

HANDBOOK OF ORIENTAL STUDIES  
HANDBUCH DER ORIENTALISTIK

SECTION TWO  
INDIA

*edited by*

J. Bronkhorst  
A. Malinar

VOLUME 22/1

# Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism

*Edited by*  
Knut A. Jacobsen  
(*Editor-in-Chief*)

*Associate Editors*  
Helene Basu  
Angelika Malinar  
Vasudha Narayanan



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON  
2009

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brill's encyclopedia of Hinduism / edited by Knut A. Jacobsen (editor-in-chief); associate editors, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, Vasudha Narayanan.

p. cm. — (Handbook of oriental studies. Section two, India, ISSN 0169-9377; v. 22/1)

ISBN 978-90-04-17641-6 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Hinduism—Encyclopedias. I. Jacobsen, Knut A., 1956- II. Basu, Helene. III. Malinar, Angelika. IV. Narayanan, Vasudha.

BL1105.B75 2009

294.503—dc22

2009023320

ISSN 0169-9377

ISBN 978 90 04 17641 6

Copyright 2009 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands. Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints BRILL, Hotei Publishing, IDC Publishers, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and VSP.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Brill provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA. Fees are subject to change.



# Table of Contents, Volume I

## Prelims

Preface .....	vii
List of Contributors .....	ix
Notes for Users .....	xix
Primary Sources .....	xxi
Primary Source Abbreviations .....	xxv
Journals and Series .....	xxvii
General Abbreviations .....	xxxi
Introduction .....	xxxiii

## Regions and Regional Traditions

(Hinduism in the Regions of India and South and Southeast Asia)

Overview article .....	3
East	
Assam and the Eastern States .....	13
Bengal .....	25
Orissa .....	43
North	
Bihar .....	59
Himalaya Region .....	73
Jharkhand .....	87
Kashmir .....	99
Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh .....	127
Punjab .....	153
Uttar Pradesh .....	171
South	
Andhra Pradesh .....	187
Karnataka .....	201
Kerala .....	221
Tamil Nadu .....	233
West	
Goa .....	249
Gujarat .....	255
Maharashtra .....	271
Rajasthan .....	285
South Asia outside of India	
Bangladesh .....	301
Nepal .....	307
Pakistan .....	315
Sri Lanka .....	321
Historical Southeast Asia:	
Burma .....	337
Cambodia .....	345
Indonesia .....	353
Thailand .....	371

**Sacred Space and Time**

Tirtha and Tirthayātrā: Salvific Space and Pilgrimage .....	381
Cosmic Cycles, Cosmology, and Cosmography .....	411
Festivals .....	429
Processions .....	445

**Gods, Goddesses, and Divine Powers**

Overview article .....	457
Asuras and Daityas .....	469
Ayyappan .....	479
Bhairava .....	485
Bhūdevī .....	491
Brahmā .....	499
Dattātreya .....	513
Draupadī and Sītā .....	517
Durgā .....	535
Gaṇapati/Gaṇeśa .....	551
Gandharvas and Apsarases .....	565
Gaṅgā .....	571
Hanumān .....	579
Kālī .....	587
Kṛṣṇa .....	605
Kuladevī .....	621
Mahādevī .....	627
Murugaṅ .....	637
Navagrahas .....	647
Pārvatī .....	655
Rādhā .....	675
Rāma .....	681
River Goddesses .....	695
Rṣis .....	703
Sacred Animals .....	711
Santoṣī Mā .....	719
Sarasvatī .....	725
Śītalādevī .....	733
Śiva .....	741
Śrī Lakṣmī .....	755
Vedic Gods .....	765
Veṅkaṭeśvara .....	781
Viṣṇu .....	787
Yakṣas and Yakṣiṇīs .....	801
Yama .....	807
Yamunā .....	817
Yoginīs .....	823
Glossary .....	829
Sections for Future Volumes .....	832

