

Classic Poetry Series

Vidyapati Thakur
- poems -

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Vidyapati Thakur(1352 - 1448)

Vidyapati Thakur, also known by the sobriquet Maithil Kavi Kokil (the poet cuckoo of Maithili) was a Maithili poet and a Sanskrit writer. He was born in the village of Bishphi in Madhubani district of Bihar state, India. He was son of Ganapati. The name Vidyapati is derived from two Sanskrit words, Vidya (knowledge) and Pati (master), connoting thereby, a man of knowledge.

 Life

Little is known of Vidyapati's life. Two other great Vaishnava poets, Chandi Das and Umapati, were his contemporaries. His patron Raja Shivasimha Rupanarayana, when heir-apparent, gave the village of Bisapi as a rent-free gift to the poet in the year 1400 A.D. (the original deed is extant). This shows that in 1400 the poet was already a man of distinction. His patron appears to have died in 1449, before which date the songs here translated must have been written. Further, there still exists a manuscript of the Bhagavata Purana in the poet's handwriting, dated 1456. It is thus evident that he lived to a good age, for it is hardly likely that he was under twenty in the year 1400. The following is the legend of his death: Feeling his end approaching, he set out to die on the banks of Ganga. But remembering that she was the child of the faithful, he summoned her to himself: and the great river divided herself in three streams, spreading her waters as far as the very place where Vidyapati sat. There and then he laid himself, it is said down and died. Where his funeral pyre was, sprang up a Shiva lingam, which exists to this day, as well as the marks of the flood. This place is near the town of Bazitpur, in the district of Darbhanga.

Vidyapati's Vaishnava padas are at once folk and cultivated art—just like the finest of the Pahari paintings, where every episode of which he sings finds exquisite illustration. The poems are not, like many ballads, of unknown authorship and perhaps the work of many hands, but they are due to the folk in the sense that folk-life is glorified and popular thought is reflected. The songs as we have them are entirely the work of one supreme genius; but this genius did not stand alone, as that of modern poets must—on the contrary, its roots lay deep in the common life of fields and villages, and above all, in common faiths and superstitions. These were days when peasants yet spoke as elegantly as courtiers, and kings and cultivators shared one faith and a common view of life—conditions where all things are possible to art.

 Influence on The Literature

It is little wonder that Vidyapati's influence on the literature of Eastern Hindustan has been profound, and that his songs became the household poetry of Bengal and Behar. His poems were adopted and constantly sung by the great Hindu lover, Caitanya, in the sixteenth century, and they have been adapted and handed down in many dialects, above all in Bengali, in the Vaishnava tradition, of which the last representative is [Rabindranath Tagore](http://www.poemhunter.com/rabindranath-tagore/). A poem by the latter well resumes and explains the theory of the Vaishnava lovers:

Not my way of Salvation, to surrender the world!
Rather for me the taste of Infinite Freedom,
While yet I am bound by a thousand bonds to the wheel:
In each glory of sound and sight and smell
I shall find Thy Infinite Joy abiding:
My passion shall burn as the flame of Salvation,
The flower of my love shall become the ripe fruit of Devotion.

It is quite true, as Mr. Nicholson says, that students of oriental poetry have sometimes to ask themselves, 'Is this a love-poem disguised as a mystical ode, or a mystical ode expressed in the language of human love?' Very often this question cannot be answered with a definite 'Yes' or 'No': not because the poet's meaning is vague, but because the two ideas are not at all mutually exclusive. All the manifestations of Kama on earth are images of Pursuit or Return.

As Vidyapati himself says (No. LXIII):

The same flower that you cast away, the same you use in prayer.
And with the same you string the bow.

It is quite certain that many poems of Vidyapati have an almost wholly spiritually significance. If some others seem very obviously secular.

This point may be illustrated by a comparison with poetry of Western Europe. Take for example a poem such as the following, with a purely secular significance (if any true art can be said to be secular):

Oh! the handsome lad frae Skye
That's lifted a' the cattle, a'oor kye.
He's t'aen the dun, the black, the white.
And I hae mickle fear
He's t'aen my heart forbye.

Had this been current in fifteenth century Bengal, every Vaishnava would have understood the song to speak as much of God and the Soul as of man and maid, and to many the former meaning would have been the more obvious. On the other hand, there are many early medieval Western hymns in which the language of human love is deliberately adapted to religious uses, for example:

When y se blosmes springe,
And here foules songe,
A suete love-longynge
Myn herte thourh out stong;
Al for a love newe,
That is so suete and trewe.
That gladieth al mi song.
Here the 'new love' is Christ.

Finally, there are other Western lyrics, and very exquisite ones, that could equally be claimed as religious or secular, for example:

Long ago to thee I gave
Body, soul and all I have—
Nothing in the world I keep.

