



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

YOGI VEMANA'S PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS: EXPLORING HINDU DEITIES AND COSMIC REALITIES

A.MEENAKSHI

Asst.Prof. of English
Govt.Degree College for Women
Karimnagar.

ABSTRACT

Yogi Vemana, a revered 17th-century Telugu philosopher within Hindu literature, explores Hindu mythology, delving into the intricate nuances of various gods, the essence of existence, and the complexities of human life. His verses intricately interlace reflections on celestial beings, the elements, and the profound dynamics between gods, presenting a tapestry of insights into the cosmological understanding of Hinduism. His reflections transcend the boundaries of divinity, touching on human conduct, destiny, and the fleeting nature of life. These musings explore the philosophical beliefs of Hinduism, equating the five elements to divine entities, emphasising Earth as the sustainer of all life. Vemana's verses offer profound insight into Hinduism's moral and spiritual teachings, underlining the impermanence of life on Earth and inviting reflection on human desires, the consequences of actions, and the enduring struggles between mortal passions and divine existences. Through his contemplations, Vemana shines a light on the Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—unravelling their grandeur, imperfections, and significant roles within the expansive Hindu pantheon. His narratives delve into the intricate stories of various gods and the ethical lessons embedded in their actions, emphasising the transient nature of existence and the eternal interplay between gods and mortals.

Keywords: Cosmic Realities, Hindu Deities, Hindu Mythology, Philosophical Insights, Trinity, Yogi Vemana

Yogi Vemana, a revered philosopher in Hindu literature, delves into the depths of Hindu mythology, exploring the nature of various gods, the essence of existence, and the intricacies of human life. His verses intricately weave together reflections on celestial beings, the elements, and the complex dynamics between gods, presenting a tapestry of insights into the Hindu cosmological understanding. Vemana's contemplations on the Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—shed light on their grandeur, imperfections, and place in the Hindu pantheon's vast expanse. These reflections traverse the boundaries of divinity, human conduct, destiny, and the transient nature of life.

Yogi Vemana contemplates the presence of various divinities, such as the Sun, moon, wind, fire, Earth, and air, suggesting their availability if one requires their presence. He also reflects on the nature of space, the relationship between space and the world, and the Sun's size within the vast expanse of space. In Hinduism, celestial bodies and the five elements are revered as Gods. Vemana illustrates this by stating, "The sun and the moon are present. The wind, fire, and peacock-spangled divinities are before thee. The earth and air are present, so are the divinities before thee. If thou wilt require, O Vema!" (Brown 1048). Vemana describes the Sun as the lover of lotus and belongs to the race of Lord Vishnu. He praises Sun as the noble God as he does his duty by giving light to the entire world. Describing the Sun as the beloved of the lotus and a part of Lord Vishnu's lineage, Vemana praises the Sun as a noble deity due to his duty of illuminating the world. He says, "Surya lover of the lotus, was born in the race of Vishnu, husband of Lakshmi, the noble other and as he duly goes his course, going about the lands and the earth; Vishnu nourisher of the elephant, travels as he does (for Surya is in reality but a form of Vishnu)." (Brown 280)

The article delves into the significance of various Hindu deities, such as Sukra, known as the planet Venus, and the guru of the *asuras* (demons). It narrates the story of Bali Chakravarthi, an *asura* king and the grandson of Prahlada, a devoted follower of Vishnu. It describes the event where Lord Vishnu incarnates as Vamana to restore heaven for the gods by cleverly seeking three feet of land from Bali during a *yajna* (sacrifice). The deed is eventually fulfilled despite Sukracharya's attempt to prevent Bali from granting the land. When King Bali decided to keep his word and was about to pour water, which signifies his acceptance of giving the three feet of land to Vamana, Sukracharya entered the water vessel and blocked the water to stop the gift to Vamana. However, Vamana, aware of Sukracharya's trick, put a straw into the vessel, which hurt the eye of Sukracharya. Due to pain, Sukracharya came out of the pot, and the gift was granted (ratified) by King Bali. Sukracharya remained as a one-eyed guru. Vemana reflects on the wavering mind of Sukracharya and compares him with a one-eyed crow. "He that is as great as Sukrachari, knowing all things with his sharp sight if instead of restraining his mind let it roam, is like the blind crow". (The crow and Sukrachari each have but one eye) (Brown 929)

