Makers of Indian Literature

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VIDYAPATI

Ramanath Jha

Makers of

Vidyapati Thakur, the greatest Maithili poet, lived between A.D. 1350 to 1460. He wrote in Maithili, a language spoken by over five million people residing in the eastern part of Bihar bordering West Bengal. Vidyapati is noted for his 800 Vaishnava and Saivite *padas* or songs, which are rescued from various palm-leaf manuscripts. He was a scholar of Sanskrit, Abahattha (Apabhramsa) and Maithili. His lyrics are full of picturesque, miniature-like descriptions of feminine charm and grace. Rabindranath Tagore remarked that "Vidyapati was a poet of happiness and love was the essence of the world for him." He had also set his songs to music, as he was a court-poet in Shiva Singha's regime for 36 years. Besides his sonorous lyrics, Vidyapati also composed many works like *Purusapariksa*, *Kirtilata*, *Goraksha Prakash*.

This monograph of the great Maithili poet is written by the late Pandit Ramanath Jha, who was a widely acclaimed scholar and critic of Maithili. He was also the convener of the Maithili Advisory Board and a member of the Executive Board of the Sahitya Akademi. Although he had expressed a desire to polish up the manuscript, unfortunately he could not do so due to his sad and sudden demise in December, 1971. In homage to his memory the text of the monograph was published as he had left it.

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MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

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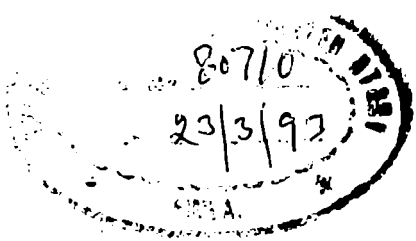

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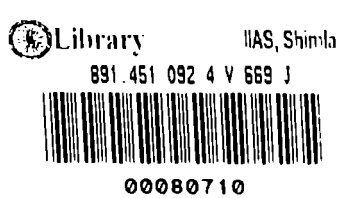

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VIDYAPATI was par excellence a maker of Indian literature. At a time when Sanskrit was the language of culture throughout Aryavarta, he made the spoken language of his region the medium of his poetical compositions, sweet and charming, and invested it with an expressiveness worthy of a literary language. He set the fashion of a new type of poetry for others to follow, and there is no literature of this part of Aryavarta which does not owe deeply to the influence of his talents and craftsmanship. He has rightly been called *Maithila Kokila* or the Cuckoo of Mithila whose sweet warblings ushered in a veritable spring in the poetry of the modern North-Eastern Indian languages.

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Vidyapati was born in the village of Bisapi (in the Madhubani sub-division of the district of Darbhanga) in the heart of Mithila about A.D. 1350 in a family of scholar-statesmen who had been leaders of Maithil society for more than five generations.

The land of Mithila has been since times immemorial famous for intellectual pursuits and speculation, but politically she had been under the suzerainty of Magadh since the Buddha's time. After the Guptas, when the highest ideal of kingship consisted in the performance of an Ashwamedha through the conquest of all the four quarters, every adventurous prince all over India overran Mithila across the Ganges to reach the Himalayas, which formed the northern boundary of their world. Thus Mithila which had no king of her own never enjoyed peace. It is strange how she could maintain her cultural entity inviolate in spite of the political turmoil but it was the Maithil way of life which set no value on political changes so long as the people were free to live their life without let or hindrance. Nevertheless, Mithila could offer no patronage to the arts, on account of which her sons had to go abroad. Therefore, when in 1097, Nanyadeva, the Karnata, came to Mithila from the extreme south, he was received with open arms, specially as he was himself a scholar, fond of the arts and letters. He established a

kingdom of his own and for six generations the Karnatas ruled over Mithila. They identified themselves completely with the people of the land and under their benevolent rule Mithila prospered in peace. The rest of Aryavarta passed under the rule of the Mohammedans but Mithila managed her affairs with such consummate statesmanship that her native Kshatriya rule continued undisturbed. This ushered in an age of renaissance in the life of the land. Lakshmidhara compiled his digest of law, the *Kalpataru*, and Gangesha produced in the realm of philosophy his famous *Tattvachintamani*, both of which set the pattern of scholarship all over Aryavarta, and even beyond, for centuries following.

But the leaders of Maithil society saw that they could not keep off the Mohammedans for long from overrunning Mithila and they set about to re-organise their social life, consolidate their social position, and create a bond of unity that would hold together the different sections, living in the land, into a single nation. When, therefore, Mithila under the intrepid young prince, Harisinghadeva, fell before the onslaught of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq in the Saka year 1245 (A.D. 1323), the last Kshatriya rule in Northern India came to an end; but it was soon found that it was not profitable nor possible to keep Mithila under the direct rule of the Mohammedan Subedar. Consequently, Pherozeshah Tughlaq made over the Raj of Tirhut to Raj Pandit Kameshwar Thakur, and to him and his descendants, members of Vidyapati's family lent their wholehearted support. He belonged to a most respectable family of Brahmanas of Kashyapa Gotra of Shukla Yajurveda with its origin at Oini, a prosperous village still flourishing near Pusa in the district of Muzaffarpur. Vidyapati was born only 27 years after the fall of the Karnatas and almost within a decade or so after the establishment of the Oinabara rule in Mithila.

The Karnatas established their rule in Mithila at a time when the conflict between Vedic and Buddhist systems had been set at rest by the assimilation of Buddhism in neo-Hinduism and the territorial division of castes had crystallised. New social values were being recognised and the old order was yielding place to the new. Old laws were being adapted to suit the conditions of the time by giving them new interpretations. On the other hand, the Mohammedans were advancing gradually from

the west and south-west, and the whole of Aryavarta was threatened with the onslaught of Moslem religious adventurism before which one state after the other succumbed with the result that, soon after the Karnatas settled themselves, the whole of Aryavarta passed into the hands of the fanatic and ruthless Mohammedans. The leaders of Maithil society under the enlightened and benevolent Karnatas used every stratagem to keep the Mohammedans away and set about consolidating their own social structure. A new norm or pattern was planned and promulgated to regulate the entire social behaviour and personal discipline for each caste or group; and though drastic changes were introduced in every sphere of life, these changes were brought about by giving new interpretations to the old rules, so that the whole process seemed outwardly evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Continuity with the past was thus maintained unimpaired, though sometimes only in name.

Vidyapati with the hereditary surname Thakur, which signified possession of landed property, was born in a family of Maithil Brahmanas belonging to Kashyapa Gotra of the Madhyandina Sakha of Shukla Yajurveda. The family had its origin at Bisapi, still a prosperous village some 16 miles north-west of Darbhanga and resided at the same village when Vidyapati was born, on account of which the family is known as Bisaibar Bisapi. This was a family of scholar-statesmen, noted in Mithila for culture in sacred literature and occupying posts of great trust and responsibility at the court of the Karnata kings. Sixth in ascent from Vidyapati was Karmaditya who seems to have joined the court as minister, and his son Devaditya, grandson Vireshwara and great-grandson Chandeshwara held the post of minister of peace and war. Another son of Devaditya, Ganeshwara, was the minister and presided over the council of the feudatory rulers, Mahasamantadhipati, and was the chief of feudatories with the high-sounding title of Maharajadhiraja. Vidyapati records tales of both Vireshwara and Ganeshwara in his *Purusapariksa*, and of the latter he tells how he was renowned all over India for his wisdom. The brother of Devaditya, called Bhavaditya, was a courtier and the brothers and half-brothers of Vireshwara held high offices, such as the Keeper of Treasury, in charge of the Transfer Department, Keeper of the Seal, etc. Vireshwara composed a Paddhati or manual of rituals

for Chhandogas or the followers of Sama Veda, and Ramadatta, the son of his third brother Ganeshwara, for the Vajasaneyins or the followers of Shukla Yajurveda and these Paddhatis govern all the rites in Mithila up to the present time. Ganeshwara is the author of many Smriti works including *Sugati-Sopana* which regulates the Sraddha rites of a large section of the Brahmanas in Mithila up to our own time. The greatest, however, in scholarship was Chandeshwara, the son of Vireshwara. He is the author of the Dharma or Smriti digest called *Ratnakara* divided in seven sections. It deals with law and rituals and has been the ruling authority among the people of Mithila for the last six centuries. Over and above these seven Ratnakaras, Chandeshwara compiled his *Raja-Niti-Ratnakara* to lend support to the Oinabaras who failed at first to receive recognition from the people of Mithila because they owed allegiance to their Delhi overlords and also because, being Brahmanas, they could not take the sacrament of Coronation. On these points as on others Chandeshwara expressed his views with a wonderful realisation of new and hard facts under the changed conditions and thereby laid the foundation of a new society which has survived to our own times through all the stresses and strains of the ages. And Chandeshwara was only one of the band of scholar-statesmen, though, perhaps, the most respected, who moulded the life of the land during this period of renaissance. Vidyapati was the rarest genius of this age of awakening who is immortal as the singer of eternal love but who is no less memorable for the fullness of his personality as man and as statesman.

3

Such were the times of great social and intellectual re-awakening in Mithila when Vidyapati was born and such the family of leaders of that cultural resurgence of which he was, indeed, a worthy scion. Connected most intimately with the newly established ruling family of the Oinabaras, he was all along his long life conspicuously attached to the court of the Oinabara kings and served with great distinction as many as seven Rajas covering four generations of the Oinabaras. He was the most representative writer of his time and the life that he lived and

the works that he did were shaped by the course of events in the Oinabara Courts. The history of the Oinabaras, however, is not well known even in Mithila. It will, therefore, be convenient to relate here briefly the history of the Oinabara rulers of Mithila in the light of which Vidyapati's life and works can be better understood.

After the Karnata rule of Mithila had come to an end with the defeat of Harisinghadeva in A.D. 1323, although the Raj was handed over to Kameshwara Thakur, for some time the Oinabaras were not recognised as the rightful kings. Kameshwara was succeeded by his eldest son Bhogishwara, but his youngest brother Bhava Singha challenged his authority and got the Raj partitioned. Consequently there was antagonism between these two branches. Bhogishwara was short-lived and was succeeded by his son, Ganeshwara, but in the L. Sam. year 252 he was assassinated treacherously through the machinations of the children of Bhava Singha. The sons of Ganeshwara, Vira Singha and Kirti Singha, fled away, and having wandered far and wide, managed at length to move Ibrahim Shah of Jaunpur to avenge their father's murder and restore them to their rightful possession. Bhava Singha, in the meantime, took possession of the entire Raj, got himself acknowledged the Raja Tirhut with the active support of the grand old man, Chandeshwara, and assumed the title 'Singha' as the insignia of royalty. In the traditional history of Mithila, Bhava Singha is regarded as the first Raja of the Oinabara dynasty.

Bhava Singha was succeeded by his son Deva Singha but he was so very much disgusted with the state of things arising out of the family feud that he handed over the Raj to his son, Shiva Singha, who was then only 16 years of age and went away forever to far off Naimisaranya, modern Nimsar near Kanpur, to live a retired life. Shiva Singha proved himself a very noble prince, powerful and popular, assumed independence, and fought many battles with the Mohammedan Nawabs, both of Bengal and Patna. Deva Singha died in the L. Sam. year 293 and then Shiva Singha became a full-fledged Raja but he could reign for only three years and a half. In the winter of L. Sam. year 296-297 he had to fight, most probably, with Ibrahim Shah of Jaunpur who had reached Tirhut with Kirti Singha to avenge Ganeshwara's assassination. In this battle Shiva Singha was

defeated, but he was not found either alive or dead. The victorious Nawab was, however, pleased to leave Tirhut undisturbed with the renewed oath of allegiance of the Raja to the House of Jaunpur instead of to the Emperor of Delhi but the wives of Shiva Singha went into voluntary exile to live under the protection of Puraditya, the Chief of Saptari, now in Nepal, to wait for 12 years for any news of the lost Raja, after which only his funeral rites could be performed under the Sastras. Tirhut was ruled in the meantime by Padma Singha, the younger brother of Shiva Singha, and after his death, by his wife, Viswasa Devi. When in L. Sam. year 309, the last rites of Shiva Singha were performed and his wife became Sati, the Raj devolved upon the next male heir of the Raja and the reversioner happened to be the old Hara Singha, the youngest son of Bhava Singha by another wife. He was succeeded by his son, Narasingha, but there was once again a conflict for the Raj. Narasingha was succeeded by his eldest son Dhira Singha, but after him the Raj went to his younger brother, Bhairava Singha, and not to his son. Vidyapati died sometime about L. Sam. year 330, a little more than 32 years after the disappearance of Shiva Singha when Dhira Singha was the Raja of Tirhut.

We do not know exactly when Vidyapati was born but it is said that he was two years older than Shiva Singha who was fifty years of age when his father died and he became the Raja in his own right on the sixth day of the dark half of Chaitra which was a Thursday in the L. Sam. year 293, corresponding to Saka year 1324, i.e., A.D. 1402. It follows, therefrom, that Vidyapati was born in A.D. 1350 or thereabout, some 27 years after the fall of the Karnata dynasty and within 25 years from the composition of *Varnaratnakara* by Jyotirishvara Thakur. Vidyapati was, therefore, a boy of ten years or so when Ganeshwara was treacherously assassinated and Bhava Singha came in possession of the entire Raj of Tirhut. It would, therefore, appear that Vidyapati was born while Chandeshwara, who was the first cousin of his grandfather, was still alive.

Vidyapati was the great-grandson of Dhireshwara who has been known as a Maha-Varttika-Naibandhika, though none of his works is now available. Dhireshwara was the brother of Vireshwara (father of Chandeshwara) and of Ganeshwara, who was the proverbially wise minister of the last Karnata king.

There are anecdotes about both Vireshwara and Ganeshwara in the *Purusapariksa*. Direshwara's son was Jayadatta and Jayadatta's son Ganapati was the father of our poet.

On the sameness of names it has been held by many that Kavisekhara Jyotirishwara, the author of *Varnaratnakara*, who was the son of Dhireshwara, was the brother of Jayadatta whose grandson Vidyapati was. This is, however, a mistake because Jyotirishwara's father Dhireshwara was the son of Rameshwara while Vidyapati's great-grandfather Dhireshwara was the son of Devaditya and also because Jyotirishwara belonged to Vatsya Gotra while Vidyapati belonged to Kashyapa. Similarly Vidyapati's father, Ganapati, has been identified with Ganapati, the author of *Ganga-Bhakti-Tarangini*, but this too is a mistake. Vidyapati's father Ganapati was the son of Jayadatta while the author of *Ganga-Bhakti-Tarangini* calls himself the son of Dhireshwara. Even Vidyapati has been a common name in Mithila and there have been many Vidyapatis, some with even the same surname Thakur, who have composed works that have come down to us. In any study of Vidyapati, therefore, we must not be led away by the mere name Vidyapati to hold him the great poet of that name unless the evidence is unassailable. This is always full of hazard and, if not heeded, will result in identifications as absurd as the identification of his father with the author of *Ganga-Bhakti-Tarangini* or of the author of *Varnaratnakara* with the brother of his grandfather.

