

Social Service in Puranas

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ABSTRACT

While Vedas glorify the nature of Atma and its ways for realization it is said to be somewhat personal. Attaining liberation from the cycle of births and deaths may be the fixed goal of a few specific souls. Vedas are not easily accessible to all due to its having a tough and terse style and dealing with super natural aspects. But puranas are simple in their style and readable to all. They are easily understandable as they are in easy Anushtup metre. They concentrate on making the theme understandable to all by their stories and narrative styles.

Without making this world a better place, by pleasing all around us, in all possible ways, one cannot simply think of reaching heaven or liberation. Social services are the basic duties of every human being. By the passing over of time and leisured life style of today, men are being trapped in luxuries. Rather than living for one self, they try to show case their status in the society. The mankind forgets the goal of the world welfare. Vedas and puranas make it more clear to follow the path of social service as a binding duty of the human being.

KEYWORDS: *Puranas are the key to the Vedas - Sanctity of time and place - Seed of selflessness - Help others at all times - Service is greater than one's son or daughter-Adaption of child, social services-Free water-Plantation of trees - Free medicines etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Selfishness in man has made this vast world a reserved place for few chosen people. But the selfish person makes this world a petty home. It is often said "fish is better than selfish". The fish by its nature swims in the water, eats the fungus and cleans the water. By its continual movement it teaches to be active at all times. While pond water wastes are cleared and steps are made non-slippery and enables others to get down to the water and have a happy and healthy bath. But the selfish man being polluted in his mind he pollutes the entire environment and stores everything for himself. To remove this social evil puranas high light the joy of paropakara, sow the seeds of unselfishness and heats up the inner conscious of the person with the fear of punishment of hell. It directs all of us to do social service activities in all angles. Giving free water, treating all alike, respecting the elders is all instructed at every step.

The Vedas have instructed us to adopt a wider prospective in our life. It asserts "I am the son of the Mother Earth and I am the son of the Father Sky." We are the children of Earth. We should develop a broad mind like the earth. At the same time by raising above our personal goals we should stand as respectable and remain lofty.

Sky The petty minded person thinks of this world as belonging to him alone and does not belong to the others. But for broad minded persons the entire world is a single family." अयं परो निजो वेत्ति गणना लघुचेतसां। उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुंबकम्"

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Puranas are the key to the Vedas.

Puranas have a special role in spreading cultural and social values of our glorious country. They are equally important and as ancient as Vedas. While Itihasas are records of past incidents, puranas highlight the moral values associated with them. It is said that if one has studied the Vedas and Upanishads and not Puranas his knowledge is inadequate.

।"इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदं समुपबृंहयेत्"1

One should make the hard gained vedic knowledge more perfect by combining the wisdom of epics and puranas.

यदि विद्यात् चतुर्वेदान् सांगोपनिषदान् द्विजः।

, न चेत् पुराणं संविद्यात् नैव स स्याद्विचक्षणः॥2

If one has mastered the Vedas along with its six angas and even the Upanishads the secrets of the Vedas, still his mastery remains incomplete. One who has not studied the puranas cannot be treated as a scholar. So learning of puranas is the basic foundation necessary for the scholarship. The other literary works like *kavyas*, *stotras*, *champus* and *gadyas* may or may not stress on moral values. But puranas assert highest importance to the practice of values. While Vedas are well known as *srutis* puranas are termed as *smritis*. Their co-ordination is beautifully mentioned by Kalidasa in his work *Raghuvamsham* by saying "शृतेरिवार्थं स्मृतिरन्वगच्छत्" 3. This was said when Sudakshina, the wife of Dilipa was serving the cow Nandini. To highlight her serving as so faithful & accurate he compares it to the *smritis* which follow *shruti*. So puranas are very much

essential to know the themes of Vedas and they explain the spirits of the Vedas by stories and discussions.

Puranas uphold the sanctity of all places and time to multiply services in society.

But puranas narrate innumerable number of stories concerning Gods, Angels, humans and demons at different periods of time. Puranas make use of hymns and ornamental language to enhance the effect of narration. The metre used in their description is almost Anushtup. They are easily understandable to all classes of people without any need of commentaries. The stories of those Kings serve as an inspiration to lead an unblemished life and their charities done on several occasions stand as an inspiration to help all classes of people. To become dearer to the kings and to fall in line with the main stream all people gave charity and compassion to the fellow beings.

