

Concepts of Yoga Psychology in the Poetry of Philosopher Yogi Vemana

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Abstract

Yoga is one of the most popular systems of philosophy that has flourished through the ages, and became very popular throughout the world today. The impact of yoga on Indian culture is also so strong that it has penetrated into all sections of the society. Several texts on Yoga have been written in the local languages of our country including Telugu. Some of them are penetrated into the folk culture where several simple verses woven with yogic philosophy are sung even by the peasants of our villages. Several world class philosophers emanated from the Telugu region like Nagarjuna, Potuluri Virabrahmendra Swami; recently, Jiddu Krishnamurti and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Great poets and devotees like Tyagaraja, Annamacharya and Vemana also contributed. In this article the concepts related to yoga psychology and philosophy in the numerous poems of Vemana are discussed.

Keywords: Vemana, Yoga Psychology, Philosophy, Kundalini Yoga, Verses

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Introduction

During the 15th Century *Câlòdukya* kings ruled Anòdhra Pradesh, which was called as Andhra Desa and Vengi Desa also at that time. After their rule Vengi Desa came into the occupation of two families of Reddy kings viz., Pakanati Reddis and Panta Reddis. Rajamahendravaram and Konòdòavidu were their respective kingdoms. After the rule of the king Prolaya Vema Reddi of Kondavidu, his son Anavema Reddi became the king. Kumaragiri Vema Reddi is the son of Anavema Reddi and became a *yògi*, popularly called Yogi Vemana (1550-1650). He is a well-known poet of Telugu whose simple but lucid poems are taught even to the school children.

Vemana traveled the entire Andhra Pradesh by preaching his philosophy mainly in the form of *âtaveladi* poems in addition to other meters like *tçòagîti* and *kanòda*. There are around 5000 verses ascribed to Yògi Vemana (Srikrishna, 2006). Out of all these poems, certain critics were of the opinion that the poems, which ended with the line “*viúvadâbhi râma vinuravçma*”, were only written by Vemana. There are so many poets who wrote in the same *âtaveladi* style and attributed them to the authorship of Vemana. Different critics felt differently regarding his philosophy. Some said he is a non-dualist. Some others said that he is a *æaivaite*. Some felt that he is first a *jaina* and turned into a *câravâka*. Still some others felt, that he is the reformer of the society. Even some modern critics considered that he is a poet preaching social justice. Peculiarly some others felt that he is not a poet at all. But on observing various poems authored by him and assessing his views from different angles, majorities are of the opinion that he is a *æaivaiteyògi*. Sriramamurthy made a forceful thesis depicting Vemana as *anâthayògi* who followed the traditions of *Navanâthàs*.

Methodology

There are quite a few biographies of Vemana in Telugu. Collections of Vemana’s verses are numerous and likewise, there are many commentaries on Vemana’s verses both in English and Telugu. *Vçmana Padyamulu* (5010 verses) compiled by Nedunuri Gangadharam (1960); *The Verses of Vemana* (693 verses) translated by C.P. Brown (1911 Reprint); *Verses of Vemana* in the Telugu original with English rendering (2,215 verses) by C.P. Brown (1967); *Saint Vemana: His Philosophy* by Iòshvara Topa (1950) and *Yogi Vemana Padyamulu* by Subhramanya (1994) are the books referred to for the purpose of this study. A thorough and systematic study of these work was done and all the relevant verses were identified. After that they have been transliterated and translated into English. Special attention

was paid to metaphorical or symbolical representation of the yoga psychology concepts. Finally a systematic analysis was undertaken and presented here.

Discussion - Yoga in Vemana Poems

Generally all his poems end with *makutamì* like *vçma*, *vçmâ*, *vimala gunarâja yôgçndra vçmanârya* and mainly *viúvadâbhi râma vinuravçma*. Majority of his poems followed a unique pattern. First a statement or an observation is made and it is then substantiated by analogy with one or more lines added to the poem and ending with a *makutamì* line. The following are few examples of poems that contain references to concepts of *yôga*.

*vivaranavaka mella velimûsi vâyuvul; manasulôna gûrcimarmamerigi
yâtmalinôga pûja nanòtìona muktirâ; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Nâtha Yôgi Vçmana, pg-67)*

This poem states that by closing all the nine outlets of the *prânic* airs and realizing the true nature of the mind, if *asâdhaka* (practitioner) performs the *Âtmalinôga pûja*, then he is bound to get liberated.

