

SEMRAWANGADH, BHOJPURI AND VIDYAPATI: AN INTERWOVEN IDENTITY

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Semrawangadh or Simraungadh (officially) is a municipality in Bara district of the Madhesh state in Nepal. Literally it stands for a fort of simal trees, as it had been so, the capital city of Tirhut ruled by the Karnata dynasty kings from 1097 till 1326 CE. Following defeat of King Harisingh Deva, the kingdom of Tirhut faced a chaos under power-tussle between the native kings and the Delhi sultans, and it ended with fall of Shiva Singh. Under his last command, Vidyapati took refuge in Benauli and composed his masterpieces of literature in Avahattha, his mother tongue in his own words. But the very place has been claimed to be Banauli in Saptari and his mother tongue Maithili, whereas, Vidyapati's Avahattha is Proto-Bhojpuri. Therefore, Semrawangadh, Bhojpuri and Vidyapati are parts of an interwoven identity. Historically and linguistically the article attempts to clarify it on the basis of qualitative and quantitative data.

Keywords: Avahattha, Proto-Bhojpuri, lineage, grammatical categories.

1. Introduction

There are three words combined in Semrawangadh: *semar* 'simal tree', *wan* 'jungle' and *gaḷ* 'fort'. It means it is a symbol of a fort in the jungle of simal trees. But there is a vital deviation from the reality, too. In deviated form, it is also interpreted as Shivaraungadh, the fort of King Shiva Singh who is also locally pronounced as Sewai Singh. But both history and archaeology favour the first analogy. Going through history, Karnata dynasty kings used to rule the then Kingdom of Tirhut or Doy surrounded within Himalayas in the North (time and again), the Rivers of Ganges in the South, Koshi in the east and Gandak in the west from 1097 (Thakur, 1956, p. 234) till 1326 CE (Choudhary, 1970, p. 52). They had constructed their capital as a fort in Semrawangadh. The first Karnata king was Nanya Deva and the last one was Harisingh Deva. Regarding language of Semrawangadh, Varṇaratnākara, the masterpiece literary work of Jyotirīśvara-Kaviśekharāchārya (Chatterji and Misra, 1940) is the best example of the contemporary language of Semrawangadh those days. Following ruin of the Karnata kingdom and chaos between the native rulers and Delhi sultans, The Thakur turned Singh King Shiva Singh

locally famous as Sewai Singh disappeared during the battle in the jungle of Semrawangadh urging his courtier, advisor and secretary Vidyapati with him to take refuge. Additionally, the language of both of Jyotirīśvara and Vidyapati seems identical.

In this context, these are the queries to be verified:

- (a) What was the language of Semrawangadh during and aftermath of the ruin of the Karnata kingdom up to life-span of Vidyapati?
- (b) Being a well-known scholar of Sanskrit, why did Great Poet Vidyapati use it for his literary writing?
- (c) How is the mother tongue of Vidyapati the primitive form of Bhojpuri?

Therefore, the specific objectives of this study are the following:

- (a) To identify the language of Semrawangadh during and aftermath of the ruin of the Karnata kingdom up to life-span of Great Poet Vidyapati.
- (b) To verify why Great Poet Vidyapati used his mother tongue for his literary writing though he was a well-known scholar of Sanskrit.

- (c) To verify how the mother tongue Vidyapati used in his literary pieces is akin to Bhojpuri.

2. Methods of identification and verification

The following activities are adopted within the methods of identification and verification of the language of Semrawangadh as well as the native language of Vidyapati in this article:

2.1 A brief presentation of grammatical categories

The then language of Semrawangadh is presented in Chatterji and Misra (1940). But there is falsification too, saying it is an old form of Maithili. Though Lohar (2020), Thakur (2021 and 2022), Thakur and Ashk (2023) and Thakur (2081 VE) have clarified the vernacular of the locality is Bhojpuri, there is still a rumour to say it otherwise. In this context, as the Indo-Aryan languages have higher intelligibility, they are difficult to be highlighted on the basis of lexical categories, therefore, properties of nouns, pronouns, pronominal adjectives and adverbs along with some copular verbs of Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili are presented so that such word classes and grammatical categories of the language of Semrawangadh as well as of Vidyapati can be identified and verified.

2.2 Public opinion

Though the core characteristics of this research article is qualitative, some litterateurs, journalists and language campaigners have also been sought for their opinion about the language of Semrawangadh and the linguistic characteristics of Avahattha, the native language of Vidyapati used in his popular masterpiece poetic creation. Their views have been presented shortly.

Dinesh Yadav, a well-known journalist, litterateur and folk-Maithili campaigner from Saptari District, iterates that the emotional and poetic sensibilities of compositions of Vidyapati, closely associated with the Karnata court, were assimilated into the Bhojpuri language, which evolved under the influence of Avahatta and Maithili.

Binit Thakur, a Maithili litterateur from Dhanusha District, opines that Vidyapati (1352-1448 CE) was a courtier and royal priest of his patron King Shiva Singh in Semrawangadh. His native

language was Prakrit or Eastern Avahattha, what he himself had declared, a proto-form of a number of Neo Indo-Aryan languages including Bhojpuri and Maithili.

Gopal Ashk, a senior litterateur of Bhojpuri and former member of the Language Commission, states that Vidyapati, a legend poet wrote his poems in Avahattha, the language that seems to be very closed with Old Bhojpuri. In a few words, it can be said that Semrawangadh is the soul of architecture, Bhojpuri language and culture.

