

Srinivasa Bala Bharati - 154

(Children Series)

VEMANA

English Version

Prof. Madhuranthakam Narendra

Telugu Original

Dr. Gurram Bhanumurthy



Published by

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, Tirupati.

2017

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FOREWORD

If a beautiful garden is to be raised, one needs to take proper care of tender flower plants. In the same way in order to create a good society, great care is needed to be taken of young children who are going to be future citizens of India. All their intellectual attainments will be futile if they fail to learn of their culture and its greatness. They need to be told of great men and women of this country so that they are inspired by their ideals. The essentials of our culture should be given to them in the form of simple and charming stories. They will cherish these ideals and be guided by them. They will promote good and they will love the society they live in. They make their families proud and bring great prestige to their country when they grow up into good citizens.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has brought out these booklets for children in Telugu under 'Srinivasa Bala Bharati Series'. Although meant for children, they are useful to the elderly too. They have found place in the book shelves of every family. The stories of legendary men and women are narrated in a simple manner. We hope that more and more children will read them and get benefitted by them.

I congratulate the Special Officer, Publications Division, TTD for his efforts in bringing out the English translations of SRINIVASA BALA BHARATI SERIES so well. We have received co-operation of many learned men and women in our efforts to popularize this series. I am thankful to them.

In the Service of Lord Venkateswara



Executive Officer,

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams,
Tirupati.

PREAMBLE

Today's children are tomorrow's citizens. They need at tender age apt acquaintance with the life-histories of celebrated persons so that they get opportunity to lead their lives in an exemplary way. They will come to know that great things such as Indian culture, basic tenets of life and moral teachings are abundantly available in the life-experiences of great men. It is observed that there is no scope to teach such subjects in school curriculum.

Observing such circumstances the Publication Division of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has published about hundred booklets in Telugu about the lives of famous sages and great men written by various authors under the editorship of Dr. S. B. Raghunathacharya under "Bala Bharati Series". The response over these books is tremendous and it has given impetus to publish them in other languages also. To begin with some of the books are now brought out with English and Hindi rendering by T.T.D., for the benefit of boys and girls and the interested public.

These booklets are primarily intended to the growing children and also generally intended to the elders to study and narrate the stories to their children, will go a long way to sublimate the aspirations of the children to greater heights.

Special Officer
Publications Division

Welcome To Srinivasa Bala Bharati Series

The series is the outcome of abundant Grace of Lord Sri Venkateswara.

This will be an unfailing source of inspiration to the young.

It enshrines the best of Bharatiya tradition. May this noble endeavour be successful.

India has been known for its culture and civilization, its ethical and dharmic way of life from time immemorial. India has marched ahead with its commitment to dharma, its resistance to adharma, its espousal of life-affirming values and its humane attitude to life as a journey towards God realization. Those who embodied these values in their life have been a beacon of light to us. Their impact is deep on the life we lead. Young boys and girls will find them exemplary and feel proud to their invaluable heritage. They will love their motherland and dedicate themselves to its service.

It is therefore necessary that the young learn about these great men and women so that they will realize their indebtedness to them for their selfless contribution to the enrichment of life. This should indeed be a chief component of true education which ensures the perennial continuity of Indian Culture and Civilization. SRINIVASA BALA BHARATI SERIES has come into existence to acquaint the young boys and girls with right perspective of Indian life and values through a series of booklets written exclusively for this purpose describing in brief the lives of great men and women.

We welcome you to share our joy in launching these booklets.

S.B. Raghunathacharya

Chief Editor

Srinivasa Bala Bharati

VEMANA

Righteous people can easily be distinguished

Salt and Camphor, though appear alike, their uses and characteristics are entirely different. The world consists of many people but righteous are only a few among them. They live like the camphor that burns to provide light to the others, and thus they get their lives fulfilled besides fulfilling those of the others. Many intellectuals, devotees, saints and poets set examples to the people by leading exemplary lives. This truth is conveyed beautifully in the form of a padyam, a form of Telugu prosody, by a great man whose name is Vemana. He is a saint to be remembered and worshipped forever. His poems are to be sung forever like Thiruvalluvar of Tamilnadu, Thukaram of Maharashtra, Sarvagna of Karnataka, and Kabir of northern India.

