

MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE OF VEMANA

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Introduction

Vemana was a Telugu poet with biographical information like birth, caste, education, period and place, presenting considerable controversy. Due to lack of proper historical evidences, one has to lean on his versified teachings only for biographical construction. Absence of authentic record of his work again is yet another limitation in this venture.

C. P. Brown was the first to collect the palm-leaf manuscripts of Vemana's verses from different centres. He collected about 2500 verses and published some of them with English translation. A number of editions with verses ranging from 100 to 5000 were brought forth by different editors/publishers. It is therefore difficult to establish the authenticity of these verses. The possibility of attributing to Vemana the authorship of verses composed in the same meter with the same tail piece line by other enterprising authors cannot be ruled out. There is hardly a proverb or pithy saying which is not attributed to him.

There seems to be a controversy regarding the place of nativity of Vemana. One of his verses indicates that his native village is Kondaveedu, while another refers to Mooga-chintapalle (of Chittoor District). W.H. Campbell considered that Katarupalle (of Kadiri Taluq) was his village. Vemana, according to some historians, was related to the Reddi kings of Kondaveedu; he was mentioned by some as the younger brother of the chief of Gandikota. The dialect of Rayalaseema and Nellore regions is prominent in his work. He indicated that he belonged to the Reddy caste, stated to be a subset of Kapus.

One of the verses says that exactly in the year Nandana, in the waxing phase of the moon of Aswija, between mount Meru and the mound Rama, the birth of a chief of heroes occurred. This may be considered the date of birth of Vemana. Another version places his birth on the full moon day of the month of *kartika* of the same year. Due to lack of information relating to the day of the week, it is not possible to fix the date according to the Christian era. With the meagre information, it can only be conjectured and the period of birth of Vemana may be placed in Nandana year which according to the almanac can either be 1772 or 1712 or even 1852. The tercentenary of birth anniversary of Vemana was celebrated in October 1972 by Government of India. The 563rd birth anniversary of Vemana was celebrated in Hubli on 19-1-75, which places the date of birth in 1412 A. D. in which also Nandana year falls. The scrutiny of verses of Vemana, however, does not lend support for such conclusion. Vemana does not seem to have the knowledge of the Maratha rule over Tanjore i. e. 1676-1685 A. D. He mentions pepper; but capsicum, which was introduced by Vasco da Gama was not referred to. His mention of the famous minister Guntapalle

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Muthana who died in 1623 A.D. and also of Rayana Bacha who flourished in 1516 A.D., rules out his existence in 15th century A.D.

Vemana through his verses, brought to the easy level of understanding, the highest truths of life and was never hesitant to repudiate in sharp terms what he considered not proper. He never advocated any traditional religion or supported the class and creed system prevalent in those days. His was a religion of universal brotherhood with no distinction of race or religion, creed or cult, class or caste. The earliest occidental scholar drawn towards his life and work was Abbe J. A. Dubios. Charles Philip Brown collected his verses and translated them. It was published in 1829 under the title "The verses of Vemana; moral, religious and satirical". Other western orientlists include Major Macdonald, C.V. Grover, Henry Bowers, W.H. Campbell and L.D. Barnett. Mir Mahmood Khan, who brought out his metrical translation into English under the title "The Musings of a Mystic" saw in him many similarities to the Sufi mystics.

According to a legendary reference, Vemana was said to have gained knowledge in the art of alchemy. He was known to have controlled *kundalini* (serpent power). Information on the art and practice of *yoga* also appears in his verses. The verses of Vemana reflect his diversified knowledge and the philosophy of the highest order. He was perhaps the only one, if not the earliest, who attempted to place great philosophy of knowledge in a language intelligible to a common man. The medical knowledge of Vemana, which in turn may be considered a reflection of the philosophy and practice of medicine of the day, is highlighted in this paper.

1. Philosophy in Medicine : The evaluation of the cosmic world as postulated by the *sankhya* system has been accepted and incorporated into the fundamentals of Ayurveda. Vemana explained this aspect of the *sankhya* system in relation to *jivatma*, *panchabhutas* and *indriyas* (VP 512, 2887, 3253 & 3251).