# Dattātreyā

Dattātreyā is a puranic deity, in origin a tantric antinomian *yogin* (→ *sādhu/sādhvī* and *yogin/yoginī*) later sanitized and adapted to the devotional milieu of the → Purāṇas. The mythical accounts present him as the son of the → *ṛṣi* (sage) Atri (“The Devourer,” son of Brahmā and author of Vedic hymns [→ Vedas]) and of his chaste wife Anasūyā (“The Non-envious One”). Thanks to the help offered by Anasūyā to the triad (*trimūrti*) of → Brahmā, → Viṣṇu, and → Śiva (through her → *śakti* [power], she had restored the sun’s light, which had been obscured by the pious Śāṅḍilī, who wished to save her husband Kauśika, cursed by sage Māṅḍavya that he would die at dawn), she and her husband are bestowed the grace that the *trimūrti* would be born as their sons: thus are born the three brothers Soma (another name of the moon [*candra*]), Datta/Dattātreyā (“The Given/Granted One,”/“The One Belonging to Atri’s Lineage”), and Durvāsas (“The Ill-Clothed,” an ascetic famous for his bad temper), → *avatāras* (descents) of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva, respectively.

If in the Purāṇas Dattātreyā is primarily identified as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (for instance, in *BhāgP.* 1.3.11 he figures as the sixth *avatāra* in a list comprising 22 descents), already in the → *Mahābhārata* he emerges as a powerful *ṛṣi* granting boons, notably one thousand arms to King Arjuna Kārtavīrya, who had propitiated him by means of austerities (→ *tapas*; *MhB.* 3.115.8ff.; 12.49.30 ff.; 13.137.5–6; 13.138.12; and 13.142.21; references are to the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute [BORI] edition, which assigns the first two text instances to an appendix as interpolations). In puranic literature and in the seminal *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (chs. 17–19, which elaborate on the story of Arjuna Kārtavīrya, and chs. 37–43, where Dattātreyā teaches *yoga* to Alarka), Dattātreyā is presented as a great *yogin*. His Vaiṣṇava traits are intertwined with antinomian traits: from its inception, Dattātreyā’s theology appears as an inextricable mixture (*miśra*) of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava elements. Though he is portrayed as a manifestation of Viṣṇu, he evidences tantric characteristics more attuned to a Śaiva or even Śākta background than to a Vaiṣṇava one. As an alter ego of Śiva, he

is “Lord of Yoga” (Yogeśvara) imparting his art to his disciple Alarka, while at the same time indulging in such impure behavior as drinking intoxicants and making love. Nonetheless, the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* emphasizes Dattātreyā’s Brahmanical purity, pointing out that his fondness for meat and sex is merely an outward appearance, a way of disguising his sanctity so as to lead astray the unworthy ones. Another puranic source for Dattātreyā is *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.7.24–11.9.33 (corresponding to *Uddhavaḡitā* 2–4; for a parallel, see *SkP.* 6, *Nāgarakhaṇḍa* 184.11–185.91), where we find a dialogue between King Yadu and a young Brahman ascetic, a *bālāvadhūta* (child-renouncer) identified as Dattātreyā. The latter teaches the secret of happiness, which lies in perfect detachment (*vairāgya*) acquired through the careful observation of the laws of nature. Dattātreyā presents a list of 24 universal teachers: the five elements; the sun and moon, the sea, twelve animals (pigeon, python, moth, bee, elephant, honey gatherer, deer, fish, osprey, serpent, spider, and wasp), the prostitute Piṅgalā (Dattātreyā is the patron god of prostitutes), a child, a maiden, and an arrow maker.

In minor → Upaniṣads such as the Yogopaniṣads, the Sannyāsoṇiṣads, and in the late sectarian *Dattātreyopaniṣad* (delving into the all-important → *mantras* [sacred formulas] of Datta, whose seminal one is *dam* or *draṃ*), Dattātreyā is glorified as a teacher of nondualist Yoga and as the veritable paradigm of the highest renouncer (*paramahansa*, *avadhūta*) beyond all rules and regulations. The medieval *Nāradaparivṛājakopaniṣad* portrays Dattātreyā along with other mythical figures as one who has no visible emblem and keeps his conduct concealed, who acts as if he were a child (*bāla*), an intoxicated lunatic (*unmatta*, → madness), or a demon (*piśāca*; → *asuras*), and who, although sane, behaves like a madman. Even a celebrated verse (1.7) of the *Dattātreyopaniṣad* extols him thus: “O Dattātreyā [who is] Hari, Kṛṣṇa, the crazy bliss-bestower! O you [who are] clad in space, the silent one, the child, the demon, the ocean of knowledge!” (*dattātreyā hare kṛṣṇa unmattānandadāyaka, digambara mune bāla piśāca jñānasāgara*). In time, Dattātreyā was appropriated by a variety of religious circles across