A Great Man

Vemana's life is a peculiar one. He was born in peasant's family. He did not have higher studies. He led a bohemian life in the beginning. He began to compose poems from his teens. Having got fed up with the family life, he became a saint later. Then he underwent hard penance, travelled vastly and sought the truth by the grace of his teachers. He taught what he learnt through experiences.

Insufficient historical evidence

Vemana lived only two or three hundred years ago. But we know a very few details about his life because of lack of research pursuits on his life and works. Many versions of his life history are popular in the form of folktales and the truth in them is questionable. Scholars tried to recreate his life history based on his poems.

Birth

Vemana might have lived about three hundred years back in between 1659-1750 A.D. His ancestors lived in a village called Moogachinthapalle. A village with that name is there both in Chandragiri taluq of Chittoor district and Podili taluq of Prakasam district. His ancestors might have migrated to the region of Kondaveedu and Vemana might have born in one of the village of that region.

Reddy Dynasty

Kondaveedu is a part of Narasaraopet taluq of Guntur district. Though it is not a popular place at present, it enjoyed great importance in the past. Reddy Kings of Telugunadu were very much popular and as the capital of their kingdom, Kondaveedu became a citadel of culture. The Reddy kings gave priority to the welfare of the people and they encouraged literature by sponsoring poets like Errapragada and Srinadha.

Among the famous Reddy kings of Kondaveedu, the most popular were Anavema Reddy, Komaragiri Reddy and Pedakomati Vema Reddy.

The Times of Vemana

The power of the Reddy dynasty, the glory of the Vijayanagara Empire and the supremacy of the Mohammaden kings were on the decline by the times of Vemana. Many independent kings were ruling small and petty kingdoms and the lack of a vast kingdom and efficient rulers was quite obvious. Mere anarchy prevailed throughout south India and the kingdom of Kondaveedu was not an exception to it. The ancestors of Vemana secured employment in the court of the Reddy kings of Kondaveedu. Reddys, a caste whose main vocation was agriculture were also called Kaapus. In one of his poems, Vemana says that he brought glory to the caste of Kaapus.

Who is Vemana?

Reddenna, Vemana's father lived in the west street in Kondaveedu. Their family was known for its loyalty to the kings they served. The word Vemana is included in the names of many of their family members. According to an anecdote, one of the progenitors of Reddy kings offended a Vaisya whose name was Vema and so the Reddy kings included the word Vema in their names as a token of their penitence. This practice was extended to the courtiers of the kings and thus Vemana might have got that name.

Neem leaves become sweet when they are eaten continuously.

Whatever may be the reason for naming him Vemana, it became an unforgettable name. Vemu also

means the neem tree which has lot of importance in Ayurveda as a medicinal plant. The mothers in the villages used to make their children to swallow the paste of the neem leaves to cure disorders of digestion. Though the neem leaves are unpalatable they help to recover health. Similarly the messages of Vemana infuse peace and tranquility though they are harsh and blunt. What neem leaves are to the health of a person, the messages of Vemana are to the psychological health of a person. Vemana says in a poem that neem leaves become sweet when they are eaten continuously. Thus he had an appropriate name.

Childhood

We donot know what kind of employment Vemana's forefathers had in the court, but we can find out that the kings treated them affectionately. They led a very happy life by managing the fields and other properties given to them by the kings. The Kapu Reddys are known for their characteristic features like valor, independent outlook, majestic temperament, patriotism, friendliness and adventurous spirit. They retaliate violently when they become furious and give away everything they have when they feel sympathetic with. All these traits can be seen in Kapus in general and in Vemana in particular. Vemana was very much fond of food when he was a child. There was no scarcity of milk and food in his house and he had everything he relished. Unlike the people of the families of the middle class, he enjoyed every luxury he thought of as he was born with a golden spoon.

Education

There was enough room for the goddess of education in the household of Reddys who were known for their affluence. Though Vemana's kith and kin were not scholars they learnt reading and writing. They were fond of the readings of the epics and scriptures and thus got themselves well informed. They were well versed of the various issues related to the subjects like religion and ethics. As Vemana's father was a village headman, their house was frequented by poets and scholars every day. Vemana used to listen to them attentively and tried to understand the related implications. In a padyam, he said, "What is the use of an education not comprehended intrinsically?"

In the beginning, Vemana attended a local school where he tasted the canes of its teachers. It helped him to learn only reading and writing. He taught himself classics like 'The Mahabharata', 'The Ramayana' and 'Basavapurana'.

