Chapter II

LIFE OF SRI VEMANA
Vemana was brought into limelight with the publication of his collected poems by C.P. Brown in 1829. Brown again published a second collection of about 1200 poems in 1839. Another edition of Vemana's poems was published in 1919 in Machilipatnam, which contained 4000 poems! It was Brown who published a translation of poems of Vemana in English. Though Vemana was looked down upon by scholars initially he as a poet secured his place in the literary galaxy became of his popular appeal. He was a poet of the people.¹

As a civil servant of East India Company, Charles Phillip Brown (1793-1884) came to India from England in 1816. He rendered yeoman service to the Telugu literature. He learned Telugu from Pandits and scholars as an interesting subject. He published Telugu to English and English to Telugu Dictionaries. He was in search of Telugu prabandhas, kavyas and other prose and poetical works to bring them into light.

When he was at Machilipatnam in 1824 he heard for the first time some verses of Vemana through his assistant Venkata Siva Sastry. Sastry interpreted fully². Brown was astonished. He at once jumped into the research field and started to collect the old manuscripts of Vemana verses. He procured several manuscripts (palm-leaves) from various places like Machilipatnam, Visakhapatnam, Nellore, Guntur, Bellary and Cuddapah. He
appointed pandits to correct the manuscripts and to write fair copies. Nearly 18 years he worked on these manuscripts. There were so many grammatical and linguistic mistakes. Different scripts had different versions. Many Pandits discouraged him. But he did not stop and continued it.

Brown says, the manuscripts proved to be full of errors of any kind in orthography, metre and meaning; no two copies followed the same arrangement and they varied in extent from two to eight hundred epigrams.

Brown divided the verses into three categories chiefly of moral, satirical and mystic. In the morals many verses occur breathing a spirit of devotion truly extraordinarily in a Hindu. The satirical part is chiefly directed against the traditional religion and customs particularly against Brahmins. None of it is personal. The mystic portion is chiefly of use as exemplifying the powers of the language. The riveries contained in this chapter are of a strangely abstruse nature and furnish a remarkable instance of a powerful mind searching for the light of truth which is lost in the darkness of heathen ignorance. It is easier to translate the verses in the Latin(aliess) that appeared to deserve an English one. To the more difficult verses he has subjoined Telugu interpretation. For some parts of its comment written in Telugu to two very learned Brahmins, who taught him the language its grammar and prosody.
They are Tippa Bhotla Venkata Siva sastry of Machilipatnam and Advaita Brahmaiah, the pandit belonging to the court in which he had the honour of being an Assistant Judge.

Brown says, To the remarks on mystic philosophy I have subjoined a short explanation of Telugu prosody. The statements are taken from Bheemuni Chandassu, but the arrangement and mode of explanation are my own. Sir William Jones has remarked (As Res I.XVII on Panini) that since grammar is only an instrument and not the end of true knowledge there can be little occasion to travel so rough and gloomy a path to teach myself the science I was obliged to reduce the rules given by Bheemana in a very fantastic form to their real import; and a mode then occurred to me through which by degrees I learnt the whole with care. The original is so mysteriously complex the failure of most aspirants even among Brahmins to knowledge of prosody is not surprising."

Vemana condemned Vedic caste system, which was the root cause of all evils in the society. He opposed openly the superiority of Brahmins. They developed jealousy on Brown who was praising Vemana's poetic talents. Eighty per cent of teachers belonged to Brahmin community in the university. They created many obstacles to the literary activities of Brown. The College Board published the Verses of Vemana for the first time. In his letters Brown says, "About 50 copies were given to me and 450 disappeared. After Ten
years I discovered these rolled up as waste paper in the library I then took steps to publish Vemana. The book became popular among those who were learning either Telugu or English. It was a juvenile effort I have since remodelled several pages literary life of Charles Philip Brown. Brahmin pandits were not ready to cooperate Brown in his literary work sincerely. Brown says in his words, “In the year 1839 I delivered the present volume to a learned Brahmin who undertook to prepare a new edition but he disappointed me, for the attempted to expunge every rustic phrase and malignant rhyme even striking out whole lines and substituted others of his own composing. He went through only about a quarter of the work for and on finding what he had done I put a stop to his edition and dismissed him.

Europeans liked only the verses of Vemana in the entire Telugu literature. The Christian priests and preachers doing religious war with non Christians took weapons from the stock room of Vemana who was the owner of the store and a Hindu moralist. Some of the Vemana verses were introduced in schools in Madras Government. They were already translated by a learned Telugu pandit.