the subcontinent: → *tāntrikas* (followers of Tantra), Brahman *sannyāsins* (renouncers; → *āśrama* and *sannyāsin*), Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, Śāktas, and even Muslim and Jaina ascetics.

Though Dattātreya's presence is traceable even in → Nepal (e.g. Bhaktapur), his heartland is undoubtedly the Marathi cultural area. In → Maharashtra, the oldest testimony of his presence – usually represented single headed – is in the literature of the ascetic, devotional sect of the → Mahānubhāvs (lit. “Those of the Great Experience”), a monastic community conceived as heterodox by Brahmanical authorities and often subject to persecutions. This tradition is believed to have originally been founded by Dattātreya himself, and later refounded in the 13th century by one Cakradhar, a Brahman hailing from Gujarat. Like the more popular → *bhakti* (devotional) movement of the Vārkarīs devoted to the god Viṭṭhala/Viṭhobā of Pandharpur (→ Vārkarī Sampradāya), the Mahānubhāvs were seminal in the origin and development of Marathi literature, although Mahānubhāvs and Vārkarīs never came into any significant contact with each other. The Mahānubhāvs believe in five manifestations of the one god whom they call Parameśvar (“Supreme Lord”), the sole source of → liberation (*mokṣa*) to whom they direct exclusive devotion. These are the so-called five Kṛṣṇas (*pañcakṛṣṇas*), comprising two deities (Kṛṣṇa himself and Dattātreya) and three sect figures: Cakradhar (d. 1274; the veritable founder of the sect), his predecessor Guṇḍam Rāul (d. 1287/1288; Cakradhar's *guru*), and Cāṅgdev Rāul (Guṇḍam Rāul's → *guru*).

Mahānubhāvs “received” Dattātreya through the medium of the pan-Indian sect of the Nāths, a Śaiva yogic tradition that became popular especially from the 12th century onwards (→ Nāth Sampradāya). From that time until today, Dattātreya has had an important place in the pantheon of the nine Nāths (*navnāths*) of Western India, being revered as an immortal and one of the originators of the movement along with Gorakhnāth and Matsyendranāth. R.C. Dhare has pointed out the connections between the Nāths and the Mahānubhāvs, suggesting that both Cāṅgdev Rāul and Guṇḍam Rāul were Nāth *yogins* or, in any case, adepts of the Dattātreya cult. This is almost certainly the reason why Mahānubhāvs excluded Dattātreya from their rejection of all other gods of the Hindu pantheon. I.M.P. Raeside (1976) hypothesized that the Mahānubhāvs would have exempted Dattātreya from their rejection of

*devatās* (gods) because of his strong popularity in centers such as Mahur (Matapur), an important *śaktipīṭha* (pilgrimage place to the goddess) in the Sahyadri Mountains close to the Varhad region, the Mahānubhāvs' heartland. One of the oldest and most sacred Datta temples is located in Mahur – proof of the deity's link with Śāktism (→ *tīrtha*).

