



## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOVE SONGS OF VIDYAPATI AND NARSIMH MEHTA ON THE BASIS OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF SRI AUROBINDO AND SACHIN KETKAR

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### Abstract

The Bhakti movement, a profound cultural and spiritual renaissance in medieval India, resulted in the rise of numerous exceptional poets whose verses echo across ages. This article enquires into a comparative analysis of the love songs penned by two eminent poets from this era: Vidyapati (1352-1448) and Saint Poet Narsinh Mehta (1414-1481). Despite the distinct spatial and regional contexts they operated within, both poets were deeply influenced by the devotional styles of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Jaidev's Geet Govind, shaping their poetic expressions significantly. Vidyapati's literary brilliance transcended geographical confines, winning him admiration and reverence across diverse linguistic and cultural terrains. His poetic genius influenced luminaries like Rabindranath Tagore, inspiring him to emulate Vidyapati's style in his magnum opus, 'Bhanusingher Padawali'. In Hindi-speaking regions, Vidyapati was hailed as a pivotal figure in Hindi literature. While numerous translations of Vidyapati's works exist, Sri Aurobindo's rendition stands distinct, capturing the intricate essence of Vidyapati's poetic vision with unmatched authenticity. In contrast, Narsinh Mehta, born around six decades after Vidyapati, experienced a similar era of literary and spiritual blossoming, albeit in a different Indian region. Mehta's poetic creations, steeped in devotional fervor and philosophical insight, have garnered admiration and scholarly attention for ages. Sachin Ketkar, a renowned post-colonial translation theorist, undertook the formidable task of translating nearly two hundred of Mehta's poems into English, meticulously preserving their originality while ensuring global accessibility. This article endeavors to uncover the unique attributes, thematic elements, stylistic nuances, and cultural underpinnings present in the love songs of these two Bhakti luminaries. It aims to highlight both the convergences and

divergences in their poetic visions, enriching the discourse on medieval Indian literature and the enduring impact of the Bhakti movement

## I. Introduction

The Bhakti movement, which unfolded as a significant cultural and spiritual renaissance in medieval India, marked the emergence of several remarkable poets whose works continue to resonate through time. Two such illustrious poets from this era are Vidyapati (1352-1448) and Saint poet Narsinh Mehta (1414-1481). This article deals on a comprehensive comparative analysis of their love songs, exploring the distinct qualities, thematic motifs, stylistic innovations, and cultural influences inherent in their poetic creations.

Despite the temporal and regional differences separating Vidyapati and Narsinh Mehta, both poets were profoundly influenced by the devotional styles of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Jaidev's Geet Govind, which left an indelible mark on their poetic expressions. Vidyapati's literary genius transcended geographical boundaries, earning him admiration across various linguistic and cultural landscapes. His compositions deeply moved luminaries like Rabindranath Tagore, who found inspiration in Vidyapati's lyrical finesse and emotive depth. In contrast, Narsinh Mehta, born approximately sixty years after Vidyapati, experienced a similar period of literary and spiritual efflorescence, although in a different region of India. Recognizing the significance of Mehta's poetic legacy, Sachin Ketkar undertook an ambitious project for his PhD thesis, translating around one hundred of Narsimh Mehta's poems that includes songs of *Sringar*, Devotional, Didactical, Philosophical and miscellaneous into English with meticulous care, preserving their originality and authenticity while making them accessible to a global audience.

This article aims to elucidate the parallels and divergences in the poetic visions of Vidyapati and Narsinh Mehta, offering readers a deeper understanding of the rich tradition of Bhakti literature. By exploring the poetic landscapes shaped by these two Bhakti period stalwarts hailing from the north-eastern and western regions of India respectively, this article seeks to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on medieval Indian literature and the enduring legacy of the Bhakti movement.

## II. Life and works of Vidyapati and Narsimh Mehta

Vidyapati was born around A.D. 1350 in the village of Bisapi, situated in the Madhubani district in Bihar. He hailed from a lineage of scholar-statesmen who had been prominent leaders in Maithil society for over five generations. Mithila, renowned since ancient times for its intellectual pursuits and philosophical speculations, had been politically under the suzerainty of Magadh since the era of Buddha.

Vidyapati stands as an eminent figure in Indian literature, demonstrating unparalleled mastery in his craft. During an era when Sanskrit dominated as the cultural language across Aryavart. Vidyapati innovatively employed the vernacular of his region for his poetic creations. His compositions, characterized by their sweetness and charm, elevated this spoken language to a level of expressiveness befitting a refined literary form. He pioneered a distinctive style of poetry that became a benchmark for subsequent poets, profoundly influencing the literary landscape of his region. Indeed, the literary heritage of this part of Aryavart bears indelible marks of his artistic prowess and meticulous craftsmanship. He was a polyglot and wrote various books in

Sanskrit as well. The books written by Vidyapati includes *Purush-Pariksha*, *Bhu-parikrama*, *Varshkritiya*, *Durgabhaktitarangini*, *Kirtipataka*, *Goraksh-Prakash* and *Kirtilata* are some finest titles which are still

Often referred to as *Maithila Kokila* or the *Cuckoo of Mithila*, 's poetic melodies metaphorically signaled a renaissance in the poetry of the modern North-Eastern Indian languages, instilling it with freshness and vitality.