The Western critic who would enquire what such a poem meant to its maker and his hearers must be qualified by spiritual kinship with him and with them. There is a similar qualification from those who propose to speak of Oriental poetry:

Wer den Dichter will verstehen.
Muss in Dichter's Lande gehen,—
if not in physical presence, at least in spirit.

It should not be forgotten that Vidyapati's songs, like those of all the Vaishnava poets—from Jayadeva to Rabindranath Tagore—were meant to be sung; and as the latter says himself, "In a book of songs the main thing is left out: to set forth the music's vehicle, and leave out the music itself, is just like keeping the mouse and leaving out Ganapati himself" ('Jiban-smrti,' p. 148). The padas of Vidyapati may still be heard on the lips of Bengali singers, albeit often in corrupt forms.

Vidyapati's poetry was widely influential in centuries to come, in the Hindustani as well as Bengali and other Eastern literary traditions. Indeed, the language at the time of Vidyapati, the prakrit-derived late abahatta, had just begun to transition into early versions of the Eastern languages, Bengali, Oriya, Maithili,

etc. Thus, Vidyapati's influence on making these languages has been described as "analogous to that of Dante in Italy and Chaucer in England."

Vidyapati is as much known for his love-lyrics as for his poetry dedicated to Lord Shiva. His language is closest to Maithili, the language spoken around Mithila (a region in the north Bihar), closely related to the abahattha form of early Bengali.

The love songs of Vidyapati, which describe the sensuous love story of Radha and Krishna, follow a long line of Vaishnav love poetry, popular in Eastern India, and include much celebrated poetry such as Jayadeva's Gita Govinda of the 12th century. This tradition which uses the language of physical love to describe spiritual love, was a reflection of a key turn in Hinduism, initiated by Ramanuja in the 11th century which advocated an individual self realization through direct love. Similar to the reformation in Christianity, this movement empowered the common man to realize God directly, without the intervention of learned priests. Part of the transformation was also a shift to local languages as opposed to the formal Sanskrit of the religious texts.

The songs he wrote a prayers to Lord Shiva are still sung in Mithila and form a rich tradition of sweet and lovely folk songs.

Folklore says that he was such a great devotee of Lord Shiva that the lord was really pleased with him. And once He decided to come to live in his house as a servant. As the servant He is said to have taken the name Ugna. At several places in the region, Lord Shiva is still worshipped by this name. It is said that the lord in form of servant had imposed a condition on Vidyapati that he could not disclose his identity to anyone else or else he would go away. When Vidyapati's wife was angry at her servant and started to beat him Vidyapati could not tolerate the same and asked her wife not to beat Lord Shiva himself and since then the lord disappeared and never was he seen again. This incident is supposed to symbolize the traditional Indian saying that "Gods are slaves to their devotees".

A New Brindaban I See

A new Brindaban I see
And renewed each barren trees;
New flowers are blooming,
And another spring is;new
Southern breezes chase the dew
With new bees roaming .
And the sweet boy of Gocul strays
In new and freshning blossoming ways.
The groves upon Kalindi,s shore
With his tender beauty bloom
While freshed disturbedheart brims o'er
By the new born love o'ercome.
And the new, sweet cary buds
Are wild with honey in the woods;
New birds are singing ;
And the young girls wild with love
Run delighted to the grove
New heats bringing.
For young the heir of Gocul is
And young his passionate mistresses.
Meeting new and fresh love -rites
And lights of ever -fresh desire,
Sports ever- new delights
Set bidyapati's heart on fire.

Vidyapati Thakur

Aagee Maaii, Joogiyaa Mor Jagat Sukhadaayak

Vidyapati Thakur

All My Inhibition Left Me In A Flash

All my inhibition left me in a flash,
When he robbed me of 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!

True, the god of love never hesitates!
He is free and determined like a bird
Winging toward the clouds it loves.
Yet I remember the mad tricks he played,
My heart restlessly burning with desire
Was yet filled with fear!

Vidyapati Thakur

As The Mirror To My Hand

As the mirror to my hand,
the flowers to my hair,
kohl to my eyes,
tambul to my mouth,
musk to my breast,
necklace to my throat,
ecstasy to my flesh,
heart to my home -

as wing to bird,
water to fish,
life to the living -
so you to me.
But tell me,
Madhava, beloved,
who are you?
Who are you really?

Vidyapati says, they are one another.

Vidyapati Thakur

Brooding Love

Madhava:

Your moon-faced love
Had never guessed
That parting hurts.
Radha is tortured,
Dreading you will leave.
Love has robbed her of all power,
She sinks clasping the ground.

