

# A Comparative Study of Love Tradition in Vidyapati and John Donne

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## ABSTRACT

Looking into the dynamics of Love tradition we can set a benchmark of platonic love as the starting point to measure the comparison of Love expressed through the poetry of Vidyapati and John Donne. Although scholars have agreed that we all worship love but it is not an easy task to define Love. It is the most complex topic which varies from person to person as it is multidimensional. Love for the beloved or the lover is just a part of it. In fact there are so many points to prove that love encompasses the entire world. John Donne is known for metaphysical form of poetry whereas Vidyapati is a kind of poet who has written on almost all the horizons of love. He is a celebrated poet and writer who know the origination of poetical imagination. He has written about beauty of Radha, pain in separation which is known as virah-vedna. Love for Nature is special to Vidyapati and he has written poems for mother Ganga also. John Donne has also written several beautiful poems on Love and it is very interesting to see both these poets forming two sides of same coin.

**Keywords** – *separation, pain, nature, beauty, worship.*

Vidyapati is a renowned Maithili poet as well as a Sanskrit writer. He was born in 1352 in Bisfi , a village situated in Madhubani district of Bihar. His poems are not simply poems but it seems that he has poured his heart in his poetry. Vidyapati was a contemporary of great writers like Chaucer, Shankaradeva, Suradas, Ramanand Roy, Kabir, Chandidas and several others. The historical poetry in vernacularised Avahatta which were written by Vidyapati stands like a link between modern vernacular and Magadhi Prakrit. No any other writer can attain his exalted style of lyrical poetry and narrative. He was unique in describing things and representing facts. It is not personal but it can be applied anywhere Bharta once said while narrating the origin of Natyasastra that-

“Brahma meditated in solitude and finally decided to compose a fifth Veda incorporating all the arts and sciences, and enlightening too. This he did by taking words from Rigveda, music from Samveda, movements and make-up from Yajurveda, and emotional acting from Atharvanaveda.”<sup>1</sup>

The above quotes can also be applied to Vidyapati. His poems invoke a similar sense of divinity and purity. John Donne is often known as a metaphysical poet who often uses farfetched imagery in his poems. The scope and variety of love poems written by John Donne is remarkable. In his writing we can find a sense of dualism between holy love and physical love. His greatness lies in the fact that he beautifully makes a balance between these two forms of love. He has also faith upon the sanctity of marriage. It is noteworthy to see that during his time writing love poems was a kind of fashion or we can say that it was a kind of fashionable exercise. He was perfect in writing love poems and it is interesting to see that his poems are very different from the Elizabethan love poems. poets like John Donne, Matthew Arnold and others who have written on love and there concept of love is physical as well as spiritual. Sexual and physical love is essential for spiritual gratification. John Donne advocates such a kind of relationship between a lover and his beloved where spirituality can be gained through sexuality. Sensuality is also related to Vidyapati and in his poems we can find detailed description of female beauty. John Donne is a great poet but even he cannot match the sensuality of Vidyapati. The technique of John Donne arises from his understanding of the ecstasy. In art of making love it is not only the physical body of the lover and the beloved which gets united but even the souls are united. Vidyapati has said that love is so divine that we cannot separate the lover from his beloved. If the lover is separated from his beloved than he imagines that his separation is only of the body not of the soul. Body as well as the soul plays an active role in love. Sexual relationship provides a way to find the soul entrapped in another soul which is very divine. Thus divinity is a mental status which can be felt only through the body. Vidyapati as well as John Donne both of them have tried to make us understand that divinity and spirituality is

not present outside the body but their way passes through the body. We cannot deny that they are right or wrong but we can expect a deeper and concrete idea of love by such a great poets. There are so many images and symbols which are used by love poets in their poems. These symbols and images are not erotic but adventurous. Comparing this kind of love to the Platonic love we will have to first understand the concept behind Platonic Love. According to Wikipedia-

“Platonic love is examined in Plato's dialogue, the Symposium, which has as its topic the subject of love or Eros generally. It explains the possibilities of how the feeling of love began and how it has evolved—both sexually and non-sexually. Of particular importance is the speech of Socrates, relating the idea of platonic love as attributed to the prophetess Diotima, which presents it as a means of ascent to contemplation of the divine. For Diotima, and for Plato generally, the most correct use of love of human beings is to direct one's mind to love of divinity. In short, with genuine platonic love, the beautiful or lovely other person inspires the mind and the soul and directs one's attention to spiritual things. Socrates, in Plato's "Symposium", explained two types of love or Eros—Vulgar Eros or earthly love and Divine Eros or divine love. Vulgar Eros is nothing but mere material attraction towards a beautiful body for physical pleasure and reproduction. Divine Eros begins the journey from physical attraction i.e. attraction towards beautiful form or body but transcends gradually to love for Supreme Beauty. This concept of Divine Eros is later transformed into the term Platonic love.”<sup>2</sup>