Interest in Music

Vemana seemed to have some knowledge of music also in his childhood. He believed, "Gangadhara is the God and music alone is sonorous." Among the subjects, he was fond of Ethics and among the musical instruments, he was drawn to the Veena. Vemana's favourite raga was Thodi. According to the musicians, every raga contains a particular character and they point out that the raga thodi reflects a yearning that never gets fulfilled as well as the spirit of freedom and

determination. Vemana was a personification of all these traits. In a padyam (meter), he declares, “Weak do not relish the greatest things. Does a bison enjoy thodi?”

Why one does gets born?

Vemana had a firm devotion to Lord Shiva like his family members. He had tremendous respect for his parents and he felt that it was preposterous to disobey his elder brother. He saw many people turning indifferent to their old parents. He pointed out, “Whether such people are born or dead, it is of no importance.”

A life worth living

It does not mean that Vemana accepted everything elders said. From the childhood, he believed that he had a special power and he would do something great after sometime. He felt that a life worth living should be like the honey produced in a mound as well the fire emanated from the dried stick. He had the spirit of determination and innovation. He avowed, “One should not arrive at a determination and if one gets determined, one should not look back.” A person with a strong character like this would definitely reach his goal.

He was not a scholar but he was a poet of the people

Vemana began to write poetry from his youth. He was introduced to the classical poets by the itinerant singers of the epics who frequented his house. The

poets whose profession was that of praising the rich and powerful to earn money used to visit his house frequently. His father used to donate them grain and vegetables. Vemana despised their sycophancy but imbibed their method of composing poems instantaneously and lucidly. Though he had respect for the classical poets, he never tried to write poetry to exhibit his scholarship like others. He seemed to have an aversion for such scholarship though the scholars and commoners are fond of his poems alike afterwards.

His choice of Aataveladi, a meter of prosody in Telugu

Telugu prosody contained many meters and different poets became popular with different meters. Thikkana, the foremost of the Telugu poets, is known for his Kanda padyam and Srinadha, who is acclaimed as the Sovereign of poets, for his Seesa padyam. Aataveladi became the favourite of Vemana and in his hands it attained greater heights. Though it is a small poem containing four lines, Vemana made it a vehicle for immeasurable themes.

Viswadaabhiraama Vinuravema

Vemana used to convey his concept, however big it might be, in the first three lines of his poem and the fourth line was a refrain, Viswadaabhiraama vinuravema. The meaning of the refrain (in Telugu it is called, Makuta). ‘Viswada’ means the one who created the world, i.e., the God and Abhirama means the person

closer to him or the person Vemana was fond of. Thus Vemana considered himself a person closer to the God and composed poems addressing himself and God. Thus he reached the others through himself.

A poet distinguished

We could procure some Kanda padyams and Thetageethalu written by Vemana. He composed around 5000 poems. Some poems composed by his students and others might have got mixed with them. But it is not difficult to differentiate his poems from the others as they are distinguished by his characteristic features like lucid style, frankness, natural and appropriate similies, original Telugu words, wit and humour.

Experience is the teacher

Though he didnot have formal education and scholarship, he became extremely popular due to his originality. He never parroted anybody. Each one of his poems was based on his personal experience and that may be the reason for some of his self-contradictory utterances. They were the products of his different ages and experiences. They were the reactions of different situations, and they were all based on his personal experiences.

Vemana's permissiveness

Aataveladi, means a woman meant for sporting. Vemana was fond of the meter 'aataveladi' as well as women. There were many harlots in every village in his

days. They were kept woman by profession and they used to entertain the men with their singing and dancing. They targeted the rich, powerful and rash young men and extracted everything from those who fell prays to their charm.

Vemana became an addict to debauchery. By then his parents were dead and his brother and sister-in-law looked after him with a lot of affection. He neither worked in a farm nor thought of any domestic affair. He was bubbling with health and energy and had so much of leisure. There were none to discipline him and the temptations were too strong to deny. His interest in fine arts like music and dance dragged him towards the nauch girls. Moreover he was reckless and emotional. All these things led him to be lecherous.