Narsinh Mehta, celebrated as the '*Adi Kavi*' or the *First Poet* of Gujarat, occupies a prominent position in the cultural landscape of Gujarat. His compositions, particularly the melodious *prabhatiyas* and poignant songs depicting the love of Radha and Sri Krishna, have endured through time, resounding in Gujarati households even today. However, the question surrounding his life, coupled with the lack of concrete evidence, has given rise to divergent interpretations and debates among scholars.

Traditional accounts of Narsinh's life are immersed in legend, full with 'miracles' that have enriched the narrative of this bhakta poet. Autobiographical compositions like '*Putra No Vivah*', '*Mameru*', and '*Hundi Na Pado*' serve as primary sources for later poets, such as Vishwanath Jani, Premanand, and the renowned Rajasthani poet Meera, who have further embroidered the tapestry of his life with their poetic renditions.

The traditional date of Narsinh's birth, Margasira (Nov-Dec) in Vikram Samvat 1470, has sparked considerable debate among scholars, including eminent figures like Shri K.M. Munshi, Shri K.K. Shastri, and Shri Umashankar Joshi. Munshi, advocating for a revised birth date between 1474 A.D. and 1522 A.D., posits that Narsinh's exposure to sadhus from Vrindavan during his formative years ignited his unique form of Bhakti, characterized by the '*sakhi bhava*' or '*gopi bhava*'. In contrast,

other critics argue that Narsinh's Bhakti was deeply rooted in the Vaishnava Canon, encompassing texts like the Srimad Bhagwatam, Srimad Bhagwad Geeta, and Jayadeva's '*Geet Govind*', as well as influences from Varkaris, Namdharis, Kabir, and other seminal poets.

Narsinh's upbringing in the conservative Nagar Brahmin community of Talaja, Bhavnagar District, adds another layer of complexity to his persona. Born to Krishnadasa, an elderly father, Narsinh lost him at a tender age and was raised by his devout Vaishnava uncle, Parvatdas, in Mangrol. His early affinity for the company of sadhus, saints, and marginalized communities, along with his unconventional behavior, such as occasionally donning women's attire, drew consternation from his orthodox community. This nonconformity culminated in the dissolution of his betrothal, as his prospective father-in-law deemed him unsuitable due to his perceived lack of business acumen or scholarly pursuits.

The scant details of Narsinh's early life and education further contribute to the mystique surrounding him. The '*Narsinh Nishal*' or '*Narsinh's school*', a cave near Talaja dating back to the second century A.D., is speculated to have been a place of solitude and reflection for the young poet. His compositions reveal a nuanced understanding of Sanskrit, a profound knowledge of the Vaishnava Canon, and influences from Vedantic philosophy and classical Sanskrit court poetry. Additionally, his musical prowess underscores his multifaceted talents.

In conclusion, Narsinh Mehta's legacy as Gujarat's most beloved poet is undeniably intertwined with myth and folklore. While his enduring compositions continue to inspire generations, the elusive details of his life remain a subject of scholarly debate and conjecture. His defiance of societal norms, coupled with his spiritual quest and artistic genius, render him a

complex and enigmatic figure, whose life and works continue to captivate and inspire.

Narsinh Mehta, although not groomed for business or priesthood, emerged as a formidable poet whose work transcended conventional boundaries. His personal experiences and transformative spiritual journey are intricately woven into the fabric of his poetry, reflecting both his inner turmoil and profound enlightenment.

Following the demise of his mother around 1425 AD, Narsinh married Manekbai in 1428 AD. Subsequently, the loss of his uncle led him and his wife to seek refuge with his cousin Bansidhar in Junagadh. However, their stay was marred by the constant taunts and insults from his ill-tempered bhabhi. Driven to his limits, Narsinh retreated to a nearby forest, where he embarked on a seven-day fast and meditation beside a secluded Shiva Lingam. This solitary contemplation culminated in a divine vision, where Lord Shiva transported him to Dwarka to witness the eternal rasa leela of Sri Krishna and the gopis of Vrindavan.

### III. Legends associated with the lives of Vidyapati and Narsimh Mehta

Over the last six centuries, Vidyapati has been celebrated and mythologized in fascinating ways. His devotees attribute to him miracles and divine interventions. One of the most enduring legends recounts that Lord Shiva, moved by Vidyapati's piety, disguised himself as a humble man named Ugna to serve the poet personally. This tale is an indispensable in Vidyapati's numerous biographies, and it is frequently mentioned in conversations among the Maithili people. Though variations exist, the central story remains consistent: Lord Shiva lived with Vidyapati in the guise of his servant, Ugna, for an unspecified duration.

