 CE), Dnyaneshwar (1275 CE), Sopan (1277 CE), and Muktabai (1279 CE) now since Vitthalapant returned to his wife and resided in Alandi.

A renunciate reverting to his life as a householder was seen as heresy by traditional Brahmins. In order to gain complete admittance to the Brahmin caste, Dnyaneshwar and his brothers were not permitted to participate in the holy thread rite. This entailed ex-communication from the Brahmin caste. Eventually, Vitthalapant and his family departed the town for Nashik. One day, Vitthalapant encountered a tiger while going about his usual routine. Three of Vitthalapant's four children also managed to flee, but Nivruttinath was left behind and took refuge in a cave. Gahaninath, whom he encountered while hiding in the cave, introduced Nivruttinath to the knowledge of the Nath yogis.

Later, Vitthalapant went back to Alandi and begged the Brahmins for advice on how to atone for his transgressions; they urged that he take his own life as a form of penance. Within a year of one another, Vitthalapant and his wife committed suicide by plunging into the Indrayani River in the vain hope that their children may live lives free from oppression. According to local lore and other accounts, the parents jumped into the Indrayani River to commit suicide. Another version of the story claims that the father, Vitthalapant, atoned for his transgression by jumping into the Ganges River. The Nath Hindu live tradition, to which their parents already belonged, accepted and initiated Dnyaneshwar and his siblings, all of whom went on to become well-known yogis and Bhakti poets.

Travel and Death of Dnyaneshwar

Dnyaneshwar and his siblings went to Pandharpur after Dnyaneshwar finished writing Amrutanubhav, where they met Namdev, who later became Dnyaneshwar's close friend. In order to initiate many individuals into the Varkari sect, Dnyaneshwar and Namadev travelled to numerous holy sites around India. It is thought that during this time, Dnyaneshwar's devotional songs, known as Abhangas, were created. According to Bahirat, Dnyaneshwar and Namadev were feted upon their return to Pandharpur by numerous modern saints, including "Goroba the potter, Sanvata the gardener, Chokhoba the untouchable, and Parisa Bhagwat the Brahmin". While some academics agree with the prevailing opinion that Namdev and Dnyaneshwar lived at roughly the same time, others, like W. B. Patwardhan, R. G. Bhandarkar, and R. Bharadwaj, disagree and place Namdev's birth in the late 14th century. After the feast, Dnyaneshwar yearned to perform sanjeevan samadhi, an Ashtanga Yoga technique that involves leaving one's physical body voluntarily after achieving a deep level of meditation. Namdev's sons made the necessary preparations for the Sanjeevan Samadhi. Dnyaneshwar had emphatically discussed the connection between greater awareness and illumination or pure energy in the format of electromagnetic radiation with reference to Sanjeevan Samadhi.

A twenty-one-year-old man entered Sanjeevan samadhi at Alandi, Dnyaneshwar, on the thirteenth day of the dark half of the Kartik month of the Vikram Samvat calendar. In Alandi's Siddhesvara Temple complex, his samadhi is located. Namdev and other onlookers lamented his demise. Tradition holds that when Namdev prayed to Vithoba for Dnyaneshwar's return, the latter was revived and brought to see him. This attests to "the immortality of genuine friendship and companionship of noble and loving hearts", according to Fred Dallmayr. Many followers of Varkari think Dnyaneshwar is still alive.

Miracles of Dnyaneshwar

The resurrection of his student Sachchidanand's corpse was one of the many miracles that came to be connected to Dnyaneshwar's life. According to Fred Dallmyr's summary of one of these legends in Mahipati's hagiography: At the age of twelve, Dnyaneshwar travelled to Paithan with his less fortunate and outcast siblings in order to request compassion from the priests there. They received insults and jeers there. While the kids were being bullied, a man was viciously beating an old buffalo on a neighbouring road, and the hurt animal collapsed in sobs. In order to protect the buffalo, Dnyaneshwar begged the owner to halt. He was mocked by the priests for being more preoccupied with a beast and careless with the Vedic teachings.

The Vedas themselves held that all life was sacred and a manifestation of the Brahman, in response to Dnyaneshwar's answer. His logic suggested that animals should also be allowed to read the Vedas, the indignant monks pointed out. After placing his hand on the buffalo's forehead, an unfazed Dnyaneshwar got it to begin reciting a Vedic hymn in a deep voice. According to Fred Dallmayr, it is not necessary to worry about whether this story exactly depicts Dnyaneshwar's life because it has symbolic value, much like the account of Jesus in Jerusalem in Matthew. A skilled yogi named Changdev, who used his magical abilities to ride a tiger, challenged Dnyaneshwar to repeat this miracle. Changdev was humbled by Dnyaneshwar's ride atop a moving wall. In the Changdev Pasasthi, a collection of 65 verses, Dnyaneshwar counsels Changdev. Changdev adopted Muktabai, the sister of Dnyaneshwar, as his teacher.