Vidyapati was born in the village of Bisapi, the ancestral home of the family as far back as they could remember, with the result that in the new set-up of social re-organisation Bisapi had been accepted as the place of the family's origin on account of which they were called Bisaibaras. Vidyapati lived at Bisapi all his life, and when Shiva Singha ascended the throne, it was this village Bisapi with the grant of which the Raja rewarded the poet for his conspicuous services to the throne. The descendants of Vidyapati continued to live at Bisapi enjoying its free gift till they migrated some 300 years ago to Sauratha, a village near Madhubani, where they still flourish. The village continued to be in the possession of the family till the advent of the British.

This village Bisapi has been called Garha or a fort which is a sure indication of the fact that, having been the seat of one of the most influential families of statesmen for many generations,

this village was politically very important, and as these statesmen were all scholars of the first rank, the village was conspicuous in the cultural life of the land. The title of the family, which is Thakur, also points to the same fact because Thakur implies possession of landed property and this becomes all the more clear when we remember that at least one of the members of the family, Ganeshwara, has been known all the time as Maha-Samantadhipati.

Born in a family that was closely connected with the court of the Tirhut Rajas, Vidyapati must have found an easy entrance into the circle of the newly established royal household and played even as a child with the many princes of the same age such as Kirti Singha, Shiva Singha, Padma Singha and Hara Singha who all played important roles in the history of Tirhut during the first century of the Oinabara rule of the land. But of all the princes Vidyapati was drawn specially towards Shiva Singha of whom he became a faithful friend, sincere adviser, constant companion and reliable officer. Their association has been a unique feature of the history of the period, specially the literary history of the land, because it was under the liberal patronage and inspiring admiration of Shiva Singha that the genius of Vidyapati found its finest flowering.

We do not know anything about the course and extent of Vidyapati's learning as a student. Traditionally he is known to have read for some time with the renowned teacher Hari Mishra who was the uncle and also the teacher of the renowned Naiyayika of the time, Jayadeva Mishra, popularly known as Paksadhara who has immortalised his uncle Guru in his *Aloka*, the famous gloss on the *Tattva Chintamani* of Gangesha. But Vidyapati does not seem to have spent much time over his studies under a Guru because we find him at Naimisaranya in the entourage of Deva Singha who had retired there to in about A.D. 1368, leaving his young son, Shiva Singha, to rule as his Regent. It was here at Naimisaranya that Vidyapati wrote his first authentic work, *Bhuparikrama*, a work in Sanskrit prose and verse cast in a Pauranika mould, describing the route from Naimisaranya to Tirhut and interspersed with eight tales with an introduction which we find reproduced exactly in *Purusapariksa*. *Bhuparikrama* promises to describe sixty-five countries and tell sixty-five tales but it does not go beyond the first chapter which

describes only eight countries and tells only eight tales. Since these tales are told exactly in the same words in the later work *Purusapariksa*, of course without the Pauranika frame-work and the topography of the countries between Naimisaranya and Tirhut, it is clear that the plan of *Bhuparikrama* was given up because he did not have the opportunity for travel further to describe the countries or to live longer at Naimisaranya to complete the plan. He was soon recalled to Tirhut to join the court of Shiva Singha and plunge head-long into the politics of the time as the confidential courtier of the young prince.

But what Vidyapati learnt under a Guru was only a small part of his education. It was an age of profound learning all over Mithila and people from all parts of Aryavarta used to come over here to receive specialised training in the different disciplines of Sanskrit lore. The mind of a creative artist like Vidyapati could not be kept confined within the narrow grooves of a particular system. With a sharp intellect and receptive mind he learnt more from the world around him than from the world of letters. His very home was a centre of light and learning and scholars from all over the country flocked there to discuss Sastras or Dharma, statecraft or social values, and it appears Vidyapati inhaled learning in the very air that he breathed at home. In fact, he could learn many things without an effort in that enlightened atmosphere that others could hope to do with diligence under competent Gurus. Moreover, his mind was too quick and inquisitive, searching and receptive to stick to one point and concentrate there. His interests were wide and all embracing; his outlook on life was liberal. As soon as he had acquired the necessary training in the rudiments of the Sastras to give him the power of comprehension of the Sastric lore, he gave up the rigours of a regular student's life and went to adopt the hereditary profession of his illustrious family and dedicated his services to the cause of his land and its people.

But his learning did not cease with his student's life. All through his life he continued a voracious reader and from the quotations in the works of his old age, one is struck with admiration and wonder how very minutely he had read the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Puranas, the Agamas and Tantras, the Dharmasastras and Nibandhas, besides poetry and drama from which echoes can be heard in his lyrical songs every now and then. He

held, moreover, the office of Raj Pandit in the court of Shiva Singha which brought him in close contact with all the scholars who came to the court. With a quick mind and retentive memory, he remembered whatever he read and retained whatever he heard and he used them with advantage whenever he required them. Vidyapati was, therefore, a scholar of wide erudition rather than of deep learning. In an age when specialisation was the mark of scholarship, Vidyapati was characterised by liberal versatility rather than by specialised mastery of any particular lore.

And much more than reading, Vidyapati had a passion for writing. In his *Kirtilata*, Vidyapati says: 'How can the creeper of renown spread out to the region of the three worlds if a platform is not constructed with poles of letters." He saw that his illustrious forefathers, though busy as statesmen, were nonetheless famous authors and he was, therefore, fired with an ambition for authorship from his early adolescence. In perfect keeping with the tradition of the house of Chandeshvara, he commenced writing in Sanskrit over which he had a wonderful command even at an early age, and before he was twenty he planned an ambitious work in the orthodox Pauranika style, his *Bhuparikrama*, which is a strange admixture of topography and moral tales exemplifying his ideal of Man. But even before *Bhuparikrama*, Vidyapati seems to have tried his hand on a drama, *Manimanjari* by name, which is very crude in its worksmanship but contains echoes of *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*, *Uttara-Rama-Charitam* and *Ratnavali* and shows at the same time a wonderful insight into the working of a woman's heart which is a sure index of Vidyapati's love poetry. Thus, from his early youth, he continued writing till the last days of his life. His last work *Durga-Bhakti-Tarangini* mentions Dhira Singha reigning when he must have been well over eighty years of age. Even if we leave aside the songs, of which he composed more than a thousand at the least, there are a dozen works which will do credit even to a life dedicated to writing alone. But Vidyapati was not a mere author; he was a man of very wide interests, busy for the best part of his life with the politics of his time. It is clear, therefore, that what he wrote in the *Kirtilata* of constructing poles of letters for the platform for the creeper of renown to spread out was but a statement of his personal ambition, and that he wrote for the very love of renown, which he did achieve in more than an ample measure even while

he was alive and ever since his death.

Vidyapati joined the court of the Oinabaras during the time of Deva Singha or even before, and was at Naimisaranya with Deva Singha but he was recalled to Tirhut when Shiva Singha was consolidating his power in about A.D. 1370. Since then to the last days of Shiva Singha, he remained constantly with the Prince and served him conspicuously with utmost devotion and loyalty as a faithful friend and wise counsellor. Officially he held the post of the Raj Pandit charged with the responsibility to deal with Pandits, to receive them, to look after them, to arrange for their rewards and gifts, etc. but he was actually the intimate friend and faithful counsellor of the Raja, his constant companion and trusted officer. He enjoyed the fullest confidence of the Raja and rendered implicit obedience to him. It is said that once when Shiva Singha was arrested for non-payment of revenue, it was Vidyapati who with Amritakara, the young son of the Diwan, pleased the Nawab with their poetry so very immensely that the Raja was not only released but honoured profusely for his patronage of such eminent poets and decorated Vidyapati with the title Kavisekhara. When Shiva Singha ascended the throne, he rewarded Vidyapati with the grant of his native village and the distinguished title of Abhinava Jayadeva. When going to fight the battle from which he never returned, Shiva Singha entrusted Vidyapati with the care of all his six wives and charged him with their safety and protection. Such was the confidence of the Raja that the poet enjoyed and which he so richly deserved.

Vidyapati was thus in the court of Shiva Singha for about 36 years. In the annals of Mithila, there has not been a more glorious king, puissant but benevolent, strong but popular, and there is a saying common in Mithila[1]:

> There is only one tank, Rajokhar; all else are ditches; there was only one king, Shiva Singha; all else were mere lads.

In the last verse of *Kirtipataka*, Vidyapati says that ladies in every household in every city in every direction sing the glory of Shiva Singha arising out of his victory on the fields of battle. In the last verse of *Purusapariksa*, Vidyapati says that Shiva Singha was

1. *Poshari rajoshari aar sab poshara*
Raja Shivai Simha aar sab chhokara.

victorious in his battles with the lords of Gajjan and Gaura, meaning thereby the forces both of Delhi and Bengal. It appears, therefore, that though in the early years, Shiva Singha was obliged to pay tribute to the Emperor of Delhi direct or through the Governor of Bihar, he came gradually to defy the authority of the overlord, stopped paying tribute, assumed independence and struck his own coins. As a result of all this he had to fight many battles where he was generally victorious. It is perhaps one of these victories which has been eulogised by Vidyapati in his *Kirtipataka*. It was, however, in one of these encounters that Shiva Singha met his end, just as Hari Singha of the Karnatas met his end on account of his intrepid qualities. Fighting, specially with the Mohammedan invaders, had never been the policy of Mithila's statesmen. They had succeeded so long to stem the tide of their advance only with the policy of appeasement. But Hari Singha of the Karnatas and Shiva Singha of the Oinabaras chose to fight them on account of their prowess and impetuosity, and both had to fall down before the overwhelming forces of the invaders.

Vidyapati has described the character of Shiva Singha variously in glowing terms, bordering almost on adulation. At the end of the third chapter of the *Purusaparikṣa*, there are two verses in which Shiva Singha has been compared with Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva, not only in personal appearance, but also in their special characteristics, and Vidyapati says that "rare indeed is the union of all three, of perspicacity, heroism and expert knowledge. In the whole universe, but three persons possess them all", the two gods Vishnu and Siva, and one human being Raja Shiva Singha, Rupanarayana. In the tale[1] of the Discerning Amoroso (Vidagdh Katha), Vidyapati says that Shiva Singha was a discerning lover both of poetry and women like the proverbial Raja Bhoja. This idea occurs again and again in his songs. He is called a cupid on earth[2], a discerning lover of beauty[3], an artist among kings[4] and a liberal patron of arts and letters.[5] Vidyapati goes so far as to

1. *Purusaparikṣa*, Tale No. 39.
2. Songs Nos. 50, 245, 343, 500, 608.
3. Nos. 240, 504.
4. Nos. 122, 243, 294, 343, 364.
5. Nos. 20, 245, 330.

call him the eleventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu[1] and a dispenser of love like Krishna.[2] It is, indeed, a fact that Shiva Singha gave the poet everything that made his life full and happy but the poet had, on his part, done all to make him immortal in his many works, specially in his songs, all over the land through these centuries. In tale No. 26 of the third chapter of *Purusapariksa*, Vidyapati describes very feelingly the relation between a poet and a patron and says that it is only in the words of a poet that the name of a king is remembered through the ages.

From 1370 to 1406 (from the age of 20 till he was fifty-six), in other words throughout the period of his manhood, Vidyapati lived with Shiva Singha and enjoyed life to the full. Like a true genius of the renaissance he was most progressive in his views, saw far ahead of his time and had the courage of his convictions to pursue the ideals in a form that would appeal to the men and women, not only of his own time, but of all time. He enjoyed the confidence of a king like Shiva Singha and under his liberal patronage, he pursued his ideals in all spheres of life in a manner which seems amazing and evokes our admiration.

4

During this period Vidyapati composed most of the songs which have made him immortal and wrote four works, *Kirtipataka* and *Kirtilata* in Abahatta, *Purusapariksa* in Sanskrit prose and verse, and a drama in Sanskrit and Prakrita, *Goraksavijaya* by name, in which he introduced an innovation by providing songs in Maithili, as Kalidasa had provided dance-songs in the fourth Act of his *Vikramorvasiya* in Apabhramsa. If we analyse all these works of his manhood, including the bulk of his love songs, we shall find that there is a point of view running through all of them and that is the "idealisation of 'Real Man', with all the marks of a man, as distinguished from a 'Man shape', a mere brute without only the tail".[3] "Easy enough it is to find a being

1. Nos. 250, 737.
2. Nos. 75, 240, 600, 767. All these numbers here and hereafter are from the Devanagari edition of *Vidyapati's Padavali* by N. Gupta (1910) unless otherwise indicated.
3. *Purusapariksa*, I.9.

in the shape of a man," says Vidyapati, "but a real man is rare."[1] "A man is a man if he possesses manliness but not simply because he is born in the shape of a man. We call cloud the *Falad* or giver of rain only if it gives rain; otherwise it is only a heap of smoke."[2] Even in his love songs the damsels love and pine for 'real men', *Supurusha* as he calls them.

Of a real man, Vidyapati recounts three marks, heroism which consists in valour with discretion and energy, intelligence or good wit and specialised skill; and a real man is one who has attained the four objects of life, namely, righteousness, worldly prosperity, sexual satisfaction and salvation. It would, thus, appear that Vidyapati believed in the balanced growth of the full personality of man. Like a true child of the renaissance, he advocated enjoyment of life in full, and his outlook on life was broad enough to include every aspect of it, balanced properly without undue emphasis on one at the expense of the other. This was, indeed, the life that he himself lived. This emphasis on a balanced life seems to have gripped his mind from the very beginning. The very first work that he composed, *Bhuparikrama*, has 'the test of man' as the main thesis and the last work of this period, *Kirtilata*, is an exposition of a 'real man' only.

But in all this Vidyapati followed in the footsteps of his own forefathers. Though eminent scholars and writers, they were pre-eminently statesmen and all their efforts were directed towards forging a bond of unity among the different sectors of society, so that Mithila might emerge as a nation to withstand the Mohammedan subjugation. They built up a new society on foundations so strong that it assumed the leadership of north-eastern India in matters cultural, and at home it continues, though in a tottering state, up to our own times. And their statemanship lay in their loyalty, not so much to the throne of the Raj of Tirhut, as to the land of Mithila and its people. Through successive generations, they built up the social re-organisation in a planned way and Vidyapati was, indeed, the last of them and the most talented, the rarest genius that Mithila produced during that age of renaissance.

Vidyapati lays so strong a stress on personal character and

1. ibid., I.8.
2. *Kirtilata*, I.12.

extols the fullness of personality because, if society is made up of real men, they will raise society along with themselves. It is something which is within easy reach of every individual, whatever his station in society may be. In the introduction to the fourth chapter of *Purusapariksa*, Vidyapati says, "Follow thou only the path that hath come down in the tradition of the tribe in which by the decree of the almighty thou hast been born." If, therefore, society is made up of 'real men' and there is a strong bond to hold together all the individuals of the society irrespective of caste and creed, sex and age, etc. the social organisation will stand out as one nation which can face any aggression from outside without deviating from the path laid down for the fullest enjoyment of life. And what can be more cementing a factor to bind together all the people living in the land irrespective of all the distinctions of birth and acquirements than the language spoken in the land? Vidyapati took up the language actually spoken in Mithila as the medium of his popular songs, and gave it a literary expressiveness as sweet and entrancing as could be found only in Sanskrit. Sanskrit which had till then been the language of the cultured was confined to a very small minority, the Pandit-class, and the unique pleasure that true poetry in Sanskrit gives was thus available only to that class. Vidyapati made that pleasure easy for everyone to enjoy and as we shall see later on he chose such topics for treatment in his songs which could appeal to the common men and women, including the lowest in society but not excluding the highest and the noblest. A common language has since those far-off days been recognised as the surest mark of nationhood and the adoption of the language of Mithila as the language of his popular songs was, indeed, the first and surest step to turn Mithila into a nation in the truest sense of the term. It is remarkable to note that even today, we of Mithila are recognised as a unit of society distinct from all the rest only on account of our language and that language owes its distinctness and graceful expressiveness to the lyrical outpourings of Vidyapati's poetic heart which had a ravishing effect on all who heard them and became at once the most popular form of literature, not only in Mithila, but even abroad.

