


Son as the Way of Salvation: Sociological Analysis of the Preta Kalpa of Garudamahapurana

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Abstract

The Puranas have displayed the socio-cultural system of the ancient society. In this context, this article aims to portray the roles of men in The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana. To gain the research objective data has been collected through the historical content analysis method from the text of The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana. Content analysis method has been used to analyze the collected data. In The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana, men are consistently depicted as holding superior status and are accorded significant respect and responsibility in familial ritual practices. Notably, the acts of Sapindikarana and performing Sraddha for deceased parents are exclusively undertaken by male members of the family. It is firmly believed that the release of the spirits of the deceased is contingent upon the due execution of these rituals by sons, elder and younger brothers, or close male relatives in the absence of direct descendants. Furthermore, the presence of sons is deemed essential to absolve parents from earthly transgressions, thereby enforcing a patriarchal social structure that aligns with Marx's assertion regarding the production of knowledge. Consequently, this research affirms the applicability of patriarchal hegemonic assumptions, thus framing the theory of patriarchy as a pertinent analytical lens for gender studies within The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana.

Keywords: *Garudamahapurana, Patriarchy, Preta kalpa, ritual performer, salvation, significance of son*

Introduction

The Puranas have displayed the socio-cultural system of the ancient society. Upadhaya (1978) has argued that The Puranas have the affinities with the five qualities from the ancient time. Those five qualities are heaven, hell, clans of Rishis, Gods and Goddesses (Manwantar) and the characteristics according to the clans. Upadhaya has further pointed out other five qualities apart from aforementioned five qualities of The Puranas. They are called security, life circle, institution, good deeds and knowledge conserving zone. Upadhaya (1978) has introduced eighteen types of puranas from The

Brahamapurana to The Bramandamahapurana. Moreover, Sharma has said that Vedas have close relation with The Puranas. Similarly, Dube (2009) has argued that The Puranas have revealed the ancient cultural values and rules to be followed in the society. Likewise, Apte (1993) has pointed out that *The Garudamahapurana* has dealt with death rituals and the critic, Kane (1992) has explained that *The Garudamahapurana* is concerned with the celebration of having the life of the paradise after the death of the earthly life. But the critic, Altekar (1959) has drawn the disputable idea of the females' participation in the activities of the death rituals. Likewise, the critics, Bennett (1983) and Walby (1991) have indicated the problem of women's involvement in the rituals of death activities as found disputable in the contemporary socio-culture structure in *The Garudamahapurana*. On the contrary, Chaturvedi (9) has claimed that The *Garuda Purana's* principal goal is to bring the sinners and criminals in the right tract of life by revealing the fear of dark side of life.

However, *The Garudamahapurana* has been regarded as one of *The Mahapuranas* that deals with the deep faith in rebirth and the main characteristics of the Hindu Culture (Kaudinayan, 2062 B.S). Moreover, *The Garudamahapurana* is especially based on the directives of the 'Death Ritual' focusing on rebirth in heaven after the end of material life. *The Purana* recited in *The Garudamahapurana's The Preta Kalpa*, relating, chiefly to the bird of Garuda from Vinita, is called the *Garuda Purana* (Rengarajan, 1999). According to Majumdar (2008), The Mahapuranas have the description of hell and norms of the death ritual is called *Garuda Purana*. In this respect, *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana* focuses on the various rituals performed in the society. Ritual is a kind of refinement process of human life. As soon as an individual is born, she/he appears like a lump of meat. Only by means of various processes and methods, she/he is associated with the socio-cultural systems. This refined cultural function has a major role in affirming meaningful existence of a human individual as a social and cultural being (Pandey, 1968). These social and cultural norms and values can be understood or defined as rituals. In other words, ritual is known as an achievement of one's mental and intellectual refinement through cultural activities or performances (Prabhu, 1961). In the process of civilization, human relationships are constructed as the ritual (Farley, 1999). These are some of the critical ideas presented by the critics but these aforementioned critics' analysis is limited only to analyze and interpret from the religious perspective rather than socio-cultural aspects.

According to aforementioned analysis, *The Garudamahapurana* is a guiding scripture to conduct the rituals process in Sanatani society and culture. Similarly, ritual is refinement process of human life and above-mentioned literatures are limited to introduce only the rituals of *The Puranas*. So, the above stated literatures have not reflected the participation, role, and position of males in the different stages of ritual practices. The gender roles and responsibilities of various rituals in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana* are unanswered yet. Hence, this research has focused to identify the answer of 'how are the men's roles and responsibilities portrayed in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*?'

Objective of Research

The research aims to portray the roles of men in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. It attempts to reveal how men have performed and participated in society under the patriarchal socio-cultural system. The research also aims to show the gender disparity within the patriarchal socio-cultural structure of the Puranic period.