Perhaps the oldest site associated with Dattātreya – which became a Mahānubhāv pilgrimage place and where even nowadays Datta renouncers known as “wearers of the twisted locks of hair” (*jaṭādharas*) meet – is the Ātmātīrth at Panchaleshwar, on the south bank of the Godāvarī River, east of Paithan. Here, Cakradhar is said to have pointed out the site of Dattātreya's hut (*gumphā*). There is even a lyric (*abhaṅg*) attributed to the great poet-saint → Jñāndev (d. 1296) that magnifies Dattātreya as the one formless *yogin* and mentions the value of a bath (*snān*) at Panchaleshwar. Datta is believed to take his morning bath here. I.M.P. Raeside (1982), allying himself with R.C. Dhare, modified his 1976 view in which he asserted that the deity would have been accepted as a manifestation of Parameśvar being the main object of veneration of potential converts:

There are enough random... references to Dattātreya in *Lilācaritra* and *Sūtrapāṭha* to convince one that he was important for the sect at a very early stage – possibly from the time of its founder. We may suppose that Cakradhara admitted Dattātreya to his list of genuine avatars of Parameśvara because he was an object of worship for his guru's guru, Cāṅgdeva Rāula, or more simply because Cakradhara himself, before he became convinced of his own divinity, was attached to or at least drawn towards the Nātha sect. (Raeside, 1982, 497–498)

This conclusion seems reasonable. Nāthism strongly influenced both the early Mahānubhāvs and the early Vārkarīs. Chief protagonists of Nāthism in Maharashtra were Gahinināth and Nivr̥ttināth, the elder brother of Jñāndev. Through his brother and *guru* Nivr̥ttināth, the young Brahman Jñāndev became an adept of the Nāth sect. Indeed, he wrote the *Jñāneśvarī* on the instruction and to the glory of his master Nivr̥ttināth. What came to be developed was an inextricable combination of both asceticism and devotion (*bhakti*). This is evidenced by the Mahānubhāvs' adoption of Kṛṣṇa and Dattātreya, the first being exemplary of devotion as per the model of

the → *Bhagavadgītā* and the second being exemplary of renunciation. In Mahānubhāv stories concerning Dattātreya, we find the essence of Mahānubhāv teaching and practice: severest asceticism coupled with pure love and service. Thus in the *Sahyādrālīlā* (and there is no puranic antecedent that has been identified for it), we are told the story of Arjuna Kārtavīrya, who took live coals in his hands for worshipping his master Dattātreya. Holding burning items in one's hands is often an extraordinary feat performed as a result of divine → possession (*aṅgāt yeṇē*). This narrative puts together the two traditions about Arjuna Kārtavīrya: self-mortification or extreme asceticism through which he propitiated Dattātreya (as in the → *Mahābhārata*, thanks to which he got his boons, notably one thousand arms) and loving service (→ *sevā*, as in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, where Arjuna Kārtavīrya serves Dattātreya as a humble disciple). Quite differently from the lay Vārkarī movement – which was always a non-ascetic, nonexclusive tradition – the adoption of an ascetic lifestyle (i.e. of *sannyās*) was the distinctive element of Mahānubhāv: this was also the main reason for their narrower and more elitist appeal.

In Maharashtra the advent of a veritable Datta Sampradāya (“The Tradition of the Datta [Followers]”) dates to the mid-16th century when the Marathi *Gurucaritra* (Life of the Master), the sacred text of the movement, was written by Sarasvatī Gangadhār. Divided into 51 chapters containing more than seven thousand verses (*ovīs*), this hagiography presents the miraculous lives of Śrīpād Śrīvallabh (c. 1323–1353) and Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī (c. 1378–1458), the two seminal figures venerated as the first “historical” *avatāras* of Dattātreya. The *Gurucaritra* emphasizes Brahmanical ritual orthodoxy, in an effort to counter Islamic dominance as well as tantric excesses.

Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī, the actual founder of the Datta Sampradāya, appears to have been a Brahman ascetic who had been ordained in the Sarasvatī order of the → Daśanāmī renunciants founded by Śaṅkara. Constantly on the move, he finally settled in the village of Ganagapur about 75 km southeast of Solapur (presently in northern Karnataka), the major pilgrimage center of the tradition along with other sites such as Audumbar and Narsobavadi. Though the Datta Sampradāya originated as a revivalistic Brahmanical cult, Dattātreya was in fact appropriated even by Sufi adepts, and his holy spots became famous

as places of exorcism and liberation from spirits (*bhūtas*) and demons (*pretas*, *piśācas*), practices that are regarded as utterly impure and non-Brahmanical (→ purity and impurity).

