

Classic Poetry Series

Vemana
- poems -

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Vemana(1652-1730)

Kumaragiri Vema Reddy popularly known as Vemana (Telugu: వేమా) was a Telugu poet. His poems were written in the popular vernacular of Telugu, and are known for their use of simple language and native idioms. His poems discuss the subjects of Yoga, wisdom and morality. He is popularly called Yogi Vemana, in recognition of his success in the path of Yoga.

Early Life and Background

There is no consensus among scholars about the period in which Vemana lived. C.P. Brown, known for his research on Vemana, estimates the year of birth to be the year 1652 based on some of his verses. Various sources say he was born in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeen centuries.

Vemana was the third and youngest son of Gaddam Vema, then the king of Kondaveedu in present-day Andhra Pradesh. He was named Vemareddy after his father.

Teachings

Yoga

Vemana came into contact with Lambika siva yogi in Kondaveedu, who initiated him into the path of Yoga. After this, Vemana travelled across the state, composing poetry and attaining success in yoga.

Poetry and Fame

Vemana composed numerous poems in the vernacular of Telugu. His poems are four lines in length. The fourth line is, in majority of the cases, the chorus Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema - he thus conveyed his message with three small lines written in a simple vernacular. He traveled widely across south India, acquiring popularity as a poet and Yogi. People really took to Vemana's poems owing to their simple language and sweet message. So high was the regard for Vemana that a popular Telugu saying goes 'Vemana's word is the word of the Vedas'. He is celebrated for his style of Chaatu padyam, a poem with a hidden meaning.

C.P. Brown translated most of Vemana's poems into English, during the British occupation of India. A large selection of his poems are a part of the present High School curriculum of Telugu in Andhra Pradesh. In his honor, The Andhra Pradesh government named a University in Kadapa the Yogi Vemana University in 2006.

Vemana was believed to have lived for some time in the Gandikota area of Kadapa.

Death

There is a headstone marking the grave of Yogi Vemana in kataru palli (Kadiri Town), a village in Kadiri Taluk, Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh. It is believed widely that Vemana died in this village. Being a Yogi, he was buried and not cremated.

Poetic Style

Many lines of Vemana's poems are now colloquial phrases of the Telugu language. They end with the signature line Viswadhaabhi Raama, Vinura Vema, literally Beloved of Vishwadha, listen Vema. There are many interpretations of what the last line signifies.

Vemana's poems were collected and published by in the 19th century. His poems are of many kinds, social, moral, satirical and mystic nature. Most of them are in Ataveladi (dancing lady) meter.

Sample Poetry

Uppu Kappurambu nokka polika nundu ????? ?????????? ????? ??????
?????

Chooda chooda ruchulu jaada veru ??? ??? ?????? ??? ????

Purushulandu Punya purushulu veraya ?????????? ?????? ?????????? ?????

Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema ??????????????, ?????? ???

Salt and camphor look similar,
but closer observation shows their taste is different
Among men, virtuous people stand apart
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Gangi govu paalu garitadainanu chaalu.....????? ?????? ?????? ??????????
?????

Kadivedainanemi kharamu paalu.....????????????????? ?????? ??????

Bhakti kalugu koodu pattedainanu chaalu.....?????? ?????? ?????? ??????????????
?????

Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema.....?????????????????, ?????? ???

A ladleful of a Sacred cow's milk is enough
Of what worth is even a potful of donkey's milk

Even a little food given with respect is sumptuous
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Atmasuddhi leni acharamadi ela.....?????????? ???? ??????? ??
Bhandasuddhi leni pakamadi ela.....?????????? ???? ??????
Chittasuddhi leni sivpujalelara.....???????????? ???? ??? ???????
Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema.....?????????????, ????? ???

What is the purpose of custom sans inner purity?
What is the purpose of cooking sans cleanliness of vessels?
What is the purpose of worship of Shiva sans purity of mind?
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Alpudeppudu palku adamburamu ganu.....????????????? ??????
????????? ????
Sajjanundu palku challaganu.....?????????? ????? ???????
Kanchu moginatlu kanakammu mroguna.....???? ?????????? ???????
?????????
Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema.....?????????????, ????? ???

A mean(low) person always speaks pompously
A good person speaks softly
Does gold reverberate the way brass does?
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Anagananaga raga matisayilluchunundu.....?????? ??
?????????????????
thinaga thinaga vemu tiyyanundu.....???? ???? ????
??????????
sadhanamuna panulu samakuru dharalona.....???????? ?????? ??????
?????
Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema.....?????????????, ????? ???