Brown published his first edition in 1829. He selected 693 verses from the manuscripts, which he had. It was with English translation and some other details. Religious 200; Moral 214;
satirical 279. Altogether 693 verses were translated. In the second edition he omitted his translation and comments. Verses belonging to religious and moral were added. In the second edition, the verses belonging to Religions were 416, Moral 468; and satirical 279. Total verses were 1163.

Afterwards several books were released on Vemana Verses. The London mission press and public instruction press both published "Verses of Vemana" Booklets from Vizag. In those booklets religious constituted 68; Moral 51; and Satirical 82, altogether 201 verses. A new edition of Vemana being called for, the work has been reprinted without the English version, and extended to nearly double the former size by an appendix added to each book. An equal number of verses yet remain unprinted.

It appears that he was not a Jangama as is indeed shown by his silence regarding their great teacher Basava. But his tenets coincide more closely with those of the Jangamas than with those of any other sect. Vemana indeed belonged to no sect. Further it is the general belief that his writings are fully four centuries old. If the Jangamas are correct in making him coeval with the writer of the Telugu "Basava Puranam" this would give an era yet more remote than the earliest I have mentioned yet in every page we find the common colloquial expressions used at the present day. Madras November 1839.
C.P. Brown left India after his retirement. Research work was not completed. He paved the way for the future research scholars. Nobody touched the work nearly hundred years.

At the dawn of the twentieth century some sensational changes took place. Kommarraju Lakshmana Rao, Dr. C.R. Reddy, Vanguri Subbarao, Veturi Prabhakara Sastry, Bandaru Tammaiah and Panchagnura AudinarayanaSastry entered in to the field. Vemana's name and fame crossed the country's limits and continental limits. In the first part of the twentieth century there were many books released on Vemana Satakas, dramas, stories and some devotional works. All were unreal and fabricated stories. A film "Yogi Vemana" was also released under the direction of B.N. Reddy. But the film was failed because of mere fantasy.

- Who was Vemana?
- When and where was he born?
- How did he lead his life?
- What were his aims and ideals?

Nobody has given an answer with authoritative evidence. All have said that he was a great people's poet of Andhra. Many fantasies and miracle stories about Vemana prevailed in the common folk.
According to Vemana Yogeendra Charitra Vemana was born in the clan of Reddy kings of Knodaveedu. They were called “Panta Reddies”. Vemana’s father was Kumaragiri Vema Reddy, his mother was Mallamamba. Vemana was the third son. Prabhu Vemareddy alias Komati Venkareddy and Raacha Vemareddy were his brothers. Komati Venkareddy ruled Knodaveedu from 1396 to 1424 and Racha Vema Reddy from 1424 to 1428. These Reddy kings patronized Sreenath Mahakavi and Rayani Bhaskara and other poets. The above book says Vemana belongs to that time. But historians and scholars discarded the genealogical tree of Sri Vemana. There was no single evidence to prove it. If Vemana’s time was before 15th century, the poets of Prabandha and the poets of Veerasaiva definitely quote his name in their verses.

There was a plea that the Vemana did not belong to any clan of Reddy. Bandaru Thammaiah was one of the old research scholars on Vemana. He believed Vemana and his ancestors were under the influence of Veerasaviam. But he failed to show an authoritative proof through the verses of Vemana. Brown thought that Vemana criticised almost all castes in his verses except Jangama. So he expected Vemana might have belonged to Jangama community which was in “Veerasaiva darsanam” Vemana did not use his Sur name. Veerasaivistes do not use their Sur names generally.
Brown wrote in the preface of his first edition of Verses of Vemana in 1829 that Vemana belonged to Jangama cult. It is not easy to ascertain anything regarding the history of Vemana, which is the personal name of the author, and sometimes occurs, through rarely among the Telugus of the present day. His family name he never disclosed, and hence was imagined him to have been a Jangam. The fact of Sudras known by this name are readers from the common religion. They worship Siva alone and on embracing the Jangama Sect. They give up the family appellation and are then usually called by the name of the sect alone. Their creed also corresponds with taught by Vemana and this is the only one not satirized by him (1829)

Vemana had no surname. He did not ridicule Jangam sect. These two points cannot stand before criticism. Brown’s opinion was wrong. There is no truth. For example, great poets like Sreenatha and Dhurjati were Saivite poets. They never used their surnames. The Non-saivite poets Marana and Jakkana also never used their surnames. Dr. N. Gopi in his famous research thesis book “Prajakavi Vemana” says Vemana criticised Jangamas also in his many Verses.