Pranaishana or the pursuit of life, *dhanaishana* or the pursuit of wealth and *paralokaishana* or the pursuit of after life, were referred to as pursuits of man by Charaka. According to Vemana, wealth, wife and children are the pursuits to be understood and discarded. By the rejection of these pursuits, a person's mind dwells in God and such person should be considered as the best of the humans (VP 2613, 3926, 3927; VV 1134; VVN 255).

Vemana spoke on the *shaddhatupurusha* of Ayurveda, as a person living in a house supported by six girders (VP 347, 351 and 352; VV 436; VNPR 688) which are also to be understood as the six *chakras* of the *kundalini*.

2. Three humours : *Vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* collectively known as *tridoshas*—three humours—are known to almost every one of this country. The detailed or subtler knowledge of the concept and functions of the humours may be lacking among the laity. It is difficult to assess the extent of Vemana's knowledge on this, from the study of the verses wherein the normal or abnormal functions of *tridoshas* are mentioned.

Vemana compared the body to a chariot, having five nails for its normal functioning in the world and states that the life leaves the body, when the nails fall down (VP 1771). These five nails are considered to be the five *vatas*. Ayurveda laid stress on the importance of the five sub divisions of *vata* which control and maintain the physiological functions of the body. It is said in Ayurveda that the simultaneous vitiation of these five *vatas* leads to death. Vemana recognised that *pranavayu* is the important among *vayus* (VP 4328) and that the function of *apanavayu* is in the process of defecation (VP 3122). Vemana agrees with both Ayurveda and *yoga* when he mentions the inter-relationship between *vayu* and *manas* (VP 4330). He states that *vata* has the capacity to increase the sexual desire of a person (VP 4311; VV 798; VVN 2315). But according to Ayurveda *vata* is responsible for enthusiasm, effort etc., including the ejection of semen and not for the stimulation of the sexual desire.

Ayurveda states that a *vataprakriti* person is talkative and Vemana also makes a similar reference on this (VP 4314). He has indicated a close relationship between insanity and *pitta* (VP 3166). The excess or vitiation of *kapha* is stated to cause failure of the functions of the brain and also produce unconsciousness indicated by the closure of the eyes. These symptoms are explained as of impending death (VP 1144; VNPR 22).

Vayorupakala of a person is divided according to the predominance of the *tridoshas*. According to Vemana, childhood is marked by the predominance of *vata*, youth by *pitta* and old age by *kapha* (VP 4315). This statement of Vemana runs contrary to the view of Ayurveda, which states that *vata* is predominant in old age *pitta* in youth and *kapha* in childhood (AH Sutra 1-8).

3. **Physician** : While stressing the importance of the diagnosis, (VP 4346; VNPR 907) Vemana categorically states that a physician who cannot diagnose a disease is useless to the society (VP 3326). He stresses the necessity of treatment for every disease and that medicine has to be prescribed by a physician only (VP 4343, 4345).

4. **Hygiene** : Sand, coal, stone, iron, skin and dust are prohibited in dental cleaning. (VP 529, VVN 727). Regular use of oil is beneficial to the skin; and exercise gives strength to the body (VP 1864, VON 1461). Gazing at the sun destroys the eyes (VP 2741). Gazing directly at sun and also during solar eclipse are meant by this. Vemana states that a woman without regular sexual indulgence ages earlier (VP 4110; VV 356), whereas excessive indulgence in sex by men is prohibited (VP 3448). The use of all intoxicants and other habit forming substances is prohibited since a person addicted to these indulges in sinful acts (VP 1456, VVN 2209), due to their effect on the mind and he loses his sense and behaves like a fool (VP 3641). Mental faculties are disturbed due to the use of hemp (VP 3308). The hunger, anger and sex desire are always to be kept under control (VP 1077). Woman is stated to be the best of aphrodisiacs (VP 3167; 4505; VVN 2341, 2467) as also stated in Ayurveda (Ch. Ch, 2 (1)-4-8). Eating food in due measure and following good regimen are the best methods of behaviour (VP 4022). Ayurveda also advocated these principles (Ch. Sutra 5-3; Ch. vi, 1-39; Sadvritta is explained in Ch. Sutra 8-18, 21).

5. **Food** : The importance and necessity of food for every living being has been explained in many verses. Food is the cause of the development and nourishment of the body. The defective utilisation of food leads to the origin and development of diseases.