*brahmajamîpi vishòu bhâgamibulô galp;vishòujamîpi æivuni velaya galpi
æivuni jamîpi tânu úivayôgi gâvale; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Nâtha Yôgi Vçmana, pg:69)*

Here Vemana explains symbolically that the *sâdhaka* should kill (overpower) Brahma first and then merge with Vishòu and after killing Vishòu the *sâdhaka* should merge with Æiva. And after killing Æiva the *sâdhaka* should become *úivayôgi*. This suggests that the three *granòdhis* namely *Brahma granòdhi*, *Vishòugranòdhi* and *Rudragranòdhi* have to be pierced through and after crossing these three *granòdhis* one after another, the *prânic* air should be gradually aroused to merge into the *Sahasrâra*. By doing so the *sâdhaka* becomes a *ÚivaYôgi*. In the following poems Vemana describes *nâdòis*. In the human body the spinal column is of utmost importance. It is also called as Brahma *Danòdòa*, *Mçru Dandòa*, *Mçru Vamiúa*, *Vîna Dandòa*, *Mçru Pròusta* etc. In the human body there are seventy two thousand *nâdòis*. Out of these seventy two thousand, sixteen are considered to be important. Some other *yôga* texts like *Hathòa rathnâvali* says fourteen *nâdòis* are more important than others. But according to Vemana ten *nâdòis* are most important.

*nâddichakramu jûddaga; nâddûlupadi mukhyamellanâddûlalônami
gûddâli nasikakuddi yedda; mûddununidâpinðgalâðkhyamuladagu vçma.
(Nâtha Yôgi Vçmana, pg-80)*

In this verse Vemana uses the word *nâddicakra*. In *Hatrâatnâvali* and other yogic treatises it is mentioned that the *nâddicakra* exists in the shape of egg in *mûladhâra* through which all the *nâddôis* run. Vemana says that out of these ten *nâddôis* are important. Further he says that *idâa* and *pinðgalâa nâddôis* exist on left and right sides of the nostrils.

*idâa pinðgalað nâddûlaku; naddûma sushumnayu velunðguyâddûcununðddun
kadôudustara madigana nâ; naddûmane ina úaúiyu harula nagaramuvçma!
(Nâtha Yôgi Vçmana, pg-81)*

In the above poem Vemana says that in between *idâa* and *pinðgalâa* there exists *sushumîna* which is very difficult to locate. Amidst them there exist the abodes of *sûrya*, *canðdra* and *œiva*. The confluence of these three, the trio, is called as *trikûtàa* in *yôgic* parlance and it is also known as *prayâga*. In the space of *trikûtàa* the *sâdhaka* could visualize *Paramî jyoti* that is Supreme light. The following poem describes *idâa* and *pinðgalâa* and *nâddôis* as Ganðga and Yamuna rivers. In between these two there exist a girl who looks like a golden doll. She is none else than *Kunððâlinî*. By contacting and making incessant friendship with her one is bound to get liberation or *Mukti*.

*ganðgâ yamunala naddûmanu; banðgârapu bommbâðle bâlika
yunðddun
sanðgatiga jelimi jçsina; bhanðgamulçkunðddâa mukti paramagu vçma!
(Nâtha Yôgi Vçmana pg-81)*

Further, Vemana describes about the *shatðcacrâs* in the following poems:
*shadðaravinðdamulanusâdhyamugâ jçsi; kunððâlini kanugonikuduru paraci
manasu nilpuvâddu mari dvijudânavaccu; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Nâtha Yôgi Vçmana, pg-75)*

Yogi Vemana calls *Shatcacrâsas Shadðaravinðdamulu*, that is, six lotuses. Here he says that one should try to gain victory over the six lotuses. Such a *sâdhaka*

and one who concentrates his mind can be called a *dvija* or a twice born.
vûru konòdòavîdòu, vuniki paúcimavîdhi; mûgasçtakellamodatiò illu
yarasi cûdòà jûdòanadi mukhtimârgamô; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Nâtha Yôgi Vçmana pg- 87)

The famous foreign critic C. P. Brown (1967) as quoted in the book ‘*Verses of Vemana*’ who collected thousands of Vemana poems has translated this poem into English as follows:

“*The village is our body in which the deity dwells is Hill Town (the head): his in back street (the spine) he dwells. There is silence in the first house. We gaze and continually view it; this is the road of beatitude*”.