The God is also helpless

Having drowned neck deep in his lecherous activities in the brothel houses, Vemana forgot his house completely. He went to his house only when the prostitutes drove him off after extracting all the money he had and then he used to get money by hook or crook from his house to regain their favour. He knew that those prostitutes were more interested in his money and they didnot know what love means. But the irony was that the more he got affected the more he realized the truth due to his passionate temperament which was common among the young men. He consoled himself thinking that even the God was not powerful enough to escape from the tricks of the

prostitutes. He was completely lost in the brothel houses like a bee running after the honey of the flowers.

Desperation

But life never flows smoothly and Vemana had a different destiny. His sister-in-law played a significant role in his transformation.

Vemana considered his brother and sister-in-law as parents after the demise of his parents. As they did not discern his weaknesses in the beginning, he fell into bad habits. Once when he was there in the house of a prostitute, the news of his niece's sickness reached him. He was disturbed to know that the girl was serious and then he ran to his house immediately. But it was already late and she was dead by then. It was a tremendous blow to him and consequently he began to despise the very life and existence. Then his sister-in-law came to him affectionately and reasoned him.

His sister-in-law's teachings

His sister-in-law said "Dear child! You have seen how small the life of a man is and everybody will die sooner or later. So one has to live deservingly and live in a way that he will be remembered for his good nature even after his death. For that one should be ethical and virtuous. You have read many epics like your brother and you have the poetic art which your brother doesn't have. Don't you remember the preaching's of Vidura in The Mahabharata who said that debauchery is the first of the formidable five bad habits? Why do you

waste your money, youth, respectability and honour by being a victim to it? It is high time to look at the reality. Get married to a good girl and lead a virtuous domestic life. You should think of your welfare and that of your family.

A farewell to the past

Vemana came under the influence of his sister -in-law and remained silent for a long time. Then he prostrated to her and replied, "Dear sister-in-law! Please pardon me. I am bidding farewell to my past and I will never forget your words." Vemana who was known for his determination and strong will changed his old habits and then never turned back.

Friendship with Abhiramaiah

Vemana had friend called Abhiramaiah who was a goldsmith by caste. He used to prepare jewels to the women of the household of Vemana and so he used to frequent to their house. He became a close friend of Vemana.

Abhiramaiah used to go for long walks everyday in the morning and he used to visit a cave to serve a saint living in it. Vemana became inquisitive of his friend's morning walks. One day he followed him secretly and overheard the saint telling him, "My dear son! You have served me for a long time and you will get a reward for it tomorrow. Do come here tomorrow."

Then Vemana who wanted to dupe Abhiramaiah forced him to stay back in his house so as to take up

the order to forge jewels urgently for his sister-in-law. Then Vemana went to the saint, prostrated to him and said that he was sent by Abhiramaiah as he couldn't come there that day. After teaching Vemana the scriptures which were originally meant for Abhiramaiah, the saint attained Moksha.

Repentance

By the influence of the scriptures, Vemana got the enlightenment which made him to realize the mistake he had committed. He ran to his friend's house, fell on his feet and pleaded him to forgive. When Abhiramaiah promised him that he would forgive him, he revealed the offence he had committed. Vemana told him that he was guilty of procuring what his friend rightfully deserves and so he wanted to compensate him by procuring him immortal fame through his poems. It is believed that his name thus got included in the refrain of his poems. But there is no historical proof to establish it as a truth. Vemana was reformed by his sister-in-law or, may be, by his friend, Abhiramaiah.

Marriage and Repentance

Then his brother and sister-in-law got him married to a beautiful girl. After his wife's arrival to his house, Vemana had to take care of his domestic responsibilities. He tried hard to be a good husband, responsible citizen and successful householder.

After the marriage, Vemana realized the difference between a wife and a concubine. He became repentant

of what he was before the marriage. The ability to realize his mistakes, becoming repentant for the same and to resolve firmly not to repeat that mistake afterwards had been the features of his character. So he became completely loyal to his wife.

But the course of the life is unpredictable. His wife never had good opinion on him. All the women of the neighborhood informed her about the lecherous life style of her husband. As she became upset and suspicious, she began to neglect him. The wife and husband began to indulge in scuffles frequently.

The disturbance at home

Vemana was very much indulgent to his wife in the beginning and so she became obstinate and hauteur. She wanted to have upper hand over him where as he was very much independent by nature. Thus the home was transformed into a hell for both of them.