Research Methodology

Knowledge is produced through social interactions, and the knowledge of a particular time period is recorded in the literature of that era, reflecting the social norms, values, and beliefs of that time (Adhikari, 2020B). *The Puranas and The Garudamahapurana* are examples of socio-cultural products that depict the values, norms, beliefs, and socio-cultural practices of the Puranic period. This kind of ontological assumption of this research demand the interpretive research approach.

This research has been related to analyze the gender roles and responsibilities of *The Puranic* period. But *The Puranic* period is not available now to visit and observe in contemporary society for the research process. In this situation, literature of that period is supportive document to get the socio-cultural information of the period (Adhikari, 2021 & Adhikari,2022). In the sociological perspective, it is believed that each literature has been socially produced and the literature reflects the socio-cultural surrounding of particular time period (Adhikari, 2020A; Adhikari et al, 2024 A; Adhikari et al, 2024D; In this context, this research has been based on the qualitative research design. Qualitative research design more applicable for the interpretive research approach.

The research has not been located in the specific geographical area. It has been based on the primary data of the ancient literature *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The secondary data have been used to support the critical analysis of the primary data. These secondary data have been available in library and they are: gender study, study of men and women and ancient scriptures related to the primary data's research articles, research report documents, *The Puranas*, and the research articles of *The Garudamahapurana* itself. So, the research is located mainly in the area of library. There are various methods including historical content analysis method under the qualitative research design (Adhikari et al, 2024B & Adhikari et al, 2024 C). In this research qualitative data has been collected through the historical content analysis method of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana* as the primary text. Content analysis method has been used to analyze the collected data.

Theoretical orientation

This research has focused to explore and analyze the gender roles and responsibilities of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana* which is one of the scriptures constructed and produced within the patriarchal social structural system of the ancient time. Ritzer (2000) has quoted to Kal Marx that the production of knowledge is the reflection of contemporary existing social structure. In this sense, this research has been guided by the production system and patriarchal theoretical assumptions. The difference in gender roles is primarily associated with patriarchy which is based on a system of power relations that are hierarchical and unequal. In this system, men control women's production, reproduction, and sexuality. It imposes masculinity and femininity characters' stereotypes in society which strengthen the iniquitous of power relations between men and women. Walby (1990) argues that patriarchy is the rule of the father called a male-dominated family. Furthermore, it is a social and ideological construct that considers men as superior to women. Patriarchal societies propagate the ideology of motherhood which restrict women's mobility and burdens them with the responsibilities to nurture and rearing children. The biological factor to bear children is linked to the social position of women's responsibilities of motherhood: nurturing, educating, and raising children by devoting themselves to family. The theoretical and conceptual framework has been presented through the following given diagram.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

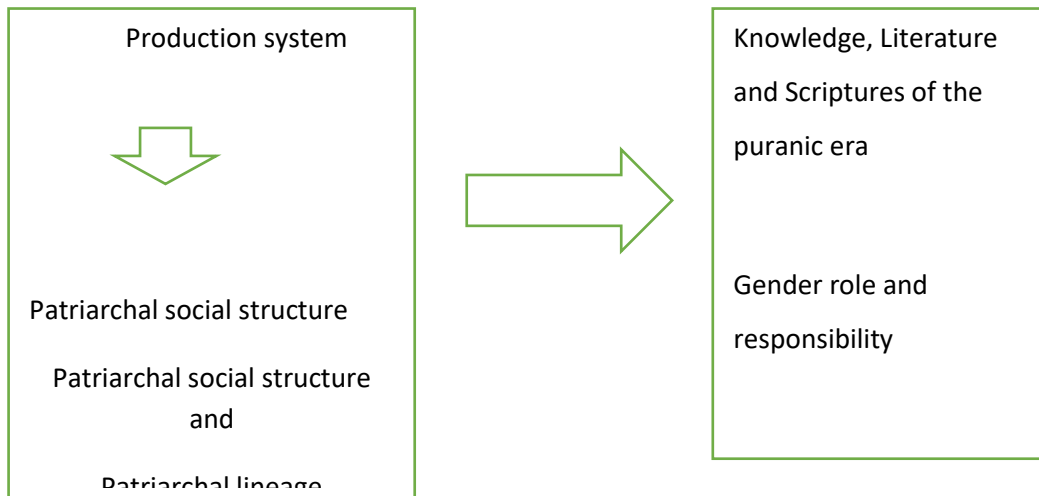


Figure 1: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theoretically, production system constructs the patriarchal social structure and lineage system and it determines the patriarchy base literature and scriptures. This research has been guided with the aforementioned theoretical concept.

