

# Vidyapati-The Poet(Part-2)

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**DR. MD. NEYAZ HUSSAIN**  
**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & HOD**  
**PG DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**  
**MAHARAJA COLLEGE, VKSU**  
**ARA (BIHAR)**

# Life and works

- **Political career**
- The independence of the kings Vidyapati worked for was often threatened by incursions by Muslim sultans. The *Kīrttilatā* makes reference to an incident where the Oiniwar King, Raja Gaṇeśvara, was killed by the Turkish commander, Malik Arsalan in 1371. By 1401, Vidyapati requested the help of the Jaunpur Sultan in overthrowing Arsalan and installing Gaṇeśvara's sons, Vīrasimha and Kīrttisimha, on the throne. With the Sultan's assistance, Arsalan was deposed and Kīrttisimha, the oldest son, became the ruler of Mithila. The conflicts of his time are evident in his works. In his early praise-poem *Kīrttilatā*, he slyly criticizes his patron for his perceived deference to Muslims.

# Life and works

- **Love songs**

While working under his second patron, Devasimha, and especially under his successor Sivasimha, Vidyapati started composing Maithili songs of the love of Radha and Krishna. He seems to have only composed love songs between 1380 to 1406, though he kept writing until near his death in 1448. He seems to have ceased writing love songs after his patron and friend Sivasimha went missing in a battle and his court had to go into exile. These songs, which would eventually number five hundred, broke with convention. They were written in vernacular Maithili as songs, not as formal poems in literary Sanskrit as was done

## Life and works

before. Until Vidyapati, Maithili wasn't employed as a literary medium. He applied the tradition of Sanskrit love poetry to the "simple, musical, and direct" Maithili language. His inheritance from the Sanskrit tradition include its repertory of standard images to describe beauty ("eyes large and tender like a doe's") and standard settings to invoke certain moods and feelings (spring with its increasing heat as an analogy for rising passion). Vidyapati also drew from the beauty of his home in Madhubani ("forest of honey"), with its mango groves, rice fields, sugar cane, and lotus ponds. In the tradition of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda, Vidyapati's songs were simultaneously

## Life and works

praises of love-making and praises of Krishna; praise of Krishna involved praise of love-making. The intensity and poetic virtuosity of the songs were integral to these songs' function as a way to directly worship god and earn spiritual merit. Vidyapati's continuation of Jayadeva's program in a different language earned him the title "the new Jayadeva".

His work did differ from his predecessor's in two ways. His songs were independent from one another unlike the Gita Govinda, which comprises twelve cantos telling an overarching story of the couple's separation and reunion.

## Life and works

While Jayadeva wrote from Krishna's perspective, Vidyapati preferred Radha's; "her career as a young girl, her slowly awakening youth, her physical charm, her shyness, doubts and hesitations, her naive innocence, her need for love, her surrender to rapture, her utter anguish when neglected - all of these are

These songs frequently mention the queens of king Sivasimha, an indicator that they were meant to be joyed by the court. At times, his poems identify Krishna with king Sivasimha and Radha with the king's chief queen, Lakhima Devi. They were sung by a court singer, Jayati, who sent the songs to music. They were learned by dancing girls and

## Life and works

eventually spread out of the court. His love songs have been collected into the *Padāvalī*, probably not by Vidyapati himself.

- **Devotional songs**

Though he wrote hundreds of love songs about the romance of Radha and Krishna, he was not a special devotee of Krishna or Vishnu. Instead, he lavished attention on Shiva and Durga but also wrote songs about Vishnu and Ganga. He is particularly known for his songs of the love of Shiva and Parvati and prayers for Shiva as the supreme Brahman.

## Life and works

- **A song titled *All My Inhibition*:**

All my inhibition left me in a flash,  
When he robbed me off my clothes,  
But his body became my new dress.  
Like a bee hovering on a lotus leaf  
He was there in my night, on me!



# Life and works

- **Influence**
- **Odia literature**

Vidyapati's influence reached Odisha through Bengal. The earliest composition in Brajabuli, an artificial literary language popularized by Vidyapati, is ascribed to Ramananda Raya, the governor of Godavari province of the King of Odisha, Gajapati Prataprudra Dev. He was a disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He recited his Brajabuli poems to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, when he first met him on the bank of river Godavari at Rajahmundry, southern provincial capital of Kingdom of Odisha in 1511–12. Other notable Odia poets influenced by Vidyapati's poems were Champati Ray and king Pratap Malla Dev (1504–32).

# Life and works

- **Bengali Literature**

Bengali Vaishnavas like Chitanya and Chandidas adopted Vidyapati's love songs about Radha and Krishna as Vaishnava hymns. All major Bengali poets of the medieval period were influenced by Vidyapati. As a result, an artificial literary language, known as Brajabuli was developed in the sixteenth century. Brajabuli is basically Maithili (as prevalent during the medieval period) but its forms are modified to look like Bengali. The medieval Bengali poets, Gobindadas Kabiraj, Jnandas, Balaramdas and Narottamdas composed their *padas* (poems) in this language. Rabindranath Tagore composed

## Life and works

his *Bhanusingha Thakurer Padabali* (1884) in a mix of Western Hindi (Braj Bhasha) and archaic Bengali and named the language Brajabuli as an imitation of Vidyapati (he initially promoted these lyrics as those of a newly discovered poet, *Bhanusingha*). Other 19th-century figures in the Bengal Renaissance like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee have also written in Brajabuli. Tagore was much influenced by Vidyapati. He set the poet's *Bhara Badara* to his own tune. A bridge in Kolkata near Sealdah Station is named after him (Vidyapati Setu).

# Life and works

- **Legacy**

Vidyapati has been kept alive in popular memory over the past six centuries; he is a household name in Mithila. His love songs are sung at weddings in the region. Many myths have arisen about him and people continue to sing his songs.

- ***Bidāpat Nāch***

- A form of folk dance-drama street theater, *Bidāpat Nāch*, where "bidāpat" is derived from "Vidyapati", is performed in Purnia district in north Bihar. While several groups performed in multiple villages in that area in the 20th century, there was just one group left in one village by 2012.

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