Dinesh Gupta, a senior Bhojpuri litterateur, supports Thakur and Ashk (2023) that evidently proves the language of Semrawangadh and the native language of Vidyapati is Bhojpuri.

In the view of Vijay Kishor Pandey, a historian who authored books on Semrawangadh, Nanya Deva Karnata founded Kingdom of Semrawangadh, in 1097 CE, where Great Poet Vidyapati was born in Benuali. His literary masterpieces were composed in Avahattha and Bhojpuri, the native language of Semrawangadh.

Rameshwar Mehta, a journalist and native inhabitant of proper Semrawangadh, says that Great Poet Vidyapati was son of the soil of Semrawangadh. His birth-place was Benuali in the vicinity. His songs with opening lines *mora re anganawa canan ke re gac'ia* and *pia mor balak ham taruni ge* already extracted in Thakur and Ashk (2023) are like heartbeat of all Bhojpuri natives in Nepal and elsewhere.

Shivnath Sah, a permanent resident of Semrawangadh and a young Bhojpuri litterateur, concludes his study of the aspects of society and researches on Semrawangadh that vernacular of the locality has been Bhojpuri, then and now. In his opinion, Vidyapati used Sanskrit and Avahatta in his literary writings. Linguistically, Avajattha is very close to Bhojpuri, not to Maithili.

Bir Bahadur Mahato, Chairman of the International Magahi Council, expresses his view regarding Thakur and Ashk (2023) that the language of Semrawangadh and the native language of Vidyapati is Avahattha, not Maithili. Besides, he states that Avahattha is more akin to Bhojpuri than to Maithili.

In views of the nine personnel involved in the field of literature, journalism and history writing,

the Maithili native speakers have already accepted Vidyapati's mother tongue Avahattha akin to Bhojpuri. The others have clearly said it is the proto form of Bhojpuri.

Now, the available data in the form of both published as well as on the tongue of general populace have been presented with analysis below.

2.3 Description and analysis of the data presented

The description and analysis of the word classes and grammatical categories in the texts of the foresaid literature obtained from different sources along with the works on such texts are essential to be identified and verified.

The texts are mostly available in Devanagari, both in verse and prose, but the vernacular of this paper is English. So, the description uses diacritics if necessary to spell the Devanagari words and the data are firstly presented in IPA, followed by morpheme break with lexical and grammatical categories in abbreviated form. At last, the free translation is presented. Besides, the assimilated free translation is also presented if the lines are part of a couplet or quadrant of a verse. (The Devanagari and IPA interface is given in the Annex.)

3. Word classes and grammatical categories

The word classes and grammatical categories of Varṇa-ratnākara is beautifully presented in Chatterji and Misra (1940) and it is identified as Avahattha in Singh (1955 and 1964) and NARA (1979). As Avahattha is still being said to have been ancient form of Maithili, the word classes and grammatical categories presented in Grierson (1881) and Yadav (1996) are verified with the context.

Besides, nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs are the major word classes whereas pronouns, postpositions, determiners, inter-clausal connectives, quantifiers, numerals and ordinals, auxiliary verbs, interjections, clitics, and particles are the minor word classes described in Thakur (2021) in Bhojpuri. Pronouns, some sorts of adjectives and adverbs, postpositions, determiners, inter-clausal connectives, quantifiers, numerals and ordinals, auxiliary verbs, interjections, clitics, and particles among them play vital roles to determine specific characters of a particular

language. Whatever among them found in Avahattha literary works are described accordingly.

Likewise, the origin, lineage and abodes of Vidyapati are presented to identify who he is. Besides, his mother tongue used in his literary pieces is presented what he himself has named it along with others how they have described and analysed it in reference to the context.

4. The language of Semrawangadh: then and now

As it is crystal clear that Varṇa-ratnākara of Jyotirīśvara-Kaviśekharaḥārya has been composed in then Semrawangadh, its vernacular certainly represents the then native language of the locality. Besides, the contemporary languages used in Semrawangadh and the other surrounding states are also unveiled in the very literary work.

4.1 The language of then Semrawangadh

First of all, the editors of Varṇa-ratnākara Suniti Kumar Chatterji and Babua Misra have given conflicting statements about the date and the language used in it. Chatterji (1940, pp. ix & xx) dates Varṇa-ratnākara to have been composed during the first quarter of the 14th Century CE, during the reign of King Harisingh Deva, whereas, Misra (1940, pp. 5*-6*) differs from him raising absence of the name of Jyotirīśvara from the *Panji-prabandha* 'genealogical records of marriages' that started during King Harisingh Deva. Due to this reason, Misra dates Varṇa-ratnākara to have been composed in the 13th Century CE during reign of King Narasingh Deva. Regarding the language of Varṇa-ratnākara, Chatterji (1940, p. ix) identifies it as the oldest work in Maithili in spite of being a Bangali native speaker, whereas, Misra looks skeptical whether to identify it as Maithili or not:

- (1) ... ai sã 600-700 varṣ pūrvak, jak^han
mithilaḷaṣa kaḥi wa naḥi, ...
ai sã 600-700 varṣ pūrv-ak
today ABL 600-700 year early-GEN
jak^han mithilaḷaṣa kaḥi-i
when Mithila-language say-OPT
wa naḥi
or NEG
'... during the time six-seven hundred
years earlier than today, whether to say it
Maithili or not... (Misra, 1940, p. 2*)

Besides this, he also expresses incompetence of understanding the language of Varṇa-ratnākara and clearly says that this was the reason that the text was only transliterated in Devanagari from the original script it was written in, as Chatterji thought it was Bangla and Misra took it as Tirhuta (Misra, 1940, pp. 2*-3*).

