

# Yogi Vemana's Profound Insights on the Hindu Trinity: A Philosophical Exploration

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## ABSTRACT

Yogi Vemana, an esteemed Telugu poet-saint, offered profound insights into the Hindu Trinity through poetic expressions. His verses provide a detailed philosophical and moral examination of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, challenging conventional beliefs about their nature and actions. This article dissects Vemana's nuanced perceptions, exploring his critical analysis and moral evaluations within his poetry. Vemana redefines Brahma's role in creation, wealth distribution, and writing the fate of the individuals. In Vemana's contemplation of Vishnu, he humanizes divine figures, portraying the deity's virtues and relatable human-like tendencies. His verses on Shiva emphasize the deity's supremacy, proclaim Shiva as the ultimate protector of the virtuous and urge spiritual seekers to seek Shiva's grace for enlightenment. Vemana's philosophical insights lead to a broader exploration of unity within the Trinity, fostering contemplation on their actions and moral dilemmas. This in-depth exploration provides a comprehensive understanding of Vemana's unique perspectives on the Hindu Trinity, inviting a profound analysis of the moral, ethical, and spiritual facets of these revered deities.

**Keywords:** Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Hindu Trinity, Philosophical insights, Yogi Vemana

Yogi Vemana, an esteemed poet-saint in Telugu literature, delved deeply into the essence of the Hindu Trinity with profound and insightful poetic expressions. His verses encapsulate a meticulous philosophical and moral examination of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, presenting these deities in multifaceted contexts and challenging established beliefs surrounding their nature and actions. This exploration aims to dissect Vemana's nuanced perceptions of the Trinity, unravelling his critical analyses and moral evaluations expressed through his poetry.

Yogi Vemana scrutinized Brahma, offering intricate moral judgments and observations. His verses critically reflect on Brahma's actions, desires, and the implications of his inclinations, particularly concerning creation, wealth distribution, and the shaping of fate for others. Vemana raises questions about Brahma's relationship with women, citing stories where Brahma's own created women become the cause of his distraction. This critical analysis redefines conventional perceptions of Brahma's intentions and actions. Vemana opines Brahma fools his creation by making illusion mount on their wavering minds. He also opines that "life is a game played by Brahma."(Narayana Moorty and Roberts 122).

Brahma makes mind a horse,

Mounts maya on it, and deceives fools.

Only the knower of Brahma knows Brahma's ways. ? ."(Narayana Moorty and Roberts 127)

Vemana criticizes Brahma for creating this miserable world. The poet questions Brahma's making of seawater salty and a wealthy man a miser. Vemana also opines that Brahma created women to destroy men. Based on stories in which Brahma gets attracted towards his own created women like Sataroopa, Vemana wishes Brahma's wife's sacred thread to be cut off which usually happens after her husband Brahma's death.

By looking at the woman as well as the wealth  
Even Brahma will be attracted to them  
Let the sacred cord of the wife of Brahma be broken.

Aadudani juda narthambu choodaga  
Brahmakaina puttu rimma tegulu  
Brahma yaali tradu banda revuna trencha. (my trans; Subrahmanyam 359)

Vemana condemns Brahma's disproportionate distribution: wealth to someone and generosity to another. and calls Brahma an enslaved person. .“The wisdom of Brahma Deva is the wisdom of a fool (lit. slave). He gives wealth here and liberality there.” (Brown 1106). People believe that Brahma writes the fate of everyone on their foreheads. However, Vemana questions it and humorously says that Brahma might have written his own fate to lose his fifth head by Shiva for his attraction towards his own creation. “Perhaps Brahma, who dwelleth in the lotus (wrote) destined that his own head should cleave to the hand of (Bhava) Siva!” (Brown 845)

It is believed that even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva too have a life span. Based on it, Vemana suggests that one cannot expect eternal life in this body, as even Brahma has to face death one day. Vemana also opines that Even Brahma cannot reverse the passed away time, and he has no power either to give life or to kill. All his actions depend on the deeds of the individuals. Thus, Vemana asserts that each one creates his own destiny through his actions.

God bestows gifts only as befits the writing on your forehead;  
But the writing depends only on your deeds.  
Brahma is the author of the writing; you, of your deeds. ? (Narayana Moorty and Roberts 106)

In Vemana's contemplation of Lord Vishnu, he extols the deity's virtues as the destroyer of enemies and the supporter of friends. He highlights the all-pervadedness and omniscience of Lord Vishnu. Lord Adishesha, the serpent bed of Lord Vishnu, follows his weapon *Sudarshana Chakra* (Wheel). “Say not he is there or here. Vishnu dwells through all places shining in splendour. Behind him does the serpent follow the course of his chakra.” (Brown 554). Vemana opines that it is difficult for men to leave married life and become a saint as Lord Vishnu himself is interested in having ten incarnations on earth. He highlights the challenges faced by individuals in transcending worldly ties, drawing parallels with Lord Vishnu's struggle to free himself from the influence of his wife, Goddess Lakshmi, the daughter of the sea. “Vishnu left the circle of skin, and would not come to the shore being entangled in the viles of Lakshi, daughter of the sea.” (Brown 928)

