



Dimensions Of Love In Vidyapati Padawali

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ABSTRACT

In Vidyapati Padawali, various types of poems can be found. Some are dedicated to different Gods and Goddesses, reflecting the cultural heritage of Mithila and folk life. Others express the deep love between Radha and Krishna. Among scholars, there is consensus regarding the sentiments expressed in most types of verses. However, regarding the verses depicting the love of Radha and Krishna, there exists a divergence of opinions. This disagreement centers around two main issues: whether this love should be classified as 'Shringar' (romantic love) or 'Bhakti' (devotional love), and whether Radha and Krishna should be perceived as ordinary human beings or as divine figures—Radha as 'Atma' (soul) and Krishna as 'Parmatma' (Supreme Soul). Furthermore, if Radha and Krishna's love is considered 'Shringar', scholars debate whether this 'Shringar' is akin to the sensual and carnal love depicted by poets of the Ritikal period, or if it belongs to a different category altogether. After examining the perspectives of numerous scholars, it is suggested in this article that in Vidyapati Padawali, Radha and Krishna, despite being portrayed as ordinary humans, embody a higher form of humanity. Their love, though rooted in the material world (Shringar), transcends mere lustfulness. Instead, it is characterized by purity of soul and profound devotion.

Introduction

Vidyapati (1352-1448 A.D.) is a renowned poet of the 'Adikal' era in Hindi literature. He contributed literature in several languages such as Sanskrit, Abahattha, and Hindi. Among his notable works are Gangavakyavali, Goraksh Vijay, Kirtilata, Kirtipataka, Bhu-Parikrama, Purush Pariksha, Likhanavali, Shaivsarvasvasar, Vibhagsar, and Vidyapati Padawali. His works express various aspects of country, society, religion, and culture. Vidyapati Padawali, a collection of 'muktaks' in Maithili, is particularly significant. In this collection, Vidyapati explores themes of Bhakti (devotion), Shringar (romance), folk culture, and folk life. Notably, his romantic verses depicting Radha-Krishna have sparked scholarly debate due to differing interpretations. This research paper aims to analyze and assess these interpretations to determine the nature of Vidyapati's depiction of love.

Comprehending Love within Vidyapati's Padawali

Love, often described as the most exquisite element in the universe, transcends mere physicality. Shakespeare famously remarked, "Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind"¹, highlighting its profound nature. Christopher Caudwell aptly stated that "Love is god and god is love"², equating its beauty to that of divinity itself. In Indian poetry, dating back centuries, love has consistently held a central role. Kalidasa, celebrated in Sanskrit literature, depicted love with unparalleled elegance, with works like Abhigyan Shankuntalam and Meghdoot marking milestones in Indian literary tradition. Jayadeva also left an indelible mark with his Geetgovindam, a masterpiece blending themes of romance and devotion. Following this tradition, Vidyapati drew inspiration from Jayadeva's legacy, crafting his own Padawali, which resonates with echoes of Geetgovindam's spirit.

Vidyapati, a poet of the transitional period, reflects the societal and religious conflicts prevalent during his time. This era was marked by internal strife and contradictions, a theme evident in the works of many prominent writers. While Khusaro's poetry reflects political contradictions, Vidyapati's focus lies elsewhere. Vidyapati's portrayal of love must be understood within the context of these contradictions. His depiction encompasses a spectrum of contrasts: between the worldly and the supernatural, the subtle and the gross, the physical and the mental, the lustful and the chaste, as well as between concepts such as swakiya (married) and

parakiya (unmarried), household and solitude, feudal and common people's love. Despite these apparent contradictions, Vidyapati's works also reveal efforts towards reconciliation and harmony among these diverse elements.

There is no need to debate whether Vidyapati's love leans towards devotion or 'Shringar'. Rather, what is crucial is to understand if Vidyapati's 'Shringar' adheres to the norms of medievalism or transcends them by incorporating elements of devotion.

The transitional period was marked by heightened sensuality, making the transition from mere sexuality to 'Shringar' quite challenging. Vidyapati's era, characterized by extreme sensuality, can hardly be confined to conventional 'Shringar'. However, Vidyapati delves deep into this sensuality, elevating it to the realm of adornment. His poetry reflects mutual respect in 'Shringar', a departure from mere physical desire, imbuing it with a sense of sacredness and desirelessness.

Vidyapati's portrayal of love also hints at the glorification of name and appearance prevalent during the 'bhaktikal'. Love centered on superficial attributes ultimately proves unsatisfactory, a theme Vidyapati explores extensively. His love transcends the superficial and embraces supernatural dimensions.

Vidyapati's love is not characterized by supplication or pleading; it upholds a woman's dignity, rejecting compromises that sacrifice honor for survival. His poetry navigates courtly luxury and solitary lust while safeguarding societal and familial dignity. Radha, depicted akin to a resolute Indian woman, adheres to familial decorum despite being enamored by Krishna's flute.

While Vidyapati touches upon both 'Swakiya' (married) and 'Parakiya' (unmarried) love, 'Parakiya' love holds greater prominence, especially evident in his portrayal of Radha.