“The Linga creed is the noblest of the six creeds. There is none superior in the world”⁸ But all are thieves who wear Lingakaya. In the Linga sect, a set of hypocrites has arisen and
these having handsomely reviled one another are all turned to dust by the Turk tribe to whom their discussion render them easy converts.⁹

Veerasaivites worship Linga and Nandi wherever they see Nandi statue, which is lifeless prostrate before the Nandi with devotion. But they beat the bull (Nandi) which is working for the welfare of man-meaninglessly. Really the devotees of Basava (Jangamas) are sinners.¹⁰

Vemana blamed the Lingayaths who cannot see Linga in his Atma, which was in his body. How can they will be of Siva.¹¹

After seeing the many evidences Brown changed his opinion that Vemana was not Jangama (1840)

They sometimes claim the poet Vemana as preaching their creed, but though he evidently held the Brahmins in detestation, and shows a partiality to the tenets of Basava, he does not embrace the Vaishnava tenets. The insulting manner in which he speaks of the female sex furnishes another proof that he could not be a Vaishnava. He also speaks future transmigrations to have terminated. He (Vemana) ridicules the Lingayaths “You take a binding rope, bind and secure it. What theft has lingadu stolen that he should be thus treated? Why is it that ye cannot be thus treated? Why is it that ye cannot see and worship the invisible Atma Linga?¹²
Regarding this verse, which was related to the birthplace of Vemana. Mcdonald received different versions with different meanings. It is not easy to grasp the meaning.

After some time Macdonald says, "When I came to the capital I had a chance to see the manuscript which was examined by Taylor. In the volume 5th I saw the below given meaning to that verse.

Meaning: The body is a town. The abode of God is on the hill place (Kondaveedu) i.e. head. The spine, which is in back side, is the western street. Vemana resides in the first house of the street. The secret of the verse is some extent revealed. Since Patanjali's Yoga Sutras there are six chakras or lotuses in the spine. Both sides spine have two nadis named Ida and Pingala. Left nadi is Ida or Chandranadi the right nadi is called Pingala or Suryanadi. From the place of Anus the two nadis go upright with the spine and connect at the place in the middle of the two eyebrows. The place is called Bhrikuti. In the middle of Ida and Pingla there is a invisible nadi named Sushumna

A spiritual serpent named Kundalini resides in the Muladhara chakra in a round shape in sleeping mood.
The yogi must awake the serpent to his spiritual progress.

(C.P. Brown in his Telugu English dictionary says this: The spinal the name of a particular tubular vessel of the body spoken of in mystic treatise the pineal gland.)

They have connection with nostrils.

With the pranayama or in any other yogic method yogi must awake the sleeping serpent. When the serpent crossing the five chakras meets Ajna chakra the yogi will get unusual power of universe.

After knowing the real meaning of these verse C.P. Brown added it in his second edition.

His translation was:

The village of our body in which the deity dwells is hill town (The head) his is in back street (the spine). There is silence in the first house. We gaze continually, view it this is the road of beautitude.

Two more versed about Ajna chakra are joined in this edition.

"The divinity Atmalinga dwells in what is termed Ajna Chakra (The space between the two eye brows). It is only by gazing intently on the part that shines so nobely the beautitude shall be attained by men.
"Cut down in the soul the five chakras nobly surmount those chakras and behold the plain beyond them.

I have seen a collection of verses of Vemana more than three thousand in a book, which has no front and last pages. So the compilers and the publisher's names are unknown. Fortunately in the last page there was the name of the printing press i.e., "Vamsi Krishna Art printers - Rajahmunday."

In the front page of the book there are 8 verses quoted with the head line "Some hints of Vemana's life history" (Popularly they are written by Vemana himself about his life as an introduction some may not believe because they have no authoritative proof)

Two of the verses are well known about his birthplace and caste:

On Poornima day in the month of Karthika a Telugu year Nandana an excellent man who will be a hero took birth and rule between the Indrakrladri (Vijayawada) and Seethuvu (Kanyakumari). Residence is the first house of Mooga chintapalle the western street in Kondaveedu whatever it may be the caste is a rude and rustic Reddy. In the beginning of my youth I was joined with cheaters, hypocrites rouges, drunkards and treacherous fellows. I wasted my valuable time with gossips scandals, gambling drinking and other all evil doings. Then I indulged in adultery and I thought the horlot's house was my heaven. I enjoyed
with harlots and Devadasis day and nights for a long time without doing any thing. I spent plenty of money and Jewellry for this lust I inwardly understood the prostitutes who were showing immense love and affection was superficial. PROSTITUTES were ALL after money and wealth.

At last I recognised my good time and wealth were spoiled wastily. I awakened from my deep slumber of this mad lust. I have lost my peace of mind. In this horrible situation fortunately I approached a Guru named Kondaveeti Abhiramaiah and prostrated at his lotus feet. He was a compassionate saint.

"Save me, forgive me, and show me a right path with your divine grace. He was a Jnani and merciful.