However, Vemana humorously illustrates instances where even divine figures such as Lord Vishnu display human-like tendencies, humanizing their divine persona and making them more relatable. Lord Vishnu rests on the serpent Adishesha, which is on the milky ocean. When he incarnated as Lord Krishna in Gokula, he stole milk from the houses of cowherds. Referring to this instance, Vemana humorously says that others' possessions are sweet for all, including Gods:

He who makes 'the milk of sea his own bed  
Craves for shepherd's milk in a shed:  
Won't all on earth covet other's things as sweet?  
Listen to Vema, Spokesman of 'vox populi'. (Kameshwara Rao 58)

The poet's evaluation of Shiva emphasizes the deity's supremacy and moral lessons drawn from Shiva's actions, relationships, and philosophical standpoints. Vemana's verses on Shiva often explore the complexities of Shiva's nature and the more profound spiritual messages embedded in the tales surrounding the deity. Though Vemana composed several verses on several Gods, he proclaims Lord Shiva as the most extraordinary God in many verses. He says that several sacred scriptures talk about the superiority of Shiva. He also considers that the two letters 'Shiva' purify the mind, and the meditation on Lord Shiva is the best. Vemana says that even the worst sinners can get rid of their sins by remembering Lord Shiva at the time of death, leaving all other things. Vemana, the devotee of Shiva, says that by the grace of Shiva, he can bless people to attain their desires. He also states that Lord Shiva supports this world with the five letters of the Panchakshari mantra. "In the five faces of Siva, the five letters (na-ma-si-va-ya) produced; by them is the world supported. Then how is it that they fail to praise the Five Faced." (Brown 1012)

Vemana gives the instance of Daksha Yajna, which Lord Veerabhadra destroyed on the command of Lord Shiva. Veerabhadra also killed Daksha Prajapathi, who humiliated Lord Shiva. Vemana also gives the example of Shiva cutting the head of Brahma for his misdeed. So Vemana declares Lord Shiva is more powerful in destroying the enemies. "Were not the men destroyed (turned into water) who held fire in their hands and reviled Siva. Do not ye know the troubles that happened at the sacrifice made by Dakshudu?" (Brown 970). He emphasizes Shiva's place as the supreme Brahman, declaring that all forms of gods are aspects of Shiva alone. "Hast not thou heard that Siva sports alone in varying forms through all religions." (Brown 942).

Shiva, in Vemana's verses, emerges as the supreme deity. The poet-saint admires Shiva's power in overcoming adversaries and declares Shiva as the ultimate protector of the virtuous. Vemana opines that with the grace of Lord Shiva alone, the spiritual seekers move forward by clarifying their doubts on spirituality.

Scriptural debates without Siva's grace  
Will not remove doubt in seekers  
Can a lamp in a painting dispel darkness? (Narayana Moorthy and Roberts 79)

Vemana beautifully illustrates the complex nature of Shiva, portraying instances where Shiva's divine strength is intertwined with human-like emotions, thereby creating a bridge between the divine and the mortal. Vemana says that even sages cannot leave their wives as Lord Shiva, who has burnt the God of Love Manmatha into ashes,, could not leave his own wife Gauri. "Siva, the chief of Gods, though he burnt up cupid with the flame of his forehead eye cannot leave his wife; who then are the chiefs of sages who can desert woman?" (Brown 912)

Vemana proclaims that Shiva Linga is the highest form of *Pasupathi* (Shiva), and *zangam* (the devotee) is the *pashu* (beast). When the devotee becomes pure, he can attain Shiva. "The lingam is the highest Siva. The (Zangam) worshipper, is the animated beast. If that animated being be pure, he shall attain Siva." (Brown 963). Vemana equates Lord Shiva to eternal Brahman and declares that all the names, such as Shiva, Paramatma , Linga, Prana linga refer to Brahman alone. "Whether you name it Siva, Indivisible the chief spirit, the Lingam or living lingam, the ters indeed vary, but the divinity is all one." (Brown 982)

Vemana proclaims that Shiva resides within oneself and compares him who searches Shiva outside with the blind man looking in a mirror, with the shepherd searching for his sheep outside, where as it is under his armpit and with him that has butter in his hands but still searching for ghee outside.