It is from the time of the *Gurucaritra* that Dattātreya's popular iconography incorporating the triad of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva emerges. He is represented standing, with three heads (*trimukha*) – the central one being that of Viṣṇu, his focal identity – and six arms holding the emblems of the *trimūrti*: the water pot and prayer beads (→ *mālā*) of Brahmā, the mace and conch of Viṣṇu, the drum and trident of Śiva. He is surrounded by three or four dogs, symbols of extreme impurity but nevertheless said to represent the Vedas, as well as by a cow, symbol of Brahmanical purity. The icon captures and recapitulates Dattātreya's integrative force, embracing all polarities as the manifestation of the fullness of the godhead. The deity's iconography as being one headed and standing or in a meditative posture is rarer and thought to be older. In temples such as in Ganagapur and other holy spots, his presence is attested to also in the noniconic form of the *pādukās*, the sandals worn by Datta or one of his incarnations, the emblem of the wandering ascetic and of the deity's unfathomable omnipresence. Indeed, he is believed to be eternal and to manifest himself under a variety of forms. Attaining his vision – that is, recognizing his presence – is thought to be extremely difficult, a rare grace: Dattātreya is unforeseeable in his transcendence, a rule unto himself being beyond caste and purity codes, abruptly appearing as well as vanishing from site.

In one of his lyrics, the poet-saint → Tukārām (1598–1649) thus portrays Dattātreya, the supreme ascetic clad in space (*digambara*, i.e. naked):

I fall prostrate before the one with three heads  
and six hands;  
A bag of alms hanging from his shoulder;  
Dogs in front of him.  
He bathes in the Gaṅgā daily.  
A staff and water-pot are in his hands;  
On his feet are clanking wooden sandals;  
On his head a splendid coil of hair;  
On his body beautiful ashes.  
Tukā says: I bow to him who is clad in space.  
(Pain *et al.*, 1988, 96; trans. Pain)

In the tradition of the Vārkarīs, the poet-saint → Eknāth (1533–1599) – initiated by his *guru* Janārḍan into an integrative, synthetic mysticism



that is open to all – and the encyclopedic Dāsopant (1551–1615) appear to be especially linked to Dattātreya. The hagiographer Mahīpati (1715–1790), author of worshipful biographies of saints, offers accounts of the *darśans* (visions; → *pūjā* and *darśan*) that Dattātreya, as a Muslim soldier and as *faqīr* (ascetic), would have granted to Eknāth (*Bhaktavijaya* 45.82–85, 105ff.; *Bhaktalīlāmṛta* 13.164–205). Mahīpati also narrates stories of the meetings between Eknāth and Dāsopant, in which Dattātreya appears to the latter as the guardian of Eknāth's house (*Bhaktalīlāmṛta* 22.79–101; see also 22.48–65).

In the development of the devotional and ascetic movement linked to Dattātreya, after Eknāth and Dāsopant, we find significant lineages of *gurus* (*guruparamparās*) of both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva masters (many inspired by Nāthism), including also *pīrs* (saintly figures of Sufi background) accommodating Islamic mysticism with nondual → Vedānta. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the most important *gurus* were Manikprabhu (1817–1865), Akkalkot Maharaj (d. 1878), Vasudevananda Sarasvati (1854–1914), Maharaj Balekundrikar (1855–1905), Shirdi Sai Baba (d. 1918), Nuri Maharaj (1869–1923), Purohit Svamin (1882–1941), Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981), and Ranga Avadhuta (1898–1968). All these, often exhibiting bizarre, antinomian personalities following Dattātreya's pattern, are revered as Datta incarnations by their devotees, who honor them as both great knowers (*jñānins*) and miracle workers, bestowers of liberation (*mukti*) as well as mundane enjoyments (*bhukti*). Of these *gurus*, the one who has produced significant literary works in both Marathi and Sanskrit has been Vasudevananda Sarasvati (popular texts such as *Dattamāhātmya*, *Gurusamhitā*, *Dvisahasrī*, *Dattapurāṇa*). Vasudevananda Sarasvati's great number of pupils and devotees exercise a noticeable influence on the present-day practice of religion in Maharashtra.