But the language of Varṇa-ratnākara has been clearly identified by different studies.

Singh (1955, p. 7 and 1964, p. 7) states that Avahattha is not Mithilabhransha. It clarifies that it is not any kind of Maithili. In addition to this, NARA (1979, p. 7) postulates that Avahattha is the developed form which was used by and for the mass of the people from 5-6th century till 15th century CE in the Indo-Aryan speaking area. Besides, Thakur and Ashk (2023, pp. 21-24) presents some grammatical features of Avahattha and clarifies it is an independent language of the time. Likewise, Thakur and Ashk (2023, pp. 25-31) presents comparative Phonologies of Avahatṭa, Bhojpuri and Maithili including consonants, monophthongs, diphthongs, triphthongs and quaterinaries. The comparison clarifies Bhojpuri lacks only quaterinaries whereas Maithili lacks both triphthongs and quaterinaries. Likewise, Thakur and Ashk (2023, pp. 31-37) presents comparative morphological paradigms of Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili showing Avahattha is more akin to Bhojpuri than to Maithili.

4.2 The languages in and around then Semrawangadh

Jyotirīśwar has himself presented the names of languages of Semrawangadh and elsewhere contemporarily being used then:

(2) *punu kaisan ḥaṭ. sanskrit. parakrit.*

punu	kaisan	ḥaṭ	sanskrit	prakrit
again	how	bard	Sanskrit	Prakrit
<i>avahatṭa. pefacī. sarseni.</i>				
avahatṭa	Paishachi	Saurseni		
<i>magadī c^haṭ ḥaṣak</i>				
magadī	c ^h a-ṭ	ḥasa-k		
Magadhi six-CLF language-REL				
<i>tatwagya. śakarī. ḥirī. caṇḍalī.</i>				
tatwagya	śakarī	ḥirī	caṇḍalī	
philosopher	Shakari	Abhiri	Chandali	
<i>mawālī. drawālī. ṭakalī. bijatiya</i>				

mawālī	drawālī	ṭakalī	bijatiya
Mawali	Drawali	Autakali	Vijatiya
<i>sat-ṭi upḥaṣak kuṣalaṭi.</i>			
sat-ṭi	upḥasa-k	kuṣalaṭi	
seven-CLF	dialect-REL	skillful	
<i>panini. candra. kalap. damodar.</i>			
panini	candra	kalap	damodar
Panini	Chandra	Kalap	Damodar
<i>ardḍaman. mahendra. mahēf.</i>			
ardḍaman	mahendra	mahēf	
Ardhaman	Mahendra	Mahesh	
<i>sarswat. praḥrit ye aṭ^hao</i>			
sarswat	praḥrit	ye	aṭ ^h -o
Sarswat	charged	PRX	eight-EPH
<i>byakaraṇ tak paraḡ.</i>			
byakaraṇ	ta-k	paraḡ	
grammar	DST-REL	scholar	

'Please look at the bard again how he is. He is a philosopher of the six languages, i.e., Sanskrit, Prakrit, Avahattha, Paishachi, Saurseni and Magadhi as well as skilful in the seven dialects, i.e., Shakari, Abhiri, Chandali, Mawali, Drawali, Autakali and Vijatiya. Besides, he is well-versed in grammars of the eight grammarians, i.e., Panini, Chandra, Kalap, Damodar, Ardhaman, Mahendra, Mahesh and Sarswat.' (Chatterji and Misra, 1940, p. 44; Thakur, 2024, pp. 150-151)

In the instance (2) the main point of attention is the names of languages and dialects used in the region those days. There are six languages and seven dialects in which the bard is said to have been philosopher and skilful but none of the names of the Neo Indo-Aryan languages or dialects are included among them. Therefore, to claim Pt. Jyotirīśwar Thakur as litterateur of Maithili is totally baseless.

Besides, there is use of the proper nouns in abundance in instance (2). The words *punu* 'again', *kaisan* 'how', *ḥaṭ* 'bard', *tatwagya* 'philosopher', *c^ha* 'six', *ḥasa* 'language', *sat* 'seven', *upḥasa* 'dialect', *kuṣalaṭi* 'skilful', *praḥrit* 'charged', *ye* 'these', *aṭ^h* 'eight', *byakaraṇ* 'grammar', *tak* 'theirs' and *paraḡ* 'scholar' are the other nouns, adjectives, numerals and other word classes, all familiar in contemporary Bhojpuri. *kaisan* 'how' among them is the fundamental entity of Bhojpuri.

4.3 Language of Semrawangadh now

Research studies of the language of Semrawangadh occurred since 1978 till 2025 in Nepal. Sonntag