You hold the Bearer of Ganges in your palm  
Yet visit holy waters and roam.  
Why look for ghee  
When you hold butter in your hands? ? (Narayana Moorty and Roberts 80)

Vemana's philosophical insights lead to a broader exploration of the unity within the Trinity, provoking contemplation on their actions and moral dilemmas. Vemana says that by concentrating one's mind on the Trinity, one can overcome one's grief. He urges a more profound understanding beyond the conventional worship of gods, promoting equanimity in the face of adversity and prosperity, as both are inherent in human life, especially in the present Kali Yuga (Iron Age). According to Hinduism, there are four Yugas: Kritha Yuga, Tretha Yuga, Dwaapara Yuga and Kali Yuga. Among these, Kaliyuga, the fourth one, is considered the most challenging time. To overcome the difficulties, Vemana advises people to see the world with equanimity as all the Trinity do. "The life we enjoy shall not pass in all one manner; wealth and poverty await us all in this iron age; even Hari, Hara and Aja look upon evil and good as one." (Brown 1038)

Vemana thinks of the woman as an obstacle to spiritual realization. He gives examples of the Trinity and their wives. People believe that Goddess Saraswathi sits on the tongue of Brahma, Lord Vishnu's heart is the abode of his wife Goddess Lakshmi, and the Goddess Parvathi resides in the left part of Lord Shiva's body. Vemana humorously says that Saraswathi kicked the mouth of Brahma, Goddess Lakshmi kicked the chest of Vishnu, and Goddess Parvathi divided the body of Lord Shiva into two.

One lady kicked on the mouth of Brahma  
Another one on the chest of Vishnu

The other one divided Siva into half.

Boti yokathe Brahma noti meedane tanne

Komma yokathe Vishnu rommu tanne

Sakiya yokathe Sivuni sagamuga jesenu. (my trans; Subrahmanyam 362)

Vemana also describes how Shiva kept Ganga on his head, Brahma in his mouth and Vishnu in his heart. Finally, Vemana declares himself as the conqueror of women. “A woman dwells on the head of Siva and ever does a woman dwell in the mouth of Brahma. In the splendour of felicity does a woman dwell in the noble breast of Vishnu. Thou alone Vema is able to put away women powerful as they be.” (Brown 305)

Vemana asserts that among the Trinity, Shiva is the supreme reality. “Brahma is the writer of destiny. Vishnu is the Minister (counsellor). Siva is the original agent.” (Brown 993)  
He thinks that the supreme Brahman has cut off the head of Brahma, made Vishnu jump into the milky ocean and sent Shiva to remain in the Kailasa. So he suggests the seekers to attain the position of Shiva and enjoy bliss in Kailasa. “If thou see him (the supreme being) who slew Brahma the lotus born who plunged Vishnu into the (ambudhi) sea, who sent Siva to remain fixed on the hill of Cailasa, if thou see him being thyself transformed into Siva, thou shalt attain the highest of joy” (Brown 981). Vemana proclaims that even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva also have to suffer death. The life of all various forms of God may be more comparatively with human life, But Brahman alone is the eternal reality and is superior to all forms of God. The realizer of Brahman alone can conquer death. “On the day when the term expired, it is impossible even for the three (Gods) to continue without suffering death. Why do ye dread the limit? Is the life eternal? It is brief, O Vema!” (Brown 1041)

People believe Brahma creates the world, Vishnu preserves it, and Shiva destroys it. But Vemana thinks that all these forms are the expressions of one Brahman alone. Vemana, an advaitin, thinks that Brahman alone is present in all the forms of God.

They say the Lotus-born creates.

Vishnu sustains, and Siva destroys

However various the forms, the Source is one. (Narayana Moorty and Roberts 18)

Vemana states the supremacy of Brahman over the Trinity. He compares Brahma to a horse, Siva to the saddle, Vishnu to the bridle and the one that rides the horse is the Brahman, which is genderless.

Brahma is the horse; Siva, the saddle;

The primal Vishnu the bridle.

Is the one mounted on it male or female? (Narayana Moorty and Roberts 135)”

Vemana says that instead of disputing supremacy among the Trinity, one should know that Brahman is the higher reality of all Gods, including the Trinity. “They who perpetually inquire which among three Gods is the chief (or root) cannot, being fools, know the chief – surely there is a higher root

of the three.” He also opines that even the Trinity does not know about the supreme Brahman clearly, so they assume different forms. “Behold! Brahmins, Kshatriyas Vysyas, Soodras, even Brahma, Vishnu and Siva – these are beasts. In ignorance of the divinity have all these forms originated”. (Brown 940). He establishes humanism by proclaiming that the righteous man is more significant than all the gods, including the Trinity of Hinduism. “Among the Gods Brahma, Siva, Vishnu and the rest and among the demi-Gods that roam the three worlds and among the excellent men and with in thyself O Vema he who acts up rightly is the eternal.” (Brown 962)

Yogi Vemana’s contemplations on the Hindu Trinity offer a profound philosophical lens into the moral, ethical, and spiritual facets of these deities, inviting readers to question traditional beliefs and reflect on the intricacies of divinity, human existence, and moral conduct. His poetic verses serve as a treasure trove of philosophical reflections, prompting a deeper exploration of the divine and human relationship within the context of the Hindu pantheon. This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Vemana’s perspectives on the Hindu Trinity, offering insights into his philosophical and moral assessments rooted in his poetic expressions and presenting a compelling study of the complexities within the divine triad as envisioned by this celebrated poet-saint.”

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