

Vidyapati-The Poet(Part-2)

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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.

Life and works

- 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.

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.

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- ▶ 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

Life and works

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 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.

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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.

Life and works

In the tradition of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda, Vidyapati's songs were simultaneously 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".

Life and works

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 over-arching story of the couple's separation and reunion. 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.

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These songs frequently mention the queens of king Sivasimha, an indicator that they were meant to be enjoyed 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 eventually spread out of the court. His love songs have been collected into the *Padāvalī*, probably not by Vidyapati himself.

(To be continued)