यथा राजा तथा प्रजा -----4

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठः ततदेवैतरो जनः।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥-----5.

stood as a revolutionary concept in a positive way.

To provide a boost to the charity, highlighting the sanctity of the place and time became more essential. A student who reads casually in a general situation, will be more alert and invest high degree of concentration while he has to present seminars in front of his teachers or special guests. It is more so during examination times. The same concept is applied in puranas also to encourage the social services and uplift the mood to achieve general welfare. Puranas highlight the glory of the land they have lived. The puranas describe the sanctity of Rivers, Mountains and oceans along with the significance of Deities in various holy pilgrimage centers. The time was never a restricting factor to do the charity. Even in times of Festivals or Eclipse or Marriage or Birth day or Fasting occasion or Celebration or even Death funeral, suitable acts of Charity has been recommended. Almost all places, all rivers, all days of the year are made important for charity in one way or the other. All these information are of great help to understand our ancient tradition. The charities to be offered during auspicious or any other occasion, to ward off bad effects due to unfavorable planetary positions etc are to be done with conviction and generosity...All these are discussed in detail in all puranas. This is the message of all puranas. All these and much more can be seen in eighteen puranas of the great sage Vedavyasa who is considered to be incarnation of Maha Vishnu. His works are philosophical synthesis of Stotras, hymns of various deities, descriptions of rituals, kings and their clans.

They sow the seeds of selflessness

Those who are selfish by nature tend to neglect the welfare of other fellow human beings and do not realize that such nature is an obstacle in the path of spiritual progress. This results in bondage. Puranas suggest that we should engage ourselves in social service activities.

द्वे पदे बन्धमोक्षाय न ममेति ममेति च।

ममेति बध्यते जन्तुः न ममेति विमुच्यते 6

By thinking that this belonged to me and I alone should possess and enjoy this to myself, man is bound by selfishness. By realizing that this is not meant for me alone, he shares it or gives away as charity and as a consequence he

is liberated. The two words on this world “Me alone” leads to bondage. The other way of thought on this world “belonged to all” is the path of liberation.

Helping others is the the essence of all Shastras:

There must be millions of literatures that throw light on moral values. But most people become skeptical when they try to implement them in their lives. Sri Vedavyasa summarizes all moral teachings in just a line. ‘Hurt never help ever’

श्लोकर्धनं प्रवक्षामि यदुक्तं ग्रन्थ कोटिषु

परोपकारः पुण्याय पापाय परपीडनम्।7.

I summarise the essence of all shastras which has been told in crores of books in half a line. Helping or Serving others is always a fruitful and good deed and troubling or disservice to others by a selfish motive is ever a sin. This is the summary of all Shastras.

Helping leads to spiritual growth and hurting leads to spiritual bankruptcy and a life of misery. One should not limit his charity to his inner circle of people but extend to even his enemies if the situation demands. In sanskrit The word ‘para’ in परोपकार PAROPAKARA indicates not only other person but also an enemy. A friend or a foe makes no difference to the great souls. Help all irrespective of your personal benefits is the theme seen behind that word.

Even animals do not lag behind humans when it comes to helping to the mankind. They are useful during their life time and later too. A cows urine is useful with its medicinal properties. And even it’s excreta has various uses. The milk, curd, ghee given are, needless to be mentioned. Even after their death the tusks of the elephants, the skin of the sheep, and the deer, hairs of the mouse are of great utility to the mankind. But man cannot help after his death to the mankind in such a way. Though he transfers his part of the body to the needy in rare circumstances it has limited scope. But animals help the mankind during their entire lifetime and also after their demise.

परोपकारश्चैतस्य दिग्मनुष्यस्य जीवितम्।

जीवन्ति पशवो येषां चर्माप्युपकरिष्यति॥ 8.

A person’s life is worthless and futile if he doesn’t give away anything for charity. He is no better than even an animal

Service is greater than a son or daughter.