As you sing (again and again), the melody (raga) excels
As you eat Neem (again and again) , it becomes sweeter
With practice, things become perfect
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Anuvu gani chota Nadhikulamanaradu.....????? ???? ??? ??????????????
Kochmayina nadiyu kodava gadu.....????????? ?????? ???? ????
konda addamandu knochami undada.....???? ?????????? ?????? ??????
Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema.....????????????????, ????? ???

When it is not our place or time, we cannot win
You have not become small because of this
Don't you know the hill looks small in a mirror
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Apadiana velanarasi bandhula judu.....???? ??????? ?????? ????
bhayamuvela judu bantu tanamu.....????????? ?????? ?????? ????
Pedavela judu pendlamu gunamu.....????????? ?????? ?????????? ??????
Viswadhaabhuraama, Vinura Vema.....????????????????, ?????? ???

In times of distress, observe the attitude of relatives
In times of fear, observe the behaviour of the army
In times of poverty, observe the nature of the wife
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Chippalonabadda chinuku mutyambayye.....????????????????? ???????
??????????????
nitabadda chinuku nita galise.....????????? ??????? ??? ??????
Brapti galugu chota phalamela tappura.....????????????????? ??? ??????
?????????
Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema..... ?????????????????, ?????? ???

The rain drop that fell in the shell became a pearl,
The one that fell in water merged with water,
Where there's devotion, there's bound to be fruit,
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Veshabhashalerigi Kashayavastramul.....????????????????? ??????????????????
gattagane mukti galugabodhu.....????????? ??????? ??????????
talalu bodulina talapulu bodula.....????? ?????????? ??????? ???????
Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema.....????????????????, ?????? ???

Changing your appearance, language and wearing saffron (renunciate) clothes
Do not lead to mukti (liberation),
Shaving of head (of a renunciate, widow etc) does not shave (unwanted)
thoughts
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Cheppulona rayi chevilona joriga.....????????????? ?????? ?????????? ??????
kantilona nalusu kali mullu.....????????? ?????? ?????? ???????
intilona poru intinta gadaya.....????????? ?????? ?????????? ??????

Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema..... ??????????????, ????? ???

A stone in shoe, a fly near ear
Pollen in eye, a thorn in foot
A quarrel in the house, are unbearable(painful)
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Tappulennuvaru Tandopatandambu..... ?????????????? ??????????????
Lurvi janulakella nundu tappu..... ?????? ?????????? ?????? ??????
Tappu lennuvaru tamatappu lerugaru..... ?????? ?????????????? ??????????
?????????

Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema..... ??????????????, ????? ???

There are many that find faults (with others)
Every one in the world has faults
The people who count faults do not know their own faults
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Inumu virigeneni irumaaru mummaaru..... ?????? ?????????????? ??????????
?????????
kaachi yatakavachu kramamu gaanu..... ?????? ?????????? ?????? ??????
manasu virigeneni mari chercharaadaya..... ?????? ?????????????? ???
?????????????

Viswadaabhiraama, Vinura Vema..... ??????????????, ????? ???

Iron, if broken, can be joined together, twice or thrice
but heart once broken can never be put together again

Medi pandu chooda melimayundu..... ?????? ?????? ??? ??????????????
Potta vippi chooda purugulundu..... ?????? ??????? ??? ??????????????
Pirikivani madibinkamilagura..... ??????? ?????? ?????? ??????????????????
Viswadhaabhirama vinura Vema..... ??????????????, ?????? ???

Medi, a fruit, looks gorgeous externally,
But when we rip it, we find worms within.
In a similar manner, a coward appears brave outside, but in reality he is not.
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Eluka tholu thechi yedadi uthikina ?????? ?????? ??????? ?????? ??????????
Nalupu nalupey gani thelupu kadhu..... ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????? ??????
Koyya bomma thechi kottina palukuna..... ?????? ?????? ??????? ??????????
?????????

Viswadhaabhiraama vinura Vema..... ??????????????, ?????? ???

Even if you take a mouse's hide and wash it for any number of days

Its black color will remain a black and never becomes white

Similarly, even if you beat a wooden doll it will never speak (it is impossible to change the original human nature)

Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Brain Drain Or Human Capital Flight

Vemana

Charity Is A Cardinal Virtue

Vemana

Experience Is A Private Affair

Vemana

On Conquering Cruelty

Vemana

Only The Virtuous Know Virtue

Vemana

The Blessedness Of Peace

Vemana

The Company We Keep

Vemana

The Plague Of Perfidy

Vemana

The Power Of The Spoken Word

Vemana

The Seer

Vemana