This is a poem that requires decipherment. His abode is his head and *sâdhaka*’s spine is the street that leads to the abode. In *tanòtòric* terminology the *paúcimanâdò* is *sushumina*. ‘His first house is silence’ means the *sâdhaka* should take to *dhyâna* and *samâdhi* and should look incessantly within to gain liberation. In the following verses he describes different *mudrâs* of *yôgasâdhana*. Closing eyes, nose and ears with hands and sending the breath to *mûladhâra* (earth) is called as *shaòmukhimudra*.

kanòdòlumukulucevulu karamula ççmûsi; nôtòavenòtòanu gâli nçla vidòici
janulushaòmukhi mudrayanucu balkudurayâ; viúvadâbhirâmavinuravçma
(Yôgi Vçmana Padyâlu, pg- 403; 2880.)

Keeping the gaze on the tip of the nose with half closed eyes without blinking is known as *æamîbhavî mudra*. In *æamîbhavî mudraasâdhaka* who visualizes the moon and the shadow in it will become an expert in the *æamîbhavi mudra*.

ara kanòtiò driòshtiyugurigânumukkupai; reppa vçyaka grudlu drippi pettòdò
janulu úâmòbhavî mudrayanucubalkudurayâ; viúvadâbhirâmavinuravçma
(Yôgi Vçmana Padyâlu, pg- 403;2881.)

Another beautiful poem in which detailed description of all *cakrâs* mentioning the deities, location and distance that exists between them is given below:
modalu mûlâdhâra monaravighnçúvarunòdaccòtaòdçvatâyadhipudòundòdu
nanòdu mîdanu renòdòu nanògulaòmulamçra svâdhisthacakramîbu varalu
brahma dîniki nenimidi dçhânògulamulapaimaòipûra cakramîbumagadòu

*vishòu vanòta dauângula manòta nâhatamunudçvudòai rudrunòddòtçjarillu
padiyu renòddànògulaòmulakupaiviæuddha manòdu jîvunòddòu
niccòtòadònadhivasinòcu velaya paramâtmudòagniyaivelayucunòddòu
nittòidò jâdòaluteliyutaòò neruguvçma*

(YôgiVçmana Padyâlu, pg- 386;2769.)

First he starts with the description of *mûlâdhâracakra* and says that Lord Gaòçsha is the ruling deity of that *cakra*. Above that *mûlâdhâracakra* at a distance of two inches upwards there exists *svâdhistòânacakra* and here Lord Brahma is the presiding deity. Over that *cakra* at a distance of eight inches exists *madìpuracakra* and the presiding deity therein is Lord Vishòu. Above that the *anâhatacakra* exists with a distance of ten inches and the presiding deity of the *cakra* is Lord Rudra. Still upwards is *viæuddhicakra* at a distance of twelve inches in which the *Jîva* is present and *Paramâtm*a exists there in the form of eternal fire. The *sâdhaka* should understand all these details while attempting the practice of *Kunòdòalinî vidya*.

*mûlâdhâramu lôpala; jâлага banòdthinòci gâli sâdhanaganurâ
yçlano dhâraòa sçyutaò; mûlamu madi teliyuteòlla mukhayamuvçmâ*

(Vçmana Yôgamu, pg-75; 3-189)

Vemana says that the most important factor in practice of *yôga* is concentrating on *mûlâdhâracakra* and controlling the *prâna* and *apânavâyûs*. Through this process one knows the ultimate truth. Vemana calls the *mûlâdhâracakra*, as also *jîvâdhâracakra* and says that is the place of Gaòapati as in the following poem:

*pâdukoni hriòdaya manòdunu; sâdhâraòa vriòttuladòaci sannuthiganu jî
vâdhâra cakramanòdunu; môdamîbunaviçhnapatinimokkumu vçmâ*

(Vçmana Yôgamu, pg-75;3112)