There is a strong feeling among Hindus community that if a son is born to a person he can avoid going to certain types of hell. The son is supposed to perform prescribed rituals for the deceased persons of his family. There is a staunch faith rooted in the mind of religious persons that getting the son is compulsory to avoid the hell. It may enable him to attain the heaven. But this is a much debated topic in our shastras.

पुन्नाम्नः नरकादयस्मात् पितरम् त्रायते सुतः।

तस्मात् पुत्र इति प्रोक्तः स्वयमेव स्वयंभुवा॥9.

Garuda purana upholds the necessity of one getting the son. The person who protects father from the hell named PUTH is called by the name PUTHRA by the creator Brahma.

It continues to state further in more clear terms.

‘ऐकोऽपि पुत्रो धर्मात्मा सर्वं तारयते कुलम्
पुत्रेण लोकं जयति इति सत्यवती श्रुतिः॥१०॥

Even a single righteous son can help the entire family to cross over the hell. With the help of a sincere son, one attains heaven is the Lord Vedavyasa’s declaration.

But a son, born may avoid his parents befalling the hell only when he is on the righteous path. The word DHARMATMA used as an adjective to the son in the above shloka must be observed closely to analyze the purport. A bad son by his wicked deeds, may push the parents into the hell during their life time in this world and even after his death like Duryodhana’s behaviour with his parents. So with the birth of a son, there may be a possibility to attain the heaven, But it is not certain. Even if one is childless he can opt to adopt a son .

Adoption of a child

Bhagavata suggests even to develop detachment with the son if he is not good. It says like this: If even an outsider does good to us, he can be treated as a son just like a medicine, though it comes from a distance is, taken inside for saving our health. Even if the son born to us, does continual harm to us, he can be kicked out like removing a tumour in our body. परोप्यपत्यं हितकृत् यथौषधम्
स्वदेहजोऽप्यामयवत् सुतोऽहितः॥११॥

Madhvacharya highlights this aspect in his Bhagavata tatparya by referring to Vamanapurana. He says even with the deprival of a son one can attain the heaven.

But he must follow righteous path and engage in good activities. The door for the heaven is not opened by the son or daughter alone, but by the punya or the good deeds done by a person. This means social services are compulsory and also infer that virtuous service is a means to reach heaven.

अनपत्योऽपि सद्धर्मा लोकजिन्नात्र संशयः॥ १२॥

Social service activities

So one should do good activities with inner cleanliness. If he is involved in social life he should do social services. While trees are planted, they certainly help a lot of people for a longer duration of time by giving shade, flowers, fruits, leaves, fuel sticks etc. So man must concentrate on charitable deeds like planting the trees, digging canals etc.

All people, including the childless couple can engage themselves in many projects that are useful to the society. They can build wells or tanks, charity houses, schools, Elder’s care centers, hospitals or any other such activities aimed at helping society. This kind of selfless service leads a man to heaven and avoids his going to hell. There are seven types of activities prescribed for childless couple as stated in our puranas. They are considered as one’s progeny.

1 DIGGING WELLS 2. GROWING TREES. 3 BUILDING PUBLIC TOILETS .4. BUILDING PARKS FOR RECREATION. 5. BUILDING PUBLIC FARM HOUSES. 6. OFFERING DRINKING WATER FACILITY. 7. ADOPTING AN VIRTUOUS AND ETHICAL PERSON AS A SON.

मार्गोद्यानं तडागं वा कूपं मण्डपमेव वा।
यः करोति स धर्मात्मा तस्य पुत्रैस्तु किं फलम्?
कूपः, तडाग उद्यानं मण्डपश्च प्रपा तथा।
सद्धर्मकरणं पुत्रः सन्तानं सप्तधोच्यते॥९॥
ऐतेष्वन्यतमाभावे नोर्ध्वं गच्छन्ति मानवाः॥१३॥

The Skanda purana concludes the debate and says in the incidence of not doing, any one out of the seven social projects, one cannot hope to go to heaven. What is the purpose of begetting children when these types of charities are not performed?

Shastra also suggests seven more types of activities for childless couple. In our Indian culture. Both social life and individual life are equally given importance. By setting aside personal fame and glory one can focus more inward too. If one attains liberation that is also good. It leads to the mental elevation of the spiritual seeker. For this Puranas suggest other seven types of putras.

