HEALTH AND HYGIENE IN MEDIEVAL ANDHRA AND THE REMONSTRATION BY VEMANA

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ABSTRACT

Vemana the revolutionary poet of medieval Andhra travelled throughout Andhra observing the social customs and traditions. He warned the society against superstitious beliefs and customs with regard to health and hygiene as in the case of other social evils and tried to divert the society into right path through his natural and easy flow of verses in a simple language. He noticed that the people were not able to understand the scientific way of treatment prescribed in the medical texts and were blindly following the irrational traditional methods which were full of misunderstandings and superstitious notions. He warned the people that this kind of trend in the field of medicine was very harmful and advocated that the diagnosis and treatment should be done in a scientific way.

Vemana opposed the miraculous powers which are ascribed to the mineral drugs and rasausadhas. He preached that those powers are impossible to be achieved and should be regarded as mere superstitions which would cause harm to the science of medicine and to the society. He refuted the use of lovepotions which was a common practice especially among the womenfolk. He propagated that the people who took these medicines would definitely fall ill and die on account of the unhygienic ingredients. In many of his verses, Vemana stressed the importance of taking well-balanced diet. He also preached some other fundamental things essential for everybody to maintain one's own health. He suggests that the physicians should treat the patients with compassion and mentions that the physicians who dedicated their lives for social service would become free from karma and attain salvation. Thus the references from the verses of Vemana not only reveal his knowledge in medicine but also give a glimpse into the beliefs, customs and practices with regard to the maintenance of health, hygiene and healing art of the people in the then society.

Under the rule of Kakatiya, Reddy and Vijayanagara Kings, medieval Andhra region became famous as an abode of learning and prosperity. If the history of this period is observed keeping in view the royal court and the cultural development, it seems to be regarded as a golden period. At the same time, it seems to be an age of confusion and chaos.

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in the context of common man's life in the janapadas. There are several causes for this contradiction. Especially it was a period which witnessed a wide gulf between the intellectual high caste and the illiterate low caste people. The 'three-crore deities' and many village goddesses were driven on to the society by the preceptors and Pithādhipatīs of the former class and the Gaṇācāryas of the latter class respectively. Just as the pious social principles had disappeared and the mean and narrow religious traditions took their roots in the society, many irrational practices had developed in the field of medicine also. It was at this time that Vemana, the great social reformer started his remonstration against all the social evils. He travelled throughout Andhra observing the social customs and traditions and repudiating in sharp terms what he had considered not proper. He warned the society against superstitious beliefs and customs and tried to divert the society into the right path with his natural and fluent verses in a simple language. He can be regarded not only as a great social reformer, a prophet or a great humanist but also as a revolutionary poet who inaugurated the revolutionary form of poetry in Telugu literature.

In medieval Andhra many books were written in Ayurveda; not only the books on medicine but the general literary works of the period reveal the scholarship of the court poets in the science of medicine. The common people also were proficient in the art of healing for their petty diseases with the knowledge gained out of previous experience. But many superstitious customs had crept into this traditional system of treatment. Vemana noticed that the people were not able to understand the scientific way of treatment and were blindly following the irrational methods and their knowledge gained out of their experience was full of misunderstandings and superstitious notions. He warned the people that this kind of trend in the field of medicine was very harmful and advocated that the diagnosis and treatment should be done in a scientific way.¹

Some ancient Indian physicians with the aim of highlighting the virtues of some medicines relating to kāyacikītsā and rasāyana tantra, ascribed miraculous powers to them.² Some people misunderstood it and tried to get kāyasiddhi, adiṣṭhyakaraṇī, ākāśagamana, kāmarūpa etc. It seems that they wandered in the forests eating leaves and roots, so that they could discover those herbs and get those extraordinary powers. Vemana refuted these and conveyed the people that these were impossible things to be achieved and should be regarded
as merely superstitions which would cause harm to the science of medicine and to the society.³

According to Vemana, both living creatures and the medicines consisted of Śaḍdhātus.⁴ He tried to prove the fact that it is irrational to think that one mortal thing can make another an immortal.