Vidyapati was, indeed, very progressive in his views and considering the age in which he lived we would call these views almost modern. He was a staunch protagonist of women's educa-

tion. In cultured families girls' education received proper attention during that age and the ladies of the Oinabara Kings' household were learned. Shiva Singha's wife, Lakhima, Chandeshwara's wife of the same name, and Vidyapati's daughter-in-law, Chandrakala, were poetesses of repute. Vidyapati advocated this on a large scale and he composed *Purusapariksa* with the avowed purpose of providing a text-book "for the delectation of those ladies of the city who display a taste for the mirthful arts of the god of love". Imparting sex-education to ladies was one of the purposes of his love-lyrics. In one of his songs Vidyapati says that he wants to teach the qualities of a Nagari[1], and a 'Nagari', though meaning etymologically a lady of the city, as Grierson translates it, has been used in Sanskrit literature, as also by Vidyapati, to connote a lady who is cultured in the art of love-making.

About education in general Vidyapati held very decided views. In the opening verse of the 16th tale, which is the tale of an adept in arms, Vidyapati says that "by its very nature book-lore is inferior to lore of arms; for it is only when a kingdom has been made safe by arms that the thought of book-lore prevails". Herein Vidyapati clearly advocates compulsory military training and we can admit at once how very urgent and essential this must have been during those days when the security of the land was under a constant threat of Mohammedan invasion, and Mithila had experienced for more than a thousand years the evils of weak defence of the land.

In matters religious Vidyapati has been dubbed a sectarian, some calling him a devotee of Vishnu, others of Siva, but Vidyapati held the most common sense view that "there is but one Almighty and naught is there in the worlds that has not been created by him" and that "only in their names is their sublimity distinct."[3] In his songs also Vidyapati dismisses the idea of distinctness between Hara and Hari.[4] In the introduction to his *Saivasarvasvasara*, a work devoted to the worship of Lord Siva, Vidyapati quotes holy texts to uphold the view that

1. *Nagaripan Kichhu Kahaba Chahaun*, No. 541.
2. *Purusapariksa*, Chap. IV, v. 5.
3. ibid., Chap. IV, v. 10.
4. No. 6 of *Haragauri Padavali* in N. Gupta's edition.

there is no difference between Hara and Hari and that the devotion to one is as good as the devotion to the other. One is free to adore any one form of the Almighty and Vidyapati did adore the Siva-form, but it does not mean that he was disrespectful towards Hari or that he was hostile to His devotion.

Much has been made of the large number of songs that Vidyapati composed in devotion to Siva, but we must remember in this connection that Vidyapati composed songs in devotion not only to Siva but to Vishnu, Devi, Ganga and many other gods of the Hindu pantheon. It is true that Vidyapati was emotionally a devotee of the Almighty in the form of Siva but traditionally he was a Panchadevopasaka, an adorer of the five deities, like every other Smarta Maithil. The reason why he composed so many songs devoted to Siva is simply the fact that of all the gods in Hindu pantheon Siva is the only one whose devotion and worship have been permitted by Sastras for every man and woman of whatever cast he or she may be, from a Brahmana down to the Chandala. Songs in devotion to Siva were therefore the only devotional songs that could appeal to the common men and women irrespective of caste or sex for whom Vidyapati composed these songs.

Vidyapati composed most of his songs during this period and as his fame now rests mainly on these songs, it will be dealt with separately later on. Of the four books composed during this period, all of which are original and creative, the earliest is *Kirtipataka*, a eulogistic poem in old Maithili or Abahatta, as it was then called, recounting the victory of Shiva Singha over some Mohammedan whose name is not given in the manuscript avilable to us. Only one manuscript of this work on palm-leaves is known to exist in the Vira Library at Kathmandu in Nepal and was discovered by Mm. Haraprasad Sastri. It is too dilapidated, broken and incomplete and full of all sorts of obscurities and errors and the late Mahamahopadhyaya Sastri gave it up as worthless for the purposes of reconstruction. Recently an edition of this worthless manuscript has been published by Dr. Jayakant Mishra of Allahabad, but it is of little use. The pagination of the leaves is lost, but the last page is intact and from this it is clear that this is a work of Vidyapati on Shiva Singha's victory but in the body of the MS., there are two introductions, including the benedictory verses. From one it appears to have

been the work of Bhishma who was a poet of renown of the later Oinabara days, and from the other it seems to have been a love-poem composed for the delectation of Arjuna by Abhinava Jayadeva which is a well-known title of Vidyapati. This cannot be *Kirtipataka*, which is a poem of valour and not of love. It appears therefore that in this bundle the leaves of three different MSS., all in old Maithili, have been mixed up, which in the absence of pagination cannot be separated. One of them is a poem of Bhishma; another a love-poem by Vidyapati for Arjuna Raya; and the third is the *Kirtipataka*, of which the first leaf is not there but only the last leaf is clear at the end of the bundle, which has led everyone to suppose that the entire bundle is one manuscript, that of *Kirtipataka*. No work of Bhishma has ever been known nor a love-poem of Vidyapati for the sake of Arjuna Raya.

The second work is *Purusapariksa* which together with *Goraksavijaya* was composed when Shiva Singha was the reigning king. To understand Vidyapati the man, this work is of inestimable value and reflects the spirit of the age also. It was planned quite early, taken up when he commenced writing, and completed when he was mature in his judgement, firm in his convictions and reputed as a writer of extraordinary eminence. In the introduction to this work, which indeed was not there in *Bhuparikrama*, Vidyapati says that he undertakes the preparation of these tales "with a view to the moral instruction of boys of immature understanding and for the delectation of those ladies of the city who display a taste for the mirthful arts of the god of love" (verse 3) and goes on to ask if "the wise man whose intellect has been made clear by skill in learning will not hearken to my work on account of the moral instruction contained therein and of the elegant language in which these tales are couched." These tales are thus of the same category as the tales in the *Panchatantra* or the *Hitopadesa* with only this difference that in the latter works, the tales are fables or legendary stories while in the work of Vidyapati the tales are all anecdotes which had actually happened or at least believed to have happened. There are altogether forty-four tales in the *Purusapariksa* divided into four chapters and the eight tales of the first chapter have been reproduced verbatim from the earlier work, *Bhuparikrama*. Some of them are, indeed, historical and even the tales involv-

ing miracles are such as were matters of common belief. The book was translated into Bengali by one H.P. Raya at Serampore in 1815 and another edition by Sir G. Haughton issued in London in 1826. It was prescribed as a text-book for entrants into the service of the East India Company at the College of Fort William.

And *Purusapariksa* is remarkable for the simplicity and elegance of its language. There was a gap of at least twenty years, if not more, between *Bhuparikrama* and *Purusapariksa*, but there is very little in the style of the entire work to show that the first part of the *Purusapariksa* was the first authentic work of his youth issued in the form of *Bhuparikrama* while the rest of the work was composed during the years of his maturity. This shows his command over Sanskrit expression which was, indeed, inborn. There are many forms in this work which do not conform to Panini's grammar and the work is full of Maithilisms. They, however, help to simplify the language without any loss to its expressiveness. All this leads one to believe that Vidyapati made an attempt in this work to create a common Sanskrit, easy and simple but vigorous and elegant, by the popularisation of which a new style of Sanskrit might come into vogue which could be easily grasped by the common men and women desirous to learn the language without much effort. Had Vidyapati's example been followed, we would have had a common Sanskrit language peculiar to Mithila but in this as in his other views, Vidyapati was much ahead of his time and during the stage of degeneration which followed soon after the death of Vidyapati, the cultural life of the land fell into the hands of the orthodox Pandit class and Vidyapati was ridiculed, his attempts at modernisation decried, his original contributions ignored except in one matter, namely the tradition of lyrical songs in Maithili which came to stay for ever in the tongues of lakhs of Maithil women throughout these six centuries.

Goraksavijaya Nataka was also composed while Shiva Singha was ruling. It is a small drama which could be easily staged. There were many small dramas in Sanskrit written during this age for staging and the comic Prahasana, *Gauri-Digambara*, by Sankara Mishra is perhaps the most famous of them. But Vidyapati introduced an innovation there also, and if followed in the spirit in which it was introduced by Vidyapati, Maithili

would have been the modern Indian language to have established a genuine tradition in drama as it is the first to have lyrical songs. Vidyapati introduced songs in Maithili in a drama in Sanskrit and Prakrit prose and verse. The next step would have been the writing of the complete drama in Maithili, as was done by Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhavadeva in Assam or the long line of poets in the different courts of the Malla Kings of Nepal. Vidyapati, however, could not go further, probably because, with the disappearance of Shiva Singha and the sudden change in his fortune, the very source of his inspiration dried up and his creative genius was rendered infructuous. His successors in Mithila kept up the tradition and went on imitating him but just in the form in which the master had done it. Quite a large number of such dramas were produced during the succeeding centuries but in all these dramas only the songs are in Maithili. A genuine Maithili drama was written in Mithila only in the early years of this century.

The last work of this period and the most controversial of all Vidyapati's works is *Kirtilata*. It is a work in old Maithili or Abahatta prose and verse and purports to be an historical account of the early days of Oinabara rule in Mithila, how Kirti Singha avenged his father's assassination with the help of Ibrahim Shah, the Sharki Nawab of Jaunpur. The account given in *Kirtilata*, however, runs counter to the course of events otherwise known. The assassination of Ganeshwara took place in the L. Sam. year 252 which according to Kielhorn's calculation was A.D. 1371 but according to Vidyapati (who says that Shiva Singha's accession to the throne took place in L. Sam. 293 corresponding to the Saka year 1324) this seems to have happened in A.D. 1361. But even supposing that Ganeshwara was treacherously murdered in A.D. 1371 there was a gap of more than thirty years before Ibrahim Shah became the Nawab of Jaunpur. These years are described in *Kirtilata* as a period of chaos and anarchy in Mithila but we know that these were the days when Shiva Singha was ruling over Mithila and there was peace and prosperity all around under his strong rule.

The theme of *Kirtilata* is the glorification of Kirti Singha who proved himself 'a real man' by his patience and perseverance, valour and determination, but in reality the poem is an eulogy of Ibrahim Shah who has been exalted beyond measure

and raised almost to the sky as the most powerful Nawab and greatest conqueror of his time. As a poem *Kirtilata* lacks those excellences which characterise Vidyapati's poetry and has, therefore, been taken to be a work of his early years but as it could not have been composed before Ibrahim Shah was the Nawab of Jaunpur in A.D. 1400 when Vidyapati must have been fifty years old, this explanation is contradicted by history. Linguistically, *Kirtilata* is obscure in places, partly because the only manuscript from which the different editions of this work have been published is full of errors and obscurities, but partly because it is a mixture of Prakrit and Apabhramsa with purely Maithili words and phrases, sometimes sentences, and interspersed with Persian and Arabic terms specially where the Mohammedan court and army are described. Five different editions of the work have been published and eminent scholars have studied it and given their own views about it. It is not possible to enter into the controversy in any detail here. I have explained my own views at great length in the introduction to my edition of the work and give here below what I feel about it.

It is a fact that Ibrahim Shah invaded Tirhut soon after he ascended the throne when Shiva Singha was the Raja here. It is also a fact that Shiva Singha suffered defeat within four years of ascending the Gaddi, exactly three years nine months after, in the winter of 1405-06. It is, however, not known either from history or tradition by whom Shiva Singha was defeated or why and against whom Ibrahim Shah invaded Mithila. But Ibrahim's invasion and Shiva Singha's fall seem to have happened at about the same time and as Shiva Singha was in possession of the Raj which was claimed by Kirti Singha as his patrimony, it is just possible that Ibrahim attacked Shiva Singha to help Kirti Singha and Shiva Singha was worsted in the battle. If that be the fact, Mithila must have been exposed to the danger of being annexed to the kingdom of Jaunpur and devastated by the victorious army. But Mithila was not annexed and we have evidence to believe that Shiva Singha was succeeded by his brother Padma Singha. Ibrahim Shah was a great patron of arts and letters and the fame of Vidyapati as the creator of Siva-songs called Nachari had reached Jaunpur of Ibrahim Shah.[1] I

1. Search Report for 1944-46 of Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha. *vide*, *Haricharitra*, Virata Parva of Lakhan Seni.

therefore feel that *Kirtilata* was composed by Vidyapati on the disappearance of Shiva Singha, and with this he approached the Nawab, pleased him and saved Mithila from devastation and annexation consequent upon Shiva Singha's defeat.

It must have been very galling to the poet to have to praise a Sultan who had caused the downfall of his patron-friend and put an end to all the dreams of his life, but the astute statesman that he was, his first loyalty was to the land and its people for whose sake he had to suppress his personal feelings and use his talents to save Mithila as he had used his talents to save Shiva Singha once before when he had been arrested for non-payment of revenue. In this light, all the problems of *Kirtilata* are solved. This explains why the poems is full of flattery and imaginary descriptions, avoids scrupulously any reference to Shiva Singha and makes the hired assassin of Kirti Singha's father the target of the Sultan's attack. This accounts also for the large number of Persian and Arabic terms and the absence of those qualities which characterise Vidyapati's poetry, because in the state of anguish at the fall of his patron-friend no poet can be expected to produce a better work. According to this hypothesis *Kirtilata* was composed sometime in early summer of 1406. It is at best an historical romance in which only the basic fact is historical, and was composed to flatter a Mohammedan conqueror.

5

The defeat of Shiva Singha and his disappearance in early 1406 changed entirely the course of Vidyapati's life. He lost the light of his life and the source of all his inspiration. All his dreams vanished with the Raja at once. The anguish of his heart was all the more gnawing because nothing was heard of the Raja either dead or alive. So completely the Raja relied upon him, so much confidence he had in his character, so implicit was his trust in his integrity and prudence, that when he started for the last battle, he entrusted all his six wives to Vidyapati to look after them, and since not even the dead body of the Raja was found, they had to wait for 12 years before his last rites could be performed according to the Sastras. For fear of molestation by the victorious army, Vidyapati sent them to a friend and ally

of Shiva Singha, the Dronabara Raja of Saptari, Puraditya, at Rajabanauli now in Nepal Terai, and followed himself, soon after the affairs of the State in Mithila were settled, to live a life of voluntary exile, looking after the six Ranis, all waiting for the news of the lost Raja for twelve long years.

