

**TRANSLATED VERSIONS OF YOGI VEMANA'S POETRY**

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Yogi Vemana is a great poet philosopher, whose verses are composed in popular vernacular of Telugu. This great poet was ignored in his native land by his own people for a long time. It is with the translations of C.P. Brown in 19th century, that the world came to know the greatness of Vemana's poetry. Till then not a single literary work in Telugu was printed and also not a single classic was translated into English. Brown's "Verses of Vemana" is the first translation of Telugu literary piece into English. Vemana, who was looked down by scholars initially, was brought into lime light with this publication. It has facilitated the availability of the original thoughts of a great poet to the global readers. It is a successful attempt made by Brown though there are some deviations in translation as he is a foreigner to both Telugu language and Indian philosophy.

The other translated versions are Mir Mahmood Alikhan's "The Musings of a Mystic", A.L.N.Murthy's "Verses of Vemana Free Rendering into English", I.V. Rangacharya's "Vemana's Pearls of Wisdom", and Dr. P. Kameshwar Rao's "Timeless poems of Vemana". Some other translations of small number of Vemana's poems are available on internet. All the translators except Brown selected only limited verses of Vemana's poetic treasure.

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C.P. Brown's "Verses of Vemana" is the result of his great love and admiration for Telugu language and literature. It is really a great attempt to discover the poetic treasure of a true genuine poet. As Vemana was a oral poet like Kabir, there is no manuscript of any antiquity which includes all his poems. Brown with great love learnt Telugu grammar and prosody from two learned scholars namely Tippabhotla Venkata Shiva Sastri and Advyta Brahmia and with great determination, collected the manuscripts from various places such as Bellary, Kadapa, chennai, Nellore, Machalipatnam and Visakhapatnam.

The manuscripts were not in good condition. They were full of errors in orthograh, metre and rhyme. So many words were substituted by other words in them to elicit a sense by the

writers of manuscripts. Finally Brown could successfully collect 2,100 poems with the help of nine primary sources. After collecting Vemana's poems from various manuscripts, Brown published 693 poems in 1829 with 500 copies. Fifty copies were given to him. And 450 copies disappeared. After ten years Brown himself discovered these rolled up as waste paper in the library. Brown says he was seen as an enemy by Hindus as he published Vemana, whose poems were against brahmins. Brown's second collection of 1215 verses was published in 1839.

The translations of Brown are not in verse form. They are in prose sentences. Brown's approach to Vemana is linguistic. Brown says that the writings of Vemana are peculiarly useful to those who study language as Vemana's style is simple and his topics are full of variety with thousands of familiar words.



Brown envisages that the mystic portion of Vemana's poetry chiefly has the powers of language. He also opined that the style of these mystic poems makes it easier to translate into Latin than into English. As he could not grasp the meaning of these mystic poems, he says that Vemana indulged at great length in writing them as Telugu speaking people were much interested in studying the obscure and unprofitable doctrines regarding mysticism. At first, Brown wrote that Vemana belonged to Zangam sect but later he realised that Vemana has no sect at all.

Brown called the Telugu speaking area as Telangana, as there was no separate state for Telugu people at that time. Brown says that many of Vemana's poems have become common proverbs and part of them are close translations of Sanskrit works such as Hitopadesa and Bhagavadgita. But it doesn't appear that Vemana knows Sanskrit. He might have gained this knowledge by being in the company of spiritual Gurus and by experiencing these truths personally. According to Brown, Vemana was a native of Kadapa district and was born in the neighborhood of Gandikota. He lived in the beginning of the eighteenth century and might have been born in 1652 AD.

Brown, who did a great service to Vemana, says that Vemana's philosophy belongs to the Vedantha shool and Vemana is a disciple of Vyasa. Not being a student of Hindu Philosophy, Brown could not determine Vemana's school of philosophy in vedantha. Brown proclaims that Vemana's mysticism closely correspond to the mystic tenets of Plato and his moral doctrines closely relate to those of Democritus. Being a foreigner, C.P. Brown could not differentiate the caste from profession and says Vemana was not a brahmin but a capoo or farmer. But he is wise enough in recognising 'capoo' as a profession where as many native writers could not understand it.

Brown divides Vemana's verses chiefly into three types: moral, satirical and mystic. Being new to Indian religion, he thinks that Hindus are not devotional and says Vemana's verses breathe a spirit of devotion truly extraordinary in a Hindu. Brown also says that the satirical part is chiefly directed against the national religion and customs particularly against brahmins. In reality, Vemana was not against

true religion. He is for the non-sectarian casteless society that was preached in upanishads. He was a true yogi, who was against falsehood, superstitions and particularly against psuedo brahmins, who claim themselves as pure and treat others as inferior to them. He believes that one can become a brahmin not by birth but by his worth.

Mir Mahmood Alikhan translated hundred selected verses of Vemana. He could fly along with the imagination of Vemana, though his mother tongue is not Telugu. Vemana's life and teachings were discussed in detail in his work. His style brings out the original force of simile and a slash of satire that characterize Vemana's verse:

To worship idols ye lend some features
To stones and set them in a dark cavern
know yet not o yet all stupid creatures
That almighty doth live in heart's tavern.

(Mir Mahmood Alikhan)

A. L.N. Murthy has translated one Hundred and fifty popular and familiar verses of Vemana which have universal bearing. His translation is not strictly according to the original. Its like a transcreation of Vemana. It is a little explanatory and the fourth line contains the central idea instead of makutam:

Why rituals without purity of heart?
Why cooking without purity of pot?
Why prayers without purity of mind?
The vanity of man these remind.

(A. L. N. Murthy)

I.V. Rangacharya translated seventy five verses. He tried to retain the spirit of Vemana and made English verse as simple as the original:

Charity with a pure heart
Even if it be small, is good.
Isn't the seed of banyan small
Listen Vema, the beloved one.

(I. V. Rangacharya)

Dr. P. Kameshwar Rao's book was published posthumously with hundred poems in 2014. These



poems don't belong to a single category but of miscellaneous:

If you catch a foe fit to be slain in your hands
Better you do him no harm at all with your hands
Help and let him go, that's his death in your hands
Listen to Vema, spokesman of 'vox populi'.

(Dr. P. Kameshwar Rao)

All these translated versions of Vemana have rendered significant service to the cause of Vemana's moral teachings and enriched English literature. Though they are not fully successful in retaining the beauty of Vemana's original poems which are combined with his philosophical intellect and poetic imagination, they tried to make the world know Vemana's unique genius and his noble ideas.

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