



## Review Article

## Yogi Vemana's Poetry: Alchemical Revelations

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>Yogi Vemana, a revered Telugu poet-saint from the Middle Ages, explores the rich alchemical insights in his poetic compositions. The narrative is woven around Vemana's transformative journey, transitioning from a hedonistic lifestyle to a pursuit of spiritual knowledge with Shiva Yogis, providing a contextual foundation for his reflections on the mystical properties of gold. The verses presented in the article articulate Vemana's critique of societal hierarchies and emphasize the supremacy of material wealth, symbolized by gold, over caste, lineage, and intellectual achievements. The article delves into various alchemical processes associated with gold, offering mystical perspectives on its origin, formation, and refinement. Vemana also addresses the formation of silver in one of his poems. From intriguing instructions involving natural elements to symbolic representations of transformation, Vemana intricately weaves together practical knowledge and spiritual wisdom. The exploration extends to the challenges posed by traditional beliefs and introduces practical alternatives, urging readers to contemplate the profound connections between the material and spiritual realms. In essence, Yogi Vemana's verses beckon readers to transcend the ordinary and explore the hidden possibilities within the alchemy of life itself.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397</li> <li>▪ Received: 12-01-2023</li> <li>▪ Accepted: 09-02-2023</li> <li>▪ Published: 13-02-2024</li> <li>▪ IJCRM:3(1);2024:126-128</li> <li>▪ ©2024, All Rights Reserved</li> <li>▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes</li> <li>▪ Peer Review Process: Yes</li> </ul>
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### Introduction

Yogi Vemana, a revered Telugu poet-saint of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, eloquently explores the realms of alchemy through his poetic compositions. His life journey, marked by a transition from a hedonistic lifestyle to a pursuit of spiritual knowledge with Shiva Yogis, forms the backdrop for his profound reflections on the transformative power of gold. The verses highlight the poet's critique of societal hierarchies, emphasizing the supremacy of gold over caste, lineage, and intellectual achievements. Throughout the article, Vemana's verses unveil the alchemical processes associated with gold, offering mystical perspectives on its origin, formation, and refinement.

Vemana discusses the power of gold, which stands above other societal influences. His verse suggests that individuals who boast

about their superior caste, family lineage, or intellectual achievements are ultimately subservient to those who possess material wealth. The poet seems to critique the misplaced pride associated with caste, lineage, and education, highlighting the real influence wielded by those with economic power, symbolized by the reference to gold.

Those who are superior in caste and family lineage.  
Those who are proud of their learning,  
Are slaves of the man who has gold.  
Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema.

Kulamu galugu vaaru gothrambu gala vaaru  
Vidya chetha virraveegu vaaru  
Pasidi galgu vaani baanisa kodukulu

Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema. (my trans.; Sastry 266; poem 1417)

Vemana proclaims in one of his poems that alchemy is the best art with which one can live happily in this world. The poem encapsulates a profound perspective on happiness and enlightenment, distinguishing worldly contentment and spiritual fulfilment. The art of alchemy suggests that achieving happiness in this world is akin to gold or pursuing material wealth. In contrast, the mention of Brahman-learning signifies a higher, spiritual knowledge associated with pursuing enlightenment in the other world beyond the confines of earthly existence. The poet dismissively characterises all other forms of learning as pursuits of pretentious fools. The verse prompts contemplation on the nature of genuine happiness. It underscores the importance of gold in worldly life and the understanding of Brahman in the broader context of spiritual life and human fulfilment.

To be happy in this world- alchemy/  
To be happy in the other world Brahman-learning  
All other learning is for pretentious fools. (Moorty and Roberts 79; poem 6).

Vemana conveys a poetic and intriguing perspective on the origin of gold. He describes the genesis of gold in diverse earthly locations, emphasising its mysterious emergence. The imagery of gold being produced in the earth on a mountain, in the pit on a hill, and within a red earth in a white ant hill paints a vivid picture of the concealed nature of this precious metal. The repetition of the assertion that gold is undoubtedly hidden in these various environments adds an element of certainty to the enigma. The poet's words evoke a sense of wonder and awe, suggesting that the origins of gold are deeply embedded in the earth's diverse landscapes. Its discovery requires an exploration into the hidden recesses of nature." In the earth on a mountain, in the pit on a hill, in the red earth in a white ant-hill, gold is produced. Surely is gold therein hidden". (Brown 389).