Kokilas call,
Startled, she wakes
Only to brood again.
Tears wash the make-up
From her breasts.
Her arms grow thin,
Her bracelets slide to the ground.
Radha's head droops in grief.
Her fingers scar the earth
Bleeding your name.

Vidyapati Thakur

Childhood And Youth

Childhood and youth are mingled both.
Her eyes have taken the road to her ears:
Wily are her words, and her low laugh
As if the moon appeared on earth.
She takes a mirror to array herself.
And asks: 'what is the game of love, my dear?'
How many times she secretly regards her bosom,
Smiling to see her breasts!
First like a jujube, then like an orange,-
Love day by day enfolds her limbs:
O Madhava, I saw a girl surpassing fair,
Childhood and youth were one in her!
Saith Vidyapati: Oh foolish maid,
The wise would say, The twain have met.

[Translated by Anand rswamy]

Vidyapati Thakur

Counterfeit

When you stay before my eyes
You make me feel your love is firm,
But out of sight how different you are!
How long does false gold shine?
Master of sweetness, I know your ways.
Your heart is counterfeit.
Your love is words.
Speech, love and humor
All are smooth
And only meant to tease
When you shed a girl,
Do you laugh?
Are your arrows always
Poisoned with honey?

Vidyapati Thakur

Dawn

Awake, Radha, awake,
Calls the parrot and its love.
For how long must you sleep,
Clasped to the heart of your Dark-Stone?
Listen. The dawn has come
And the red shafts of the sun
Are making us shudder.

Vidyapati Thakur

Dekhu Sakhi Da'I Ma'I Thakalaka Babhana

Vidyapati Thakur

For Heaven's Sake, Listen, Listen, O My Darling

For heaven's sake, listen, listen, O my darling:
Do not dart your cruel, angry glances at me,
For I swear by the lovely pitchers of your breasts,
And by your golden, glittering, snake-like necklace:
If ever on earth I dare touch anyone except you,
Let your necklace turn into a real snake, and bite me;
And if ever my promise and words prove false,
Chastise me, O darling, in the way you want to.
But, now, don't hesitate to take me in your arms,
Bind, bind my thirsty body with yours; bruise me
With your thighs, and bite, bite me with your teeth.
Let your fingernails dig deep, deep into my skin!
Strangle me, for heaven's sake, with your breasts,
And lock me in the prison of your body forever!

Vidyapati Thakur

Gaurii Kee Var Dekhi Bara Duhkha Bheela

Vidyapati Thakur

Ham Nahin Aaju Rahba Eehi Aangan

Vidyapati Thakur

He Promised He'D Return Tomorrow

He promised he'd return tomorrow.
And I wrote everywhere on my floor:
'Tomorrow.'

The morning broke, when they all asked:
Now tell us, when will your 'Tomorrow' come?
Tomorrow, Tomorrow, where are you?
I cried and cried, but my Tomorrow never returned!

Vidyapati says: O listen, dear!
Your Tomorrow became a today
with other women.

Vidyapati Thakur

In The Spring Moonlight The Lord Of Love

In the spring moonlight the lord of love
Thro' the amorous ravel's maze doth move;
The crown of love love's raptures proves;
For Radha his amorous darling moves,
Radha the ruby of ravishing girls
With him bathed in love's moonlight whirls.
And all the merry maidens with rapture
Dancing together the light winds capture
And the bracelets speak with a ravishing cry.
And the murmur of waist -bells rises high-
Meanwhile rapture -waking string
Ripest of strains the sonata of spring
That lover and lord of love- languid notes
With tired delight in throbbing throats.
And rumours of violin and bow
And the mighty Queen's-harp mingle and flow;
And Radha's ravisher makes sweet measure
With the flute,that musical voice of pleasure.
Bidyapati's genius richly wove
For King Roupnaraian this rhythm of love.

[Translated by Sri Aurobindo]

Vidyapati Thakur

Jait Dekhali Path Naagari Sajni Gee

Vidyapati Thakur

Lochan Dhay Phoghayal Hari Nahi Ayal Re

Vidyapati Thakur

Maanini Aab Uchit Nahi Maana

Vidyapati Thakur

My Friend, I Cannot Answer When You Ask Me To Explain

My friend, I cannot answer when you ask me to explain
what has befallen me.

Love is transformed, renewed,
each moment.

He has dwelt in my eyes all the days of my life,
yet I am not sated with seeing.

My ears have heard his sweet voice in eternity,
and yet it is always new to them.

How many honeyed nights have I passed with him
in love's bliss, yet my body
wonders at his.

Through all the ages
he has been clasped to my breast,
yet my desire
never abates.

I have seen subtle people sunk in passion
but none came so close to the heart of the fire.

Who shall be found to cool your heart,
says Vidyapati.