These years of voluntary exile at Rajabanauli were the darkest period of Vidyapati's life. There was nothing before him except frustration and disillusionment. The creative genius was dead and poetry given up. He wrote a small treatise, of course in Sanskrit, on the forms of letters, documents, etc. for the Raja of Saptari and this *Likhanavali* is the only work of the poet written during this period. The dates given in the forms are all of them L. Sam. 299 which shows that the work was compiled during that year. The book has been published, and the letters and other documents throw much light on the life of the time, social, political, economic and commercial.

At Rajabanauli Vidyapati had nothing to do, and he read extensively the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, etc. Brooding all the time that it was probably as a punishment for the sacrilege he had committed in praising Shiva Singha and his amours as those of Lord Krishna that he had to lose him, Vidyapati began copying *Srimad Bhagavata*, the sacred text of the Vaishnavas of the Krishna cult, which he completed on the 15th day of the bright half of the month of Sravana in L. Sam. 309, which was a Tuesday, at Rajabanauli, just when the period of waiting was expiring. It is written on 576 leaves of the palmtree, each leaf 27 inches long and five inches broad, with five lines on each page and 112 letters in a line in excellent letters, very legible, with only a few scratches or errors corrected, which shows the care and concentration Vidyapati bestowed upon it. The whole manuscript is safely preserved in the library of the Sanskrit University at Darbhanga and is worth seeing. This is the only autograph of the poet available so far.

On the expiry of this painful waiting for 12 years, the last rites of Shiva Singha were performed and though nothing was known as to what became of the other Ranis, Lakhima is said to have burnt herself on the funeral pyre where the body of the Raja made of Kusa grass was burnt. Relieved of the trust reposed in him by the departed Raja, Vidyapati returned home a changed man, sad and old, approaching the Biblical limit of

three score years and ten. Viswasa Devi, the first wife of Padma Singha, Shiva Singha's younger brother, was the ruler of Mithila at the time. Scholars have said[1] that after Shiva Singha, Lakhima, his widow, ruled for 12 years, and then Padma Singha and Viswasa Devi for thirteen. It is, however, a mistake of duplication. As Shiva Singha was not declared dead for 12 years, the question of succession did not arise. Shiva Singha had no issue nor had Padma Singha any. Legally Lakhima, his widow, was his regent to rule in his absence but she lived at Rajabanauli and did not come back to Mithila. She appointed her husband's younger brother to rule in her stead. Padma Singha died soon afterwards and in his place his wife, Viswasa Devi, held the reins of government. But a woman could not hold the throne as the ruler, and therefore, after the last rites of the deceased Raja were over, the question of succession arose and the next reversioner happened to be Hara Singha, the youngest son of Bhava Singha. But it is doubtful if he was alive at the time, in which case his son, Nara Singha succeeded Shiva Singha as the next male heir. Any way, the period of waiting for 12 years has been assigned separately both to Lakhima and to Padma Singha and Viswasa. It may be interesting to note here that beginning from Deva Singha every ruling Raja of the Oinabara dynasty assumed a *Viruda* or title on ascending the throne. Deva Singha was Garudanarayana. Shiva Singha was Rupanarayana, Narasingha was Darpanarayana and so on. No such *Viruda* is available for Padma Singha which shows that he was only a regent and not a full-fledged Raja, nor is it available for Hara Singha and therefore, it is doubtful if he was alive when the question of succession opened after Shiva Singha was declared dead.

Vidyapati was, however, a man of action and did not shirk the duties of life. He joined the court of the Raja of Tirhut and for a little over 20 years that he lived after his return, he attended the court of three kings, Hara Singha, his son Narasingha and his son Dhira Singha. He compiled as many as seven works for four royal persons, two for Viswasa Devi, one for Narasingha, one for his wife Dhiramati, and the last one for Dhira Singha. They are all of them Smriti works, all in Sanskrit, all compilations and not even one original creative work. It appears,

1. Grierson, G.A., *The Test of a Man*, Introduction, p. xii.

therefore, that he joined the court indeed, but not as an active courtier but only as an elder statesman, ready for consultation on matters of law, custom or polity but without holding any independent post of responsibility. Scholars say that he composed some devotional songs, specially those in which the frustration and disillusionment of old age are depicted so very feelingly and so very faithfully, but the sentiments expressed in the songs need not be attributed to his personal experience. Vidyapati has written hundreds of songs on the non-marital love of a *Parakiya* but on that account we must not hold the view, as the Sahajiyas of Bengal have held, that Vidyapati himself was involved in unlawful sexual relations. In Maithili, as in Sanskrit, poetry is only impersonal and what appears the faithful effusion of the heart is due to the intensity of feeling which the poet creates in himself by the force of his imagination.

The two works associated with the name of Viswasa Devi are *Saivasarvasvasara*, devoted to the worship of Siva and *Gangavakyavali*, devoted to the pilgrimage to the holy Ganga in general and places of special sanctity in particular and the rites to be performed there.

Saivasarvasvasara is a famous work dealing exhaustively with all aspects of Siva-worship which is a matter of common interest to the people of Mithila. It is, however, not yet published and MSS. of this work are very scarce. The book on the Ganga is no less important, specially as it includes a detailed discussion of the everyday necessary duties of a Brahmana, the Ahnika. This book has been published in the series, "Contributions of Women to Sanskrit Literature," edited by the late Dr. J.B. Chaudhary. The special feature of both these works, as of all the books of this period, is the wealth of quotations from sacred texts with which each statement is supported. This shows how extensively Vidyapati was well-versed in the sacred literature of the Brahmanas and how prodigious his memory was to have quoted from them so relevantly because books were then in MSS. only and it was not easy to consult a relevant text in a MS. when it was needed in a particular context.

Another work equally exhaustive is *Danavakyavali* published at Varanasi in A.D. 1883 and has been long out of print. It was compiled for Rani Dhiramati, the second wife of Narasingha, and is dedicated to her. In this work the various kinds of gift

have been described and the Sankalpa Vakyas of making them have been set down with sacred texts to support each one of them.

The last work of Vidyapati was *Durga-Bhakti-Tarangini*, which is exactly like the works on Siva, Ganga and Dana and deals exhaustively with the Durgapuja, the popular festival of Mithila. It is stated to have been compiled by orders of Bhairava Singha while his brother Dhira Singha was still ruling. Vidyapati must have been above eighty years of age at the time. No work of Vidyapati has come to light which can be dated later than this.

All these works are on rites and rituals, socio-religious in nature, but there is one work of this period which is on the Hindu Law of inheritance, *Vibhagasara* by name, compiled under the orders of Narasingha Darpanarayana. Chronologically it falls, therefore, between the work on Ganga and that on Dana. What could have impelled Vidyapati to compile this serious work on law when he was almost eighty years of age, specially when there were so many authoritative treatises on the subject? The work is not yet published and has not received the attention it deserves. If we look into the contents of this work, we shall find herein only one point that has been discussed with great stress, and all the rest are the common topics dealt with in any work on the subject and that point is the impartibility of a Raj which should be inherited by the law of primogeniture. Narasingha's succession to his father seems to have been disputed by his other half-brothers claiming partition of the Raj, and one of whom Ranasingha actually assumed the Viruda, Durlabhanarayana. From his sons also Narasingha apprehended danger, and actually all his three sons assumed royalty. It is most likely, therefore, that as Narasingha's grandfather, Bhava Singha, had commissioned Vidyapati's grandfather, the grand old man Chandeshwara, to lend him his support by upholding his royalty of limited status even without undergoing the regular coronation rites, so Narasingha also commissioned the grand old man of his own time, a worthy scion of Chandeshwara's family, to lend him his support and establish with authoritative texts the fact that the succession to a Raj is not governed by the general law of inheritance but by the special rule of primogeniture. And Vidyapati has done it very conclu-

sively by quoting, besides other texts, from the *Nitisara* of Vireshwara, the father of Chandeshwara, and the eldest brother of his own great grandfather. That there was family feud among the Oinabaras of this generation is borne out by a line in the Bhagirathpur inscription of Anumati Devi, dated L. Sam. 394 or A.D. 1503.[1] This Rani was the daughter-in-law of Bhairava Singha, wife of Rambhadra, and mother of the last Oinabara king Kamsanarayana. In this inscription she has been praised for having brought about amity among her kinsmen by means of her great humility and high diplomacy.[2] It seems that in view of the impending attack from the Mohammedan Nawab of Bengal, Rani Anumati patched up the differences among the later Oinabaras, which were coming down for three generations from the days of Narasingha. This work of Vidyapati was thus motivated by political reasons and shows how highly he was esteemed among the learned men of his own time.

There are two more works of Vidyapati, commonly known but not available and they are *Gayapattalaka* or a work on rites to be performed at Gaya and *Varshakritya* on the festivals falling during the year. No complete manuscript of either of these has yet been found, and the fragments that are available do not contain any introduction, not even the benedictory verse with which every work begins. It appears therefore that the fragments available were not compiled in book-form but were mere notes made by Vidyapati from time to time. For the same reason it is not possible to say anything about the time of their composition.

It is remarkable to note in this connection that manuscripts of Vidyapati's works are very scarce in Mithila. No manuscripts of works other than the *Purusaparikṣa* are easily available. *Kirtilata*, *Kirtipataka* and *Goraksavijaya* are available only in Nepal, and there too only one manuscript, a very bad one, is available. Of *Bhuparikrama*, the sole copy known to be there is in the Sanskrit College collection at Calcutta. Of *Likhanavali* no manuscript is available and though the book was printed in Darbhanga some 70 years ago, not even a printed copy is easily available. Of *Saivasarvasvasara* there is an incomplete copy at Darbhanga and a fuller one in Nepal. It appears that,

1. *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, Vol. XLI, part 3, 1955.
2. *Kincoccairvinayannayacca vasalam nila yaya vandhavah.*

except *Purusapariksa*, none of his works was popular in Mithila. It is evident that the songs of Vidyapati so completely eclipsed his other works that his popularity remained confined only to his songs. The Pandits as a class very reluctantly refer to his views and do not recognise him as an authority. The great Naiyayika Keshava Mishra (the grandson of the jurist Vachaspati) refers in his *Daivataparisista* very reverentially to Vidyapati's *Gangavakyavali*, but he too does not miss the opportunity of flinging a gibe at him for his accepting the gift of his native village, Bisapi, from Shiva Singha by calling him, "the greatly covetous beggar of a village", *Atilubdha-nagara-yachaka*. It is interesting to note that even today the Durgapuja in Mithila is not performed according to the treatise compiled by Vidyapati. Clearly enough, Vidyapati was far too advanced in his views for the age in which he lived and was not, therefore, looked upon with due reverence by the orthodox Pandit class.

There are thus four clearly defined periods of Vidyapati's life, each distinct from the other, and the works that he produced reflect clearly the course of life he lived during the period. The first period extending over the first twenty years was one of preparation, and we find him at the end of this period at Naimisaranya in the entourage of Deva Singha. The next thirty-six years, the period of his manhood, were spent at court with Shiva Singha. It was the happiest period of his life when his creative talents were at their best and he produced all those works for which he is immortal. The next twelve years of voluntary exile were the darkest period of his life when he had to suffer silently the deepest anguish of frustration and disillusionment. The last twenty years were spent comparatively quietly at home, as an elder statesman at court, engaged in reading and compilation of sacred texts. All through the changes of fortune and vicissitudes of life, through bright sunshine and darkest clouds, there was, however, one work which he never forgot, which he never ceased to do and that was writing. In his own words, he went on patiently and perseveringly constructing poles of letters to build up the high platform for the creeper of his renown to spread out.

Vidyapati married two wives though we do not know if he married the second at the death of the first. From his first wife he had two sons and two daughters and from the second only

one son and two daughters. His descendants through his eldest son, Harapati, who was a Mudrakastaka or keeper of the Royal seal of some later Oinabara king and composed a work on Astrology, *Daivajnavandhava*, are still flourishing, but not at Bisapi but at Sauratha, a village near Madhubani famous for its annual marriage Sabha where lakhs of Maithil Brahmanas congregate to negotiate and settle the marriage of their boys and girls. The seventh in descent from Vidyapati was Narayana Thakur who transcribed a copy of the *Purusapariksa* which is preserved in the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta on which my edition of that work has been based. It was transcribed in the L. Sam. year 504, i.e., 1613 or 1623 according to Kielhorn in the village of Bisapi from where Narayana's grandson migrated to Saurath. Those flourishing at present at Saurath are 16th in descent from the poet. Many more respectable persons all over Mithila claim descent from Vidyapati through his three daughters, specially from the ones from his first wife.

Many miracles are told about Vidyapati all over Mithila. It is said that, having been pleased with his devotion, the Lord Siva attended upon him as his servant under the guise of Ugana, but this name with a cerebral *ṇ* is there in the famous Rudradhyaya in the Samhita of *Shukla Yajurveda*[1] with which the Lord is invoked. It is also said that, during his last journey to the bank of the Ganga, Vidyapati found himself unable to proceed further, but during the night the course of the river so changed that it passed by the spot where Vidyapati was sojourning during his last night and consequently Vidyapati found himself in the morning on the bank of the Ganga where he breathed his last. It should, however, be remembered that this incident has been told by Vidyapati himself regarding the Kayastha Bodhi in his tale of "A Man genuinely righteous" (Tale No. 30 of the *Purusapariksa*). Whatever may be the fact, it is clear that in the eyes of the people of Mithila the image of Vidyapati was holy among the holiest and indeed people believed him to be holiness incarnate with supernatural powers and capable, therefore, of all miracles.

In one of the songs attributed to him it is said that Vidya-

1. Madhyandina Sakha, Adhyaya 16.25.

pati saw Shiva Singha in dream thirty-two years after his disappearance and that he expired on the 13th day of the bright half of, perhaps, the following Kartika. It is a miracle for a man to tell the date of his death while still alive, but even if this song be one of a later poet, it is very old and believed as a fact by people at large, so that this thirteenth day of the bright half of Kartika is regarded as the date of his death as a result of which this date has been celebrated as the Vidyapati Day by all his admirers all over the country. Vidyapati is said to have breathed his last on the bank of the Ganga near the spot where now stands the Vidyapati Nagar railway station on the Barauni Junction in Hajipur branch of the North-Eastern railway. Vidyapati thus attained the fourth object of life, namely salvation, by breathing his last on the bank of the Ganga. He had lived a full life, lived literally the meaningful life, which he had been advocating all through his life, successful with attainments of the purposes of life—the unfailing mark of a 'real man'.

6

Such was the man Vidyapati; but Vidyapati is immortal as the maker of songs, the first great poet to use the spoken language of the land in the composition of the songs of ravishing melody and exquisite beauty, which opened up, at once, new vistas of Indian poetry. I have, however, always held the view that howsoever great as a poet, it was but a mere part of Vidyapati's personality, and since the whole is always greater than a part, how ever significant it may be, it is essential to know Vidyapati, the man, in order to understand and appreciate him as a poet. It was, indeed, the unique genius of Vidyapati that felt the pulse of the age so correctly, foresaw the possibilities of his talents so clearly, and laid the foundations of a new type of poetry on such strong grounds that it became a tradition for the poets of the succeeding centuries to follow and imitate; but Vidyapati was himself a creature of his own heredity and environment of his own land, his own age, his own society and his own family, because it was from them that his talents took their shape and direction. We are apt to be misled in our appraisal of the poet if we study him in isolation divorced from all the limitations under which he had to work, and may be led away in our

enthusiasm to credit him with things which Vidyapati could never have even dreamt of.