Now analyzing this form of Platonic love we can see that it starts from mind and enters the soul. It is a kind of inspiration both for the lover as well as the beloved. So in Vidyapati we can see similar kind of love which starts from heart and then enters into soul. Thus there is a kind of transportation from physical world to the world of serenity. This is purity of body and soul and there is nothing obscene in it. This concept is equally applicable to John Donne. The common element between these two poets is sensuality. Vidyapati focused more on the beauty of the beloved and writes-

“Ah, who has built this girl of nectarous face?  
 Ah, who this matchless, beauteous dove?  
 An omen and a bounteous boon of love,  
 A garland of triumphant grace<sup>3</sup>.”

The above lines clearly hint about the poet's approach to beauty. He is trying to thank the almighty who has made such a beautiful maid. John Donne is a kind of poet who is known best for his metaphysical conceits. In his poems we can find that the emotions like love are presented through the natural objects and different other images. In one of his poems entitled *The Flea* Donne has written that the flea, an insect is not merely an insect but it should be treated like a temple. It is a kind of marriage bed as it contains the blood of both the lover as well as the beloved. Here John Donne has tried to give shape to the abstract emotions like love. *The Flea* represents three lives as it contains blood of the three lives namely the lover, the beloved and the blood of itself. If a person is going to kill the flea he is going to commit three crimes all together. This kind of farfetched imagery of John Donne is very famous as it is unique. John Donne observes that-

“Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
 How little that which though deniest me is;  
 It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,  
 And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;  
 Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
 A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead.”<sup>4</sup>

The above lines clearly show that during the time of John Donne loss of maidenhood was considered as a shameful act. The union of the lover and the beloved was considered as a sinful act if it was performed before marriage. In

*The Flea* Donne has tried to search the possibilities of the lover and the beloved to get unified. *The Flea* becomes a temple or the marriage bed for the poet. This poem has appealed a lot to several scholars as it brings forward some mystic ideas of John Donne. Here a lover can notice a world of infinite within the finite however, Vidyapati has tried to throw some light over the love affair of a beloved. The physical beauty of the lady is far more expressive than any other poets. There are few scholars who have refereed Vidyapati as an obscene poet. If the poems of Vidyapati are obscene it means that we are biased for Platonic concept of love. There is nothing wrong in writing poems of love dedicated to a lover or a beloved. This kind of love is more realistic and expressive. These lines are melodious also and it can also be sung. In *The Wisdom of Poetry* Ezra Pound has tried to give a suitable definition of poetry. This definition is actually applicable to the functions of the poetry and is inspired by Dante where he says "melody which most doth draw...the soul into itself."<sup>5</sup> It means that after reading a true poem a reader is drowned into the words of the poet. This effect can be seen while reading the poems of all the sensual poets. Discussing only poems related to man and woman love affairs will be unfair as it is a very complex topic. It encompasses all the explored and unexplored forms of love which exist in the society. It is a very tough but interesting task. We have seen the Platonic love, themes of Petrarchan sonnets and several other poems related to courtly love culture and among all those poems love remains at the centre. Apart from these love concepts we can also find poems dealing with love for the almighty. We cannot deny the existence of God but it is also right that nobody on this earth has seen God. It has been rightly said that God can be felt but it cannot be seen physically. In a normal love relationship it happens that when a lover loves his beloved he watches her physically but if someone cannot see his beloved is it possible for him to love her? For loving someone physical presence matters a lot but love for God can be an answer for this question. A devotee loves God more than his life but he is unable to see the almighty. His love is so real and so true that he presents himself to the almighty. Apart from this concept we have also seen the concept of Platonic love. It says that the presence of body hardly matters. Soul must be unified for platonic love but nobody has seen soul yet there is love for the soul. Similarly we have not seen God but we cannot deny the existence of God. Donne has written poems which encompasses body as well as soul. He has beautifully gone through the physical world only to explore the spiritual world. Human body is only a medium to explore the spiritual world. Scholars have argued that the subject matter of Vidyapati is mostly mythical in nature. This mythical element is not applicable everywhere but it is regional in nature as well as appeal. Eric Gould in his famous book *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature* has said that-