(1978, p. 14) grades 1 to 5 of the varieties from Bhojpuri (Westward) to Maithili (Eastward), grade 1 for exactly the same to, 2 for very similar to, 3 for similar to, 4 for different from and 5 for very different from Bhojpuri. It starts from Solakpur, the core Bhojpuri native speaking area, in Parsa district and lasts at Khajuri, a core Maithili speaking area, in Dhanusha district. On these criteria, the study shows Garahal and Thaskol in Bara district towards East of Pasaha River in the surrounding zone of Semrawangadh scoring grade 3. It clarifies that the dialect spoken in and around Semrawangadh is similar to the one in Solakpur. Thus Sonntag (1978) makes it clear the language of Semrawangadh is Bhojpuri till date. Following this, Lohar (2006, p. 67) presents Swadesh's 100 word-list analysis in a table that shows Central Bhojpuri of Bara-Parsa is cent-percent identical with the Bhojpuri of Bara-Rautahat Semrawangadh belongs to. Likewise, Thakur and Regmi (2012, p. 105) presents table 9.2 of the comparison of lexical similarity of a basic 210 wordlist and concludes the Central Bhojpuri of Maisthan, Birganj and Kachorwa, Semrawangadh have a lexical similarity of 92%. It is the result of the Sociolinguistic Survey during Linguistic Survey of Nepal (LinSuN). Recently, Thakur (2081 VE, pp. 69-72) has classified the dialectal variation in Bhojpuri on the basis of Sonntag (1978), Lohar (2006) and Thakur and Regmi (2012) with a conclusion of having six dialects, four geolects and two sociolects. The geolects are Central dialect between Kalaiya and Birganj, Westward of Pasaha River in Bara up to whole Parsa District; Semrawani, between Pasaha River in Bara and Bakeya River in Rautahat Districts; Eastern, Eastward of Bakeya River in Rautahat up to whole of Sarlahi District; and Western of Gandaki-Lumbini, Westward of the Narayani River covering Nawalparasi (East and West of Susta River) and Rupandehi Districts. Likewise, the sociolects are Tharu mainly in Bara and Rautahat and Sheikh in Rautahat.

Thakur (2081 VE, pp. 75-77) presents results of the comparison of the different dialectal varieties of Bhojpuri from Sarlahi in the East to Rupandehi in the West placing Table 6.1-6.4. The results of Swadesh's 100 wordlists of Central Bhojpuri and Semrawani Bhojpuri show 92% similarities both on lexical and phonetic comparison whereas the results of the 210 wordlists between the two

varieties of Bhojpuri also come to be identical with the previous one. Thus, this section may be concluded Bhojpuri is the vernacular of Semrawangadh and it is akin to Avahattha during the Proto-Neo period of the Indo-Aryan languages.

5. Vidyapati and his native language.

Vidyapati, popularly known as a descendent of Thakur dynasty ministers and secretaries of the Karnata dynasty kings of Tirhut ruled from Semrawangadh as the capital city, is introduced as son of Ganapati Thakur, a native of Bispi village in Madhubani District in Bihar. His life time is still contradictory but can be assumed between second half of the 14th and first half of the 15th centuries CE. Moreover, he is being claimed as great poet of Maithili along with strong argument of being poet of Bangla and Uriya at the same time. The vital text for all arguments is the only Vidyapati Padāwālī or Verses of Vidyapati.

5.1 Lineage of Vidyapati

The family surname of Vidyapati is Thakur or Thakur. Moreover, Thakur and Ashk (2023, p. 97) presents lineage-tree diagram of Vidyapati on the basis of Jha (1954, p. 180), Sahay (1965 VE, pp. 2a-b) and Jha (1976, p. 10). It shows the pioneer forefather of his lineage is Vishnu Sharma. He is known as a great Brahmin scholar of Sanskrit, living in a South Indian city of Mahilaropya. On request of the King of the very city state, Amarshakti, he composed polity-based collection of stories known as Panchatantra, in about 3rd-2nd Century BC. Certainly not, he can be treated as Maithila. Likewise, the tree-diagram shows that grandson of Vishnu Sharma is Karmaditya Tripathy whose sixth generation-grandson is Vidyapati. Either Sharma or Tripathy doesn't represent surname of any Maithila Brahmin. Besides, Thakur and Ashk (2023, pp. 97) quotes Singh (2022) as unveiling Patron of Vidyapati King Shiva Singh conferred him with title of Thakur and the whole dynasty was recognized accordingly. Moreover, it is a bare truth that *panjī* system started from the reign of Harisingh Deva in Semrawangadh is the only source of present day Maithila Brahmins. Besides, Thakur is also not the only representation of Maithila Brahmins till date.

Majumdar (1958, pp. 53-56), moreover, describes several Vidyapatis since 11th century CE, among whom the one was King Bhoja of the Paramāra dynasty, who composed his Siddhānta-Śiromaṇi in 1151 CE. It indicates that Vidyapati was not the proper name of a certain person, rather the title of various learned men in Avahattha era.

Later on, Grierson (1899, p. 96) rejects authority of a copper-plate, claimed by some Thakur Brahmins in Bisafi to have been Vidyapati's descendants and it was a donation certificate conferred by King Shiva Singh to Vidyapati. But the plate has an inscription of Fasali Era that Grierson rejects to have been in practice during life-span of Vidyapati.

Thus, the above facts are dubious to accept Vidyapati as a Maithili Brahmin.

5.2 The language of Vidyapati

Vidyapati, the very great poet under our discussion, undoubtedly was a Sanskrit scholar who composed several books among which *Purusha Pariksha* has itself been translated by Grierson in English. But Sanskrit has neither then nor now been a native language of the people. Vidyapati also realized it and very clearly wrote not only about Sanskrit, but also about Prakrit and his native language, Avahattha:

(3) a. *sakkaḷa vaṇī buḥaṇa ḥawai*

sakka-ḷa vaṇī
Sanskrit-GEN language
buḥa-ṇa ḥa-wai
learned-DAT impress-3S.PRS
paua-rasa koi mamma na pawai
paua-rasa koi mamma
Prakrit-taste anyone essence
na pa-wai
NEG get-3S.PRS
'The Sanskrit language impresses the learned ones. Prakrit loses the essence of literary taste.'

b. *desil baṇa sabajan miṭṭha*

des-il ben-a sab jan
country-ADJ speech-DEF all man
miṭṭh-a
sweet-DEF
tē taisan jampāno ḷaḥaṭṭha
tē taisan jamp-ḍ
so as such create-1SG.PST

ḷaḥaṭṭh-a

Avahattha-DEF

'The native speech is sweet enough to all people. So, I composed as such in Avahattha.'