Vemana talks about several ways of making gold. In a poem, he offers a mystical and alchemical insight into the transformation of metals. His poem suggests a process where nitre and *tulasi* (basil plant) buds, when powdered together, are amalgamated onto gold. Additionally, the poem instructs the mixture of the milk of the *dushta* plant on a copper plate, prophesying its conversion into gold through this mystical combination. The verses weave an enchanting narrative of alchemical transmutation, hinting at the potential for material metamorphosis through a sequence of precise instructions. Symbolic elements like *tulasi*, gold, *dushta* plant milk, and copper plate add an air of mysticism to the poem, invoking an ancient alchemical tradition that sought to unlock the secrets of transformation and transcendence. "If you powder nitre and *tulasi* (buds) together, amalgamate then upon gold; mix the milk of the *dushta* plant and mingle these upon a plate of copper which will thus become gold" (Brown 681).

Vemana's poem delves into the intricate process of extracting the purest part of gold, underscoring the significance of knowledge in alchemical pursuits. The mention of extracting with vermilion implies a meticulous refinement of the gold,

possibly alluding to a purification process. The subsequent instruction to form a crucible of potter's earth emphasises the necessity of a specific vessel for conducting alchemical operations. However, the poem also notes caution, highlighting that pursuing this knowledge would yield only an advantage with a proper understanding of the associated scientific principles. The passage suggests that practical skill, accompanied by a deep comprehension of the underlying science, is essential for any meaningful outcomes in the alchemical processes related to gold refinement. "If thou extract with vermilion the purest part of gold, and if thou form a crucible of potter's earth and if thou know not this science thou know not this science thou shalt reap no advantage from it." (Brown 391)

Vemana, in a poem, introduces the concept related to the formation of gold, drawing an analogy between a rock upon a hill and an entity residing in a white-ant-hill. The language suggests a meticulous combination or integration of these elements, emphasising a closeness that enhances their similarity. The poem reflects an alchemical perspective, where combining distinct elements is believed to unlock transformative properties. This poem alludes to the intricate and esoteric nature of alchemical practices, where the union of seemingly disparate components is thought to yield profound and mystical results. "This is a rock upon a hill. If thou closely combine him who is in the white-ant-hill, so that the similarity shall be great. Then will gold be produced". (Brown 392).

In another poem, Vemana presents an intriguing alchemical proposition, suggesting a process for creating gold by combining specific elements. The mention of putting together fruit with a ripened husk, a grown neem tree, black sugar, and quicksilver implies a carefully curated blend of diverse natural components. Quicksilver, another term for mercury, adds a characteristic alchemical element to the process. The outcome of this intricate combination, as stated in the poem, is the production of gold with inherent value and exceptional beauty. This passage reflects the mystical and symbolic language often associated with alchemy, where the transformation of base materials into a precious substance like gold is believed to symbolise spiritual or philosophical enlightenment. "If thou put together a fruit with ripened husk and a grown vepa tree, and black sugar and touch them with quick silver, there will be produced gold excelling in value and beauty". (Brown 393).

Vemana introduces a symbolic and philosophical perspective, suggesting a transformative process involving a stone. The instructions involve grinding one stone upon another, emphasising understanding the nature of metal and the union of these elements. This could be interpreted as an allegory for the alchemical or spiritual transformation of the self. The metaphor of grinding stones speaks to the effort and intentional action required for this process. In this context, understanding the nature of metal may symbolise a deeper knowledge of oneself or the essence of existence. The poem encourages contemplation on the nature of transformation, emphasising the symbiotic relationship between understanding, intentional action, and the resultant vitality. "If thou take a stone and grind it on a stone

knowing the nature of metal and unite them, if thou understand their union thou shalt thereby live". (Brown 394).