He embraced me with kindness and affection. Blessed me. I became his disciple. His disciplinary actions and his teachings hypnotised me. I was changed. My heart was filled with love and mercy towards mankind. My heart was longing to live lonely in a seclusion. I wanted to go somewhere from this society. I told my guru my inner feelings and my unconsciousness. He agreed.

I prostrated before my Gurudeva Kondaveeti Abhiramaiah and worshipped Lord Siva as universal power.

I intentionally decided in my poetic verses that I would remember these names of my Guru Abhiramaih and Siva the Visweswara as "Vishwadabhirama Vinura Vema. Vemana became
calm. He was a simple metal but the Guru changed him as Gold (Perhaps it may be a kind of Alchemy)

C.P. Brown in his translation of a verse says" Vemana openth not his mouth to say no to anyone's assertion. Thus he seems like a mad man. He can explain every mystery of that Vedantam which destroys all distinctions and differences. From this knowledge his apathy arises."

In the fifth year Vemana was sent to a pandith for his learning. In those days teaching profession was undertaken by Brahmin or Viswabrahmin pandits. They taught from the alphabets to Telugu kavya, prabandhas ethics and epics along with history and mathamatics. Vemana learned within a short time to write and read. By birth he was intelligent.

In the boyhood Vemana moved freely and closely with his boy friends who belonged to various castes and creeds. He was well talkative and well behaved. Naturally he became the leader of the boys in the village circle. In those days Vemana used to go to Harikatha's, puranas, pravachanas, local folk ballads and puppet shows to improve his knowledge and for time passing. As a young boy Vemana was interested in music and poetry composing. In his verses he used simple local telugu.

When he composed verses he read out it in the friends circle. They felt happy and applauded. Vemana entered into youthful stage
with charming personality. He seems like a prince, young ladies were trying to attract him. Beautiful Devadasis and Basivis are calling him with secret gestures. Vemana moved with lust fully ideas. One day a devadasi was dancing at the Vaishnavalaya. After ending the performance Vemana followed her. She was very happy. Her mother also invited Vemana honourably because he was a small Zamindar with decent and dignified character. He stayed in their house the whole night. Vemana thought that girl was an angel and her house was heaven. Days were going on. Though she was a devadasi she loved Vemana heart-fully.

In the course of time Vemana became a paramour. He frequented once or twice in a week to fetch money or Jewellary. He could not live without his horlot. His friends and relatives advised him. After a long time he lost everything in his house. Horlot’s mother threw away him out recklessly.

Vemana was in critical juncture. He could not go anywhere without money. Parents expired. His brother led a large family with hard work. There was no any helping hand or well wisher. All became enemies. Without peace of mind he left the native place. He joined a Gosayi circle known Alehemy they deceived Vemana. At the time of Vemana there were Yogis, Sanyasis, Ascetics and Sadhus wandering all over the country preaching their religious ideologies.
and yoga. Naturally Vemana was sensitive and had a divine spark in his heart.

A Hatha yogi attracted him. Vemana obediently approached him and joined as his disciple to learn Hatha yoga. Vemana served a long time the Hatha yogi. With disciplined breathing exercises (pranayama) rigorous Asanas and other activities Vemana lost his physical strength and became lean as a patient. He disgusted with the life. Some body told him Hathayoga was the easy way to get miraculous powers with in a short period In the mean while the Hatha yogi eloped with another's wife. Vemana gave up the Hathayoga and came out. Vemana roamed with the wavering mind in the forests and mountains in search of Guru. In that continued journey he met many advanced souls rajayogis, Kundalini yogis and Achala yogis and discussed with them. All enlightened yogis told Vemana who was in search of reality or truth. There was no any mantras or Tantras to attain salvation. This whole universe is God, the power is Goddess. Both are staying in your body happily. God is love and peace. If you want to see them go and serve the Jeeva rasi (Human beings, beasts creatures and other all pranis)

There is no greater than service of Jeeva

Who are you? Who am I?

"Think always about it with purity. You can get self realization at once. In this universe every thing is personification of God. Don't
waste your time control your mind. Go home”. Vemana went some where and felt in deep meditation. Vemana experienceed in the meditation and attained realization.

"The whole world is my house and I am the world.”

**Self-realization of Sri Vemana**

With self realization Vemana became “Mouni” (dumb) For some time he was in that state. He look like a madman.

Self realization means knowledge of one’s own self and of its oneness with God.

The way to higher life leads through the garden of self realization. Life is un ending in its scope and measureless in its expression, Planes of life correspond to various levels of thoughts. Conversely thought is an indicator of the plane of consciousness in which the mind dwells. Life unfolds its wealth and beauty according to the unveiling of progressively higher states of consciousness.