To take a very simple example, Vidyapati used the language actually spoken at the time as the vehicle of his poetical expression, but except in his songs he never used that language as such. In the historical romances, *Kirtilata* and *Kirtipataka*, as also in his songs on Shiva Singha's accession and his victory, which might have been written originally for the *Kirtipataka*, he used a language the that was supposed to have been spoken at some distant past and was, therefore, approved by usage. When Vidyapati says in the *Kirtilata*[1] "Vidyapati's language is like the young moon; this adorns the forehead of the Lord Siva; that ravishes the hearts of the connoisseurs of poetry", we seem to hear the defence of Vidyapati against the attack of his orthodox critics for the spoken language that he used in his songs. But Vidyapati used Maithili only in the songs in his drama also and in *Likhanavali*, he gives all the forms of letters, deeds and other documents in Sanskrit only and not in Maithili which could have been most useful and desirable. But we must remember that literacy at that time was strictly limited to the orthodox class that favoured Sanskrit and among women it was negligible. Vidyapati used Maithili in his songs because these songs were not written and read but were meant to be sung and listened to, and learnt by heart. Even in the songs of Vidyapati we find the spoken Maithili language of two varieties. There are some in the sophisticated language of the court and the elite where *Tatsam* words predominate and pictures are laden with strings of figures of speech. There are, however, other songs which are couched in a language simple, direct and homely with *Tadbhava* or *Deshee* words predominating. Evidently Vidyapati chose the language according to the cultural status of the audience for whom he meant the songs; and to reach the men and women of his time all his songs had to pass through any one of these channels, through the court and courtly circle, through his own household or through the homes of his friends and admirers. Vidyapati does not seem to have written his songs for himself independently of the particular audience for whom they were meant. Later on, when his fame as a song-

1. *Kirtilata*, I.5.

writer spread out, Raja Shiva Singha appointed a young professional musician of his court, Jayata by name, to take songs from the poet, set them to music and give demonstration when prepared on suitable occasions at court or elsewhere. This is the most basic fact about the songs of Vidyapati and we can understand and appreciate the songs of Vidyapati only when we look at them in this light.

And exactly for this reason, the greatest problem in any study of Vidyapati's songs is the question of authenticity of a song ascribed to Vidyapati. This is done generally by the presence of the name of the poet in the last couplet of the song, technically called the Bhanita, which is a special feature of these songs, but in course of oral transmission over the centuries, specially through the uncritical singers mostly women, the Bhanitas have been confused, misplaced and added. Moreover, not all the songs have the Bhanita either. In many collections specially in Nepal, the Bhanita has been left out for economy of space. Even in anthologies made by scholars as far back as the 18th century, we find such confusions which are baffling. In Mithila, the practice of adding the name of Vidyapati at the end is still common. Many lesser poets have purposely given the name of Vidyapati in their songs to give them the prestige of the master's composition. In Bengal, at least one poet wrote all his songs under the borrowed name of Vidyapati.

Therefore no complete collection of Vidyapati's songs has yet been made and it is very doubtful if it can still be made. Vidyapati never collected his songs; they have been floating orally in Mithila, in Bengal, in Nepal, etc. The pioneer work in this direction was done in Bengal where the Padas of Vidyapati were very carefully preserved in the Vaishnava anthologies as depicting the amours of Lord Krishna and the Gopis. The most critical edition of these Padas, and the most exhaustive too, was made by the late Dr. B.B. Majumdar of Patna. The Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad has also been bringing out collections of Vidyapati's Padas. My friend Dr. Subhadra Jha brought out a very valuable collection of these songs as preserved in an old palm-leaf manuscript in Nepal, and before him Pandit Shivanandan Thakur had published a collection which he found in a manuscript in Mithila. A book on Maithil music, *Ragatarangini* by name, compiled by Lochana in the middle of the 18th century

contains 53 songs of Vidyapati and I have published a manuscript of Nepal, *Bhasha Geeta Sangraha*, which contains 77 songs of Vidyapati, 37 of them being altogether new. But all this does not exhaust the songs. I have found two manuscripts in Mithila containing 300 songs, of which some eighty are not yet published and I am just now busy making a critical edition of this *Mithila Padavali* for the Maithili Development Fund of the Patna University. But most of these collections are vitiated by corrupt readings, except the *Bhasha Geeta Sangraha* which is a collection made very meticulously by a Pandit more than 200 years ago. The reason is obvious. All the collections were made either by persons not speaking Maithili or persons who were not learned enough to understand what they were writing. I, therefore, feel that a scientific study of Vidyapati's songs is possible only when the authenticity of the songs and the genuineness of their readings are determined.

We do not know when Vidyapati began composing these songs. The earliest, pointed out so far by many on the basis of its Bhanita, which contains the name of Raja Bhogishwara, is one on the Kandarpa Puja (song No. 850) but it is palpably absurd. Vidyapati was not more than 12 years old when Ganeshwara, son of Bhogishwara, was assassinated in L. Sam. 252. How can it be believed that Vidyapati when he was only ten years old or so composed a highly erotic song depicting the grief of a Virahini, associating therewith Raja Bhogishwara who was of the age of his grandfather? In his first Sanskrit work, *Bhuparikrama*, Vidyapati does not talk of love but in the subsequent sections of the *Purusapariksa* love is the dominant theme even when the tales are meant to exemplify other marks of man. Befitting a disciplined child of a cultured family Vidyapati began writing on love only after his adolescence was over and he had entered manhood.

Vidyapati's songs are of three different categories, each with its own characteristics, the only thing common to all three being the language, which is the language actually spoken by the men and women in Mithila during that age. The most popular of them, which have kept Vidyapati alive in the throats of lakhs of Maithil women over these centuries, are the songs suitable for social functions including the prayer songs of the family deity with which any auspicious function begins in Mithila. Next to

them are the songs devoted to Lord Siva, including the songs depicting Siva's marriage and family life. Vidyapati created a new variety of such songs called 'Nachari' which became so popular and were so widely renowned that a poet of Jaunpur praised Vidyapati as their creator and Abul Fazl in his *Ain-i-Akbari*[1] calls all the songs of Vidyapati, even those that depict the violence of the passion of love, under the general name of Lachari. Those songs are still very popular with the devotees of Siva all over the country and can be heard in any temple of Siva every day. The last but the most important on which his fame chiefly rests are songs in which the various forms and phases, moods and situations of sexual love are depicted, some with reference to Lord Krishna and the Gopis, and others to men and women in general.

Before, however, we enter into these different categories of Vidyapati's lyrical outpourings, it is pertinent to give an account of the background in which these overflowings took place and the success achieved by the experiment. Of all the titles with which Vidyapati has been decorated over these centuries there are two that are authenticated by his drama *Goraksavijaya*, the copperplate grant of Bisapi and by tradition, over and above by the Bhanitas of those many songs which are genuinely his. Vidyapati was called Abhinava-Jayadeva or 'a modern Jayadeva' during his own lifetime and also Kavikanthahara or 'a poet who was the garland for the throat'. Dr. B.B. Mazumdar who has discussed in detail the many titles associated with Vidyapati has come to the conclusion that these two only were genuinely his and his only. Both these epithets are meaningful, and if we analyse and assess their connotation we shall visualise clearly the ideals that inspired the poet in the experimentation and the immediate ravishment with which this experiment enraptured the heart of all those who listened to them.

It is an established fact, which does not require a reiteration, that for centuries before Vidyapati appeared on the scene there were two streams of poetry running side by side all over North-Eastern India in general, and Mithila in particular. Both these streams were entertaining and not edifying. The one was the stream of classical Sanskrit poetry coming down from the remo-

1. Gladwin's translation, edited by Jagadish Mukhopadhyaya, p. 730.

test past of which the most outstanding representative is the *Amaru Sataka* (the Century of Amaru) of which it has been said that a single verse is equivalent to a hundred treatises. This was in Sanskrit, modelled on Sanskrit rhetoric and composed in Sanskrit metres by Sanskrit poets, and patronised by the cultured society and the various courts all over the country. Sanskrit being the lingua franca of the entire Bharat, this kind of poetry had an all-India appeal, though confined to that class only that knew Sanskrit. This poetry was lyrical and mostly erotic though eulogistic and devotional lyrics too were in vogue. The other stream was the folk poetry in the spoken language refined by usage, the earliest representative of which we have in the *Gatha Saptasati* but which developed in the eastern region of Aryavarta through the Charchari dance-songs of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasiya* to the songs of the Vajrayana Siddhas, of the Pal days, of which a collection has been published as *Bauddha Gana and Doha* which are characterised by the fact that they are all set in various Ragas peculiar to this part of Aryavarta, and mention the poet's name at the end which came to be known as Bhanita later on.

Jayadeva was the first poet to attempt a fusion of the two and give a new variety of Sanskrit poetry. The language was still Sanskrit there; the theme was the amours of Lord Krishna as depicted in *Srimad Bhagavata* though enshrined in the Prakrit poetry since the days of the Gathas; the style, manner and the attitude were the same as in the classical Sanskrit poetry. Only the technique was the one used in folk-poetry; they were songs to be sung, and were set in the local Ragas with the Bhanita used for the first time in Sanskrit poetry. There was such a happy fusion of true poetry and ravishing melody in the new poetry that it was at once popular, and even today people are enraptured with the songs of *Gitagovinda*, even if they do not understand the meaning, simply by their sweet diction and melodious rhythm.

With the advent of the Karnatas, music and dance received a great impetus in Mithila and from *Varnaratnakara* of Jyotirishwara we gather what an important place they had in the social life of the time. Songs became an integral part of the social life of Mithila which they still are, and there is no function in a Maithil home, religious, social or seasonal, for which there are not songs with tunes peculiar to them.

Vidyapati took the cue from Jayadeva. He adopted the tech-

nique of songs of the folk-poetry coming down from the Pal days which Jayadeva had adopted almost two hundred years earlier; he adopted the language of the land as actually spoken and not its refined form, approved by usage, which he himself sometimes used specially in his historical romances. But the theme was taken from classical Sanskrit poetry with its style, manner, tone, etc. There was a true fusion between the two streams of poetry. He went one step still further than Jayadeva towards modernisation and made available the pleasure of Sanskrit poetry even to those who did not know Sanskrit. In Vidyapati's compositions, both the sound and sense appealed to the common men and women and not the sound only. It was in this sense that Vidyapati was an Abhinava Jayadeva because Jayadeva's innovation popularised only the sound element but Vidyapati really modernised it by popularising both the sound and sense.

Vidyapati was like the bright sun in the firmament of Maithili poetry with whose rise in effulgence all the lesser planets and stars disappear from view. All the compositions of his predecessors, most of those of his contemporaries and some of those of even his successors, all of them floating orally among the connoisseur of the art, have perished or they may still be floating with the name of Vidyapati replacing that of the author in the Bhanita. We can imagine that Vidyapati had a sweet voice and talent for singing. Hearing songs being sung by the ladies of his family, he would compose songs even as a lad and give them to the ladies to sing. He must have, therefore, begun with the songs for the social functions and as he grew into manhood he would have composed erotic songs for his friends, for his friends' wives or for his own wife, which moved about in private circles. Vidyapati wrote most of his songs, at least in the early stage, for the women-folk who had to sing them, and therefore, required them. Vidyapati was not a poet by profession; he was a man of the court, and when his reputation spread, he began to compose songs for the king; but there also it was the queens who learnt them with avidity and required them enthusiastically because the men-folk could get the delight of these songs in Sanskrit lyrics also but the women-folk, once they had experienced the exhilaration of poetic delight which his songs afforded, could not be content with what he had given them but

wanted more and more of them. Vidyapati had the wonderful insight into a woman's heart and he depicted the secret emotions of a woman so very faithfully, realistically and feelingly that women found in them their own portrayal. It was, therefore, the women who learnt these songs and transmitted them from mouth to mouth till some one put them down in a note-book. Till very recently every cultured family in Mithila had its own book of songs, and modern editions of these songs have mostly been made from these family song-books. Vidyapati hardly, if ever, wrote down a song; no song written in the poet's own hand has yet been found or heard of. And since these songs were then, as now, adornments for the throats of the lovers of these songs, he was very affectionately and correctly called Kavi-Kanthahara.

7

The Vyavahara songs, as the songs meant exclusively for social functions are called, are of as many varieties as there are functions, and each variety has a tune peculiar to it. These songs have been the most popular, and therefore, the most floating, and are found very rarely in writing. The authenticity of these songs, therefore, is most doubtful. Except a few devotional songs in praise of or prayer to the goddess with which all festive functions in a Maithil household begin, some songs describing Siva's marriage, which are sung on the occasion of marriage, and some Uchiti songs which are sung to the bridegroom by the ladies of the bride's party on behalf of the bride in the form of an appeal to look upon her kindly and excuse her faults —except these varieties of Vyavahara songs, none others, genuinely Vidyapati's, for any festive occasion, are available in any old and reliable collection. People have come even to doubt if Vidyapati actually composed any such songs as are popularly attributed to him. One such song has, however, been available to me on a palm-leaf[1] not less than 400 years old; it is a typical Vyavahara song, the prototype of a host of such other songs sung still all over Mithila to the bridegroom at the time of feeding

1. *Some Unpublished Maithili Songs*. Ganganatha Jha Research Institute Journal, Vol. II, Part 4, p. 408. Aug. 1945.

for full one year after the date of marriage or even afterwards. These songs called 'Joga' describe the various methods of spell or charm calculated to make the husband subservient to the newly married wife. The central idea underlying this type of songs is given by Vidyapati in the refrain here: "Listen carefully, Oh my daughter, to the devices of charm by virtue of which your (newly-married) husband will not fall into the influence of another (girl)" and goes on to give recipes for a herbal concoction for drink, an incense to be burnt, and a special collyrium to apply to the eyes, processes described in any work on erotics to bring a man under the control of a woman. For sheer weirdness it can be compared with the Witches' song in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

It is sad that these songs have not received the attention which they deserve. Partly it is due to their non-availability, and partly to the fact that belonging as they do to the social life of the land, they can be relished only in that social background. These social functions have certain rites peculiar to each, and although they are nowhere recorded, they are known to the ladies who officiate over these functions. Those rites are described in these songs and they serve, therefore, as guides. When composed, these songs incorporated within themselves the various rites, processes, etc. concerning the function, and in course of transmission these songs served the purpose of lessons for the new generation. Thus these songs kept the function alive in the throats of the women-folk and saved them from being forgotten or confused. Thus they gave an unbroken continuity to the social functions, set a standard for them, and brought about uniformity in them. They have, therefore, a cultural importance of their own. Poetically they are simple, sensuous and straightforward without any effort for embellishment. They evoke homely emotions and sentiments, and appeal to the commonest people as well as the most sophisticated alike because the occasion is equally important for them all. Such are songs suitable for investing a boy with the sacred thread, for the joy of the forefathers is described on the occasion when a new child is being initiated into Duija-hood; songs (called Samadaona) to be sung when a married girl goes to her husband's house, in which the feelings at the parting are portrayed; birth-songs (called Sohara) which are sung on the occasion of the

birth of a son, rarely on the birth of a daughter, expressing the joy of the members of the family, specially the sisters of the father of the child who press the parents of the child, specially the mother, to give them presents; rains-songs (called Malara or Pavasa) which express the grief of the young girls whose husbands are away and they spend time in recreation by swinging and so on. These are all sentiments which are common to every member of society, feelings shared by all, and couched as they all are in simple, sensuous and sweet words with a lilting music each peculiar to itself, they electrified the women-folk, then as they do now, and thousands of such songs have been composed by hundreds of poets since Vidyapati's days, but all on the pattern set by the master.