Writings by Dnyaneshwar

B. P. Bahirat asserts that Dnyaneshwar was the first recognised philosopher to publish works in Marathi. In the year 1290, at the age of around 16, he wrote Dnyaneshwari, a commentary work on the Bhagavad Gita that later turned into a foundational work of the Varkari sect. Sacchidananda, who consented to serve as Dnyaneshwar's amanuensis, took notes of everything he said. The Ovi, a four-line metre with the first three or first and third lines rhyming and the fourth line having a sharp and short finish, was first employed to compose women's ballads in Maharashtra and was utilised in Dnyaneshwari. The **ovi** "*trips, it gallops, it dances, it whirls, it ambles, it trots, it runs, it takes long leaps or short leaps, it halts or sweeps along, it evolves a hundred and one graces at the master's command*", as per W. B. Patwardhan, an expert on Dnyaneshwar.

Finally, he wrote 'Pasaayadana' in Dnyaneshwari, wherein he prayed solely for other people and all of humanity while saying nothing at all for himself. In his own words, Saint Dnyaneshwar, "*The whole world has one soul*". He wrote Dnyaneshwari to make philosophical concepts accessible to the general public because, at the time, Sanskrit was considered a language of the high priestly class, and members of lower castes were not permitted to study it. As a result, this important work in Indian history made philosophy accessible to the general public. He wrote his first work, Dnyanesvari, in Marathi rather than the traditional Sanskrit language. According to Bhagwat, Dnyaneshwar, like other Bhakti poets, chose the vernacular language, which was a significant departure from the high-caste Hinduism and the dominant cultural hegemony of Sanskrit. This tendency was perpetuated by later bhakti poets throughout India. According to Bhagwat, Dnyaneshwar is to Marathi literature what Dante is to Italian literature.

Tradition has it that Nivruttinath requested Dnyaneshwar to produce a separate philosophical treatise since he was unhappy with the commentary. Amrutanubhava is the name given to this work in later years. On the timeline of the Dnyaneshwari and Amrutanubhav, scholars disagree. According to Patwardhan, Amrutanubhav predates Dnyaneshwari since it employs more metaphors and imagery and shows a broader acquaintance with a wider range of philosophical systems, including Samkhya and Yoga. Bahirat and Ranade, who both oppose this viewpoint, point out that, despite the text's use of simpler language, Amrutanubhava demonstrates the author's knowledge of complex philosophical ideas like Mayavada and Shunyavada. When Dnyaneshwar was admitted into the Varkari faith, it is thought that he composed his devotional works, known as Abhangas, while on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur and other sacred locations.

Influences on Dnyaneshwar

Dnyaneshwar was influenced by the Nath Yogi tradition and the Mahanubhava sect, two significant movements during the period. Mahanubhavas were followers of Krishna who did not adhere to the Vedas, the caste system, or the veneration of Vitthala. Dnyaneshwar's religious principles diverged

greatly from those of Mahanubhava. His worldview was based on the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, later Vedic works, and devotion to Vitthala served as the foundation of the egalitarian Varkari sect, which Dnyaneshwar created. However, Dnyaneshwar's writing was affected by the literary approach taken by the Mahanubhava authors. Dnyaneshwar "*stands to Mahanubhavas just in the same relation as Shakespeare stood to Elizabethan writers*", claims R. D. Ranade.

After their parents passed away, Dnyaneshwar's brother Nivruttinath inducted him into the Nath Yogi tradition, while Dnyaneshwar himself initiated Sopana and Muktabai. The Gorakshanath-founded Nath Yogi sect was responsible for introducing the Hatha Yoga method, which placed a focus on yogic postures and physical fitness. Nivruttinath had been introduced into the Nath Yogi lineage by Gahaninath, a Gorakshanath disciple. His inheritances from the Nath Yogi culture were Dnyaneshwar's non-dualistic theory, the use of a regional language in his writing, stress on yoga, and the unification of Vishnu and Shiva. His connections with the religious Vitthala sect, a tradition that already existed during Dnyaneshwar's time, inspired him to write about the virtues of universal brotherhood and empathy. J. N. Farquhar also mentions how Dnyaneshwar's poetry was influenced by the Bhagavata Purana.