The goal of life of all beings consists in acquiring happiness, peace, satisfaction, security, conscious knowledge, and immortality. These longings for perfection spring from the soul – the image of God that lies buried within us. Thus perfect image of God is trying to manifest in each human life.

The only way to eradicate your imperfections is to unite your isolated human consciousness with the ocean of cosmic
consciousness - God. An individual ware rising out of the ocean is bound by the laws of change. It is born, It lives, it dies. But when the wave realizes that it is but a manifested from of the sea, when it knows that the sea has become that wave and all other waves. When the wave knows that it is the sea, Then it knows that though its form may change it is never lost or annihilated.

VEMANA'S UNIVERSAL MESSAGE

Vemana did not produce long literary works like those produced by the 'Puranic' or the 'Prabanda' poets. Nor was he, like them, a profound scholar well versed in grammar and poetics. Yet he wrote great poetry, adopting a simple native meter, 'ataveladi', and in a language that common people spoke in their every day lives.¹ His poetry was the result of his genuine humanism and of his rationalistic approach to all human problems and as such, it has a universal appeal. We can, therefore, rightly place Vemana among the great poets of the world.

Nothing that is narrow. Vemana's poetry transcends time and place. Even though his teachings and critical utterances related to the social, economic and religious problems of his time, there is the quality of universality in them. In spite of differences of nationality, of language, of religion, economic and political institutions, man's fundamental problems are the same every where problems regarding his humanity and the growth of his mind.
What does man need to live a long, happy life? This is not a question of recent times. It arose even when man was in the earliest evolutionary stage. The mental development that modern man has attained is tremendous. He has conquered nature. Time and distance are no longer barrier to him. He is able to move with incredible speed, and is visiting other heavenly bodies. Nothing can check his progress. He goes freely wherever he wants to. Notwithstanding all this wonderful progress, he is not happy. What is the cause? It is not far to seek. His selfishness, his self deception and his indifference are the cause.

Vemana was a humanist, a progressive thinker and a psychologist who could discern the depths of the human heart and mind. Man should exercise his reasoning powers, develop his sense of judgment and perform his duties and responsibilities. He should never forget his humanity and his duties as a human being. This is the substance of Vemans's teachings. The following stanza is remarkable in as much as it contains a true dedicated man.

"Anyulakunu vachu napada tanadiga
Nennuvadu bhuvini nunna vadu"

"Only that man is a living man who feels the sufferings of his fellow men as his own. And when such a living man meditates upon the meaning of this life and the life hereafter, he becomes a supreme human being. Vemana implies that all the others may be
considered a dead so far as the duty of man as man is concerned. How well he has pointed out man’s first duty. What great meaning is contained in four short lines: Unless man cultivates his attitude, he can never solve his problems. There can never be peace and happiness in his life.

Who can overcome fate? There is no help against fate. What man suffers now is the result of his past ‘karma’. Nothing can be done to ward off the blows of fate. Things happen according to God’s will. The human problem can never be solved, for no sooner is one problem solved than another arises. Who are we, either to help others or to harm them? Such beliefs and questions are frequently given utterance to by our so called philosophers, of whom there are any number in the society of our time. There have been, too, some extreme fatalists who look on calmly doing nothing even when their neighbors are being robbed in front of their eyes. They ascribe everything to man’s ‘karma’ or fate. What sort of men are these pseudo-philosophers?

Vemana was a bitter enemy of this kind of fatalistic philosophy. He was a great optimist and believed in man’s creative effort.

"Bhumilona Puttu bhusara mellaru
tanuvulona puttu tattvamella
sramamulona puttru sarvambu tanounu"
All the articles essential for man's existences have their source in the earth. All philosophies arise out of the human mind. It is human labour that produces everything.

Man's history reveals to us the progress that he has achieved through the ages since the time he was living on trees. We can find there have been incessant efforts at progress in the different fields and in the different stages in his development. Man's will to live better is the one dominant factor that has brought about all revolutions, reforms and scientific inventions and discoveries. He has achieved almost all that he could wish for.

While, on the one hand, man must strive to achieve higher and yet bigger things, he should, on the other hand, always remember his duty as a man. This is the greatest rule of conduct. Man cannot afford to forget that he is a social being. He has to be aware of the inseparable link between his welfare and that of the society in which he lives. Everything in the universe obeys certain natural laws, and man, being the pinnacle of evolution, should not disregard the duties enjoined upon him by his moral sense. If any man looks at other man's wives with lustful eyes, will not his wife be looked at in the same way by other men? If you rob others, it is but just that others should rob you. The golden rule is to consider your neighbor's difficulties as your own and to do what you would want them to do to you. This one principle is enough as foundation
for the creation of a really cultured society. It is utterly useless merely to quote rules of conduct from 'dharma-shastras' in which, very often, principles praised in one place are condemned in another place.