Vidyapati's Siva-songs are no less popular, specially as one kind of these songs, those describing Siva's marriage with the daughter of the Mountain-King, have been treated by the women-folk of Mithila as marriage-songs. He composed, however, a number of songs of devotion to Siva in a specific tune which devotees sing in dance in accompaniment of Damaru[1], sacred to Siva, and they are called Nacharis. It is not the subject-matter that characterises a Nachari, it is the tune which is peculiar to it. One can see a devotee in any Sive temple dancing in ecstasy while singing a Nachari. Mithila is mostly Saiva and even those who profess devotion to Sakti adore Siva alike. Vidyapati's Siva songs have led people to call him a Saiva and believed in stories of miracles like the one that Siva attended upon him in the guise of a servant called Ugana.

Thematically Vidyapati's Siva-songs are of three kinds. There are the prayers and praises of the Lord, so sincere in feeling, so penitent in tone, so completely surrendering in attitude, so simple in expression and so sweet in diction and lilting in tune, that they are universally popular, specially as the adoration of Siva is permitted to all Hindus irrespective of caste and sex. "Oh Bholanath, when wilt thou allay my agonies?"[2] or "How shall I cross over the end of this life? There appears no end to the sea of life, Oh Bhairava, take hold of the oars."[3]—are some

1. Damaru—A pan-like drum.
2. *Padavali*, edited by Benipuri, No. 243.
3. ibid., No. 239.

of the popular songs which evoke the pathos in every one when he thinks of his own helplessness. In many of his songs Vidyapati has depicted the incongruity in the life, looks and deeds of Lord Siva which are humorous in extreme. Siva is said to have burnt Cupid but taken over his wife Gauri as one-half of his own body (in the form of Ardha-Narisvara). Alluding to this, a friend of Parvati asks Siva[1]—"Oh Sambhu the benevolent, Oh Sambhu the beneficent, thou who destroyedst the five-arrowed (Cupid), how is it that on one side thou hast (man-like) beards and on the other side (woman-like) breast—what a nice combination. Indeed, on account of thy intense desire to possess the great qualities of Gauri, thou tookst her into your own body, ignoring the infamy that this will give rise to."

Secondly, there are the songs describing the various stages of Siva's marriage with Parvati—Siva with five heads and three eyes, the third with fire burning therein; the Ganga flowing from his matted hair; with the digit of the moon on the forehead; the whole body besmeared with the ashes of the cremation ground; with the hide of an elephant for the cover of the body, and a bullock to ride on; with serpents coiled round his neck and arms and hanging all over his body; with his throat black on account of taking poison to which he was addicted inveterately; with the ghosts, Pisachas and other such strange Ganas as his followers—such was Siva as old as eternity and could not therefore be a suitable match for the sweet, pretty daughter of the king of mountains. Kalidasa in his *Kumarasambhava* describes how Lord Siva went in the guise of a young Brahmana student boy to Parvati while she was engaged in austere penance to gain Siva as her husband and to test the sincerity of her love dissuaded Parvati from wishing such a disparate union. Disparaging Siva as an old ugly mad mendicant, the Brahmana boy shows how Siva lacks all those qualities which are generally sought in a match for any young girl, more so for a princess. Vidyapati has taken his cue from Kalidasa and what Kalidasa has said in seven verses[2], Vidyapati has described in dozens of his songs in different forms of invective, full of sarcasm, from the mouth of different persons, sometimes from

1. *Haragauri*, N. Gupta's Edition, No. 19.
2. *Kumara Sambhava*, canto V, vv. 66-72.

the mouth of the mother of Parvati, sometimes of her friends, sometimes from the ladies of friends' families, but always disparaging the personality of the Lord, his age, his looks, his attributes and his associations. Says the mother of Parvati[1]—"He who has only to beg from house to house every day since he was born, how can he think of marrying, and he will be the bridegroom for Gauri—this is intolerable" or "Who gave the name Sankara (which means one who brings about good) to him who has five heads, who destroyed the demon Pura, who is so dreadful with three eyes with fire burning in the third, and nobody knows in which family he has been born, etc."[2] Says the lady of the neighbourhood—"Oh my friend! What a mad bridegroom has Himavat brought home – it is stupefying to think of it. The mad old fellow does not ride a horse, howsoever well the horse is caprisoned, etc."[3] All this is highly suggestive when we remember that in Mithila the bridegroom is even today sought after and brought home for marriage by the guardian of the bride with the help of the match-maker, and in these songs the famous sage Narada in the form of the match-maker is the butt of the ladies' attacks for negotiating such a disparate match. It is in this social background that these songs have an everlasting univeral appeal for the ladies of Mithila.

And when Siva arrives for marriage, his person, his accoutrements and his associates create a good deal of confusion and amusement. There are various rites in a marriage which ladies perform, over and above the Vedic rites prescribed in the Sastras and many of the local rites have become standardised in the songs of Vidyapati which have been sung over these centuries all over Mithila. Ladies go forward to receive the groom, but they all blush and move away when they find him stark naked and only wrapped in an elephant's skin. They have to catch hold of the bridegroom by the neck with a wrapper but they are scared away by the hissing of the black serpent hanging by his neck. They have to put collyrium to his eyes but their hand is burnt in the fire burning in the third eye. Says one of the ladies assembled to perform the rites[4]—"What a bridegroom has

1. *Haragauri*, No. 14.
2. *Bhasha Geeta Sangraha*, Appendix No. 3.
3. *Haragauri*, No. 13 in N. Gupta's edition.
4. *Bhasha Geeta Sangraha*, No. 67.

been brought by the ascetic (meaning the match-maker, Narada) on seeing whom Gauri has been so deeply enamoured! Fire is burning in the eye; where shall we put the collyrium; there is the pool of the Ganga on his head; how shall we perform Chumaon[1]? Ghosts have come in the marriage party; how shall we feed them? He has five mouths; to which shall we apply the Mahuaka[2], etc." These are all local rites but even in the performance of the Vedic rites there was confusion. Says a spectator[3]—"It was a sight to see when Siva went over to the Vedi.[4] As the *ankusi*[5] was thrust into the matted-hair, the Ganga began to flow down and all the materials collected for the rites began to float away. The bullock of Siva saw the Kusa grass and began to nibble at it. The fried rice grains attracted the attention of serpents which began to hiss dreadfully on account of which the bullock was frightened, etc."

The suggestiveness of all these popular songs can, however, be properly understood and appreciated only when the background of the peculiar social life is generally known. This is the reason why they have not yet received the attention they deserve outside the Maithil Society. They depict, however, an abundance of fanciful situations, highly amusing and entertaining.

And lastly, there are the Siva-songs depicting the domestic life of Siva, more properly of Parvati in the household of Siva. Looked at from the wordly point of view, the predicament of the housewife, Parvati, is, indeed, unenviable. The head of the family is an old man without any possession and addicted to poison. He himself has five mouths and of his two sons, one has six mouths and the other has the elephant's trunk. Parvati

1. Chumaon is a practice common in a Maithil household which consists in moving round over the head of a person of a round flat basket made of split bamboo pieces and full of paddy, bananas, coconut, betel leaves, curd, etc.
2. Mahuaka which is a Maithili form of Madhuparka is a sweet porridge prepared with rice boiled in milk which a bridegroom is made to lick by the mother-in-law.
3. *Bhasha Geeta Sangraha*, Appendix No. 2.
4. Vedi is a specially built up spot in the courtyard where the Vedic rites of Homa, etc. are performed after the girl is given over to the bridegroom.
5. A hook made of lac and coloured, which is hung by the pig-tail (Sikha) of the bridegroom while he is performing Homa.

herself has taken the lion, Lord Siva the bullock and serpents, the eldest son a peacock and the youngest son a mouse and all these animals are sworn enemies of one another. It is a problem to keep peace in the household and provide food for all. Says Parvati—"Oh my mother, how shall I live on; there is nothing in the house except a bag full of ashes. With no possession, not even a piece of cloth to put on; no one to lend any thing; sons oppressed with hunger; what shall I give them to eat? The serpent lives on air and the lord on poison. The master and the servant have no anxiety but how shall I live on, etc.?" To Siva himself Parvati says[2]—"I have repeatedly advised you, my lord, to take to farming. Unless you have food grains, you cannot do without begging which in a degradation in itself, etc." In dozens of such songs Vidyapati has depicted a realistic picture of abject poverty and helplessness and couched as they all are in the simple language spoken actually by common men and women, they have a special appeal to all the women-folk for whom the trials and patience of Parvati evoke sincerest sympathy. No wonder, therefore, that the image of Parvati has been the ideal of all housewives in Mithila and they all adore her for managing a successful domestic life.

It is, however, important to note that in all these Siva-songs, whether they are satirical in tone or incongruous in content, the image of the Lord in all its peculiarity is brought forth and to that extent they serve the purpose of bringing before us those special features of the Lord, to meditate on which is an important part of devotion. Whatever they may appear outwardly, they are essentially devotional songs. Some of them are dreadful; many of them are humorous; sometimes they are even erotic; but a strain of wonder runs through them all which helps to evoke the feeling of devotion, and it is a common sight in any temple of Siva to see a devotee singing one of these songs while dancing in ecstasy.

And these Siva-songs are a special feature of Maithili literature, the like of which we do not find in the literature of any other language even of this region. They are original contributions of Vidyapati to the Indian literature so much so that for

1. *Bhasha Geeta Sangraha*, Appendix No. 4.
2. *Haragauri*, No. 31.

quite a long time the name of Vidyapati was associated in the public mind with his Nacharis, which is clear from what Lakhanseni said in the 15th and Abul Fazl in the 16th century. In Mithila this became the most popular form of devotional poetry and in the course of these five centuries or more, thousands of such songs have been composed by hundreds of poets all over Mithila. In Nepal it became a fashion to compose all devotional songs in the form of a Nachari and we have in the collections preserved in Nepal the Nachari of Vishnu, the Nachari of Ganesha, the Nachari of Surya and the Nachari of Durga, etc.

It is sad to observe that in modern times very little attention has been paid to this aspect of Vidyapati literature, as if these songs were inferior in poetry and not worthy of the great master that Vidyapati was. Almost a hundred years ago Vidyapati caught the attention of scholars of the new light, and English scholars like Beames and Grierson followed by Bengali scholars like Sharadacharan Mitra and Nagendranath Gupta began to study Vidyapati as a poet in the most critical manner. They, however, studied of Vidyapati only that which was available in Bengal in the books of Bengal Vaishnavism, and there only the erotic songs of Vidyapati were available in which the amours of Krishna are described. That set the pattern of Vidyapati studies and most unfortunately the scholars of Mithila also followed in the footsteps of the Bengali admirers of Vidyapati. Only recently I have read with great delight the works of Dr. Sankari Prasad Basu of Calcutta in which as much attention has been given to Vidyapati's devotional Siva-songs as to his erotic Krishna-songs and one can hope that efforts will be made to collect as many Siva-songs of Vidyapati as are still not all lost and a serious attempt will be made to study these songs critically in the true Maithila perspective when alone they can be properly understood and correctly adjudged.

8

It is, however, a fact that the fame of Vidyapati as a world poet today rests solely on his love lyrics. He was indeed a sweet singer of eternal love—physical or sexual love which consists in the urge for mating of persons of both the sexes. This is the most elemental of all human feelings, the one on which the process of

creation rests and has been the most popular form of poetry at all times all over the world – Sanskrit literature has been very rich in erotic poetry and the beginnings of this poetry can be traced back to the Prakrit lyrics of pre-Christian days. Vidyapati, however, took it direct from Jayadeva whose *Gitagovinda* is a poem depicting the various aspects of sexual love of Lord Krishna and the Gopis of Vraja land.

But the love songs of Vidyapati have been so popular, not only because of their universal theme, but also because of the superb craftsmanship of the master poet. There are three different elements in these songs, each important in itself, and all three combined together have given these songs the unique popularity which has transcended all the limits of time and space.

The first in importance is, indeed, the theme. All his songs are lyrical or what is technically called in Sanskrit rhetorics as 'Muktaka' poetry, in which each poem is complete in itself. These songs, therefore, depict the various moods in the sexual life of a man and a woman. By the force of his imagination Vidyapati visualises the particular mood which caught his fancy and depicts it so very truly, realistically, feelingly and sympathetically that everyone feels his own self portrayed there in the circumstances described therein.

Secondly these songs are couched in a language which is sweet, rhythmical and melodious. The words are chosen with the utmost skill, the right word in the right place, appropriate in the context, simple, direct and perspicuous but mellifluous all the same. With a preponderance of short vowels and liquid consonants, Maithili, like Bengali, is a very sweet language and the credit for this goes primarily to Vidyapati who so moulded the forms of words that all crudities of the Apabhramsa period were shorn off and the flow of words was soft and rhythmical. The nature of words in a song of Vidyapati is determined by the kind of audience for whom the song was meant, but whether the word is Tatsam, Tadbhava or Deshee, it is soft, sweet, simple and touching at once the heart while pleasing the ear. Also, Vidyapati had the talent to make the sound follow the sense so that even if we fail to understand the meaning we can at once perceive the kind of feeling that pervades the song.

Thirdly, the songs are all set in different Ragas peculiar to the eastern region of India. The Ragas used by the Baudha

Siddhas in their Gana, those used by Jayadeva in his *Gitagovinda*, those mentioned by Jyotirishwara in the *Varnaratnakara* are all of the same variety as used by Vidyapati. In Mithila under the Karnatas, music received patronage under which it was cultivated extensively and from what Lochana says in his *Ragatarangini* it is clear that there was an independent school of Maithil music which had certain characteristics, e.g., it was always sung in chorus and in *vilambita laya*, etc. etc. Vidyapati contributed largely to the development of this music. He took the Ragas as they were used and provided them with tunes at once sweet and melodious so that there were different tunes even under one Raga. The versification of songs was based on the time taken in reciting a word and consequently the long and short vowel sounds depended upon the mode of recitation and was never fixed. Lochana in his *Ragatarangini* says that the metre of any song of Vidyapati is the same as the name of the Raga, and this has been the view accepted all along, but if the metre is based on the arrangement of words in a line this view of Lochana does not seem to be quite accurate because the same song is quoted under different Ragas by different masters according to the mode of singing, and therefore it is not quite relevant to call the same arrangement of words by different metres, though the different arrangements of sounds of a song can place it under different Ragas. Vidyapati has, however, in his songs given us divers varieties of the same Raga, and since most of them were new innovations they became popular not only for the theme or contents but also for the new music that they provided.