He began to repent for accepting to get married. He felt that he got into a muddle by following the advice of others. As his wife often created havoc in the house by her bickering nature, he believed that it was better to leave for a forest than to be in the house. In a padyam (meter) he pointed out that a bickering wife was as disturbing as a speck of dust in the eye and a fly in the ear.

Vemana eagerly wanted to have a son but in vain. He felt that a house containing good wife and wise son is nothing but a heaven. But there is no historical

evidence to say that he had sons though he said, in one of his poems, that a useless son is as bad as the white ant in a mound.

Poverty

After a few years, Vemana's brother and sister-in-law passed away and the domestic responsibilities fell on Vemana completely. By that time the family was in bad times as most of their property was lost. He struggled very hard to manage the family by hook or crook. He was completely shattered in the cruel dent of poverty. He understood the true nature of hunger, poverty and the draught. He noticed that there were very few kind-hearted and generous people in the society where as there were hundreds of selfish and miserly people.

Respect for the Donors and hatred on the misers

The people of the times Vemana praised a great donor called Mutharaja who used to provide food to all going to his house every day. There were two more such donors, Kota Singaraju and his wife, Gangamamba. Vemana wanted to follow their example as he was very much fond of food from his childhood. He had a strong belief that feeding the hungry was like feeding the God. So he used to feed the poor and downtrodden as much as it was possible. But he never had enough money and his wife never approved his generosity. In a poem he said, "The miser never allows his kith and kin to be generous and, so, they are like

the thorny bushes under the tree of prosperity". He wanted to encourage others to do what he could not. He declared, "Riches never follow the dead. Generosity is great. It is the generosity that takes the soul to the other world safely." But there were none to hear his advice. Those who had money were misers and the generosity of the poor was useless. Vemana realized that the irony of the world lies in its people with unsuitable natures. He asserted that the riches of the misers were as useless as the salt of the oceans. He had nothing but contempt for the misers and so rebuked and chided them in many of his poems.

Contempt for misers

According to Vemana, requesting a miser for alms was like going to a sterile cow for milk. A miser would lament for spending dried wood to burn a corpse when somebody dies in his house. Having fed up with the misers, he finally said, "There is no need of poison and drugs, swords and knives to kill a miser. It is enough to ask him for a donation as he will rather die than to part with money."

Struggle for survival

Vemana could not reform either his wife or his contemporaries. He had to search for a job for survival. Finally he got a job in the court of a local lord. But he did not stay there for long, because the lord was completely indifferent to the ordeals of his subjects. Vemana realized that the service to a lord is like having friendship with snakes.

So he had to find out a means to survive once again. The haves were misers, donors were scarce and the lords simply exploited the vulnerability of the poor. Many a poor were simply starving. He seemed to have felt that there was nothing wrong in stealing the rich and feeding the poor. But he was against the violence from the beginning. He finally said, “Stealing and looting are sins in spite of the reason for undertaking those resorts. They will definitely get the due punishment.”

Nursing the patients

Vemana had lot of sympathy for the patients. He spent much of his time in their service. He pointed out, “The people who serve the poor will have their copper transformed to gold. Serve the unwell and then you will be taken care of when you are not well.”

Transformation of meals into gold

Having realized that money is needed for everything in the world, Vemana tried all possible methods to earn but in vain. Finally he resorted to alchemy. He tried to learn it from the goldsmiths in the beginning but he then knew that they were helpless. Then he turned to the saints.

Service to the saints

One may get wondered why the saints who renounce the worldly things crave for gold. The severe penance demands the seekers to be strong and healthy. But it is denied to the saints. Ayurveda says that the ashes of gold serve as a good medicine to restore good

health. So some saints run after the people who seemed to have known the art called alchemy to procure gold.

The alchemy and its consequence

Vemana also wanted to learn alchemy from the saints to eradicate his poverty. But it was not so easy to please the saints who were never willing to reveal it to anybody. But he seemed to have met many a saint and consulted many important books on it and learnt it to some extent. Then others who were also interested in it dogged him to squeeze it from him. Then he realized how dangerous it was and so kept it as a secret forever. Vemana said many poems denouncing the alchemy.

All is well that ends well

What finally happened was not ever thought of by Vemana. He went after the saints in search of gold but he finally got something more valuable i.e., renunciation. He was very much astonished by the nature of those saints who never got troubled neither by the heat nor cold. They did not think of even food. And they always took up penance with utmost sincerity and commitment. The very appearance of them was sanctifying as an aura seemed to be there all around them. He felt that they had final enlightenment and they understood the mystery of the world. They attain supernatural powers capable of miracles. Vemana got convinced that his goal was to attain their state but not running after trifles.