सच्चास्त्रश्रवणं तीर्थयात्रा सज्जनसंगतिः।

जलदानं चान्नदानमश्वत्थारोपणं तथा।

पुत्रश्चेति च सन्तानं सप्त वेदविदो विदुः॥१४॥

नासनतिर्लभेल्लोकान् कृत्वा धर्मशतान्यपि।

तस्मात् सन्तानमन्विच्छेत् सन्तानेष्वेतो ब्रजेत्॥१५॥

The Seven types of sons, mentioned in Skanda purana, where Vaishakha masa Mahatmya is narrated, are as follows.

1. Studying scriptures,
2. Visiting pilgrimage centres for earning positive vibrations,
3. To remain in the company of virtuous people,
4. Providing clean drinking water,
5. Feeding the needy people
6. Planting Aswatta tree,
7. The heir who continues the above welfare activities even after his death.

It may be noted that even in the second section of recommendations, a few social projects are involved. By this we can come to the conclusion as follow:”Serving the common people is a must for a common man or scholar to get liberation.

Poor feeding:

Distribution of food to the poor is much insisted in Garudapurana as a good deed. We see large amount of food being wasted in marriage halls, public party halls and large scale conferences. Love for a luxurious life, over flow of money, dis regard for the weaker section of the society etc are the main reasons for this neglect. Garuda condemns even wasting a morsel of food. It may be given to the guest or to the poor and at least for animals. Garuda purana warns that -”Those who do not observe social sensitivity in this aspect will be thrown into hell”

ग्रासार्थमपि नो दत्तं न श्ववायसयोर्बलिं।

नमस्कृता नाथितयो न कृतं पितृतर्पणम् ॥१६॥

Distribution of food is prominently described in Garudapurana. By being a king Rantideva gave food to all and even he gave away his own share of food and the share of his family to the down trodden people and animals. So giving food to the needy is binding on all irrespective of the social status they hold.

सर्वेषामेव दानानां अन्नं श्रेष्ठमुदाहृतम् ।

अन्नस्य हि प्रदानेन रन्तिदेवो दिवं गतः ॥17.

The shloka tells thus: Among all charitable acts, serving food is referred as of Paramount importance. By giving away the food Rantideva attained heacen. Referred in m.B)

Rantideva -----18.06 व्या म.भा.

Purana says there are some more proven procedures to elevate oneself Spiritually. They are serving gracious people, having unalloyed devotion on SriHari, and following the do, s and don'ts as prescribed by scriptures.

Feeding the poor people is considered to be great and people reach heaven by such service. King Shwetharaja was very pious and gave a lot in charities except 'ANNA DANA', which is mandatory.? It is said that later he was unable to eat anything in spite of being very hungry. A stage was reached, when he had to eat his own flesh to avoid starvation. Later by Brahma's boon he offers a garland to SriRamachandra through the sage Agastya and gets cured of his disease.

श्वेतदत्तां तथा मालां अगस्त्यादाप राघवः । वेतो

अन्नं न्नयज्जकृच्छ्वेतो राजा क्षुद्विनिवर्तनम् ।

कुर्वन् स्वमांसैर्धात्रोक्तो मालां रामार्थमर्पयत् ।

अगस्त्याय न साक्षात्तु रामे दद्यादयं नृपः ॥19.

Free water supply and plantation of trees

Giving free water to all pleases the society at large. A healthy drinking water is essential to all classes of people. The trusts or the community leaders should take a vital step in providing water to all .The common people whose fatigue and their thirst are removed by free water and the plants grown in turn give fresh air to breath. This creates a healthy society, and in turn, makes the environment beautiful. Even birds can rest on those trees. Entire flora and fauna looks attractive and beneficial. With an all-round growth of the society who will not be pleased?. Even Devas will be pleased by such actions.

देवानां च पितॄणां च ऋषीणां राजसत्तम ।

अत्यन्तप्रीतिदं सत्यं प्रपादानं न संशयः ॥

प्रपादानेन सन्तुष्टाः येनाध्वश्रमकर्षिताः ।

तोषितास्तेन देवाश्च ब्रह्मविष्णुशिवादयः ॥20.