In ancient times, there was a prevailing belief that anjanam possessed mystical properties capable of unveiling hidden treasures, particularly gold. However, Vemana challenges this notion by suggesting that gold could be created through a combination of plant juices, rendering the need for anjanam unnecessary. Vemana's perspective is articulated through a fascinating process involving the root of the *chedarasi* plant. He proposes that by extracting its beauty and combining it with the juice of the moon plant and then meticulously triturating the mixture, one could produce a versatile and magical *anjanam*. This *anjanam*, when applied to the eyes, reveals the concealed locations of hidden objects. This insight Vemana provides challenges the traditional belief in the mystical powers of *Anjana* and introduces a more practical and natural approach to achieving similar results. His intricate process showcases a unique blend of botanical elements that, according to him, can rival the supposed magical qualities attributed to traditional *anjanam*. "If thou take the root *chedarasi* plant in its beauty, pour the juice of the moon plant there on and triturate it well, this shall produce a universally useful anjanam (magic mixture applied to the eyes to show where things lie hid). (Brown 390).

In ancient times, there existed a belief that birds possessed knowledge of the precise locations of gold, be it within caves or hills, prompting people to rely on their calls as indicators of potential wealth. However, Vemana challenges this dependency by introducing the concept of the philosopher's stone, which, upon touch, has the remarkable ability to transmute base metals into gold. He likens this transformative power to a person who holds the root of a *mudiyu* ("touch me not") plant, making the search for the entire plant unnecessary. In Vemana's perspective, if one possesses the philosopher's stone, there is no need to bother with the guidance of birds or the exploration of caves and hills where gold might be concealed (Brown 591).

Vemana opines that only saints can understand the nature of metals and the production of gold. He draws a vivid metaphorical comparison between the innocence of an infant and the intricate knowledge required for processes such as roasting stones to extract metals. The rhetorical question posits whether an infant understands such complex metallurgical techniques, emphasising the esoteric nature of this knowledge. The assertion that only a saint comprehends such practices underscores the wisdom and divine insight required for such intricate arts. The poem advises to understand the inherent degraded nature of metal and, intriguingly, suggests leaving it behind. This could be interpreted as a practical consideration and a metaphor for transcending material pursuits, urging readers to elevate their understanding beyond the mundane and embrace a more spiritually enlightened perspective. "Doth an infant know anything of (dressing) roasting stones to extract metals? The god like sage alone comprehends it. Know thou the degraded nature metal and leave it?" (Brown 176).

In another thought-provoking poem, Vemana delves into the alchemical transformation of tin into silver, revealing a fascinating process that combines simple elements to achieve a

remarkable outcome. According to his verse, by pouring milk into the tin and allowing it to boil, the tin transforms, exhibiting a shining quality. Vemana emphasises the significance of timing in this alchemical process, suggesting that if one carefully observes the proper moment and removes it from the fire at precisely the right time, the tin is said to metamorphose into silver. This poetic revelation challenges conventional beliefs, portraying it not as a mere fabrication but as a truth affirmed by Ishwara, adding a spiritual dimension to the naturalistic alchemy described by Vemana. Through these verses, Vemana intricately weaves together the elements of everyday life and spirituality, inviting readers to contemplate the profound possibilities hidden within the seemingly ordinary processes of the material world. "If thou pour milk in and boil it the tin will shine. If thou observe the proper moment and take it off the fire, it will turn to silver. This is no lie but truth, Ishwara". (Brown 682).

Yogi Vemana's exploration of alchemy through his poetic compositions unveils a tapestry of mystical insights, blending the material and spiritual dimensions of existence. Vemana's life journey, transitioning from a hedonistic past to a pursuit of spiritual knowledge, serves as a poignant backdrop for his reflections on the transformative power of gold. Throughout the article, Vemana's verses critique societal hierarchies, emphasising the supremacy of material wealth symbolised by gold, and offer intricate glimpses into alchemical processes associated with its origin, formation, and refinement. The poet seamlessly weaves practical knowledge and spiritual wisdom, encouraging readers to contemplate the profound connections between the material and the spiritual realms. From challenging traditional beliefs about *anjanam* to introducing the concept of the philosopher's stone, Vemana's verses invite us to reconsider our understanding of alchemy and its potential implications on our perception of the world. In essence, Vemana's profound verses beckon readers to transcend the ordinary and explore the hidden possibilities within the alchemy of life itself.

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