Assimilating the quadrant:

'Sanskrit is only the language of learned men and Prakrit has already lost its literary taste of essence. In this context the native speech is sweet enough to all people, so, I composed as such in Avahattha.' (Saxena, 2014 VE, p. 6; Singh, 1955, p. 30 and 1964, pp. 228-229; Agrawala, 1962, p. 14-15; Jha 2020, p. 44; & Thakur, 2024, p. 151)

Now it is clear that the native language of Vidyapati was Avahattha. But what does it look like? Is it akin to Maithili or Bhojpuri? To solve these queries, the lexical words may not clarify since all the three languages have the same root in same branch of the same language family. So, it is necessary to compare the grammatical categories of the three languages. Thakur and Ashk (2023, pp. 25-37) has compared the phonological and morphological closeness between Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili. Pronouns, pronominal adjectives and pronominal adverbs between the three languages have been compared below:

Table 1: Pronouns of Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili: First person

	Avahattha		Bhojpuri		Maithili	
	S	PL	S	PL	S	P L
NO M	<i>hō, hō,</i> <i>hōḍ</i>	<i>ḷhe,</i> <i>ḷhē</i>	<i>hām</i>	<i>hāmni,</i> <i>hāmraṇi</i>	<i>hām</i>	
ACC	<i>mē, mē</i>	<i>ḷhaṇ</i> <i>ḷm</i>	<i>hāme</i>		<i>hām</i> <i>e</i>	
GEN	<i>maḥa,</i> <i>maḥu,</i> <i>maḥju</i>	<i>ḷha,</i> <i>ḷmma</i> <i>hā,</i> <i>ḷhaḥi</i> <i>ḷm,</i> <i>mor</i>	<i>hāma</i> <i>r,</i> <i>hāma</i> <i>r,</i> <i>mor</i>		<i>hām</i> <i>ar</i>	

Table 1 shows Bhojpuri and Maithili pronouns in first person look very akin to Avahattha, only exchanging the initial phonemes. But Bhojpuri has also started dropping /h/ in /mor/ 'my or mine'.

Table 2: Pronouns of Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili: Second person

	Avahattha		Bhojpuri		Maithili	
	S	PL	S	PL	S	PL
NOM	<i>tuA,</i> <i>tufu,</i> <i>tufū,</i> <i>tufum</i>	<i>tume</i>	<i>tu, tū,</i> <i>tē,</i> <i>rAua,</i> <i>Apne</i>	<i>tofini</i>	<i>tō,</i> <i>Ahā,</i> <i>Apne</i>	
ACC	<i>pem,</i> <i>tuma</i>		<i>tohe</i>		<i>tohe</i>	
GEN	<i>to, tō,</i> <i>tufA,</i> <i>tufu,</i> <i>tujjA,</i> <i>tujjū,</i> <i>tuma,</i> <i>tuḍra</i>		<i>tohar,</i> <i>tohar,</i> <i>raur,</i> <i>tor</i>		<i>tohar</i>	

Table 2 shows Bhojpuri and Maithili pronouns in second person look more akin to Avahattha, retaining the initial phonemes with changes of the following ones. But both of the Bhojpuri and Maithili have developed /*Apne*/ 'you (H)', whereas Bhojpuri has developed /*rAua*/ and Maithili /*Ahā*/ in the same environment. Moreover, /*raur*/ 'your (H)' and /*tor*/ 'thy' or 'thine' are developments in Bhojpuri only.

Table 3: Demonstrative pronouns of Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili

		Avahattha		Bhojpuri		Maithili	
		S	PL	S	P L	S	P L
NO	M	<i>sA, se,</i> <i>so,</i> <i>tehi,</i> <i>tram</i>	<i>te,</i> <i>tA</i> <i>hi</i>	<i>i, u</i>	<i>o</i> <i>k</i> <i>n</i> <i>i</i>	<i>i, u</i>	
	F	<i>se, so</i>	<i>tiv</i> <i>i</i>				
	NT	<i>se,</i> <i>so,</i> <i>sē,</i> <i>tAm</i>	<i>ta</i> <i>im</i>				
ACC	M	<i>tA, so</i>		<i>eke,</i> <i>oke,</i> <i>heke,</i> <i>hoke</i>		<i>eke,</i> <i>oke,</i> <i>heke,</i> <i>hoke</i>	
	F	<i>tAm</i>	<i>ta</i>				
	NT	<i>tAd,</i> <i>tAm</i>					

GEN	M	<i>tassa,</i> <i>tasa,</i> <i>tAhA,</i> <i>tAfu,</i> <i>tasu,</i> <i>tasū,</i> <i>tAhAm</i>		<i>ekar,</i> <i>okar,</i> <i>hokar</i> , <i>hunka</i> <i>r</i>		<i>ekar,</i> <i>okar,</i> <i>hokar</i>	
	F	<i>tAhe</i>					
	NT						

Table 3 shows the demonstrative pronouns both in Bhojpuri and Maithili look different from those in Avahattha.