He expressed similar opinion with regard to the mineral drugs. A mineral known as ‘Kāntalōha’ occupied an important place in the medical field. It is a good rasāyana medicine. About it the tantrics say: Kartavyam mantra ucyate. Amṛtodbhavāya svāhā ityanena lohamāraṇam.⁵

If the purification and calcination were done with the mantra, the Kāntabhasma would become equal to that of nectar. Another drug known as Kāntasindūra is the best one among the rasāyana medicines. It alleviates all the physical diseases and promises long life. And it was believed that it was an aphrodisiac drug and would not allow old age to enter into one’s life who used this medicine. This kind of propaganda to the rasāyana medicines led to the common belief that the intake of rasāyana medicines would result in getting super powers. In this context Vemana said that ‘Kāntasindūra’ cures only the diseases which happened due to the imbalance of vāta and pitta and could promise neither long life nor evergreen youth. In a verse he revealed the nature of power one would get with the intake of mineral drugs thus: Ukku sunnamu dina nuļugu kaṣṭamul. Ukku sunnamu dina nuļugu kṣayayu. Ukku sunnamu dina nuļuguṇa Karmamul ⁶

The mineral drugs alleviate the body from pains and tiresomeness. They cure the diseases like rājāyakṣma, urākṣata, anemia and strengthen the body, but cannot remove the fate of the human beings. One should realise the fact that birth and death are natural in this world and one cannot escape from them. The philosophy of Vemana implied in this verse is that births and deaths cannot be removed by the medicines, but can be removed by the destruction of karma. It can be achieved only by the real knowledge i.e. the realisation that the world is impermanent.

In the same way as in the case of mineral drugs, some scholars in the science of medicine had attributed great powers to the rasāyana medicines. They said that by the use of rasāyana medicines, one could get the power of making miracles ⁷ Some writers of the medical texts in
the medieval period wrote that if one took in the rasāyana medicine with the mantras (prescribed), he would be free from old age and would live for 10,000 years and after that he would get divinity. In this way many miraculous things were ascribed to the rasāyana medicines. Vemana ridiculed the physicians who were misled by these and tried to educate the people thus in the following verse: Rasamu gandhakambu mesavi devatalaina, svargamela vere janamulāra, bhuvini vaidyula gani divi vaidyuleļıvaro.

In those days rasavāda or alchemy was very popular and it seems that many people tried to transmute the other basic metals into gold. Vemana ridiculed the people who were engaged in this pursuit and preached that it was impossible to be achieved.

Vādamāṇjari and Nāgārjunatanttra mentioned many tantras to achieve suvarṇa tantra. Many people who followed these tried in many ways to make gold but did not succeed in that. On seeing these, Vemana felt pity for the ignorance of the people. He said in a verse thus: Uppu cintapanulu nūrūra nūḍanāga hemamunaku neśıturrellajanulu.

He opined that people require salt and soup and not gold to survive in this world. He wondered why the people took pains to get gold while salt and tamarind were available in every village.

Philters were very much popular and in vogue in medieval Andhradesa. Some prostitutes and maidens had great belief in these love potions which were intended to impart sex attractiveness. They used to employ these potions through food or drink in various forms such as powder, oil, paste etc. In the making of the paste of this kind, the sweat of the particular lady was also mixed. It seems that some housewives who were neglected by their husbands used to employ this kind of medicines on their husbands. Vemana abhorred these practices as evil and dangerous. He remonstrated that the people who ate these medicines would definitely fall ill and die on account of the unhygienic ingredients of those medicines.

The practice of worshipping deities to ward off epidemic diseases was very much common in those days. Vemana mentioned in a verse that sheep were sacrificed to Ammavāru (goddess) to ward off cattle diseases such as domma, pāru etc. He abused these inhuman activities.
and ridiculed the people that they would do such things with the intention of eating those animals on the pretext of a sacrifice to the goddess.  

In his opinion, insects would cause the disease in the plants and trees. Likewise, animals also fall ill on account of the attack of some germs and insects. Hence Vemana made it clear that this kind of diseases of animals and plants should be cured with the help of medicines and pesticides respectively.

People believed that physical diseases were to be cured by Yoga which would promote self-control and self-concentration. Vemana supported this and propagated that the exercises would give strength to the body and mind, lustre to the skin and promote mental and physical health. But these are, in his opinion, not useful to get mokāsa as some people believe. In another verse he said that one could never get mokāsa merely by the physical exercises. He gave primary importance to self-concentration through right and proper knowledge and secondary to that of physical exercises.

In many of his verses Vemana laid stress on the importance and necessity of well-balanced food for every living being to get strength and lustre. He explained that the food which was pleasing in appearance and alluring to the person would act as a nectar whereas the food with opposite qualities would act like a poison. Excessive intake of food would lead to death and lack of it also equally would effect the body. The food is capable of both giving life and killing a person.