Studentship under yogi Lankasiva

Having got fed up with the family, worldly things and yearnings, Vemana wanted to shed off the old desires and resolved to become a saint. He began to search for a good teacher and he finally became a student of yogi Lankasiva.

Hatayoga

People have been trying to understand the mystery of God to attain the ultimate peace. They sought to understand him through devotion or enlightenment. But some others sought it through a more difficult way called yoga following a great saint called Patanjali. Hatayoga is one of the ways that they finally arrived at.

People who seek salvation should progress slowly step by step. The eight steps of the fulfilment of yoga are: yamam, discipline, Posture, Pranayamam, alternate food, extemporariness, meditation and Samadhi. It takes many years to reach the goal and the life may not be enough to procure it, but the people who want to reach it soon take up hatayoga, a method demanding a lot of struggle by the mind and body. The word “ha” signifies oxygen moving upwards and “ta” signifies apanavayu moving downwards. These saints believe that salvation depends on the union of these two.

Saint Lambikasiva

Saint Lambikasiva was also a practitioner of hatayoga. The word “lambika” means jaws. It was said that these saints pierce the tongue into the hole in the

palate and in between the jaws to lick the nectar that secretes between the two eyebrows. It is said that they didnot have hunger, thirst and ailment as they drank that nectar. They could continue their yoga consequently without any hyndrance. Vemana’s preceptor got that name because of that power he attained. It is also called ‘Kechari Mudra’. Besides the hatayoga, Vemana also learnt the scriptures, ‘Panchakshari’ and ‘Dwadasakshari’. He practiced pranayama by controlling his breath. It is told that a peculiar sound called ‘Anahatham’ emanated from the body and of a seeker and then he had to concentrate on it to progress further. It is told that Vemana procured many powers by that way.

Veda Deeksha (Penance of Vedas)

Unlike many people who get satisfied by those petty gifts and powers, Vemana tried hard to understand the ultimate one. After getting satisfied by his efforts, his preceptor taught him the Veda Deeksha.

The person who attains salvation

It is said that every person will have a power called ‘Kundalini’ situated beneath his womb at a foremost base. It would be in a dormant state and the saints wake it up by their efforts. It is believed that there are six circles from the foremost base to the hole of Brahma in the head. The kundalini, when lifted upwards, will break all these circles and the ultimate enlightenment descends. The person who could procure it is called

‘Jeevanmuktudu’ (The person who attains salvation). It means that he got salvation even when he is alive.

Attainment of the ultimate enlightenment

When the preceptors sympathized with their students who fail to reach the final phase of enlightenment they touched their bodies from the knees to the jaws to drive off their sins instantaneously. Then they would lose their consciousness and could get self realization. Vemana got it in the same way. People believed that Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda also got it in the same way. But a preceptor and a student like them cannot be found much in number. Saint Lambikasiva and Vemana belong to the same category.

Where is the God?

After attaining the enlightenment, Vemana learnt that the God was there in himself but not elsewhere. There is God in Every Being. He began to spread what he learnt from others by travelling to all places.

Travels

Like Buddha who spread his message by travelling, Vemana also travelled vastly. By and large he travelled mostly in the districts of Chittoor and Kadapa and some nearby places of Tamilnadu.

He wore only a small loin cloth. He travelled mostly to the villages as he felt that the town dwellers won't relish his sayings and they were always pretentious. It

is told that he was driven out of a village when his loin cloth fell off and he became naked. Then Vemana simply related “No cloths are worn when one is born and nobody takes them along when dead. Celebrating them in between is mere foolishness.”

Message

Vemana studied the life and practices of the people after visiting many places. He was exposed to all the trials and tribulations of the life. He finally located God in every being. He never hesitated to denounce the bad and evil he saw and tried to concentrate in the reformation of the humanity. But people were not interested in being criticized because the truth was always unpalatable. So he resorted to satire which makes the people laugh and realize their mistakes only afterwards. His satire is not amiable as it is always severe and harsh. He applied sweet coating to the sour truth and so that people would not get hurt. Vemana also felt that the world was not realizing its bad ways in spite of his teachings. So, he lamented, “A broken pot can't hold water. And can the bends of a river be corrected?” (**Oti kundalo neellu nilustaya? Yeti vankaranu chakka diddagalavarevaru?**) But he never stopped his teachings.