Besides, the pronouns have been demonstrated briefly in table 1, 2 and 3, only the forms having inflected but not followed by postpositions, from NARA (1979, pp. 116-117) and Singh (1964, pp. 130-131) for Avahattha, Grierson (1884, pp. 15-21) & Thakur, 2022, pp. 245-249) for Bhojpuri and Grierson (1881, pp. 24-34) & Yadav (1996, pp. 103-114) for Maithili. Among them, Grierson (1881, pp. 26 & 28) presents /*mē*/ 'I', /*mohi*/ 'me', /*mor*/ or /*mora*/ or /*hamar*/ 'my', /*tō*/ 'thou', /*tohi*/ 'thee', /*tor*/ or /*tohar*/ 'thy' contemporarily being used in Maithili only for poetry but Grierson (1884, pp. 15-21) presents these all forms being used in Bhojpuri regularly. It's the clear indication that these forms of pronouns have been borrowed in Maithili from Bhojpuri.

All the personal pronouns in genitive case are used as possessive personal adjectives which are akin to *hammarī* 'my', *toharā* 'your' and *taharā* 'his/her/its' in Avahattha (NARA, 1979, pp. 122-123).

Let's observe the paradigms of interrogative pronouns in Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili in Table 4.

Table 4: Interrogative pronouns in Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili

		Avahattha	Bhojpuri	Maithili
nom	S	<i>ki, ko, ka,</i> <i>kaman,</i> <i>kawane,</i> <i>kanoṇ</i>	<i>ka, ke,</i> <i>ka^{thi}</i>	<i>ke, ki</i>
	PL	<i>kaṭ, kaim</i>	<i>kekani</i>	
acc	S	<i>kim, kivi,</i> <i>kayau</i>	<i>kekara</i>	<i>ka^hkara,</i> <i>kanika</i>
	PL			

gen	S	<i>kassa, kasa, kahe</i>	<i>kekar, kinkar</i>	<i>kakar, kanik, kanikar</i>
	PL			

Source: Singh (1964, p. 133) and NARA (1979, pp. 121-122) for Avahattha, Grierson (1884, p. 26) and Thakur (2022, p. 249) for Bhojpuri and Grierson (1881, pp. 39-40) for Maithili.

Likewise, a few adverbs of place, time and manner in Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili are presented in Table 5 on the basis of Thakur and Ashk (2023, p. 36).

Table 5: Adverbs in Avahattha, Bhojpuri and Maithili

Avahattha	Bhojpuri	Maithili	English
<i>uppari</i>	<i>upar</i>	<i>upar</i>	'up'
<i>ūhā</i>	<i>uhā</i>	<i>otā</i>	'there'
<i>bahirā</i>	<i>bahar</i>	<i>bahar</i>	'out'
<i>wahi</i>	<i>bahari</i>	<i>bahari</i>	'outer'
<i>ajju, ajja</i>	<i>aju, aj</i>	<i>ai</i>	'today'
<i>kalli</i>	<i>kaḷu, kaḷ</i>	<i>kaḷi</i>	'yesterday'
<i>kʰaṇu</i>	<i>kṣaṇ, kʰaṇ</i>	<i>kṣaṇ</i>	'moment'
<i>aise</i>	<i>aise</i>	<i>ena</i>	'like this'
<i>oise</i>	<i>oise</i>	<i>ona</i>	'like that'
<i>kaise</i>	<i>kaise</i>	<i>kena</i>	'how'
<i>jaise</i>	<i>jaise</i>	<i>jena</i>	'as such'
<i>aisan</i>	<i>aisan</i>	<i>ehān</i>	'like this'
<i>oisan</i>	<i>oisan</i>	<i>ohān</i>	'like that'
<i>kaisan</i>	<i>kaisan</i>	<i>kehān</i>	'like what'
<i>jaisan</i>	<i>jaisan</i>	<i>jehān</i>	'as such'
<i>taisan</i>	<i>taisan</i>	<i>tehān</i>	'like that'

Going through Table 1-5, the presented paradigms of the pronouns, pronominal adjectives, possessive pronominal adjectives and different types of adverbs demonstrate Avahattha is more akin to Bhojpuri than to Maithili. So, the Avahattha epics of Vidyapati Kirtilatā, Kirtigāthā and Kirtipataka are said to be composed in primitive Bhojpuri.

But his songs and Padavalī are solely claimed to have been composed in Maithili, though, neither historical nor linguistic facts favour the analogy. Historically, Vidyapati's statement is more than enough that he himself said he preferred to compose in native language, Avahattha, the vernacular of general populace at that time, already presented in instance (3a-b).

Besides that, Thakur and Ashk (2023, p. 103) quotes Nagarjun (1979, p. 8) as describing the language of Vidyapati to have been a mixture in which the native vocabularies of Bangla, Oria, Assamese, Santhali, Nepali, Magahi, Bhojpuri, Awadhi and Brajbhasha have been adopted.

In addition, Grierson (1886, pp. 236-239) presents a Bhojpuri song composed by Vidyapati. The first quadrant is extracted:

- (4) *baśaḥar ḡarawa e uḍo*
 bās-flar ḡar-wa e uḍo
 bamboo-ADJ house-DEF VOC Uddhav
rama jili-mili batī
 rama jili-mili bati
 Lord Rama flickering lamp
piya le mē sutalō e uḍo
 pia le mē sut-alō
 husband take 1S.NOM sleep-1S.PST
 e uḍo
 VOC Uddhav
rama ācara ḍasaī
 rama ācara ḍasa-i
 Lord Rama anchal spread-PRF
 'O Uddhav, I slept with my husband
 spreading anchal (bordering part of the sari)
 as a bed in the bamboo-house where the
 lamp was flickering.'