Vemana's verses highlight the philosophical beliefs of Hinduism, equating the five elements to divine entities. He emphasises Earth as the mother of all living beings and the sustainer of life. Vemana, known for his moral and spiritual teachings, presents Earth as equal to Shiva, emphasising their roles as sustainers of the world. He says, "The Goddess of Earth, as they call her clay, seeing that all men know how that Goddess was produced, she became very weighty; they even call that Goddess equal to Siva as sustaining all." (Brown 1013). Vemana talks about the reality of life where people take birth on Earth, live on it, play with mud, leave it, reborn on it, and again mingle with it after death. He thus asserts the transient nature of life on Earth, affirming its impermanence and the idea that Earth is a temporary abode and not the ultimate destination. He says, "They heap up earth and wallow in mud but they adhere not to the earth but turn again, and are mingled with earth. Where shall they then depart to?" (Brown 669).

Vemana reflects on the delusions and realities of human existence, drawing parallels between people's claims of ownership over the Earth and the inevitability of their birth, life, and death on this planet. He depicts the Earth as an entity that seems to react to the audacious claims of human ownership. When individuals proudly assert ownership over the Earth, Vemana suggests that the Earth metaphorically bursts into laughter. It reflects on the futility of such claims, given that every human being is born, lives, and eventually returns to the embrace of the Earth upon death. Similarly, Vemana employs a similar symbolic personification in illustrating Lord Yama's response to cowardice. When an individual flees from the battlefield due to fear, Lord Yama, the harbinger of death, is said to laugh. Yama's laughter signifies that running away from life's challenges or battles does not grant escape from the ultimate fate.

If you claim the Earth is yours,
 The Earth bursts into laughter.
 Looking at a miser, money mocks,
 Looking at a coward in battle, Yama laughs. ? (Moorty and Roberts 38)”

Vemana’s narrative on the prowess of Lord Agni, the God of Fire, highlights the veneration of Agni as the provider of spiritual emancipation. However, he presents a compelling episode where even the mighty Fire God finds himself powerless in the face of Veerabhadra during the tumultuous destruction of Daksha Yajna. Daksha Prajapathi, the father-in-law of Lord Shiva, conducts a grand yajna without extending an invitation to Lord Shiva and his consort, Sathi Devi. Sathi Devi, against Shiva’s counsel, attends the yajna but cannot bear the humiliation meted out to her husband, Shiva. Distraught, Sathi Devi immolates herself through Yogagni. Upon learning of Sathi Devi’s tragic demise, Shiva, in a fit of rage, manifests Veerabhadra from his locks and dispatches him to obliterate Daksha Yajna. Veerabhadra, the fierce manifestation of Shiva, beheads Daksha and casts his head into the ceremonial fire. This event serves as a poignant moment where the revered Fire God, Agni, is unable to intervene or save Daksha despite the latter’s worship of Agni as a part of the ritual. Vemana’s reflective query on this event—“Were fire a deity, by worshipping it should not we attain the dwelling of salvation? Did not the fire turn pale before Veerabhadra.” (Brown 969)” —underscores the limits of Agni’s power in the face of Veerabhadra’s divine might. It provokes contemplation on the prevailing might of Veerabhadra, showcasing that in this tumultuous confrontation, Agni’s revered status was overshadowed, revealing the paramountcy of Veerabhadra’s authority.”

The planet Uranus is known in Hindu mythology as Indra. Indra, revered as the celestial father of Arjuna, plays a crucial role in the epic Mahabharata. In one incident during the Mahabharata war, Indra, driven by a desire to protect his son Arjuna, approaches Karna in disguise as a Brahmin. He requests Karna for his divine armour and earrings to weaken Karna’s invincibility. Vemana, however, critiques Indra, the reigning king of gods in Hindu cosmology, for what he perceives as Indra’s avarice and questionable tactics. Vemana questions the actions of Indra in his verse: “Though his dwelling be on Meru, the golden hill cupidity will not leave the God Indra himself. Did not he ask Karna for his armour and large earrings?” (Brown 918). Vemana’s commentary highlights the moral implications of Indra’s actions, highlighting the conflict between his divine stature and his acts driven by personal gain. This narrative involving Indra’s quest for Karna’s armour and earrings reflects the complexities of divinity and the ethical considerations even within the celestial realm.