Quite a number of tantric works centered upon ritual practice are attributed to Dattātreya, among which are *Dattātreyakalpa*, *Dattātreypūjāpaddhati*, and *Dattātreyatāntra*. Besides these, the most popular texts ascribed to the deity – in which Dattātreya figures in the role of immortal teacher, *yogin*, and renunciant – are three: the *Jivanmuktagītā* (The Song of the Liberated-in-Life), a Śaiva nondualist text in only 24 stanzas; the *Avadhūtagītā* (The Song of the Free), a nondualist text of Nāth inspiration in 289 stanzas divided into eight chapters; and the *Jñānakhaṇḍa* (Section on Knowledge) of the *Tripurārahasya* (The Secret of [the Goddess]

Tripurā), a Śākta nondualist text from South India in 2,163 stanzas (→ Śrī Vidyā), divided into 22 chapters. These works are all late compositions, possibly dating to the 17th or 18th century.

All in all, the contemporary Dattātreya movement exhibits ambivalent, contradictory traits, part and parcel of the deity's assimilative force. On the one hand, it expresses an open, integrative spirituality that accommodates even Islamic tenets, but on the other, it is the catalyst of Brahmanical pride and of an assertive Brahmanical ritual orthodoxy, which has given rise to clashes with → Dalit and low-caste communities and the Muslim minority (such as in the controversy over the control of a disputed shrine in the mountainous locale of Bābā Budhan Giri in the Chikmagalur district of southern Karnataka).

## Bibliography

- Abbott, J.E., *Dāsopant Digambar: Translation of the Dasopant Charitra*, Pune, 1927.
- Abbott, J.E., *The Life of Eknāth: Śrī Eknāth Charita*, Oxford, 1927, repr. 1981.
- Abbott, J.E., & N.R. Godbole, *Bhaktavijaya: Stories of Indian Saints, Translation of Mahipati's Marathi Bhaktavijaya*, Poona, 1933, repr. 1982.
- Bahadur, S.J.C.W., *Dattātreya: The Way and the Goal*, London, 1957.
- Dalādanamuni, *Dattalaharī: L'onda di Datta*, Venice, 1999.
- Ḍhere, R.C., *Datta Sampradāyācā Itihāsa*, Pune, 21964.
- Joshi, H.S., *Origin and Development of Dattātreya Worship in India*, Baroda, 1965.
- Kamat, R.K., *Shri Gurucharitra*, 1937, 21990.
- Lubin, T., "Science, Patriotism, and Mother Veda: Ritual Activism in Maharashtra," *IJHS* 5/3, 2001, 81–105.
- Mate, M.S., *Temples and Legends of Maharashtra*, Bombay, 1962, 31988, 79–101.
- Pain, C., & E. Zelliott, "The God Dattatreya and the Datta Temples of Pune," in: E. Zelliott & M. Berntsen, eds., *The Experience of Hinduism: Essays on Religion in Maharashtra*, Albany, 1988, 95–108.
- Raeside, I.M.P., "Dattātreya," *BSOAS* 45, 1982, 489–500.
- Raeside, I.M.P., "The Mahānubhāvas," *BSOAS* 39, 1976, 585–600.
- Rigopoulos, A., *Dattātreya: The Immortal Guru, Yogin, and Avatāra: A Study of the Transformative and Inclusive Character of a Multi-Faceted Hindu Deity*, Albany, 1998.
- Saptarshi, K., "Orthodoxy and Human Rights: The Story of a Clash," in: E. Zelliott & M. Berntsen, eds., *The Experience of Hinduism: Essays on Religion in Maharashtra*, Albany, 1988, 251–263.
- Sikand, Y., *Sacred Spaces: Exploring Traditions of Shared Faith in India*, Delhi, 2003, 53–68.
- Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī, *Datta-Purāṇa and Other Works, Together with His Biography Gurudeva-caritra*, Pune, 1954.