Vidyapati's depiction of love resonates with the depth of feeling akin to 'Bhakt Kavi' (devotional poets) and the aesthetic beauty typical of 'Riti Kavi' (courtly poets). His verses often highlight physical beauty, romantic rendezvous, and moments of intense passion. Yet, in some instances, his portrayal merges elements of devotion and adornment. For example, descriptions like 'nakh-shikh' and 'shikh-nakh' blend worldly and supernatural elements, while expressions of dissatisfaction in love elevate his narratives beyond earthly realms. As the pioneer of both Bhakti poetry and courtly literature ('Riti Kavita'), Vidyapati defies categorization into conventional molds. His love is pure and unique, shaped by the contradictions of his era, which enrich rather than restrict its dimensions. Vidyapati's depiction of Radha and Krishna differs significantly from Surdas' supernatural portrayal. Instead, Vidyapati envisions them as Raja Shiv Singh and Lakhima Devi. While he does compose verses of feudal 'Shringar' at the king's request, the deep emotional depth in his verses of separation suggests that his portrayal of love cannot be solely categorized as courtly love based on occasional verses commissioned by patrons. The verses depicting separation were not merely dictated by patrons but emerged from Vidyapati's personal introspection and heartfelt expression. Despite being dedicated to courtly circles, Vidyapati's portrayal of love resonates with the collective consciousness of the people, reflecting the poet's personal experiences. This contrasts with the superficiality often associated with courtly poetry, where themes cater primarily to the whims of patrons.

Subhadra Jha underscores this transformation in Vidyapati's portrayal of love, noting that initially, his portrayal of Madhava (Krishna) was human and erotic, likely influenced by his patrons. However, as Vidyapati matured, Madhava evolved into a figure with divine attributes, reflecting a deeper spiritual dimension. In essence, Vidyapati's representation of Radha and Krishna moves beyond the constraints of courtly conventions, blending personal emotion with cultural and spiritual resonance, ultimately transcending the purely materialistic aspects typical of courtly poetry. It is also worth noting that none of the poems in the manuscript N explicitly refer to Madhava as a divine being, nor do they mention any other patrons of the poet by name³. Vidyapati's portrayal of love leans towards a luxurious solitude, distinct from the unrestrained customs of libertine poets or the supernatural asceticism of Sufi poets. His depiction of Radhika, despite her desire for Krishna's physical affection, repeatedly wrestles with societal norms and conscientiously restrains her emotions. The boundaries of familial decorum present obstacles to this solitary, luxurious love, intertwining with societal and familial expectations.

Subhadra Kumar Jha categorizes Vidyapati's Maithili songs into two main classes: erotic and non-erotic. The non-erotic poems include praises dedicated to deities like Shiva, Durga, Ganga, and Vishnu, on which critics generally agree. However, opinions diverge regarding the nature of the erotic songs. Some view them as religious or mystical, while others interpret them as pure expressions of romantic love⁴.

George A. Grierson interprets the allegory of Vidyapati's work, suggesting that Radha symbolizes the individual soul (jivatma), the messenger (duti) represents the evangelist or mediator, and Krishna represents the Supreme Being (paramatma)⁵. This view contrasts with Benoy Kumar Sarkar's perspective, influenced by Coomaraswamy, who sees Vidyapati as celebrating earthly pleasures and sensuality⁶. Sarkar compares Vidyapati with Tagore and Kalidasa, highlighting Vidyapati's focus on physical and sexual love without spiritual or mystical dimensions⁷.

In Vidyapati's portrayal, whether of Radha-Krishna or other lovers, Krishna and Radha are not symbols of divinity but embodiments of human passion and earthly beauty. The love depicted is profoundly human, devoid of supernatural worship or mysticism. Vidyapati's poetry explores the depths of human emotions, including both the ecstasy of union and the agony of separation. The intensity of these emotions justifies the explicitness of his sexual descriptions, as they are integral to the portrayal of love's profound joys and sorrows.

Conclusion

In this context, it becomes evident that many of Vidyapati's critics have viewed his portrayal of love from a narrow perspective, depicting it as crude, carnal, and excessively lustful. However, the depiction of separation stands out as a significant achievement in Vidyapati's presentation of love. Ignoring this aspect undermines a thorough evaluation of Vidyapati's portrayal. The intense focus, emotional depth, and self-awareness evident in Vidyapati's descriptions of separation elevate his depiction of love to the lofty heights of "Janma Awadhi Hum Roop Niharal Nayan nē Tirpit Bhel".

Vidyapati is fundamentally a poet, a seeker of beauty, and a devotee of love. This essence imbues his love stories with sensuality, emotional richness, captivation, intoxication, and continual renewal ("Tile Tile Nootan"). Over time, his depiction of love never stagnates or loses its freshness and vitality. It remains perennially new and vibrant, which contributes to its enduring and exceptional nature.

It is true that Vidyapati's depiction of love is worldly; Radha and Krishna are portrayed as worldly beings, with Krishna being human rather than divine despite his incarnation. However, labeling Vidyapati's depiction as purely lustful and physical is only a partial truth. Those who hold this view should delve into Vidyapati's verses on union, which are erotic, as well as the poignant lamentations of his heart in moments of separation. Only through a comprehensive engagement with both aspects can one accurately grasp the true essence of Vidyapati's portrayal of love.

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