Vemana imparts a significant teaching on the perils of succumbing to lust, illustrating his point through the tale of Indra. In the story, Indra deceives Ahalya and engages in a physical relationship, assuming her husband’s appearance, Sage Gautama. When Gautama discovered this deceit, he cursed Indra, manifesting a thousand eyes across Indra’s entire body. Vemana poignantly questions, “Did not Indra, driven by his unbridled desires, fall from grace?” (Brown 920). This account serves as a cautionary tale, emphasising the degradation and downfall brought upon by yielding to insatiable desires. Vemana employs the narrative of Indra’s misconduct to underscore the adverse consequences and moral decay resulting from yielding to temptation and deceit.

The Indian nomenclature designates the planet Pluto as Yama. Lord Yama, revered as the God of death, is identified in Hindu mythology as the Sun God’s and Sandhya Devi’s progeny. Vemana advocates the practice of Yoga to break free from the perpetual cycle of birth and death, thereby seeking liberation from Yama’s dominion. Vemana portrays life as transient and admonishes those who delude themselves into perceiving an eternal existence, asserting that individuals who neglect virtuous deeds face the consequences at the hands of Yama, akin to goats led for sacrifice. His verse states, “They talk as if life were eternal and pride themselves greatly, the fools. All beings are as sheep bound for sacrifice before Yama.” (Brown 711).

Lord Yama is renowned for his unwavering commitment to duty and impartiality. Vemana opines that many individuals lament Yama's punitive measures, including the idea of suffering in hell due to his wrath. Nevertheless, Vemana emphasises that it is one's conduct that directly influences their suffering. He contends that Yama, free from the slightest transgression, sanctions retribution according to an individual's deeds. Those who disregard their conduct, revelling solely in worldly pleasures, are destined to endure the punitive repercussions in Yama's domain of punishment. Vemana asserts that nobody else has the power to bestow sorrow or joy upon an individual; these emotions are the products of one's actions. Yama, possessing an acute understanding of each being's true nature, administers justice according to their deeds. Vemana reveres Yama as the epitome of righteousness.

Knowing the nature of the twins-birth and death-
He regards all beings as equal.
No one can punish like Him.
Who is holier than Yama? (Moorty and Roberts 120)

Reflecting on the inevitability of facing the consequences of one's actions, Vemana illustrates the irrefutability of destiny. He maintains that even a virtuous person sins killing a cow cannot escape Yama's judgment, drawing a parallel between the guilty person and a sacrificial goat. "If a noble person comes and kills a cow, his crime can by no means be evaded, and at last, he is surely to Yama as a goat bound for sacrifice." (Brown 1047). Vemana proclaims that the devotees of Shiva need not fear Yama, citing the example of a devout merchant who, while renowned for his virtuous acts, notably failed to honour Yama. Remarkably, due to his unwavering devotion to Lord Shiva, the merchant managed to evade the clutches of Yama. "There was once a merchant who for a wonder in this earth knowing the deity performed every virtue and became celebrated. But failing of reverencing Yama he drew near to Siva." (Brown 987). The narrative underlines Vemana's profound contemplation on the consequences of actions and the significance of devotion to transcend the ultimate arbiter, Lord Yama.

Vemana delves into the Hindu mythos by exploring the realm of Manmatha, the revered God of Love. He denotes the concept of *Maya*, an illusion in Hindu philosophy, as a creation attributed to Lord Vishnu. Within this realm of illusion, Manmatha holds a significant role as the beloved son of *Maya*. During Lord Vishnu's incarnation as Lord Krishna, Manmatha is believed to have been reborn as Pradyumna, his son. This association signifies that Manmatha's abilities contribute to the creation and perpetuation of the illusory aspects of *Maya*. Vemana further elucidates that Manmatha's emblematic flower-tipped arrows are responsible for fostering romantic connections between individuals. Eating and procreation is a universal phenomena observed in various species. Vemana draws an intriguing comparison, juxtaposing an Islamic conversion scenario with the influence of Manmatha. He compares the impact of a Muslim king's conversion tactics—where people were enticed into Islam through the offering of cow meat—to the compelling effect Manmatha exerts, leading individuals to challenge established caste norms due to their alluring attraction towards the opposite sex. Vemana's poignant comparison accentuates this theological exploration. He compares the Sultan's methodology of converting people to Islam by providing cow meat to Manmatha's sway over societal norms through the potency of romantic connections. The verse presents a metaphorical juxtaposition, alluding to the potential societal disruption caused by both these influences.