During a moment when they were lost in a forest, Vidyapati asked Ugna to fetch water. Unable to find any water source nearby, Ugna

revealed his true form and produced a pot of fresh Ganga water from his own locks. A devout follower of Shiva, who recognized the distinct taste of Ganga water, grew suspicious as the river was nowhere nearby. He pressed Ugna to disclose the secret, promising to continue serving Vidyapati while keeping the revelation confidential. However, Vidyapati's wife, in a fit of anger towards Ugna, inadvertently forced him to reveal his true identity. As a result, Ugna vanished before Vidyapati's eyes.

Another legend recounts that upon his death, Vidyapati aimed to journey south to meet the goddess Ganga. However, fatigue overcame him a few miles short of the river. Resolved to test his own piety, Vidyapati believed that if he was truly devout, the sacred Ganga would come to him. Miraculously, the water level of the river began to rise until Vidyapati could take his final holy dip. This event led to the renaming of the location as Vidyapati Nagar, and a Shiva temple was subsequently constructed there.

Another legend is associated with him is about to get his master or King Shiva Singh where in the court of him, he was serving as the court poet, got him released from the captive of the Mughal ruler. Pleased with the poetries of Vidyapati they freed him.

Legend has it that Narsinh, utterly captivated by the celestial spectacle, inadvertently burnt his hand with a torch, yet remained oblivious to the pain. His ecstatic proclamation, "My manhood dissolved and I became the Lord's lover," encapsulates his profound spiritual metamorphosis. The poet's encounter with Lord Krishna, symbolized by the divine touch and the awakening of his primal speech, catalyzed his resolution to compose approximately 22,000 kirtans or devotional songs, extolling the divine virtues and experiences he had witnessed.

Upon his return to Junagadh, a transformed Narsinh humbly touched his bhabhi's feet, expressing gratitude for her

insults that had inadvertently propelled him towards spiritual enlightenment. Despite living in impoverished conditions with his wife Manekbai and their two children, Samaldas and Kunwarbai, Narsinh found solace and joy in his firm devotion to Lord Krishna. His spiritual pursuits transcended societal norms, as he embraced and celebrated the company of sadhus, saints, and Harijans, irrespective of their caste, class, or gender.

However, Narsinh's close association with the Lord's sakhis and gopis, particularly his female followers, seemed to have garnered him some disrepute within his community. His uninhibited dances and songs with these devotees, reminiscent of the rasa leela he had witnessed, further underscored his unconventional and transcendent spiritual journey.

On the other hand, scholars like Grierson view these songs through a mystic lens, akin to the works of Kabir, where the soul's yearning for union with the Divine is described using the language of sexual love. However, it's worth noting that less than half of Vidyapati's songs mention Krishna and Radha, and even then, only their names are invoked.

Chaitanyadeva's followers interpret all of Vidyapati's songs as references to Krishna and Radha's love, while many songs actually refer to Vidyapati's patron, Shiva Singha, whom he considers the eleventh incarnation of Vishnu, using terms like Kanha and Madhai. In essence, Krishna serves as a prototype hero, and Radha or the Gopis as the heroine, in line with Sanskrit poetics.

Vidyapati crafted these love lyrics drawing inspiration from Sanskrit literature. In a fragment of his work, "Kirtipataka," it's suggested that due to the Lord's separation from Sita in his Treta incarnation, he reincarnated as Krishna in Dvapara to relish the pleasures of life with the Gopis, representing various types of heroes and heroines in Sanskrit poetics.

What truly matters in Vidyapati's poetry is not necessarily the identity of the hero or heroine but the fundamental roles they play in evoking the sentiment of love. As Aristotle aptly put it, poetry aims for universality by giving characters expressive names. Poetry captures the universal essence of human life, portraying idealized images of character, emotion, or action through sensory forms. Vidyapati's genius lies in his ability to capture this universal sentiment in his poetry, regardless of the specific identities of his characters.

#### IV. Comparative analysis of selected poems of Vidyapati and Narsimh Mehta

Both Vidyapati's as well as Narsi Mehta's poems are rich in sensuous imagery, comparing the beloved's changing body to various fruits like plums, oranges, and pomegranates. These imagery is vivid and evokes a sense of beauty and growth. While also employing sensual imageries, Narsi Mehta's poems focus more on the intimacy between the devotee and Lord Krishna. The reference to "*the threads of my choli*" and "*the fruits of my breasts*" (Ketkar, Sachin.5.1.7,2001) "My fruit-like breasts are your possessions" (5.1.25) emphasizes a personal, intimate relationship with the divine. Vidyapati says "*Day by day her milk-breasts drew splendour*", "*Her breasts before were plums of light*" , "*Golden oranges next and then / now are they fruits-of-opulence twin.*"( II, Sri Aurobindo,pp-5)

The devotion in Vidyapati's poem is implicit, conveyed through the longing and admiration for the beloved. The reference to "Madhav," another name for Krishna, indicates the divine nature of the beloved. His poem paints a pastoral scene with references to woodlands and bathing, creating a serene and natural setting for the encounter with the beloved.

