Social Service in Puranas

Dr. N. Venkatesha Rao

Associate Professor, Department of Sanskrit, Sri Satya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Brindavan Campus, Kadugodi, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

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 leisureed 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 – Adoption 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 petry 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.” अर्थ परी निति वैश्विति गणना लघुचेतसा।ृदार्धरतितां तु वस्तुपूर्व उक्तवक्तम्

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.

१) इतिहासपूर्णम् वेदे समपुपुष्पबैतूला

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

यद्यविद्यात्यतुवैद्यादमानीपरिविद्यादमदविज्ञा|
, न वैद्य पूर्णान्वितिविद्यादत्त् नैव स्त्यान्विविद्यवक्षणः॥

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 “सुतीतवर्ष्मण्युपस्तिनवदात्” 3. This was said when SudakaShina, 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 Anushtrup. 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.

Helping others is the essence of all Shastras:

periods of time. Puranas make use of hymns and ornamental language to enhance the effect of narration. The metre used multiply services in society.

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 Sutras, 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.

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 "belonging to all" is the path of liberation.

Helping others is 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' र्लौक्यद्वीप प्रकृतिका यदुक्तर शरण्य कोटिपा परीकृता: पुरुषाय पापाय पुर्वीकृतमं 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’ अर्थात् 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, 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.

र्परापरा कर्म सत्यंतरसांनां जीवांतरसां नीतिम् ।
जीततिर्म पशौं यायं चर्मण्युपकरणियति॥ 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.

पुत्रामः नकाद्वस्मात्पिताम् तत्र तु सुपुत्रमाधवी।
तस्मात्पुत्र दत्त वै त्रित्य प्रौढः: स्वयंमैव स्वयंमभुव॥ 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.
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 DHRATMATMA 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 Duruydohana’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.

Madhvacharya highlights this aspect in his Bhagavata taparya 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.

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.

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.

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”

यासार्थभिमो जी दत्तं न श्वास्वागतेऽभिमो
नमस्कृता नाथियो न कृत्य पितृनिःणयम्

@ IJTSRD | Unique Paper ID - IJTSRD38347 | Volume – 5 | Issue – 2 | January-February 2021
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.

सर्वाधिकमेव दानानात्म अन्नं श्रेष्ठमुदाहरतम्।
अन्नस्य हि प्रदानं रत्निदेवी दिवं गतः॥ १७॥

The shloka tells thus: Among all charitable acts, serving food is referred as of Paramount importance. By giving away the food Rantideva attained heaven. Referred in m.B) Rantideva ---------18.07 यथा म.भाः.

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, 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.

श्वेतराजः तथा वालवालमन्त्राय राधिकांशैः न कृपयांजलितकात्रि राजा शुद्धविनितातिष्ठतमुः।
कुर्वस्वरूपस्योत्तरकान्त्यानं सायणामहासमपेतः।
अगस्त्याय न साक्षात्तदाय रामे दशकादय लपेतः॥ १९॥

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 दिँपुरावणो श्रीरीणा राजसत्तम।
अन्नतपि तद्वन्येद सङ्कुचनं न संशयः।।
प्रपालातन्त्र सन्निधि: देवनाथाभिनक्षिप्तः।
तौष्ठितस्ते देवाशर ब्रह्मविशव्यवहारः॥ २०॥

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.

जनत्यां न अकृत्तेः हि नित्येति मनुनित्येः: पुष्पसिद्धते।
शृङ्खलायोपयायमकरे नान्विणि देहिन कविचित्तिंस्त्र सत्त्वस्य कृतम्॥ २१॥

“दानानात स्वरूपवाच्यातोति तोयद: सर्ववीषुभवके॥ 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.

पानीप्राणिर्प्राणीः विश्वमेव च तम्मम।
हि तीव्राद्वितीये वृद्धितः स्वस्थस्य व्याधिस्वरूपः॥ २३॥

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.

हेतुनमः च परशुप्रचाय वेदाधिग्ने महाप्राप्तः।
जलसेवा दानसेवा सेवा वेदाधिग्ने च ॥ २४॥

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 Brahmın also must be included.
Garuda purana tells the same in the following way.

Garuda purana, 3-4

Subhashita-

Bhagavata mahapurana, 7-5-7.

Compassion is a basic eligibility to all human beings to earn the grace of god. The Sanskrit word दया joined with the word दय 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.

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 permissible body to yield the permanent benefits and to record in the history as an inspirational person.

Foot notes:
1. Bhagavadgita Madhya bhshyam-introduction to second chapter.
2. Ibid.1-1-1.
3. Ragguvamsha, 2nd canto-रशloka.
4. Subhashita-
5. Bhagavadgita-
6. Garudapurana-16ch-shloka 93
7. subhashita
8. subhashitamanjari-samanya paddhati-274
9. Garudapurana-9 -07
10. Abid.-9-08
12. Bhagavatatatpayanirnaya of Madhvacharya.13-31?
13. Skandapurana, Vaishakamasamahima-
14. Ibid.36
15. Ibid.-37
16. Garudapurana03-41
17. Garudapurana 3-4
18. rantideva---
20. Skandapurana, Vaishakamasamahima, 02-15, 16
21. Garudapurana 02-37
22. Ibid.02-37commentary
23. Vaidyakiyasa subhashita sahitya.10-01
24. Vishnu Rahasya—३
cDownloaded from ijtsrd.com by IP: 177.116.255.164 On: Thu, 26 Jan 2023 21:42:23
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.

Books referred:

Books referred:


Books referred:

1. Vaidyakiya Subhashitasahitha.