Vemana has explained the development of the fundamental tissues of the body in a nutshell. The essence of the food first transforms into the *bindurasa* (rasadhātu) and this finally develops into *bija* (probably indicating semen) (VP 165; VVN 979; VV 369) and therefore food prepares the humans to indulge in sex and the lack of food kills the desire (VP 154, 155; VNPR 57) Proper or nutritious food is capable of improving intellect (VP 625). The food which is pleasing in appearance and is liked by the person, acts as nectar (VP 4254; 4256) whereas the food with opposite qualities acts like a poison (VP 4253).

Excessive intake of food leads to death, and the lack of it also equally affects the body. The food is responsible for both giving life and killing a man (VP 156, VVN 2581). Ayurveda has also mentioned the effects of excessive intake of food in the causation of obesity, *ama*, the diseases due to *santarpanakriya* etc.

Vemana abhors the habit of fasting (VP 981, 983). If the digestive fire is not supplied with food it destroys (digests) the *mala* present in the intestines, resulting in the fasting person enjoying the *mala*, instead of food (VP 1439; VV 424, 1068, VVN 1065) Ayurveda advocates fasting as a therapeutic measure only. The *jatharagni* not supplied with fuel (food) destroys the tissues of the body.

If the vitiated *mala* is accumulated in the abdomen, the *annarasa* also gets vitiated (VP 1251; VVN 1461) and thereby the person emaciates and falls a prey to the disease.

Vemana stresses the importance of the use of ghee with food (VP 2852). Ayurveda lays down that oily substances are to be used with food (Ch. vi. 1-38) and ghee is stated to be very beneficial to the body (Ch. Sutra 13-14). Vemana advocates the use of milk as diet because milk in addition to its being an aphrodisiac is a good nutrient (VP 3132, 3134; VVN 1597, 1598).

6. **Drugs** : Iron, the best *rasayana* drug should be purified before it is administered. Iron cures all diseases, including consumption, (VP 604-608, 610 and 611; VVN 1201, 1202, 2521; VNPQ 949).

Both Charaka and Vagbhata have indicated iron as a good *rasayana* (Ch. Ch. 1 (3) 5-23; AH. Uttara 39-150). This drug may be used as dust or *bhasma*. Vemana has indicated the use of *ukkusunnamu* as *rasayana*. This kind of preparation of *sunnamu* or *chunnamu* is popular in the Siddha system of medicine.

Vemana indicated the use of *kantabhasma* with honey for *pitta* diseases. He considers that this *bhasma* gives strength to the body (VP 1269, 1273; VVN 1057).

According to Vemana the excessive use of *haritaki* has anaphrodisiac effect (VP 1160; VV 805), Ayurveda on the other hand mentions that *haritaki* does more good to a person than one's own mother; but this particular observation is not mentioned.

Use of *tambula*—a combination of betel leaves, areca nut and lime—is best for caries of the teeth (VP 2875; VVN 2646; VNPR 1015).

The bark of neem tree alleviates the diseases due to poisons and increases the lustre and complexion of the body and also strength (VP 4559, 3918; VVN 938, VNPR 465). Ayurveda mentions *nimba* as *vishahara* (Bhava Prakasha, Purva khanda 5-91).

7. Embryology : The embryological development of foetus has been explained by Vemana (VP 2290). "In about five days after the fertilisation, the fertilised ovum will be like a mixture of curd and phlegm. Between 10 to 15 days it solidifies. By the end of one month, the head is formed; by the second month the four extremities; by the third month the trunk; by the fourth the lumbar region and the sides of the body; by the fifth other organs; by the sixth the eyes and by the end of seventh month life enters the body. By the end of the eighth month *jnana* develops; by the ninth month the *dhyana* or concentration and by the tenth month the foetus is completely developed."

The above developmental stages do not coincide with those mentioned in Ayurveda. It can also be noticed that Vemana indicates certain psychological functions developing in the foetus.

8. Difficulty in delivery : It is well known fact that a transverse position of the foetus leads to difficulties during delivery (VP 2478).