The devotion in Narsi Mehta's poem is explicit and direct. The repeated plea to not untie the threads of the choli and the assertion that the fruits of the breasts are not good enough

for the lover, Ananga (god of love), highlights the deep yearning and devotion of the devotee towards Lord Krishna. The setting is less emphasized in Narsi Mehta's poem, with the focus being more on the emotional and spiritual connection between the devotee and Lord Krishna.

Vidyapati's poems have a narrative quality, describing a specific encounter with the beloved in a chronological manner, from seeking her in the woodland to observing her beauty. The structure of Narsi Mehta's poem is more repetitive, with the refrain "*Don't untie the threads of my choli, my love*" reinforcing the central theme of longing and devotion throughout the poem.

On analysis of two poems (Poem No-288.207 5.1.3 and XIV) Both Vidyapati's poem and Narsimh Mehta's poem explore into the theme of intense emotional and physical pain caused by one-sided love or separation. They both employ the metaphor of music or song to describe the overwhelming nature of this pain, but they do so in distinct ways.

Vidyapati's poem presents a vivid and sensual description of the speaker's experience. The flute's music is described as both sweet and dreadful, filling the body with a violent force that cannot be controlled. This music, or the emotion it represents, permeates the soul and leaves the speaker in a state of shame and utter flame. The language used is rich and evocative, with phrases like "sweet dreadful sound," "enamoured swoons with shame," and "filled and panted with sweet agony" painting a picture of intense, almost overwhelming, emotion. The speaker's physical reactions, such as not daring to lift their eyes and their slow, careful steps, further emphasize the profound impact of this experience.

On the other hand, Sachin Ketkar's translation of Narsimh Mehta's poem uses the metaphor of a bird's song to convey a similar sense of longing and pain. The bird's cry is

described as beautiful but also as an arrow of desolation that pierces the speaker's heart. The repetition of the line "Someone silence that bird; he doesn't leave me alone!" serves to emphasize the relentless nature of this emotional torment. Unlike Vidyapati's poem, which focuses on the sensual and physical aspects of the experience, this poem highlights the psychological and existential anguish caused by separation from a loved one. The mention of the dark night, lightning flashes, and the heart of a maiden separated from her love adds layers of imagery and emotion to the poem, creating a sense of despair and hopelessness.

While both poems explore the theme of unrequited love or separation through the metaphor of music or song, they differ in their approach and tone. Vidyapati's poem is more introspective and sensual, focusing on the physical and emotional sensations experienced by the speaker. In contrast, Sachin Ketkar's translation of Narsimh Mehta's poem is more outwardly expressive, using vivid imagery and repetition to convey the speaker's anguish and desperation.

In precise, both poems offer a poignant exploration of the pain and longing caused by unrequited love or separation, using the metaphor of music or song to convey the intensity of these emotions. However, they differ in their style, tone, and focus, with Vidyapati's poem being more introspective and sensual, and Sachin Ketkar's translation of Narsimh Mehta's poem being more outwardly expressive and despairing.

## V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the love poems of both the poets i.e. Vidyapati and Narsimh Mehta while sharing similarities in their focus on physical beauty and possessive love, offer distinct perspectives and poetic styles that reflect their cultural and historical contexts. Narsimh Mehta's poem captures the immediacy and intensity of human desire, while

Vidyapati's poem, offers a more elaborate and contemplative exploration of love, beauty, and devotion. Narsinh Mehta's life and poetry epitomize the transformative power of devotion and the quest for spiritual enlightenment. His personal trials, challenges, and divine encounters shaped his poetic genius, enabling him to craft verses that resonate with profound spirituality, human emotion, and universal truths. Despite facing adversity and societal scrutiny, Narsinh's firm faith, love, and devotion to Lord Krishna and his fellow devotees remain a timeless testament to the enduring power of Bhakti and the human spirit. It's important to highlight that Vidyapati's erotic songs primarily focus on love, specifically the physical and sexual love between a man and a woman, without any deeper spiritual or mystical connotations. The brilliance of his work lies in its ability to resonate differently with various audiences. For Chaitanya and his followers, these songs depict the romantic escapades of Lord Krishna. Given that recounting the divine play or 'Lila' of the Lord is a form of worship, these songs are revered as purely devotional within the Vaishnava communities of Bengal.

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