'Dharma' and justice do not originate in books; their real place of origin is the human heart. They depend upon place, time and circumstances. Only that ethical(dharma) is the best which is conducive to the progress and happiness of society. Anything that causes the disintegration of society is 'adharma', even if it is found in the 'dharma shastras'.

There is in our country, no lack of 'dharma shastras', 'niti shastras' and works of good counsel. Most of these books repeat the same things, though indifferent words. And they are: Speak the truth. Do good deeds. Revere your parents and teachers as you would revere the gods. Character is the best of man's adornments. Do not covet others possessions. Do good to others. Maintain your self- respect and dignity – And one can go on adding to this list endlessly.

Though it may be argued that Vemana, too, taught the same things, there is a fundamental differences. There is a certain uniqueness in his telling them. His sayings are full of rationalist thought and a remarkable realism pervades them. One must possess a keen sensibility and a sympathetic understanding to see
the greatness of Vemans's utterances. Look at the following highly thought-provoking and practical suggestion he has given us with regard to speaking the truth:

"Nijamuladu vani nindinchu jagamella
nijamuladaradu neechnthonu
nijamahathmu gooda nijamada Valayura"

"Mean people look down upon a man who tells truth. Truth must never be spoken when dealing with such people. Tell the truth only when you are in the presence of truthful men." This is very sound, worldly wise advice. We are told how to avoid trouble from hypocrites. I am afraid, people who believe in truth as Harischandra practiced it, will not like what Vemana has said here with regard to truth.

As Dr. C.R. Reddy has said, whenever Vemana was in doubt with regard to the righteousness or otherwise of an action, he did not refer to 'dharma shastras' but applied his naturally unerring commonsense, and took a decision. It was this great poet who set rationalist criticism on its throne. Here is another of Vemana's verses in which he speaks about giving charity.

"Dosakari yaina doosarikadaina
pagathudaina veda bahyu daina
Vatti leni pedavani keedagu neevi"

During Vemana's time, the disparity between the rich and the poor was very great. The poor had to depend on the rich for their
existence and they invariably lived in misery. But the rich people, in accordance with the injunctions in the 'Dharma Shastras', gave charity only to the high-caste people and those were always Brahmins. And even among the Brahmins only certain sects were worthy or receiving charity. It was immaterial whether the recipient was really in need or not. It is enough if he belonged to a caste specified in the sacred books. And even that charity was done for prestige. It was mere showing off. Both the giver and the receiver were hypocrites. It was like a game. We see this sort of game being played even today. We very rarely find a sincerely generous person.

Vemana's heart was filled with genuine love for the poor. There was no vagueness in his statement. His ideas are to the hearts of thoughtful people as the sun's rays are to the lotus.

He asked the rich to give relief to those who starved, who ever they might be. The starving must be fed, whether they were good or bad, high-caste or low-born, friends or foes; even if they were 'chandalas' (untouchables). A rich person, however worthy he may be, by virtue of his birth, does not deserve charity, Vemana declared.

Vemana's heart went out to the indigent, and his words are full of significance. One must have a really feeling heart to understand their full import. We thus see that Vemana was a great humanist and a sincere friend of the poor.
“Give freely to the starving poor and save their lives. Love all living beings. The 'jeeva' is God. Man is born to live, to live long and in peace and happiness, and not to die soon because one has to die sometime or other. He adage: (He who is born has to die) should not be misunderstood. Its purpose is that we should live without fear of death. It does not mean that are should think of death constantly and die long before death actually comes. If man had given way to despair because death was inevitable, what could he have achieved? There would have been not progress of any kind. It is a truism to say that man has to die sooner or later. But he has to live happily and peacefully as long as he lives. He should not suffer injustice in spirit of fatalistic resignation. The good things of life produced by his labour are meant for him, too, not only for the affluent.

They should be shared by all. Such is Vemana's practical philosophy, born out of his humanism. The rich in his days lived most selfish lives thinking that the poor suffered as a result of their past 'karma', and that it was but just punishment. They did not feed the hungry even though they had plenty of food, They were indifferent spectators of misery, starvation and death. Addressing such heartless rich men, Vemana said:

"Jeevi pokamunde Jeeva vasthuvu lichchi
Jeevi nilupa valayu Jeevanamuna
Jeevi tholagu venuka Jeeva vasthuvu lela"
"Give the life-sustaining things when there is life in the body. No charity can help once the life ceases. Of what avail can the good things of life (Jeeva Vastuvulu) be after death? This is the direct question that Vemana put to the indifferent rich of his time. Even today this is the most pressing of man's problems all over the world.