The Sultan converted people to Islam
By feeding them cow meat.
The flower arrowed God corrupted castes
By feeding them the meat of maiden's lips. ? (Moorty and Roberts 46)

Additionally, Vemana recounts the legend where Manmatha employs his flower arrow to kindle love between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi. Shiva, in response, reduces Manmatha to ashes for disturbing his intense meditation, symbolising the power and consequences of desire. "Was not Cupid, through desire, turned into Earth?" (Brown 920). The verse muses on the transformative consequence of Manmatha's desires, contemplating whether Manmatha was transformed into an earthly existence in his pursuit of love.

In Hinduism, Lord Brahma is the creator and author of the destiny of all living beings. Vemana, a philosopher, raises an intriguing question about Brahma's own fate. Despite being the creator and orchestrator of destiny, Brahma faced the consequence of having his fifth head severed by Lord Shiva due to his infatuation with a woman he had created named Sataroopa. Brahma, in his fascination, gazed upon her with all his five heads, drawing the ire of Lord Shiva, resulting in the removal of his fifth head. Vemana reflects on the lesson behind this event, emphasising the repercussions of indulging in lust and its far-reaching implications. When Shiva separated Brahma's fifth head, due to the sin of *Brahma hatya pathakam* (the act of killing Brahma), the head of Brahma clung to Shiva's hand. Only after Shiva's penance at a site in Uttarakhand could he separate Brahma's head from his hand, now recognised as Brahmakapala. "They call Brahma the author of the writing of fate in our foreheads. Perhaps Brahma, who dwelleth in the lotus (wrote) destined that his own head should cleave to the hand of (Bhava) Siva!" (Brown 845).

Vemana further explores the consequences of Brahma's creation of the woman, Sataroopa, insinuating that such acts were designed to lead men astray. He draws parallels by highlighting the celibacy of Ganesha, Bhairava, and Anjaneya, attributing their abstinence to a fear of women's deceit. Vemana also uses the examples of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, illustrating their challenges due to their relationships with their respective consorts. He symbolises their struggles by stating that Lord Shiva kept his wife Ganga on his head, Lord Brahma kept his wife Saraswathi on his tongue, and Lord Vishnu placed Lakshmi in his heart. This depiction showcases the enduring challenges they faced due to their relationships with women. In essence, Vemana urges reflection on the consequences of succumbing to desires, illustrating through these divine tales the perils of indulging in passion and the enduring struggles it can bring.

One has kept his wife on his head, another in his mouth
The other one placed his wife in his heart
Like this, they struggled a lot for women
Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema.

Padathi mose nokadu, padathi mesenokandu
Padathi nuramu jerchi brathike nokadu
Padathi korake pekku patlanu badiraya.
Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema. (my trans; Subrahmanyam 357)

In Hinduism, Lord Vishnu is the preserver of the world. Vemana contemplates the profound relationship between Lord Vishnu and the world, expressing that the entirety of existence resides within the womb of Lord Vishnu. According to Vemana, all living beings are inherently Vaishnavites by birth, existing within the encompassing embrace of Vishnu.

In the womb of Vishnu, the world shines
In it arranged all the beings of the universe
Thus, all living beings are Vaishnavites
Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema.

Vishnu garbhamandu velasenu lokammu
Landu sakala jeevulamara galavu
Praanikotulella paraga Vaishnavulaya. .
Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema. (my trans; Sastry 4426)

Vemana delves into the various incarnations of Lord Vishnu, such as Rama and Krishna. He reflects upon the valour and virtues exemplified by Rama from the Ramayana, showcasing the dichotomy between virtue and vice. Vemana praises Rama's qualities of courage, hard work, and determination required to accomplish goals. "Did not Rama cast the fire-dart, and dry up the sea, pass over, and return and stand still. Then did he not bring trees and bills and with them build the bridge?" (Brown 312). However, he questions some of Rama's choices, like chasing a golden deer, challenging the perception of Rama's actions as a wise ruler.

Vemana advocates prioritising wisdom over age and uses examples, such as people worshipping Lord Krishna (Vaasudeva) despite his father, Vasudeva, being older. He humorously highlights human nature by referencing Krishna's penchant for stealing milk from the cowherd families, drawing from the descriptions in the epic Bhagavatham of Krishna's birth and upbringing in Gokula. "He, Vishnu, that lay down in the sea of milk, why should he have wished for the milk of the shepherd's village? How sweet is the property of our neighbour? (Brown 919)

Vemana reflects on the power of time. He opines that time can downgrade even mighty Gods like Krishna.