Certainly, this song has been included in Grierson (1886, pp. 207-267) in an anthology of Bhojpuri folk-songs. But how far the popular songs of Vidyapati on the tongues of the general populace present the Bhojpuri elements, a few specimens of them are presented below:

- (5) *ḥana bidyapati mor*
 ḥan-a bidyapati mor
 say-3PRS Vidyapati 1SG.REL
ḥolanatʰ gati
 ḥolanatʰ gati
 Lord Shiva state
deḥu aḥay bar moḥi,
 de-fiu a-ḥay bar mo-fi
 give-IMP.H NEG-fear boon 1SG-DAT
ḥe ḥolanatʰ
 ḥe ḥolanatʰ
 ADD Lord Shiva
kakʰaṇ fīarab dukʰ mor
 kakʰaṇ fīar-ab dukʰ mor
 when take-2FUT.H sorrow 1SG.REL

'Vidyapati says, "O Lord Shiva! Please avail me state of fearlessness. When will you make me free of sorrow?"' (Thakur, 2024, pp. 151-152)

In the instance (5), these are the last lines of very popular hymns known as *nacari* 'a prayer to Lord Shiva'. The pronominal adjective *mor* 'my/mine' in genitive case and *mofi* 'me' in dative case belong to Bhojpuri, not to Maithili.

Besides, there is gender agreement between subject and verb as well as between adjective and noun in Vidyapati's verses:

(6) a. *kunj hawan sē nikasali*

kunj hawan sē nikas-ali
garden house ABL come out-1PST.F
re rokal giriḍarī

re rok-āl giriḍari
ADD obstruct-3PST Krishna
'When I came to garden from house, Lord Krishna obstructed my way.'

b. *saṅgak sakhi*

saṅg-ak sakhi
company-REL lady friend
Aguaili re hām
Agu-ili re hām
go ahead-3PST.F ADD 1SG
eksari narī
eksar-i nari
alone-F woman

My lady friends went ahead and now I'm a lonely woman.' (Gupt, 1910, p. 64)

In the instance (6a) there is agreement between the lady as the subject who utters the lines and the verb *niksali* 'I came out' she uses for her and also between *rokal* 'obstructed' and *giriḍari* 'Lord Krishna'. As the lady, though in first person, the suffix *-i* with *niksal* 'come out' maintains the gender agreement for a feminine subject. Conversely, as Krishna is masculine, so, the verb also is used but without feminine marker *-i*. Similarly, the adjective-noun gender agreement is also seen in (6b) between *eksari* 'alone' and *nari* 'woman'. Hence, *eksar* takes suffix *-i* to show agreement with *nari* 'woman'. This fact of grammatical category of gender agreement is also presented in Shrivastava (1992, pp. 92-93). This is the characteristics of Bhojpuri, not of Maithili. (Thakur, 2024, p. 152)

Let's see another instance from Vidhapati's verses:

(7) *keo de has suḍa sam nīk*

keo de has suḍa sam
someone give cheer nectar equal
nik
good

jaisan parhōk taisan bīk

jaisan parhōk taisan bik
REL first sale COR day sale

'Whoever can give me nectar like smile, as the day-long sale depends upon the first one?' (Gupt, 1910, p. 67)

In the instance (7), the relative correlative adverb of manner *jaisan* *taisan* 'so and so' stands as a typical Bhojpuri one. It is replaced by *jehān* *tehān* in Maithili.

Let's see another example of the adverb of time and place he has used in Padavali:

(8) *aju ati niare karal parihas*

aju ati niar-e kar-āl
today excess near-EPH do-3.PST

parihas

joke

na janiā gokul kakar bilas

na jan-ia gokul kakar
NEG know-1.PRS Gokul whose

bilas

luxury

'Today he (Lord Krishna) cracked jokes being the nearest one, I don't know who will enjoy assets of Gokul.' (Gupt, 1910, p. 39)

Going through instance (8), *aju* 'today' has its synonymous pair *ai* and *niar* 'near' is replaced with *lag* in Maithili.

(9) *jaise ḍagmag nalanik nire*

jaise ḍagmag nal-nik nir-e
COR wave water-good water-LOC

taise ḍagmag ḍanik sarire

taise ḍagmag ḍani-k
REL wave woman-GEN

sarir-e

body-LOC

'As the water surface in a watershed remains waving, body of my beloved is waving like that.' (Gupt, 1910, p. 76)

Going through instance (9), the relative-correlative adverb of manner *jaise* *taise* 'so and so' stands as a typical Bhojpuri one. It is replaced by *jehāne* *tehāne* in Maithili.

Indefinite adverb and pronoun of Bhojpuri have been used in Padavali:

- (10) *ḥamar ḥare ki majari ḥāḡe*
 ḥamar ḥar-e ki majari
 butterfly quench-3.PRS or blossom
 ḥaḡ-e
 wander-3.PRS
dek^hal kaṭaḥu keḥu (2/144)
 dek^h-al kaṭaḥu keḥu
 see-PRF anywhere anybody
 'Has anyone seen anywhere the butterfly
 fleeing from flowers?' (Gupt, 1910, p. 74)

Going through instance (10), *kaṭaḥu* 'anywhere' and *keḥu* 'anybody' are the indefinite adverb of place and indefinite pronoun respectively as the entity of Bhojpuri.