Vidyapati classified his songs on the basis of the Ragas. When any one of them became popular, later poets imitated it and in this way many varieties of Vidyapati's popular songs became the types and came to be known under various names. One example will make the point clear: *Khandita* is a type of Nayika in Sanskrit literature who is cross with her lover whom she has found involved in the love of another lady and the lover appeases her by all means at his command. Vidyapati in some of his songs describes how the lover having tried all through the night to appease her tells at the end that the night is coming to the end yet she has not relented. This type of song became very popular and was sung in a tune suitable for early morning (called Prabhati). Later poets followed this pattern till this kind of song

came to be known as 'Mana', which is an important kind of Maithili song which every poet has composed in exactly the same tune. Thus has developed various kinds of songs under different names, all suggestive of the theme and with their peculiar tunes, but to Vidyapati these names were unknown. What was important for him was only the tune, and this was one of the most potent reasons why his songs leapt into instant popularity. These tunes electrified the people; the sweet rhythmical flow of the soft words gripped their mind; and when they easily followed the sense through the incantation of the words, their soul was filled with true poetic delight. To enjoy the songs of Vidyapati to the fullest extent, one must listen to them when they are properly sung. In reading his songs we can get only two thirds of the delight. But by reading them in translation, we will miss the magic of the music and the incantation of the words and receive only one third of the delight that these songs are capable of yielding.

It has to be emphasised that the theme of Vidyapati's erotic songs is love, physical love, the sexual love of man and woman, without any ulterior meaning either spiritual or mystic. It is the greatness of his genius that his words have different import for different sets of people. To Chaitanya and his followers these songs described the amours of Lord Krishna, and since the recitation of the Lila (diversion or pastime) of the Lord is a part of adoration, these songs have been known in the Vaishnava circles of Bengal as purely devotional. To Grierson and persons like him these songs are mystic like those of Kabir where the craving of the soul for union with the Lord has been described in terms of sexual love. But only in less than half the songs of Vidyapati is there a mention of Krishna and Radha, and even there only the names are mentioned. Followers of Chaitanyadeva, however, treat all these songs as referring to the amours of Krishna and Radha whereas we find that in many songs[1], Vidyapati has meant by such terms as Kanha, Madhai, etc. his patron Shiva Singha whom he calls the eleventh incarnation of Vishnu. In any case, Krishna is only the type of the hero and Radha or Gopi of the heroine of the Sanskrit poetics.

In fact, Vidyapati composed these love lyrics on the pattern

1. Songs Nos. 35, 164, 175 & 177 in Mitra and Mazumdar edition.

of Sanskrit literature. In the fragment of the work, published as *Kirtipataka*, there is a passage[1] wherein it is said that because the Lord had to suffer separation from Sita in his Treta incarnation, He appeared again as Krishna in Dwapara and in the form of the Gopa-boy enjoyed the sexual pleasures of life as the four kinds of the hero with the young Gopi damsels who were one of the eight kinds of the heroine. This explains Vidyapati's craftsmanship. He took the forms of Sanskrit poetics—the four types of the hero and eight types of the heroine and composed his songs with reference to them. It does not matter whether the hero is Krishna or any man and the heroine a Gopi, Radha or any woman. The hero and the heroine, the lover and the beloved, are essential for the evocation of the sentiment of love because then only Sadharanikarana or the universalisation of the principal sentiment is possible; in Aristotle's words[2], "it is universality at which poetry aims in giving expressive names to the characters". Poetry is an expression of the universal element in human life. In other words, it is an idealised image of human life, of character, emotion or action, under forms manifest to senses. "The capacity of poetry is so far limited that it expresses the universal not as it is itself, but as seen through the medium of sensuous imagery."[3] Judged in this light, Vidyapati gave us true poetry and when we consider him as a poet, we may leave aside the consideration of who his hero is or who the heroine.

It is absurd likewise to read any mystical import in Vidyapati's songs. Here there is not only the craving of the beloved for the Lord, but even the Lord has craving for the beloved. It is true that the self-surrendering love of Vidyapati's heroines was interpreted by Chaitanyadeva as the complete idealisation of the craving of the devotee for union with the Lord in the form which came to be known in Vaishnava circles as Madhura Rasa, or it was symbolised by Kabir as the craving of the soul for union with the infinite. But these concepts were not before Vidyapati when he composed these songs, and they do not find

1. *Kirtipataka*, pp. 8-9.
2. Poetics, IX. 3.
3. Butcher, S.H., *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. London. 1895, p. 178.

a place in the tradition that Vidyapati accepted from Sanskrit erotic poetry and established in the poetry of Mithila. Vidyapati sang of love because to him sexual satisfaction was as important a purpose of human life as piety, riches and final liberation.

It has been held[1] that nearly all interpretations of poetry may be classified roughly as Aristotelian or Baconian, and from whatever point of view we look at the poetry of Vidyapati, we find that he was a master of the craft. Aristotle considered poetry as an imitative art but he admits[2] that the poet's business is to relate not what actually happens but what may happen. Speaking of the poetic truth he says[3] that a probable impossibility is to be preferred to a thing improbable yet possible, for, he says, that the impossible is the higher thing; for the pattern before the mind must surpass the reality. Whether it is the description of the person of a damsel or of her feeling, of the lovers in union or in separation, or it is the description of the season, time or weather in relation to sexual passion, Vidyapati always produces a new thing, not the actuality of experience, not a copy of reality, but a higher reality. He brings together many elements of beauty which are dispersed in nature. It is not enough to select, combine, embellish, to add here and to retrench there. He always harmonises them all into an ideal unity of type.

Bacon, on the other hand, holds[4] poetry as 'feigned history', and "the use of feigned history hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it, the world being in proportion inferior to the soul; by reason whereof there is agreeable to the spirit of man a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety than can be found in the nature of things". Bacon thus ignores altogether the principle of poetic truth and regards poetry as an untrammelled exercise of imaginative power. He therefore considered poetry merely 'theatre' of the mind to which one may repair for relaxation and pleasure but in which it is "not good to stay too long" because it only 'feigneth'.

1. Hudson, *Introduction to the Study of English Literature*, p. 66.
2. Aristotle, *Poetics*, IX. 1.
3. ibid., XXV. 17.
4. Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (Everyman's Library), pp. 82-83.

Vidyapati's lyrics are "an idealised representation of human life—of character, emotion, action," and what Matthew Arnold has said of Wordsworth, we can say of Vidyapati that he has given us all 'the wonder and bloom" of the world of love. Vidyapati was, however, not a poet by profession. It was merely his avocation, in the sense that when he was in the mood to sing, he wrote songs for the delectation of his admirers, specially ladies. It can therefore be said that he was 'feigning' all the time he wrote these lyrics. He composed them only in the full flush of his youth when he was happy in the benevolent patronage of Shiva Singha. He was by profession a Pandit, a Raj Pandit, busy all the time with serious things of the State and life. When, therefore, Vidyapati sings of extra-marital love, of Abhisara, of meeting secretly by assignment, etc. we cannot say that he was giving poetical expression to his own experiences; we can explain them only by saying that Vidyapati is 'feigning'. And actually these songs are sung on particular occasions only for enjoyment, or as Bacon says, they have been actually like a theatre of the mind to which people repair for relaxation and pleasure.

One chief element of Vidyapati's poetry is its revealing power. It opens our eyes to sensuous beauties of the female form or of nature. The range of Vidyapati's poetry is thus limited. He has written only of the sexual life of the female world, but within that range his power of observing and feeling the sensuous beauties and even the beatings of the women's heart shines pre-eminent. And he possesses, at the same time, the power of so expressing and interpreting what he sees or feels as to quicken our imagination and sympathy to make us see or feel with him. He awakens our mind's attention and "directs it to the loveliness and wonders" of the sexual love. Browning tells us through the mouth of Fra Lippo Lippi:

> For, don't you mark ? We're made so that we love,
> First when we see them painted, things we have pass'd
> Perhaps a hundred times, nor cared to see,
> And so they are better, painted-better to us,
> Which is the same thing. Art was given for that.

This is a painter's apologia but Vidyapati too was a word-painter. Who has not seen girls in the first phase of adolescence, but Vidyapati in his many songs depicting the changes daily becom-

ing apparent reveals to us the beauties which seem altogether new and wonderful. He perceives beauties in the minutest details and can recall with the help of his most sensitive imagination those details which he expresses in a language simple, sensuous and passionate. What is true of early adolescence is equally true of the first meeting of the adolescent girl and her aged lover. In Mithila till very recently boys of cultured families generally married at the age of about twentyfive a girl of ten and this aspect of the social life of the land is wonderfully reflected in the love lyrics of Vidyapati. In the songs[1] on early adolescence we have a detailed picture of the changes that gradually take place in the growing girl perceived minutely and feelingly, while in those[2] on first meeting there are minute details of the working of her mind, the psychological picture of the girl going for the first time to meet her lover.

The most remarkable thing about Vidyapati's love lyrics is the fact that he almost invariably looks at love from the woman's point of view. This is true of his Vyavahara songs and of Siva-songs also but it assumes an importance all its own in the love lyrics. In this respect he differs remarkably from both Jayadeva and Govindadasa and other Vaishnava poets. It is always the attraction of the girl for her lover (Purvaraga) which has been so finely portrayed by Vidyapati, not the attraction of the lover for the girl. In one of his songs[3], Vidyapati says that "he sings after visualising the hundreds of mute pleasing desires and longings that secretly pass through a woman's heart". From early adolescence to full maturity, there is no stage of a woman's growth of which Vidyapati has not drawn full-length pictures and he has drawn largely from nature and art to describe the charm. From the hairs to the nails of the feet, each part of the body is described in the spirit almost Hellenic and the sense of colour is so correct and penetrating that the picture becomes wonderful, ideally attractive and captivating. He had, likewise, a wonderful insight into the working of a woman's heart and mind. An analysis of any song of Vidyapati can bear witness to this basic fact but I cite here three examples to show how

1. e.g., songs Nos. 3 to 11, 13, etc.
2. e.g., songs Nos. 150 to 214, etc.
3. e.g., song No. 829.

penetrating and revealing his love lyrics are. In one set of his songs (No. 330 and the following) we have the advice of a friend to a girl going to meet her lover and the advice is so true to nature, so revealing of the coquetry common among young girls. In another (No. 334) the girl describes her helplessness when she was face to face with her lover alone and the state of her mind, so true to nature, so simply told, so very sensuous and so passionate. In the third (No. 288) a girl has come out of her room fully prepared to go out to meet her lover whom she had promised to meet that night under the impression that it would be the new-moon night, but now perceives that the whole sky is bright in moon-shine. She is in a fix. She cannot disappoint her lover but she cannot also take the risk of being seen on the way. The whole is a picture of her perplexed mind, torn between her love and her prestige. This speciality of his talents endeared his poetry to the women-folk at large who have kept him alive in their throats. There is, indeed, no aspect of the sexual life of a woman, in union or separation, her joy or sorrow, the longing and regret, the hope or despair, the doubt or determination, which he has not portrayed, and in every one of them he has caught the true glimpse of her heart by the force of his imagination in the most idealised form, and expressed it in a language always in keeping with the spirit of the theme. Still one can say that there are two aspects of this physical love —the feminine form and lovers in union—which throw Vidyapati into lyrical raptures. Rabindranath has, indeed, made the correct evaluation of Vidyapati's poetry when he says Vidyapati was the poet of pleasure, the pleasure of the union of lovers.

Vidyapati had, however, the complete picture of sexual life clear before his mind, a very clear concept of the philosophy of sexual love. It was to him not merely a primary emotion of the human heart, nor even a prime purpose of human life, a biological necessity only. To him love was a source of joy in this joyless life. His songs which are things of beauty are, therefore, a source of joy for ever.

And so true to life is Vidyapati's panorama of the sexual life of a woman, so full and complete, so variegated and colourful, so imaginatively conceived and so feelingly expressed and so sweetly worded and melodiously tuned, that it served the purpose of sexual education to the women-folk to cultivate feminine

charms to the fullest extent and enjoy their sexual life fully to the entire satisfaction of their lovers.

One of the strangest results that followed Vidyapati's treatment of love was the attraction that these songs so readily had for Chaitanyadeva. We know that Chaitanya had his own peculiar way of devotion which became the cult of Bengal Vaishnavism and which in the hands of Chaitanya's very learned disciples made a revolution in the concept of Bhakti and gave rise to what is known as Madhura Rasa in Sanskrit poetics. Chaitanya considered himself Radha, the beloved of Krishna, who surrendered herself to the love of the Lord, and Chaitanya's companions considered themselves the Gopis of Vrindavana, all pining for meeting in union with the Lord. Sincerely devoted as they all were, possessing really the feelings of the beloved, their sensibilities were all feminine. Vidyapati's love lyrics, therefore, seemed to them to portray their own feelings and emotions, longings and desires. They vibrated the chords of their hearts and as these songs were true and faithful pictures, they appealed personally to these saintly beloved of Lord Krishna. No wonder, therefore, that every love lyric of Vidyapati was to them a delineation of the feelings of the devoted beloved, a woman that the Gopi was and that they made themselves to be. This is why Chaitanyadeva was captivated so completely by these love lyrics and felt an ecstasy on hearing his own heart's throbbings portrayed in so sweet and melodious a form. Thus what was merely secular poetry was metamorphosed into devotional lyrics of Chaitanyadeva's school. Vidyapati, the singer of feminine charm and sensibilities, came to be adored as a Vaishnava Maha-Jana. This is why only Vidyapati's love lyrics found their way into Bengal and spread all over Aryavarta along with the cult of Chaitanya of which these songs became the sacred literature.

As a poet, therefore, Vidyapati was a seer, and through the veil of feminine beauty and feminine sensibilities he saw into the mysteries of the sexual life of man.

9

But Vidyapati was not only a seer; he was a master craftsman and he produced poems that have proved through the ages things of beauty and sources of joy.

There are two aspects of Vidyapati's craftsmanship which deserve special mention. I would not repeat what I have already said about the use of the spoken language in all the songs of Vidyapati, how he made available to the common men and women of Mithila the poetic delight which only Sanskrit poetry can give and by the use of this language he did forge a bond of unity among the people living in the land irrespective of caste or sex, riches or learning, on a national plane.

The first thing about Vidyapati's art of poetry is the complete fusion of music and poetry. Music, indeed, is the seasoning of the language and without melody poetry would lack its perfect charm. But Vidyapati never gave us ethereal melody only for the sake of music; the subject-matter in his songs is as important as the melody and he expressed the ideas in a form which was in complete harmony with the theme. The melody of his songs is always appropriate to the mood which the song portrays.

Secondly, Vidyapati used the language not for the sake of meaning only; he had wonderful ears for the sound of the words that he used and his songs are, therefore, really rhythmic creations of beauty. His language is characterised by two of the Gunas or excellences described in Sanskrit poetics and they are sweetness (Madhurya) and lucidity (Prasada). Sweetness in Vidyapati consists not only in the perfectly rhythmical arrangement and selection of words but his poetry reads sweet, sounds sweet and is sweet when understood. Moreover Vidyapati uses such idiomatic expressions as have gathered special import through usage and when these idioms are employed poetically, they appeal to the heart and please the sensibility while conveying the ordinary sense. A proverb, for example, contains within itself the observation or experience of the people speaking the language and when such a proverb is used by Vidyapati it is used poetically with the full import of the proverb throwing out its sweet suggestiveness.