Vidyapati Thakur

Nava Jeban Abhiraamaa

Vidyapati Thakur

River And Sky

Oh friend, I cannot tell you
Whether he was near or far, real or a dream.
Like a vine of lightning,
As I chained the dark one,
I felt a river flooding in my heart.
Like a shining moon,
I devoured that liquid face.
I felt stars shooting around me.
The sky fell with my dress,
leaving my ravished breasts.
I was rocking like the earth.
In my storming breath
I could hear my ankle-bells,
sounding like bees.
Drowned in the last waters of dissolution,
I knew that this was not the end.

Says Vidyapati:
How can I possibly believe such nonsense?

Vidyapati Thakur

Sad Love

The moon spits fire,
Lotuses droop
And loaded with fragrance
Mingle in sad love.

Kokila, bird of spring,
Why do you torture?

Why do you sing
Your love-provoking song?

My lover is not here
And yet the god of love
Schemes on and on.
You do not know the meaning of 'tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow' is my tomorrow
And water
Escapes the dam of youth.

You are in love,
So is your lover,
And your two banks
Are brimming with the flood.

My lover left and I would die
Than wait still longer
For his loved return.

The fragrance of flowers
Enters the city,
Bees sing,
The moon and night enchant,
Yet all are enemies.

Vidyapati Thakur

Sajni Kanha Kein Kahb Bujhaai

Vidyapati Thakur

Sarsij Binu Sar Sar Binu Jarsij

Vidyapati Thakur

Sasan-Paras Rabasu Asbara Ree

Vidyapati Thakur

Season Of Honey When Sweets Combine

Season of honey when sweets combine,
Honey bees line upon line,
From sweet blossoms honeyed feet
Honied blossoms and honey sweet.
O sweet is Brindaban today
And sweeter than these our Lord of May;
His maiden -train the sweets of earth,
Honey -girls with laughter and mirth,
Sports of love and dear delight,
When instruments honey sweet unite
Their sounds soul-moving, and sweet O sweet
The smitten hands and pacing feet,
Sweet the swaying dancer whirls,
Hinied the movement of dancing girls,
And sweet as honey the love -song rings.
Sweet bidyapati the honey sings.

Vidyapati Thakur

Shattered Desire

Swelling breasts, hard, like golden cups.
Those wanton glances have stolen my heart,
O beautiful one, protest no longer.
I am eager as a bee, let me take your honey.
Darling, I beg you, holding your hands,
Do not be cruel, have pity on me.
I shall say that again and again,
No more can I suffer the agony of love.

Says Vidyapati:
Shattered desire is death.

Vidyapati Thakur

Signs Of Youth

Radha's glances dart from side to side.
Her restless body and clothes are heavy with dust.
Her glistening smile shines again and again.
Shy, she raises her skirt to her lips.
Startled, she stirs and once again is calm,
As now she enters the ways of love.
Sometimes she gazes at her blossoming breasts
Hiding them quickly, then forgetting they are there.
Childhood and girlhood melt in one
And new and old are both forgotten.
Says Vidyapati: O Lord of life,
Do you not know the signs of youth?

Vidyapati Thakur

The Moon Has Shone Upon Me

The moon has shone upon me,
the face of my beloved.
O night of joy!

Joy permeates all things.
My life: joy,
my youth: fulfillment.

Today my house is again
home,
 today my body is
my body.

 The god
of destiny smiled on me.
No more doubt.

Let the nightingales sing, then,
let there be myriad
rising moons, let Kama's
five arrows become five thousand
and the south wind

softly, softly blow:
for now my body has meaning
in the presence of my beloved

Vidyapati says, Your luck is great;
may this return of love be blessed.

Vidyapati Thakur

Thinner Than A Crescent

Her tears carved a river
And she broods on its bank,
Hurt and confused.
You ask her one thing,
She speaks of another.
Her friends believe
That joy may come again.
At times they banish hope
And cease to care.

O Madhava,
I have run to call you.
Radha each day
Grows thinner
Thinner than the crescent in the sky...

Vidyapati Thakur

Time And Love

As I guard my honor,
My love in a foreign land
Ravishes beauties
Who belong to others.
Safely he will come,
But he has left me dead.

O traveler, tell him
That my youth wastes away...
If time goes on
Life too will go
And never shall we love again...

Vidyapati Thakur

Twin Hills

Her hair dense as darkness,
Her face rich as the full moon:
Unbelievable contrasts
Couched in a seat of love.
Her eyes rival lotuses.
Seeing that girl today,
My eager heart
Is driven by desire.
Innocence and beauty
Adore her fair skin.
Her gold necklace
Is lightning.
On the twin hills,
Her breasts,

Vidyapati Thakur