9. Treatment of mad dog bite : If a person is bitten by a dog (mad dog) he should at once be caught, controlled and the juice of lemon has to be massaged on the head (VP 1395). Here the phrase '*kuyaniyaka patti*' clearly indicates the requirement of treatment before the signs of hydrophobia are developed. Sushruta also gives the same opinion regarding the treatment of mad dog bite (Su. Kalpa. 7-58).

10. Love potions : Vemana has despised the use of love potions (*gara visha*) by women to entice control their husbands. He states that these potions finally kill their husbands (VP 720, 3612; VVN 1035).

11. Prognosis of a paralytic : Vemana states that a paralytic is difficult to be cured (VP 1392; VVN 2632). According to Ayurveda also, *pakshaghata* cannot be cured easily.

12. Pathya : The dietetic and other restrictions are to be followed scrupulously till the treatment is completed. Without these restrictions the disease cannot be cured (VP 3611).

13. Position of the uterus : A person is born between *mala* and *mutra* but he despises both of them and he cannot stop their excretion also (VP 3742). Vemana

hints that the uterus wherein the foetus grows, is between the rectum and urinary bladder.

14. **Constipation** : Regular excretion of the fecal matter gives strength to man. But constipation is dangerous to life (VP 3741).

From the above references as culled from the verses of Vemana it is obvious that Vemana definitely had some knowledge of medicine, which he thought essential to preach to the general public. This information which could be extracted from these verses is also necessary for every man to maintain his health.

As already explained, there are many verses which appear as riddles and therefore difficult to interpret whether they explain medicine, yoga or alchemy. Due to the use of regional dialect, some times a verse could not be interpreted properly. It is hoped that scholars of Telugu language and other technical subjects like chemistry etc. would delve deep into the meaning of the verses and enlighten the general public.

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SUMMARY

Vemana, a Telugu poet called also a yogi or saint, probably flourished in 17th century. He was considered a revolutionary poet because of his open criticism on the prevailing religious beliefs, castes etc; he preached his own version of religion—religion of man based on love, understanding and amity leading to a universal brotherhood, in the form of verses, which later on were written probably by his disciples. Keen interest was evinced by occidental and oriental scholars in these teachings and most of them were translated into different languages. The teachings of Vemana project his versatility of knowledge and the present paper attempts to highlight the medical knowledge contained in his works. Fundamentals of Ayurveda, including the importance of diagnosis for treatment, certain aspects of embryology, the effects of food, milk and some drugs, the importance of water are a few topics discussed therein.

वेमना का वैद्यकीयज्ञान

ले० - बी० बी० एस्० शास्त्री ।

वेमना, एक तेलुगु कवि थे, जिन्हें योगी अथवा सन्त भी कहा जाता था ; उनका जन्म १७ वीं शताब्दी के लगभग हुआ था । वे एक क्रान्तिकारी कवि माने जाते हैं, क्योंकि, उन्होंने प्रचलित धार्मिक विश्वासों और जातीय मान्यताओं की, व्यक्तरूप से आलोचना की है । अपनी कविताओं में धर्म की चर्चा करते हुए उन्होंने जिस भाषा का प्रयोग किया है उससे यही विदित होता है कि धर्म वही है जो मानवों के बीच प्रेम का आधार स्थापितकरे और पारस्परिक विचार विनिमय एवं मैत्री के मार्ग पर विश्वबन्धुत्व का नेतृत्व करे । इनकी कविताओं को बाद में इनके शिष्यों ने लिपि बद्ध किया था । इन उपदेशों के प्रति भावुक प्राच्य तथा पाश्चात्य विद्वानों को गहरी रुचि हुई और इनका विभिन्नभाषाओं में अनुवाद होगया । वेमना के उपदेश इसबात के प्रमाण हैं कि उनका ज्ञान बहु क्षेत्रीय था तथा प्रस्तुत लेख में उनके कृतियों में जो वैद्यकीय सामग्रीयाँ हैं, उन्हींपर विशेषप्रभाव डाल आयुर्वेद के मौलिकसिद्धान्तों के साथ ही चिकित्सा में निदान का महत्त्व, गर्भाधान संबंधी कुछ विषय, आहारका प्रभाव, दुग्धपान तथा औषधोपयोग और जल की उपयोगिता आदि विषयों का विवेचन हुआ है ।