

Vidyapati-The Poet(Part-1)

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Life and works

- **Vidyapati** (c 1374-1460) the poet, was born in a scholarly Shaivite Brahmin family in the village of Bisfi in the Sitamari subdivision of Mithila. His father's name was Ganapati. The family, whose title was 'Thakkar' or 'Thakur, were employed in high positions at the court of the rulers of Mithila and had made many important contributions in military matters as well as artistic and cultural areas. Vidyapati himself was a member of the court of the kings Dev Singh and Shivsing. Vidyapati studied under Sri Hari Mishra. Vidyapati wrote in Maithili, abahattha, and sanskrit. Since he was born in a Shaivite family, he also wrote many Shaivite songs. However, the verses on

Life and works

- Radha-Krishna that are written in brajabuli are considered his masterpieces. It is due to these grew a type of Vaisnava verse language known as Brajabuli. Vaishnava verses that he has gained so great reputation. These songs, in metrical feet and written in Maithili, gradually became popular all over Bengal. However, they were later transformed by the influences of local dialects and the singers of kirtan. From this Although Brajabuli is mainly a mixture of Bangla and Maithili, it also includes some Hindi words. Vaisnava verses continued to be written in Brajabuli till the nineteenth century.
- Rabindranath Tagore wrote the *Bh'a'nusingha Th'a'kurer*

Life and works

Pad'a'val'i in this language. Sri chaitanya himself was fond of listening to the songs of Vidyapati. Kirtan and Padasabgit were the main pillars of the vaisnavism.

- Vidyapati's fame spread all over Bengal. Later, many Bengali and non-Bengali poets wrote verses in imitation of Vidyapati. Research on Vidyapati started in the late nineteenth century. Nagendranath Gupta was the first to publish an authentic version of the songs written by Vidyapati.
- Apart from writing songs, Vidyapati also wrote books on ethics, history, geography and law. Among his books are

Life and works

- *Puru's'par'i'k'sa* (moral teaching), *Likhan'a'bal'i* (on writing), *K'i'rtilat'a'* (history), *Bh'u'-Parikram'a* (geography), *D'a'nb'a'kyabal'i* (on charity), *Ga'b'g'a'b'a'kyabal'i* (on holy sites). *Durg'a'bhaktitara'b'gin'i'* and *Bibh'a'gs'a'r* are autobiographical in nature.

Life and works

- Little detail is known of Vidyapati's early life, though his status as a Brahman undoubtedly meant rigorous training in Sanskrit and other such marks of scholarship. Likely through his father's efforts, he received a commission from the king during the reign of Kirti Simha (ruled c. 1370–80). The result of this commission was the long poem *Kirtilata* ("Vine of Glory"). Vidyapati became a court scholar under Kirti Simha's son, Deva Simha, for whom he composed *Bhuparikrama* ("Around the World"), a group of romantic stories that also contained advice to the king.
- The poetry for which Vidyapati is best remembered, however, is a collection of love poetry written between 1380 and 1406.

Life and works

- This collection expands on what had become the cult of Radha and Krishna, subject also of the 12th-century Bengal poet Jayadeva's celebrated *GitaGovinda* ("Song of the Cowherd" [Govinda is another name for Krishna]). According to the English scholar W.G. Archer, Vidyapati's work is distinct from that of Jayadeva in both form and voice. Unlike Jayadeva's work, which is a unified dance-drama, Vidyapati's offering is a collection of separate love songs that examine the many moods and seasons of love and lovemaking. Jayadeva's viewpoint is also unremittingly masculine, while Vidyapati finds Radha's feminine sentiments and observations the more nuanced, and he does not esteem Krishna over Radha.

Life and works

- Many of these love songs were written in the court of Shiva Simha, grandson of Vidyapati's first patron. When in 1406 Muslim armies routed the court, Shiva Simha, Vidyapati's friend and patron, disappeared, and Vidyapati's golden age was over. He lived in exile in Nepal, where he wrote the *Likhanavali* ("How to Write Letters in Sanskrit"), and returned about 1418 to rejoin the court of Mithila. He wrote no more, however, of Krishna and Radha and composed little in the Maithili language. Until his death he produced a number of learned Sanskrit works. He is believed to have retired from the court in 1430 and returned to his village for the remainder of his years.

Life and works

- Though he is little known in the West, Vidyapati remains a treasured poet centuries after his death. Especially the contemporary Maithili and Bengali peoples as well as practitioners of Vaishnavism hold him in high regard.

(To be continued)