Forefathers rejoice when a son is born in their clan. But when the couple engage in helping society and especially if they provide drinking water facility to the needy it will definitely please Gods, angels, sages including forefathers. Why?. Even Brahma Vishnu and Maheshwara are also pleased. Shastras chastise miserly people who are not doing enough for the society.

"What you sow is what you reap". Influential people are questioned. Why did you not construct water storage tank for public and animals?. You should have given such facility

in areas where there is scarcity of water. Why did you not do anything for cows and Vipras? By being influential as a Corporator or Legislative assembly member or a parliament member, or a village panchayat member, you are supposed to invest your heart and soul for social causes. Even by using the public fund allotted to them they can do all these .They can stand as a role model and inspire others to do such activities. The pity is that, even influential persons are not doing much for the society though they receive funds for the welfare schemes. Garuda purana says : As you have not done any philanthropic social service eat the pain of your bad deeds and You cannot cross the destined hell.

जलाशयो नैवकृतो हि निर्जले मनुष्यहेतोः पशुपक्षिहेतवे ।

गोविप्रवृत्त्यर्थमकारि नाप्यपि देहिन् क्वचिच्छिन्निस्तर यत्त्वया कृतम् ॥21.

"दानात् स्वर्गमवाप्नोतो तोयदः सर्वतोभुवि" । २२

No life on earth can survive without water and the rivers hence, water is termed as Jivana() in Sanskrit. The food chain exist because of flora and fauna. The rivers feed water bodies like Lakes, Ponds and Wells. So any water available in wells or bore wells are due to the abundant and enriched groundwater level created by rivers. Either sickly or healthy, everyone needs water. Without water one cannot exist. World's existence and its cleanliness is fully dependent on water.

पानीयं प्राणिनां प्राणाः विश्वमेव च तन्मयम्

न हि तोयाद्विना वृत्तिः स्वस्थस्य व्याधितस्य वा ॥23.

So providing, water tanks, water canals, water reservoirs, free water supply etc, enable men to cross over heinous hells. Even for birds and animals it is essential.

Even you have not done not a bit to help the society. How can you cross this hell ?

Free hospitals and free medicine distribution:

Puranas advocate social welfare activities; spiritual progress and detachment from worldly matters is its message. There are three types of charities by which a person can achieve spiritual elevation. They are by offering water facility, feeding the poor and constructing charity hospitals for the needy and the poor. This is essential for the healthy survival of the mankind.

Even while providing medical facilities or reasonable medical services we should avoid middle men or agents. Even costly medicines should not be suggested.

हेतुत्रयं च प्रत्येकं हेतुस्थित्यै महाप्रभुः ।

जलसेवा चान्नसेवा सेवा चैवौषधस्य च ॥24

For the sustainability of the world the lord has made these three compulsory. Free water, free food and free medical care centers and free medicines have to be provided to all. Even for water and food all are eligible. Some may come and plead, some due to self respect they may stay away from showing their need. But for all, without considering caste or creed, free water and food has to be given, Vishnu Rahasya warns that in that world welfare approach Brahmin also must be included.

अन्नस्य क्षुधितं पात्रं पानीयस्य पिपासितं
न हि जातिविवेकोऽत्र विशेषात् ब्राह्मणः स्मृतः ॥25

Garuda purana tells the same in the following way.
सुलभानि न दत्तानि जलन्यान्यपि क्वचित् ।26.(ग.पु.०३-४०)

“You have not even offered easy charities like water and food.how do you cross the hell” In this way servants of yama question the sinners.

Giving land for the noble purposes

Even giving land for noble purposes earns greater merits. The land given to the educational institutions, or for the construction of schools or for the hospitals benefits the society at large. Such acts of charity boosts the morale of the real founders of such charitable institutions to pass on the benefit to the society at large. Garuda purana considers this as an immeasurable great deed.

अत्यल्पफलदानि स्युरन्यदानानि काश्यप।

पृथिवीदानजं पुण्यमहन्यनिवर्धते।27.

Oh, Garuda, the son of sage kashyapa, other charities give merits to a limited time and to the limited extent. But the noble act of giving land to the noble purpose multiplies the deed every day.