There is only one God

Vemana was disturbed to find barriers between people though God can be located in all of them alike. The people of the contemporary Hindu society followed different beliefs like Shaiva, Vaishnava,

Dwaitha and Adwaitha. All of them were fighting with each other. By then Islam was also a force to reckon with. Fanaticism could be seen everywhere and they didn't have tolerance towards each other. Besides the religion, caste and creed, wealth also created divisions among them and they were always at loggerheads with each other. Vemana questioned, "Why can't the people shed these divisions and share everything reasonably? The colour of the milk is the same in spite of the difference in the colour of the animals. Though every religion has a different way of reaching the God, He is the same. Then why should there be these conflicts?" He treated Muslims on par with Hindus. He proclaimed that Allah and Eswar are the two names of the same God. Later, Gandhiji said the same when he observed that Allah Mohammad is the most perfect one. Ramakrishna Paramahansa pointed out the same when he related that all the religions lead the man towards the same God.

Worship without Sincerity is useless

Vemana summarily condemned the worship of the people who perform without sincerity. He asked, "What is the use of worshiping and fasting without a clean mind? How can the food be useful when the utensils in which they are cooked are muddled? What is the use of customs without having a clean soul?" He never denounced the worshiping of God, but insisted that worship should always go with clean consciousness. Otherwise it is useless. He was an epitome of sincerity and clean consciousness throughout.

True Preceptor

Vemana warned the people against many dubious preceptors who deceived the people in the name of religion and respected good preceptors at the same time. He said, "A shovel can shatter all the pots made by a potter in a year with a single stroke. The person who can shatter all the sins of the people with a single word or a touch is the real preceptor."

A good person speaks soothingly

Vemana insisted that one should not get tired of one's efforts and a tireless striving will definitely lead to success. He avowed, "The more you practice the more sweeter your song will be. If you continuously eat neem leaves, you will realize that they have become sweet to taste. Thus practice without hindrance will definitely lead you to success". He questioned, "Why cannot everybody introspect to find out one's own faults instead of pointing out the faults of the others? Why do the wise people voluntarily become servants of the rich? The small wound on the finger of a rich man gets sensationalized as news and why don't an important event like the marriage in the house of a poor man go unnoticed?" He observed, "The idiot speaks like the jingling of brass where as the pious speaks soothingly like the ding-dong of gold. The blunt words of a well-wisher are as good as the hard washings of a washer man whose sole interest was to clean the dirt of the clothes. Every person has ears only to hear the suggestions of the elders." Taking a cue from his own

life he declared, “If there is a hole in a pot it can be closed by piercing a piece of cloth into it. But it is not so easy to rectify a person who is evil through and through. One should not hurt ones friends and relatives. We can mend the broken iron pieces but it is not possible to mend the broken minds.” We can say that his poems are undoubtedly a store house of practical wisdom.

Vemana showed the right path to the people - a path that leads people to realize the importance of keeping calm to pursue the God through meditation and enable to locate the same God existing in everybody.

Vemana pointed out that there are seven principles to be practiced.

Seven Principles

1. Stealing is bad

Vemana taught it only after realizing the bad effects of it. A thief may get away without a punishment but one cannot get away from the guilt. One who protects the people from the thieves is the right king. Man seems to have a weakness for the wealth of the others. Vemana observed that the evil of stealing is the same, irrespective of the position of the person indulged in it.

2. Kindness for creatures is needed

As there is God in every being, harming even a small creature like an ant is bad. Animal sacrifice in the

name of Yagna is also bad. Even when you are in an advantageous position, you should not harm your enemy and you should show him what is good by setting yourself as an example

3. One should not hurt others feelings

As nobody is devoid of mistakes, it is not right to pinpoint the mistakes of the others. We should please others by cordial talk and we should avoid hurting issues. A broken heart will not be mended.

4. Self containment is desirable

One who is not satisfied with what he has will be a prey to his desires. One who has an eye for others wealth and others wives will finally get doomed. One who could renounce the desires is the one who alone attains salvation. Procure self containment and shed desires.