Sweetness, however, is the virtue peculiar to erotic poetry in general and in the field of Maithili literature there are other poets too, Govindadasa for example, who are as sweet as, if not more than, Vidyapati. What distinguishes Vidyapati is the most simple, direct and natural manner in which he expresses his ideas in the speech actually spoken by the common men and

women of his time. It was indeed his genius to have used that language and invested it with an expressiveness so very rare among the other languages spoken at that time in this region. This is so characteristic of his poetry that it can safely be taken as a guide to the genuineness of Vidyapati's works. This is true not only of his Maithili songs but of all his poetical works whether in Sanskrit or in Abahatta, and that is the reason why the obscurities of *Kirtilata* or *Kirtipataka* give rise to the suspicion if they are the creations of Vidyapati or if they are available as they were written by Vidyapati.

And the most important thing about the lucidity in Vidyapati's poetry is the naturalness of his expression. Vidyapati wrote from his heart without straining for effect, and the effectiveness of his poetry lies in the absolute sincerity of his thoughts and feelings. This is true about the mode of his descriptions also. Vidyapati took his ideas from the vast treasure of Sanskrit erotic poetry but when he reproduced them, they were spontaneous outflowings of his heart. His treatment of nature shows this at its eminence. He observed nature minutely and did not take things as they had been described by the poets. The season of spring as also the rains has been described by Vidyapati with a thoroughness hardly surpassed. Nature for the most part has been treated by the Sanskrit poets and their followers as the background of human emotions and Vidyapati has followed them. Thus we have beautiful descriptions of the rainy season in the context both of the meeting and the separation of lovers, but spring has been described by Vidyapati as a person in itself, and not only as a background. But whether it is the spring or the rainy season, his descriptions are not stereotyped but realistic, because they are natural and described from observation. They appeal therefore direct to the heart and serve the purpose of exciting the predominant emotions admirably well. His sense of colour was acute and the word-pictures painted by him emerge most impressive, life-like and therefore charming mostly by contrast. All his images are concrete and vivid; he observed whatever was beautiful and expressed it so naturally that the reader experiences the same raptures therein as the poet himself.

But the most important thing about his perception of beauty was that he observed not only what was beautiful externally to the eye but also what was beautiful internally in the thoughts

and emotions on account of his accurate, realistic and penetrating observation of the mind or heart of the women-folk.

And nothing illustrates the naturalness of Vidyapati's expression more clearly than his use of the Alamkaras or figures of speech which consist in "the striking way of telling a thing". They owe their origin to the imaginative fertility of the poet. They have two-fold functions, illumination and embellishment. Vidyapati excels in the vividness of his pictures and on account of his nimble wit and imaginative alertness, his poetry is superbly picturesque. Vidyapati is a seer inasmuch as he perceives beauty wherever it may be found; he is a poet in the real sense of the word, because he paints that beauty so very vividly that any one can perceive it. The range of his imagery is, indeed, very vast. If we compare Vidyapati's use of imagery with that of Govindadasa, another master poet of Maithili, we shall find that Govindadasa is at his best in the use of metaphor (Rupaka)[1] and when he imposes one thing upon another he does it so completely that all the characteristic properties of the one are imposed upon those of the other. He has the wonderful capacity of concentrating on one picture. Vidyapati, however, does not feel content with one picture only but in one song he brings together a number of pictures in so quick a succession that the whole song becomes full of pictures, all beautiful. Vidyapati excels, therefore, in the use of what they call 'fancy' (Utpreksha).[2] Similarly Vidyapati excels in the use of indirect description[3] (Aprastutaprasamsa). But whatever they are, the images are always concrete, easy to visualise and beautiful because true to nature, accurately observed and faithfully expressed.

If we try to arrive at a clear definition of poetry with an objective differentia, certainly the definition will revolve round the concept of Alamkara, the word Alamkara being taken in the widest sense of the term. Alamkara is the beautiful in poetry, the beautiful form. In a great poet, the Alamkaras form the inevitable incarnation in which ideas embody themselves. But the importance of form notwithstanding, one should not misunder-

1. *Sringarabhanjana Gitavali*, edited by Dr. Amaranatha Jha, Darbhanga. Part I, Nos. 5, 6, 11, 12, 42, 44, 45, etc.
2. Songs Nos. 12, 14, 16, 20, 21, 23, 36, 47, 52, 541, 573, 584, 586 to 592, etc.
3. Songs Nos. 84, 96, 140, 384, 417, 440, 452, etc.

stand rhetoric as poetry. It is possible to sacrifice poetry at the altar of Alamkaras. There is such a thing as 'Auchitya', appropriateness, harmony, proportion, which is the ultimate beauty in poetry. "The final ground of reference for this Auchitya, the thing with reference to which all other things are appropriate is the soul of poetry, Rasa."[1] The body becomes a carcass when there is no soul there and of what use are ornaments on a carcass? The poet can make Alamkara render the help its name implies if he introduces it in such a manner as will be conducive to the realisation of the chief object, namely, Bhava and Rasa. Walter Pater in his essay on style speaks of 'permissible ornament', being for the most part 'structural or necessary'. A talented poet so manipulates it that it is borne along with his delineation of Rasa and becomes a wonder in the proper context. It may appear that the Alamkara is artificial, elaborate and an intellectual exercise requiring great effort in turning it out preciously but it is not really so difficult of effecting for a master poet. "With him, as emotion increases, expression swells and figures foam forth".[2] There is a strong tendency to wax figurative in forceful situations. When the poet has talents and is lost in Rasa, he produces excellent Alamkaras. In Vidyapati we have innumerable instances of Alamkaras rushing to the poet's pen in moments of overflowing Rasa. Such for example are the songs[3] describing feminine beauty, or the songs[4] describing the union of lovers. These are the two subjects which inspired him to heights of poetic fancy, evoked in him the true poetic delight. This does not mean that Vidyapati could not describe separation feelingly. In fact there are many songs[5] describing the state of separation, specially of the heroine, and they are of so high-strung emotion that figures are employed only sparingly and the sublimity or pathos of the situation is left to itself to appeal to us with its own grandeur and beauty.

1. Raghavan, Dr. V., *Some Concepts of Alamkara Sastra*, Adyar, 1942. p. 54.
2. ibid., p. 61.
3. Songs No. 14, 16, 19, 30 to 55, etc.
4. Songs Nos. 542, 584-587, 590, etc.
5. Songs Nos. 618 to 808.

10

And lastly, there are some songs – only half a dozen have been available so far—where the vanity of human life is depicted, its ephemerality and sordidness. Five of them[1] are addressed to Madhava or Hara and one[2] to Age, where the helplessness of decrepit old age is described most realistically and feelingly. In these songs the poet regrets that he traded in his life only in those things which did not yield him any permanent gain that would help him in the end; that he spent all his life in crying "mine, mine" but there was no one who proved his own when the time has come for him to depart from this world; that in his youth he cast his eyes on the wives and property of others; that this life was like a drop of water on hot sands and no one, not even his son, wife or friend, was able to help him when he was approaching death; that half his life he spent in sleep, and then there were infancy and old age, but even during his youth he was inflamed with sexual love so that there was no time left to spend over the meditation of Lord who alone can take care of him in the life hereafter; that having spent all his life over the sordid affairs of life he was approaching the Lord towards the evening of his life which was as absurd and ridiculous as a wage-earner would go for a day's job to an employer when the day was coming to a close and the time for work has passed away; that he was surrendering himself to the mercy of the Lord in the hope that He would not take into consideration either his merits or misdeeds but would vouchsafe to him the shelter of His unbounded grace. Of old age Vidyapati has drawn a very sordid picture so that man may be forewarned of the shape of his existence as years roll by. This would open his eyes to the reality of life and may induce him to meditate on God who alone can help him in the end.

All these songs are Santa or Quietistic in their emotional appeal of which the 'latent emotion' is Nirveda or repulsion, and self-disparagement its basic feeling. They are felt intensely and described sincerely. Much has been made of these songs to

1. Songs Nos. 437, 838, 839, 840 & No. 44 of *Haragauri Padavali* in N. Gupta's Devanagari edition.
2. Song No. 613 of Mitra & Majumdar's edition.

show that they are self-revealing or autobiographical inasmuch as having spent his life in the love of others' wives or in grabbing others' properties, Vidyapati was penitent in his old age. It has been observed that having basked in the sunshine of the royal patronage of Shiva Singha, Vidyapati was frustrated when his patron disappeared so mysteriously and these songs are born out of that frustration.

To me this does not seem quite the right view to hold of Vidyapati either as a man or a poet. He belongs to a tradition where poetry is an expression of the universal element in human life. In other words it is an idealised image of human life—of character, emotion, action—under forms manifest to the senses, and it is all 'feigning'. As in the erotic songs, so in these quietistic ones, Vidyapati is objective and is never drawing upon his own personal experiences. How can we reconcile the love of 'Parakiya', the extra-marital love, with the piety of life which his name evokes? There is nothing in these songs to warrant us to take them as revealing his own past life when we do not do so in his love songs. They are the common pictures of human life when looked upon from the quietistic point of view. Vidyapati's lyrics are the creations of the particular moods. As a poet he could write with intense feeling on any topic that took his fancy, and he wrote from the fullness of his heart which was overflowing with the particular sentiment or Rasa of which he was writing. The sentiments expressed in these songs are the common experiences of an average man of the world and it is too much to say that these are the special experiences of the poet who is penitent in his old age. A poet of Vidyapati's genius could have seen and observed these common frailties of man so that they could have a universal appeal. The feeling of repentance or the sense of the sordidness, ephemerality or unsubstantialness of life are all the common features of Santa Rasa. Keeping therefore in view the tradition which Vidyapati followed so scrupulously in his poetry and the facts of the poet's life as far as they are known, I do not believe that in these songs Vidyapati was personal or subjective while in his erotic songs he was impersonal or objective. That there is perfect evocation of the Santa Rasa in these songs as there is perfect evocation of Sringara in his love-songs goes without saying. Vidyapati observed and felt equally intensely the vanity and sordidness of human

life. The self-disparagement of these songs does not belong personally to the poet as the obsession of his hero in the sexual love of his beloved does not do so. To depict the universal through the particular has been the highest aim of poetry and Vidyapati was able to achieve it eminently whether it was the sexual love or spiritual, whether it was the joys of life or the disparagement of self when face to face with the vanity, frailty, sordidness and frustration of life.

11

The fame of Vidyapati as a maker of sweet melodious songs, saturated with all the beauties of Sanskrit poetry, spread phenomenally far and wide. Whoever heard these songs was ravished by their melody and the sentiments expressed were so common that they afforded aesthetic delight to even common men and women till then strangers to it. At a time when Sanskrit was the language of the cultured and in the land of Mithila where to write in any language other than Sanskrit was almost a sacrilege, he had the courage and self-confidence to write in the language actually spoken by the people of the land. He was derided by the orthodox Pandits of the day for his adoption of the vernacular but when they saw that this new poetry brought Vidyapati unique popularity and unprecedented fame, "that last infirmity of noble minds" induced them to follow in the footsteps of Vidyapati. Composing songs on Vidyapati's pattern became a fashion for even talented Pandits of Mithila. It is true that they did not go beyond an imitation of Vidyapati but the process went on unbroken and Maithili literature was built up on the tradition and the pattern set by Vidyapati.

Outside Mithila, Maithili literature flourished in Nepal under the influence of Vidyapati for almost three centuries. The Malla Rajas of Bhatgaon and Kathmandu who claimed descent from the Karnata rulers of Mithila patronised Maithili literature and the political condition of Mithila after the fall of the Oinabaras led Maithil scholars and poets to seek patronage under the Malla Rajas of neighbouring Nepal. In imitation of Vidyapati they produced a vast literature, the most important of which is the large number of dramas written in pure Maithili which were staged there regularly and are indeed the earliest dramas written

in any modern Indian language. Till about the middle of the 18th century when the Malla rule was supplanted, Maithili continued to be the literary language of Nepal courts and Vidyapati the one source of inspiration. It is a pity that most of this vast literature has not yet been brought to light and therefore it is very little known, but it is well preserved in the libraries there.

But the most potent influence of Vidyapati inspired the great poets of Bengal and led to the growth of Bengali literature in its early stage. The story of Vidyapati in Bengal is indeed a romantic one. Mithila had cultural relations with Bengal since long and just at that time the Pandits of Bengal used to come over to Mithila to brush up their learning and give it a finishing touch with the great teachers of Mithila. When they returned home, they took melodious songs of Vidyapati on their lips. To Chaitanyadeva and his companions these songs proved ecstatically appealing, because under the influence of Sahajiya cult they felt divine love in a sexual way. The love-songs of Vidyapati became the devotional songs of Chaitanyadeva's school and Vidyapati became 'Vaishnava Maha-Jana', a great exponent of Bengal Vaishnavism. Kirtana or singing of devotional songs was a chief feature of this new cult and hosts of talented poets began composing songs, all on the pattern set by Vidyapati. In following Vidyapati, they imitated even the language used by Vidyapati and since they could not write pure Mathili their language was a strange admixture of Maithili and Bengali which in later times came to be known as Brajabuli. For the followers of Chaitanyadeva Vidyapati became the model and Brajabuli the language of poetical composition. As the new cult of Chaitanya spread, Vidyapati's songs went along with it, and thus in Orissa and Assam, as far as the distant Brajabhumi, Vidyapati came to be recognised as one of the greatest exponents of Divine Love, and songs became the form of their devotional compositions. In Bengal itself Vidyapati was revered as a leader of their cult and people came to consider him a Bengali, one who was born in Bengal and poets used his name at the end of their songs to lend prestige to them. There was at least one poet who composed all his songs under the assumed name of Vidyapati. There is a vast literature in Brajabuli which is a pride of Indian literature and when we remember that Brajabuli is the language of

Mithila as used by people not born to it, and that all this was inspired by the love-songs of Vidyapati, we marvel at the unique phenomenon and admire the genius of Vidyapati.

It is remarkable to note in this connection that Vidyapati exerted his influence even on Rabindranath at the threshold of his poetical life and he wrote his *Bhanu Singher Padavali* in what he himself calls 'Imitation Maithili'. The age of Vidyapati thus extended up to the end of the 19th century in Bengal as in Mithila.

In Assam, the great Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhavadeva wrote in Maithili under the direct influence of Vidyapati and though their works were designed to propagate Vaishnavism through entertaining stage plays, the inspiration came from Vidyapati who employed the language actually spoken by the people in his compositions meant for the people.

The talent to express and communicate poetic delight in the language actually spoken proved so very popular and the craftsmanship to employ melodious songs as the form of poetic expression proved so very captivating that Vidyapati established a pattern which was followed by most of our great poets during the centuries following and we can count Surdas, Mira, Tulsidas and Kabir among many others who drew inspiration from Vidyapati, maybe indirectly.

12

Vidyapati was the brightest product of the Maithil renaissance. He was not a poet by profession. He had varied interests in life; his outlook was most liberal; his views were far ahead of his times. It is a pity that during the centuries since he flourished, there was a cultural degeneration in the land of Mithila. Consequently Vidyapati the man and the ideals he stood for were forgotten and he was turned into a legend, a myth. But ever since he sang the melodious songs to people around him, his fame as a poet has never diminished. Vidyapati still lives as a poet and will live as a poet. He has been par excellence a maker of Indian literature and will remain immortal as such in the annals of Indian literature.

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