Moreover, Vemana muses on the supremacy of time, asserting that it can diminish even the most formidable beings, including Krishna, despite his miraculous feats.

The course of time belittles everyone,
 However great. This is not rare.
 Did not Krishna who raised a mountain
 On his finger, float on a banyan leaf? (Moorty and Roberts 110)

Vemana presents his perspective on Lord Shiva, regarding him as the paramount deity responsible for both joy and sorrow in life. Vemana says, "Siva sports alone in varying forms through all religions" (Brown 942), emphasising Shiva's presence across diverse belief systems. Vemana illustrates Shiva's supremacy by recounting incidents such as the destruction of Daksha Yajna and the removal of Brahma's fifth head. Vemana uses the example of Lord Shiva's life to convey the belief that destiny determines everyone's fate. He questions why Shiva, despite his friendship with Kubera, the affluent God, continues to lead the life of a beggar. "Kubera being his friend, and united to him how did Siva become a mendicant?" (Brown 921)

Vemana humorously comments on Shiva's paradoxical situation without sparing even Lord Shiva from criticism. Although Shiva is the Lord of the hills, residing in the silver hill Kailasa and wielding the golden hill Meru as his bow, he wanders as a beggar. Vemana quips that everyone, including gods like Shiva, finds pleasure in the possessions of others. "Thou he hath the hills of silver and gold, Kailasa and Meru, why doth the god Siva wander and collect alms. His neighbour's property is sweet to every man however great." (Brown 926). Furthermore, Vemana criticises Shiva for granting excessive freedom to his wife, Sathi Devi, which resulted in the devastation of the Daksha Yajna. He also mentions the narrative of Shiva bestowing half of his body to Parvathi, asserting that while Shiva's sect existed, the Shakti creed, embodied by Parvathi, has become more prominent in contemporary times.

In Hinduism, the Trinity comprises Lord Brahma as the creator, Lord Vishnu as the preserver, and Lord Shiva as the destroyer of the world. While Vemana delves into the virtues, shortcomings, and consequences of the actions of various gods, he firmly asserts the superiority of the Trinity over all other deities in Hinduism. He emphasises the significance of wholeheartedly immersing one's soul in worshipping these three principal gods—Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma. Vemana says, "Why all this grief. If with singleness of heart though extinguish thy desires by immersing thy soul in (Hari, Hara and Aaja, Vishnu, Siva and Brahma) the three gods and maintain a subdued spirit, happiness shall be formed within thee. (Brown 207).

Among the Trinity, Vemana proclaims Shiva as the supreme deity. Despite extolling these three gods' greatness, Vemana does not hesitate to critique their weaknesses and question their capabilities. He posits that there exists an even higher truth, Brahman, which serves as the ultimate source of the Trinity. To comprehend this ultimate source, Vemana suggests that one should first acquaint oneself with one of the three principal gods and offer suitable praises. "Let us know the source of the three Gods. First know one of the three, Then fitly with thy tongue offer praise" (Brown 281).

Vemana's profound insights into Hindu deities, elements, and cosmic realities offer a deeper understanding of the philosophical nuances within Hinduism. His contemplations, whether on the Trinity or the intricate relationships between gods, underscore these ancient tales' complexities and moral lessons. The imagery and metaphorical expressions employed by Vemana illuminate the transient nature of existence, the consequences of desires, and the interplay between gods and mortals. His narratives provide insight into the dynamics of Hindu mythology but also offer timeless wisdom, reflecting on the human condition and the cosmic order. Vemana's teachings, while rooted in Hindu mythology, offer universal truths and moral reflections that continue to resonate across cultures and generations, inviting individuals to ponder life's transient nature, the repercussions of desire, and the complexities of divine existence. Through his intricate verses and thought-provoking narratives, Vemana's wisdom transcends the boundaries of time, inviting contemplation and introspection into the depth of existence, the nature of divinity, and the eternal relation between gods and mortals.

REFERENCES

1. Brown, C.P. *Verses of Vemana*. Fourth A.E.S. Reprint, *Asian Educational Services*, 1993.
2. Moorthy, J.S.R.L.N., and Elliot Roberts. *Selected Verses of Vemana*. Sahitya Akademi, 1995.
3. Sastry, Chilukuri.S.S. *5000 Vemana padyalu*. *Rohini Publications*, Vijayawada, 2014.
4. Subrahmanyam, Bhagavathula. *Vemana Padya Ratnakaramu*. *Navaratna Bookhouse*, 2013.