Vemana abhorred in sharp terms the intake of food without ghee and curry. He advocated the use of milk as diet because milk is an aphrodisiac and a good nutrient.

Vemana denied the habit of strict fasting. 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.

According to legendary references, Vemana was said to have gained knowledge in the art of alchemy, but failed to get swarnasiddhi. Though he failed in it he gained knowledge in the art of healing and propagated the principles of health and hygiene in the society. He mentioned that the physicians who would serve the patients without expecting any reward would be free from karma and attain salvation in the end.
Vemana is a unique reformer who observed the truths of life in a proper perspective and in all aspects. He repudiated the evil customs and advocated the rational outlook

Thus the reference from the verses of Vemana not only reveal his knowledge in medicine but also give a glimpse into the beliefs, customs and practices with regard to the maintenance of health, hygiene and healing art of the people in the then society. He led a remonstration against the superstitions in this field and advocated the importance of social service and humanitarian outlook needed in the medical ground. This kind of remonstration is necessary even in the present society to educate the common-folk and to instigate the physicians to cultivate humanitarian outlook.

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सारंश

मध्यकालीन आंध्र में स्वास्थ्य एवं स्वस्थ्यवृत्त और वेगना का प्रतिवाद

पृ. हृंभवति

मध्यकालीन आंध्र के काव्यकारी कवि वेमना ने समय आंध्र प्रांत का भ्रमण किया और स्वास्थ्य एवं स्वस्थ्यवृत्त के सम्बन्ध में अन्य विषयों की धारणाओं के साथ समाज को चेतावनी दी और समाज को सही मार्ग की ओर अपने स्वास्थ्याधिकार, प्रवासी तथा सरल कविता द्वारा बदल दिया। उन्होंने यह देखा कि जनता वैद्यक प्रथम से चिकित्सा नित परिवर्तन का समझने में अशक्त थे और गलत फहरायी और अंगि विश्वासों के धारणाओं से पूर्ण विनिवेश्त सामाजिक पद्धतियों का अनुसरण कर रहे थे। फिर से बेवकूफ़ देह हुए उन्होंने छोड़ों को सामाजिक गतिविधि करते हुए यह प्रचार किया कि चिकित्सा के सम्बन्ध में लागू का यह दृष्टि कोण हानिकारक होता है, अतः वैज्ञानिक पद्धति हो अपनायी जाए।

वेमना ने खिलजी दल्हों और रसोधियों के द्वारा असाधारण सिद्धियों की प्राप्ति का विशेष प्रति किया, उन्होंने यह वोध किया कि इन सिद्धियों के प्राप्ति असम्भव है और इन्हें केवल अंध विश्वास ही समझना चाहिए जो चिकित्सा विज्ञान तथा समाज को हानिकारक हो सकती है। साधारण जनता विशेषत: विश्व में प्रचलित प्रभु औषधियों (बसीकरण) के उपयोग का भी उन्होंने खेड़न किया। उन्होंने प्रचार किया कि इन औषधियों का उपयोग करने वाले अध्ययन अध्ययन व्यक्ति, व्याप्त अवधी प्राप्ति नाटक या स्वास्थ्य नाटक या स्वास्थ्य लोगों के कारण हम उनकी मृत्यु होगी। अपनी बहुत से कविताओं में वेमना ने संतुलित आहार को बहुत करते हैं बल दिया। उन्होंने इस प्रश्न के व्यक्ति के स्वास्थ्य की रक्षा के लिए आवश्यक मौलिक विषयों का प्रचार किया, उन्होंने गुमाय दिया कि बेवकूफ़ रोगियों की चिकित्सा सहायता के साथ करने और कहा कि जो चिकित्सक सामाजिक सेवा के लिए अपने जीवन का सम्बन्ध करते हैं वे क्लेश से विनियुक्त होकर मोक्ष को अभाव करते हैं। इस प्रकार वेमना की कविताओं के संदर्भ में केवल वैद्यक ज्ञान को ही प्रकट करते हैं। अपने तत्कालीन समाज की जनता में स्वास्थ्य, स्वस्थ्यवृत्त तथा चिकित्सा कला के सम्बन्ध में प्रचलित विश्वास, प्रथाओं और पद्धतियों की भरक्षा देते हैं।