Parts of some verses in Vidyapati's Padavali collected and edited by Shree Nagandra Nath Gupta and published by the then Darbhanga Naresh Shree Maharaja Rameshwar Singh Mahoday in Indian Press Prayag in 1910 has abundant of such Bhojpuri pronouns, adverbs and even verbs too. It also hunts want of Maithili grammatical vocabularies why not used by Vidyapati.

Though Vidyapati was a great poet, he was a social reformer at the same time. Due to the Muslim invasion and forced marriage of Hindu girls with Muslim bridegrooms under the decree of the rulers, child marriage came into practice. Sometimes the bride was in infancy and sometimes the bridegroom was so. Vidyapati wrote satirical song describing how the bride was sad regarding her infant groom. The first couplet is presented below:

- (11) *pia mora balak me taruni ge*
 pia mora balak me
 husband 1S.GEN child 1S.NOM
 tarun-i ge
 young-F VOC-F
kon tap cukal b^helāi janani ge
 kon tap cuk-al
 which penance miss-3.PST
 ḥo-al-āi janani ge
 be-PST-1PST.2.H mother VOC.F
 'My husband is an infant child and I'm a
 young woman. What did I miss in my

penance that I became mother without giving birth to a child?'

The opening couplet of the satirical song of Vidyapati on child marriage as a whole is intelligible and any Bhojpuri native singer can sing it.

But there is a Vidyapati's song that caught my sight to research about his language. The first time I observed it during a stage performance of a theatrical group. It depicts the melancholy of a housewife whose husband is out of station for livelihood. I heard it in Bhojpuri for the first time and later on I came to know with a slight change that it was the composition of Vidyapati.

- (12) *mora re aṅṅama canan ker gac^hia*
 mora re aṅṅ-wā canan
 1S.GEN VOC courtyard-DEF Chandan
 ker gac^h-a
 gen tree-DEF
tafi caṛi kurare kag re
 tafi caṛ-i kurar-e
 DST.DEF climb-PRF crow-3.PRS
 kag re
 jackdaw VOC
sona cōc maṛae deb bayas
 sona-e cōc maṛa-e
 gold-DEF beak crown-PRF
 de-b bayas
 give-1.FUT bird
jō pia awat aj re
 jō pia a-wat aj re
 if husband come-FUT today VOC
 'There is a Chandan tree in my courtyard and
 a jackdaw is crowing on. O bird, if my
 husband comes today, I'll crown your beak
 with gold.'

The opening couplet in instance (12) of the song has no need to translate into Bhojpuri for the intelligibility of its native speakers, though it is slightly a deviation of the version I heard first in my childhood.

Going through the extracts of the texts from the Vidyapati's verses and songs, the heart of the language such as personal pronouns, personal pronominal genitive adjectives, pronominal adverbs, subject-verb gender agreement and noun-adjective gender agreement prove that his native language is Avahattha, not Maithili.

Besides, the comparative paradigms of the three languages show Avahattha is more akin to Bhojpuri than to Maithili.

6. Conclusion

Going through the lineage of Vidyapati along with the public opinion, he is proved to have had strong affinity with Semrawangadh. He is also proved to have passed his exile in Semrawangadh. His masterpiece compositions are in Avahattha, very akin to the vernacular of the populace of Semrawangadh even these days, i.e., Bhojpuri. Thus, there can be strong obligation towards him that he is the great poet of primitive era of Bhojpuri. Regarding his verses' compilation and editing, his Padawali has been published nearly 5 centuries following his lifetime. Its editor and financier, both are currently Maithili native speakers. So, it can be compared with a custom office where smuggling is in abundance in a single overlook of the officials, but hence the smugglers are themselves the custom officials.

But it is a great doubt with regret why Bhojpuri scholars are aloof till date of the reality that the language in Vidyapati Verses used has only Bhojpuri grammatical categories, not the Maithili ones, these days. But either political or literary or linguistic history, once constructed otherwise, may be destructed and reconstructed accordingly as the awareness gradually aroused in the defeated or suppressed or deceived populace. Therefore, Vidyapati must be re-explored in depth and re-established as the pioneer great poet of Bhojpuri. Certainly, this article may contribute to explore and reinstate the pride of Semrawangadh, Bhojpuri and Vidyapati as a single identity on the basis of ground reality.

Annex: Devanagari-IPA interface

Consonants:

क	ख	ग	घ	ङ	ञ	च	छ	ज	झ
k	k ^h	g	g̃	ŋ	ɲ	c	c ^h	j	j̃
ज	ट	ठ	ड	ड	ढ	ण	त	थ	
ɟ	t	t ^h	d	d̃	ɖ	ɳ	t	t ^h	
द	ध	न	न	प	फ	ब	भ	म	म
d	d̃	n	ɳ	p	p ^h	b	b̃	m	ɱ
य	र	ऌ	ल	व	श	ष	स	ह	
y	r	ɽ	l̥	ɭ	ʃ	ʂ/k ^h	s	ɦ	

Vowel and their diacritic symbols:

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ
ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ
ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ
ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ	ॐ

Abbreviations

1	First person	NEG	Negative
2	Second person	p	page
3	Third person	PL	Plural
ABL	Ablative	pp	pages
ADJ	Adjectival	PRF	Perfect
ALL	Allocutive	PRS	Present tense
CE	Christian Era	PST	Past Tense
CLF	Classifier	PST	Past tense
COR	Correlative	REL	Relative
DEF	Definitizer	S	Singular
DST	Distant	VE	Vikram Era
EPH	Emphatic		
F	Feminine		
FUT	Future tense		
H	Honorific		
IPF	Imperfective		
LOC	Locative		

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