One should concentrate on the *anâhatacakra* and control all the vagaries of the mind and then he should bow to Vignçsvara who is the Lord of *mûlâdhâracakra*. In another verse he calls this *mûlâdhâracakra* as *âdhâracakra*.

arasi gattòidò vçsi yâdhâra cakramibu; prâðavâyuvanòde padila paraci

yedà tegaka yundòdu nila yôgyudàguyôgi; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Vçmana Yôgamu, pg-75; 206)

Further Vemana narrated *svâdhistòâna cakra* as under:

sarivitòdò gûdò svâdhishthòacakramibu; prâdapavanamulanu banòducçsi
vedòala kundòdu vâdò vçdânòtavçttayau; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Vçmana Yôgamu, pg-76;4803)

Here Vemana says that in the *svâdhistòânacakra* if the *prâna* and *apânavâyûs* are controlled by *Kumîbhaka* one is sure to become a realized soul. In the following poem he describes that on understanding the mystery of *madîpûracakra*, in which the *vyânavâyû* vibrates, the secrets of the *sâdhana* shall be revealed to the *sâdhaka*.

madîpûra cakra mahimamîbu kanugoni; vyâna vâyuvu ççta vanarucunna
manasu cedòakaynna marmamîbuteleyadâ; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Vçmana Yôgamu, pg-77;1724)

The following verse describes *âjñacakra* in which the *âtmalinòga* is present. It is explained that *asâdhaka* who realizes this shall attain liberation.

âjñayanedò cakramanòdâtmalinògamibu; naridi nalarucunòdò nattòdò dâri
paraga jûcinanòtha braptinòcumôkshòamibu; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Vçmana Yôgamu, pg-77)

In his works Vemana describes the *Sahasrâracakra* with several synonyms such as *Vimalacakra*, *Canòdraúâla*, *Nanòdidurga* and *Mçruúikhara*. The technical terminology used by Vemana is very difficult to understand. Vemana described the *Astòâdala* (eight petal) lotus as the *Sahasrâra*

astaòòdalaòmulanòdu nâtmanu sçvinòci; nishthòabòûni migula nçrputòdò
dhròishtiò yanòde dhriòshtiòtemalaka chûdòara; viúvadâbhirâma vinuravçma
(Vçmana Yôgamu, pg-78; 246)

He describes that in *Sahasrâra* the *Astòadalòapadma* exists and the *sâdhaka* is advised to concentrate upon his own self by looking within. Then one is sure to gain Self-realization.

jâddâlô guài mçddâlô jôddou gûddôi; vçddiyashtaòksòharamulòni vidhameàinòdgi kûdi yâddedòu vâddepò kòvidunòddòu; vimala guna râja yògîndra vçmanârya
(Vçmana Yògamu, pg-78)

Above the *kanda* the *Kunòddalinûakti* lies dormant in the form of *Astòaprakròiti*. The same is also said in *Sânòddîlya* (SU-1.4.8) and *Yòga Cudòâmaòdi* as *Astòadhakunòddòlâkròiti* (YCU-36&44) Upanishads.

Ranògugabhrûmadhyamibuna; æròinògârapuravaliò vinucu jihnamuganucun bonògucu ninòddòinamadilò; linògamibunu galayucunòddòu lîlagavçmâ
(Yògi Vçmana Padyâlu, pg- 240; 1763)

In the above poem Vemana describes about the *âjñacakra* and after mastering over the *cakra* the *sâdhaka* experiences *nâda* (*ravalòdi*), *binòdu* (*æròingâòra*), *kalòa* (*jihnamu*) and finally attains unity with the *linòga* that exists in *Sahasrâra*.

Conclusion

The above are only few examples where Yogi Vemana exhorted people to understand and take up *yòga* for Self-Realization, sometimes directly and sometimes in highly coded poetic language. In a symbolical manner Yògi Vemana exhorts the *sâdhakâ* in one of his poems; to first kill Brahma, then Vishòu and finally Æiva. This means that the *sâdhakâ* should pierce through the three *granòthîs* by the help of *Kunòddalinî*. Vemana also explains about the secrets of *nâddòî cakra*, otherwise known as *kanòda*, which is believed to be the place where all the *nâddòîs* originate. Thus

Yogi Vemana made a rich contribution to yoga psychology and philosophy.

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