Vemana's message, therefore, is for the entire humanity. He has taught us what man's highest duty is, and reminded us again and again that our welfare is dependent on how well we perform this duty. A similar philosophy is the basis of all Tolstoy's novels and short stories. Vemana was a believer in one God, a great humanist and a practical philosopher. There is no ambiguity anywhere in his writings.

Historical Background of Sri Vemana

Kakateeya Kingdom was established in 13th century, by Ganapathi Deva Raya. It was a great remarkable period in the history of Telugu country. The entire Telugu land was under his rule.

The difference between Andhra and Telugu was avoided and a special name was coined as "Trailinga Dhaneetalam". In this time Mahakavi Tikkana completed his writing of "Mahabharata". In those days there was inter-caste marriages in the famous Raja, Veera,
Brahman, Kamma, Kapu and other castes. There was a "Nayamkara prabhu system" established in the leadership of above-mentioned Nayakas of Kakateeya emperors. Induluri Annaya manthri, kolani Rudradevudu and other Brahmana warriors were ministers. The Ministers and kings were all saivas. The difference between saiva and Vaishnava were avoided. All were united. Ganapathi Deva's favourite poet Tikkana worshipped Hariharanatha a new deity. The Jaina religion, which was against Vedic religion, was eradicated in his period. This nayankara system unitedly attacked the invasions of Delhi Sultans till the time of prataparudra. In 1723 prataprudra was defeated by Delhi Sultans and Kakateeya Empire declined. In 1347 the South Indian Muslim Kings captured Delhi and established various Bahmani kingdoms. Nayankara system devided with the difference of various Nayakas. Popular Reddies secured the kingdom of Kondaveedu, Harihara and Bukkaraya occupied the Vijayanagara kingdom. Some of the coastal and Telangana areas were handed over by the kapaya and prolaya nayakas.

There were STRUGGLES between the kings and competetions in patronising the poets and pandits. Regarding the unwholesome relations with Bahamani sultans and the differences struggles were raised. This period was called Golden age for finears. Many poets and pandits were patronised by the rulers. KavisarvaBhouma
Srinatha and other poets were honoured in their "Asthanas". The famous Bhakthi poet Pothana rejected the patronisation of kings and led his life as a farmer.

Sayana and Vidyaranya, the Gurus of Vijayanagara kings wrote commentaries on Upanishads. By the influences of Vaishnavacharyas of South India the kings of Vijayanagara converted from Saivism to Vaishnavism. Sri Krishnadevaraya wrote a Vaishnava prabandha named "Amuktha Malyada".

The kings of Vijayanagar maintained good friendship for sometime with Bahmani sultans. Krishna devaraya the yavana rajyasthapanacharya with the friendship of Golkonda Nawabs ruled the country peacefully. Fine arts like literature, music, sculptures were nourished. "The religion of sword" Islam had taken a peaceful harmonious nature with the effect of Sufi culture.

Many Urdu, Arabic poets of medieval ages wrote poems about freedom of thought, religious patience, worship of nature's beauty, ecstasy of life and the superiority of human being. The Sufi poets mingled with Hindu poets. Mohammed Khuli Kutubshahi in the 16th century, Nadruddin Mohammad in the beginning of 18th century, Vali Mohammad 1667-1741 Meer taki Meer (1713-1830) and several other poets wrote progressive and inspiring verses. ("Indian literature - Meerja Galib" an essay written by a Soviet writer E.P. Chelvashave)
In between 1675 to 1800 Rayalaseema was under the rule of Nawabs and poligars. Besides Madhura and Tanjavoor also in the same condition. Madhura kings were also responsible for the downfall of Vijayanagara Empire.

Within a short time Mohammadans occupied Madhura. After the death of Venkatapathi Rayalu in 1614 Chnadragiri Throne was occupied by Raghunadha rayalu. Raghunatha Rayalu showed special interest in fine arts literature, music, sculptures and arts. He himself was a poet. Rangajamma a notable poetess was his darling. He had a good taste of beauty with aesthetic sense. He patronised many dancers in his Janana. Radhika Santwanamu a masterpiece written by Muddupalani a famous telugu poetess. Tupakula Ananta Bhupaludu a popular prose writer was also in his court.

In 1633 Son of Raghunatharayalu became king of Tanjavoor. He was a notorious politician. He collected tax violently from starving peasants. In 1662 there was a serious famine in the area. He had no even religious- patience. As a Veeravaishnava he forced cruelly the people who belonged to other religions for conversion of religion. In 1675 Maharastra king Venkoji brother of Sivaji occupied Tanjavoor. At that time Abdul Hasan Kuthubsha ruling Golconda (1658-1687). Tanisha who was former to Kutub Sha was requested
by English businessmen for shelter to stay for their safety. Aurangajeb invaded Golkonda in 1687 and captured it.