Showing compassion

Showing compassion and larger consideration to the weaker section of the society is a must. Orphans, deserted persons, Weak Senior citizens, Uncared kids, and all such types of persons are eligible to be treated in an honorable way. There are a few rude persons who take vengeance on good people keeping selfish motives. A few persons assigned with the authority punish the innocent persons to prove their might and authority. Out of gross arrogance, they may accuse and punish the innocent. Garuda purana warns against these evil trends of the society and says in clear terms that all those associated in this circle will be punished in the hell for a longer time.

अनाथं नानुकम्पन्ति ये सतां द्वेषकारकाः।
विनापराधं दण्डन्ति ते वै नरकगामिनः।28.

Care for all-Even orphans and handicapped should be looked after.

The following shloka says that even parents, ie, father, mother, relatives, friends blind, dumb, duff, depressed, physically challenged, differently enabled, servants of the house, all must be assured protection and lively hood. The house holder should protect all the above to the maximum extent of his capacity. The word यावत् स्यात् शक्तिवैभवम् has wider meaning in extending the welfare of all.

अन्येष्यनाथा ये च स्युः पितृमातृस्वबान्धवाः

सुहृदोन्धदीनबधिरमूकाव्यङ्गाश्च रोगिणः।

अतिथ्यभ्यागतविप्रा दासदासीपशुव्रजाः

ऐते पोष्या गृहस्थस्य यावत् स्यात् शक्तिवैभवम् ॥29

Compassion is a basic eligibility to all human beings to earn the grace of god. The Sanskrit word हृदय joined with the word दया shows the need of kind heartedness of human beings towards all. This is common to all. compassion, charity, glorifying god's name is common to all castes and it is the common to all activities.

दयादानमहिंसादि विष्णुनामानुकीर्तनम् ।

सर्वासामेव जातीनां एष साधारणो विधिः ॥30

This type of serving not only uplifts us from selfishness. With social service people gain worldly fame and their family will be proud of good recognitions. It brings good deeds also for them. By stating this Vishnu Rahasya says this is not optional. Whoever does not abide by this will surely gets the hell and also a bad name in the society.

सेविचेकीर्तिं च लभते लोके ततः स्यात् पुण्यवर्धनं

अन्यथा निरयं गच्छेदपकीर्तिं च विन्दति।31

Share everything for the social good

Bhagavatha instructs us to adopt a simple life style so that with the saved money we can achieve our own progress and social welfare. Even by propagating and concentrating on noble thoughts we can make the society most responding. If situation demands, even by our lives ie, by giving blood, parts of the body or pledging to gift our eyes after death or sharing our prosperity for the larger section of society we should do good. It says this is the goal of life. This makes perishable body to yield the permanent benefits and to record in the history as an inspirational person.

एतावज्जन्म साफल्यं देहिनामिह देहिषु।

प्राणैरर्थैः धिया वाचा श्रेय एवाचरेत् सदा ॥32.

Foot notes:

1. Bhagavadgita Madhva bhshyam-introduction to second chapter.
2. Ibid.1-1-1.
3. Ragghuvamsha, 2nd canto-२shloka.
4. Subhashita-
5. Bhagavadgita-
6. Garudapurana-16ch-shloka 93
7. subhashita
8. subhashitamanjari-samanya paddhati-274
9. Garudapurana-9 -07
10. Abid.-9-08
11. Bhagavata mahapurana, 7-5-7.
12. Bhagavatatatpayanirnaya of Madhvacharya.13-31?
13. Skandapurana, Vaishakamasamahima-
14. Ibid.36
15. Ibid-37
16. Garudapurana03-41
17. Garudapurana.3-4
18. rantideva---
19. Bhagavatatatpayanirnaya of Madhvacharya.09-22
20. Skandapurana, Vaishakamasamahima, 02-15, 16
21. Garudapurana .02-37
22. Ibid.02-37commmentary
23. Vaidyakiya subhashita sahitya.10-01
24. Vishnu Rahasya—३८
25. Ibid.38-12
26. Garudapurana.03-4
27. Ibid.08-52.

28. Ibid.04-45
29. Vishnu Rahasya 20-10, 1
30. Ibid.35-93
31. Ibid.20-22
32. Bhagavatamahapurana.10-33-35.

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