5. Jealousy has to be shunned

The story of Duryodhana in ‘The Mahabharata’ illustrates the ultimate fall of a jealousy man who brings doom on himself. Many myths tell the same.

6. Anger is self destructive

Anger makes a person insane. An angered man will get himself away from rationality and reasonability. One can get what he wants only when one gets rid of anger.

7. Meditating on God

God is present everywhere and in every body. A person who searches for God elsewhere is like a hooded donkey lost in wilderness.

All the seven principles taught by Vemana are meant for all people of all times and all places.

The death

After travelling to many places spreading his message, Vemana realized that he too got nearer to the final destination, the death. He never indulged in miracles and marvels. He simply taught sense and cast his messages in poetry.

Finally Vemana felt that he fulfilled his mission. He did not have the fear of death as he knew the nature of man's existence. Death makes the man to go back to the five elements of nature from which he is made of. He finally gave his message to his students and the others and then went off into a cave in Pamuru, a village in the district of Kadapa. Following his instructions, his followers closed that cave with a huge stone. It is not unnatural that renounced saints like the great preceptor Sankaracharya entering into a grave alive and thus welcoming the end.

Vemana asked, "What is that the man brought with him when he is born and what is that he takes with him when he is dead?" But extraordinary people like Vemana come to the world with a mission to reform the humanity and leave it with the satisfaction of fulfilling their task. His poems remain as beacon lights in the path of the progress of humanity forever.

An immortal saint and a poet

Born in an ordinary peasant's family, reared up in the brothel's in his youth and then transforming into an

ascetic saint, Vemana's life is full of twists and wonders. He remains an immortal poet forever.

Every poem he related- the meter he used is called 'Aataveladi' in Telugu - is a precious jewel. The refrain of his poems, 'Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema', always reverberate in the places wherever the people of Telugu are present. He is a poet of the people - from the people going to the nurseries to the people going to the parliament alike.

Vemana, the poet has no death at all.

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Appendix – 1

Vemana of Kataru Palle (Thunga)

A miracle took place a few days after the demise of Vemana in a village called, Kataru Palle in the district of Ananthapur. There was peasant in that village by name Thunga Pulla Reddy who died on a day struck by a thunder. His body remained unburied for seven days due to some unknown reason. He regained life on the eighth day and said he was not Pulla Reddy but he was Vemana. Then he led the life of a saint and many people became his followers. It is told that he performed many miracles and wonders and that the British rulers of the then Madras state revered him. He also related many poems like Vemana and soon they were also popular. But one can easily discriminate the poems of Vemana from them though he continued the same reformative zeal of Vemana. He too attained live-burial in Kataru Palle and now it is well established that they are not the same.

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Appendix – 2

Some poems of Vemana in translation

1. The more it is recited the more mellifluous the tune
will be,
The more you continue to eat the sweeter the leaves
of the neem will be,
Tireless striving makes the things possible in this
world,
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
2. What is the use of a practice without a clean
consciousness?
Why should there be a food prepared in a dirty
pot?
Where is the need for worship without a clean
soul?
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
3. The frivolous speaks in a high tone
The pious speaks soothingly,
Gold do not jingle like Brass
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
4. One should not avow that one is great at a wrong
place,
Nothing is lost by being humble,

Doesn't the big mountain appear as a small one in
a mirror?

Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.

5. When the iron rod is broken,
The blacksmith can join it together by heating,
But the broken heart cannot be mended,
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
6. Why should the person lying on an ocean of milk,
Crave for the milk of the poor shepherds?
Everyone casts an eye on the wealth of the others,
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
7. The stone in the shoe, the fly in the ear,
The speck of dust in the eye, the thorn in the foot,
And the naggings of the wife in the house are
unbearable,
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
8. The small wound of a rich man,
Is sensational news in this world,
But even the marriage in the house of a poor man
goes unnoticed,
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
9. You should not hurt your enemy,
Even when he falls into your hands,

It is always right to render good to him before
disposing him off,

Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.

10. The colour of the animals is different but their milk
is of the same colour,
The types of the flowers are different but all are
used for the same worship,
The ways of the religions are different but their
goal is the same,
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
11. What is the use of ears,
Unless they hear the words of the elders,
The more you hear it the more you understand the
truth,
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.
12. A real sapphire is enough,
Why do we need a basketful of colour stones?
A moral poem is more than enough in this world,
Hear me Vema, the friend of Abhirama and Viswa.

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