After getting victory on Golkonda, Aurangajeb lived nearly 20 years. But he failed to establish peace in the kingdom and at paraganas. There was no law and order. People have no security for their lives and properties. As a result of the previous wars there were disturbances and chaos. In this critical period, small rulers, Samanths, Jamindars and Jaageerdars revolted against the government.

Afterwards the kingdom of Nizam came into light and within a short period fell down. Zamindars were remained. After Tipu Sultan's death, Ryala Seema was occupied by Nizam Nawab. Though the Britishers entered into the Andhra area in 1611 but it took long time to 200 years to occupy the entire Andhra land. The disturbances and crisis which arose after the downfall of Vijayanagara Empire stopped. The whole Andhra area came under the British rule.

17th century the period of crisis.

The 17th century was an agitated and disturbed period of Indian History. With the downfall of Vijayanagara Empire many bad conditions were taken place. The Mohammadan rule was gradually extending. Bijapur and Golkonda Nawabs occupied many parts of the Vijayanagara kingdom. In 1570 Vijayanagara kingdom was
divided into three parts. Sri Rangarayalu ruled Telugunadu one of the three parts as the penugonda capital city. As SriRangapatnam capital Ramarayalu ruled another part. Venkatapathi Rayalu ruled some area in Tamilnadu and some part in Rayala seema. His capital city was Chandragiri.

After declining the first two parts Venkatapathi rayalu ruled 1586 to 1614. Then he died. Afterwards there were many struggles for the throne of Chandragiri in between hereditary kinsmen. Vijayangara empire completely disappeared around 1675 without no single reminder. Less or more in the same period in 1687 the Golkonda kingdom also destroyed. Aurangzub occupied Golkonda.

In those days whoever may be on throne in capital cities the local rulers like Samanthas, poligars and chotanawabs had authority to command on villages. Though the chittur and cuddapah districts under Golkonda Nawabs the village level rulers were poligars. They were violently and cruelly collecting the excess revenue from the village farmers. Cuddapah Nawab ruled Madanapalle, Voyalpadu and Punganoor Talukas. The remaining areas were ruled by Arcot Nawab under the kingship of Golkonda Nawabs. After the down fall of Golkonda kingdom Nellore also has gone into the Arcot nawabs.

These Nawabs are all rulers of Durgas. Durga means fort. They want power. in the village and Taluka level rulers were all
local persons. Chiefly poligars, In those days some of the Nawabs
good-natured and had religious patience. They were far from these
political, religious disturbances. But they were unable to control the
poligars and landlords violent activities in the villages and Talukas.
Poor peasants and suppressed classes were suffered too much by
those immoral commanders. Now and then whenever they were in
need of money become decoits and gang robbers to loot the villages
mercilessly. Vemana observed all these incidents. As a people's poet
he was always on the side of poor people. He abused the rulers as
cowards, impotents, cheaters and hypocrites. There was a talk in
1746 Maharstra military commander Murari Rao occupied the
Gooty, Tadipatri and penugonda areas and suppressd the brutal
poligars and village rulers. In those days there was no safety and
security to the lives and properties of poor we can see the actual
pictures in Vemana Verses. Vemana divided the rulers in three
varieties. (1) Cowards or impotents (2) Criminals, sinners or evil
doers (3) Innocents or ignorants.

In the words of Vemana they are not helpless, supporters or
saviours. For the sake of name they are rulers. When the enemies
invade on the villages the rulers and poligars run away from the
field. When there was no settled administration and every Kavalgar
or poligar or even a village munsiff became a law unto himself
grabbing rent free lands or temple properties with impurity,
encroaching on common lands for private profit. The angry saint spoke out without fear or favour. He was in deed the tribunal of the people.

Those poligars now and then invades like bandits robbed the neighbour villages to loot their wealth ruthlessly. There was no peace and security to the villagers. Some of the rulers were cowards. They were unable to protect people's lives and wealth. They were only for the namesake. Vemana condemned and abused these impotent rulers in his verses.

"For their belly's sake these bandits loot lands sickling the poor in hamlet most wretched bands Death's head will definitely sack these bands listen to Vema, spokes man of 'Vox populi'. Bringing all lands under one yoke of care who shall be the ruler for the poor to love and bear can any man fit to be called a king even be? Listen to Vema spokesmn of 'Vox populi'. Seeing the foe and his force, if the fellow takes to his heels, as a coward most shallow who can stop, as death in agner will follow? Lisen to Vema pokes man of 'Voxpopuli'. When a coward is made a commander in war he will take to his heels and war he will mar can that man be entrusted that role in war listen to Vema spokesman of 'Vox populi'.

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