"Myths apparently derive their universal significance from the way in which they try to reconstitute an original event or explain some fact about human nature and its worldly or cosmic context. But in doing so, they necessarily refer to some essential meaning which is absent until it appears as a function of interpretation. If there is one persistent belief in this study, it is that there can be no myth without an ontological gap between event and meaning. A myth intends to be an adequate symbolic representation by closing that gap, by aiming to be a tautology"<sup>6</sup>

Thus we can see that Gould has beautifully conveyed the message that even surrounding and atmosphere understands the value of myth in expressing and analyzing the reality. To prove this point we shall have to see the character sketch of the knight mentioned in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Here the knight is supposed to be heroic in nature. It is a kind of myth but even surroundings and atmosphere are ordered to express the truth. In reality we can find that the Knight is chivalric in nature. In fact he is one of the positive characters of Chaucer. Now some body can ask that why not the other characters have been justified by the poet? The knight represents the military group and in that period it was considered as the noblest profession after the church practices. Chaucer has tried to show us the reality of the time. In fact he has done justice to almost all the characters and this is the reason behind his success. We can also see the character sketch of the Squire who is the son of the Knight. He represents the secular pilgrims among the military group. They have the highest social status and are very famous in the society. Few lines are worthy to quote for this young man who was a lover also. There are some common symptoms present in every lover who is young as it is true that age cannot be a barrier to love someone.

"With hym ther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,  
A lovyere and a lusty bachelor;  
With lokkes crulle, as they were leyd in presse.  
Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.  
Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,  
And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe.  
And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie

In Flaundes, in Artoys, and Pycardie,  
 And born hym weel, as of so litel space,  
 In hope to stonden in his lady grace.  
 Embrouded was he, as it were a meede,  
 Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede;  
 Syngyng he was, or floytyng, al the day,  
 He was as fressh as is the monthe of May"<sup>7</sup>

He is described as a lover and a lusty bachelor. Here also we can see that the myth is playing its role. The Squire was supposed to be a young man who is in love and who was considered as a lusty bachelor. Here the surrounding is supporting the reality of expression. He is fresh and young and apart from the church officials he is not corrupt. Injustice has also not been done to the other characters because during the time of Chaucer the condition of Church was really not good. Chaucer has only tried to show us the reality of that time. Now we also cannot deny that it is also a myth that church officials were sinful in nature. It was necessary to write about Chaucer here because he presents a fine dichotomy between mythological and real world of art and humanity. He makes our work easy to understand that this dichotomy has been equally balanced in the poems of Vidyapati and John Donne. Vidyapati has written poems on youthful life. In the life of a girl there are so many so many changes when she enters in the youthful life. Her physical as well as the mental features changes a lot. First of all she feels a lot of problem as she is unable to understand the changes within her. Childhood has just gone and she has entered into a new life. Her eyes have started playing with the advancement of age and maturity. Her way of speaking has also changed and it seems that there is no more children like appearance left in her. She looks very beautiful and her beauty is like the beauty of the moon. When she takes the vanity box in her hand she looks herself in the mirror and asks with her friend about the elements of love. She wants to know about the stages of love as it seems that she has been haunted by some desires. In seclusion she watches her breasts and laughs because once they were very small and now they have become bigger in shape. Vidyapati says that she has a perfect feminine beauty and charm. She is beautiful enough to create sensations in the heart of her lover. It seems to the poet that at the beginning there is a continuous struggle between childhood and adulthood and both of them are trying to defeat each other. We can also say that there is a continuous struggle between the realms of innocence and experience. Now the days of childhood have gone so in the struggle between the world of innocence and experience there is no chance for innocence to come back. It is a proven fact that time and tide waits for none. Time has arrived when the maiden can feel sexual desire in her heart. She asks her friend about the sexual act of love. Vidyapati has compared the physical beauty of a woman with the statue of lord Shiva. The sexuality associated with a woman tends to produce Sringara Rasa whereas the statue of Lord Shiva acts as a central point of devotion. The poet has mixed sexuality with spirituality and thus we are reminded about John Donne who too combines sexuality with spirituality in his poems. It has proved earlier also that Metaphysical poets thought that the spirituality can be gained through the sexual act. Soul is within the body and it can be separated from the body at the time of death. When a lover performs the act of love with his beloved than the soul of the lover as well as the beloved come out and unite. This unity is not less than attaining divinity. Thus Vidyapati and Metaphysical poets share a common view point here. Metaphysical poets came very late so we can also say that there is a chance that the idea of Vidyapati must have been copied. It can be possible or it cannot be possible but we cannot deny that Vidyapati was a born genius who was very ahead of his own age. Maithili Literature has been enriched by the jewels like Vidyapati.

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