Philosophy of Dnyaneshwar

Ontology and Epistemology

In Amrutanubhava, Dnyaneshwar begins to examine being or brahman. According to him, being serves as the foundation for thought and is what allows for thought and cognition. Being is unique from Kantian categories since it exists before the mind and concepts; therefore, epistemological analysis and other mental processes cannot be used to analyse being. Dnyaneshwar is of the opinion that reality can be known without the need for evidence. It predates the dualism-based divides between the knower and known, existence and nonexistence, subject and object, as well as knowledge and ignorance. The limitations of the conventional epistemological approaches (pramanas) utilised in Indian philosophy are highlighted by Dnyaneshwar. He makes the point that every perception can only be supported by a deeper understanding, and that in proving the validity of reason, the reason is transcended. Even scripture witness, which is seen as a reliable source of knowledge by adherents of the Vedanta and Mimamsa schools of philosophy, is discouraged by Dnyaneshwar. He believed that the authenticity of the scriptures comes from its agreement with experiential truth, not the other way around.

Ethics

In his commentary on the book Dnyaneshwari, Dnyaneshwar explains the Bhagavad Gita, revealing his moral philosophy. He views as qualities the joy of solitude, dedication to one's Guru and God, humility, non-injury in action, thought, and speech, forbearance in the face of difficulty, dispassion towards sensory pleasures, purity of heart, and mind. In Dnyaneshwari, having a pessimistic outlook on life is seen to be a prerequisite for spiritual development. Saints, according to Dnyaneshwar, are indifferent to differences and humble because they associate all things, living or nonliving, with their own Self. The commentary places a lot of emphasis on devotion to the Guru. His Guru Nivruttinath, who is praised by Dnyaneshwar as the person who assisted him in "*cross the ocean of existence*", is invoked at the beginning of many of its chapters. He continues the topic of virtue and vice in his explanation of Bhagavad Gita chapter 16, wherein virtues and vices are referred to as divine heritages and demonic heritages, respectively.

In addition to the qualities already mentioned, the divine inheritance includes fearlessness, which results from a conviction in the unity of all things, generosity, sacrifice, and compassion, whereas the demonic heritage includes six vices: ignorance, rage, arrogance, cruelty, hypocrisy, and pride. In Dnyaneshwari, the Bhagavad Gita's teaching on Karma Yoga is revived, and its usefulness in reaching

actionlessness through action and in fostering harmony between the two is explored. The acts of the ideal karma yogi are contrasted to those of the Sun in the fourth chapter, which, despite appearing to rise and set, is truly motionless; similarly, a karma yogi appears to act but doesn't actually do anything. According to Dnyaneshwar, there are four paths that lead to actionlessness and self-realisation: performing one's obligations, behaving without egoism, renouncing the results of one's activities, and dedicating one's actions to God. The metaphysical premise of Dnyaneshwar that the universe is a manifestation of the divine and not an illusion also establishes an ethical framework that discourages renunciation and encourages carrying out one's obligations and doing one's work with devotion.

As a natural law that controls both the cosmos and human civilisation, *rta*, a Hindu theological concept akin to *dharma*, is viewed in traditional Indian texts. Thus, fulfilling one's obligations to sustain social structures like marriage and the family becomes necessary, and responsibility takes precedence over individual choice. In line with tradition, Dnyaneshwar holds that moral order and divine order are inseparable and immanent in the universe. Therefore, he advises that all social institutions be fully safeguarded and maintained. However, he adopts a more humane stance and promotes spiritual egalitarianism when discussing the institution of caste.

Legacy of Dnyaneshwar

The Varkari movement's culture was influenced by aspects of Dnyaneshwar's life and works, such as his critique of the priestly elite's parochialism, a promotion of family life, and religious egalitarianism. For the Varkari movement, Dnyaneshwar's life and works have "developed into primary exemplars of genuine religiosity for the Varkari movement, as well as crucial sources and focal points of bhakti devotion", according to Dallmayr. Devotees of the Varkari sect participate in an annual pilgrimage known as the Wari in the Vikram Samvat month of Ashadh with symbolic Dnyaneshwar footwear (known as Paduka in Marathi) brought in a *palkhi* from Dnyaneshwar's temple in Alandi to the Vitthala shrine in Pandharpur. In the later poetry-saints of the Varkari movement, the Padukas (sandals) of Dnyaneshwar was carried in a *Palkhi* (palanquin). Varkari authors like Namdev and Eknath incorporated his *chidvilas* concept into their own works. *Hastamalak* and *Swatmsukha* by Eknath exhibit Amrutanubhava's influence. The writings of Tukaram incorporate and clarify Dnyaneshwar's philosophical ideas, such as the debunking of *Mayavada*.

In Popular Culture

Sant Dnyaneshwar, a Marathi film released in the year 1940 about Sant Dnyaneshwar's life, was directed by Vishnupant Govind Damle as well as Sheikh Fattelal. The Sony Marathi channel has been airing the Marathi Television series "Dnyaneshwar Mauli" since 2021.

Works of Dnyaneshwar

Year	Work
1290 CE	Dnyaneshwari or Bhavarthdipika
1292 CE	Amrutanubhava or Anubhavamrita
1294 CE	Changdev Pasashti
-	Haripath

-	Abhangas
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