Findings and Discussion

Men Portrayed as Superior Characters in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*.

In this context, the superior characters are those characters who are contemplated as having better virtues and qualities for the sake of performing special roles for the salvation of the mankind and also for releasing the souls of the deceased persons of the family members. Sons are often concerned to have at all cost in the family for the sake of performing the rituals of Sradha, offering funeral fires for the dead members of the family, offering *Sapindikarna* for the dead spirits of the family members and releasing the spirits of the deceased from the punishments of their sins in the hell. Moreover, the male characters have been portrayed as the characters who decide what it would be right to do and what it would be wrong to perform in the ritual performance of the deceased persons as the roles given to the male characters in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*.

Males as Superior Characters

Males have been presented as superior characters in all the stanzas of ninety-one to ninety-seven in fourth chapter in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. Female characters have been depicted as inferior characters in all of the ninety-one to ninety-seven stanzas since the women are inspired to burn down alive with their dead husbands together on their pyres for achieving heavenly joys, for the praise of the celestial nymphs, for the salvation of all the sins of their husbands, for releasing their husbands from the punishment of their sins in the hell and so on.

Likewise, son is taken as the source of releasing from all types of sins of the earthly life. A man gets released from the world of sorrow, pain, suffering, struggle, and life cycle of rebirth if he obtains the opportunity of seeing the face of son, or grandson or great grandson and gains the life of heaven. This

kind of concept has been written in stanza thirty-four in twenty-five chapter of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has claimed that a man is released from three kinds of debts on seeing his grandson, on beholding his son, and on looking on his great grandson and he attains his eternal life or of the celestial worlds (VedaVyasa, 2012, Garuda, stanza 34). This stanza has described that man has got his birth on the earth to pay three types of debts- Pitri-parental debts, Rishi's -teachers'-debts and Deva-Gods' debts and the stanza has argued that a man is released from all these three kinds of the debts if he gets the chance to see his son, or grandson or great grandson. Not only that but man also attains his eternal life in the paradise or he is apt to gain the celestial worlds even after his earthly life by the cause having son or grandson or great grandson. The significance and value of son has often got high place in all the activities of the rituals in the house in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*.

Male as Ritual Performer

The ritual performances are allowed to do only by the male members of the family and females are prohibited to carry out any rituals in the house. This type of system has been prescribed in twenty-three and twenty-four stanzas in twenty-sixth chapter of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. These two stanzas have claimed that the *Sapindikarana* of the dead person is always performed by the son alone. If the deceased person does not have a son, then it ought to be performed by his wife and by his elder brother and again if the dead person does not have his elder brother, then it must be performed by his younger brother or by his younger brother's son. If the deceased person does not have his younger brother or younger brother's son, then it should be performed by his close relative or by his disciple (VedaVyasa, 2012, Garuda 23 and 24 stanzas). These two stanzas have highlighted the role of male members to perform the ritual of *Sapindikaran* on the occasion of the death of a person in a house. The first duty of performing the ritual of *Sapindikarana* is of the son of the dead person and in absence of his son only, his has got the right to perform the role of *Sapindikarana* and the next duty is given to the dead person's elder brother or younger brother or the son of elder or younger brother and in the absence of the sons of the elder or younger brothers, it must be performed by the deceased person's close relative but it is not given the right to perform by the daughters of the deceased person. In this context, son has been regarded as the most essential one for the ritual performance in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*.

Son as the Medium of Salvation

Sons are taken only one medium of salvation for men from the realm of the pangs of the earthly life and to take them out of the life cycle of rebirth. This doctrine has been prescribed in stanza fourth in chapter twenty-nine in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza argues that there is no salvation for a man without a son. The man can never attain the heaven without a son. So, the man must obtain a son at any rate (VedaVyasa, 2012, Garuda stanza 4). The stanza has compelled to have the son at all cost for the salvation of the man. No man can have the salvation without the role of the son and to attain the paradise, the man must have the son anyhow. No ritual performance can be performed in absence of the son. Similar idea has been narrated in stanza five in chapter twenty-nine in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza states that even if the ultimate salvation is not possible, a son will necessarily save the man even from the hell. The rights of the cremation ought to be performed only by the son and in the same way the grandson of the man can light the funeral pyre

(VedaVyasa, 2012, Garuda stanza 5). The mentioned stanza has argued that the son only can protect the man from the hell and the son has got the rights of cremation of the father only by the son and the funeral fire of the man's pyre also must have been offered by his own grandson. It has claimed that a man neither can go to heaven nor can get out of the inferno and nor can avoid the punishment of all kinds of the sins that the man has committed in his earthly life in absence of the son. In this context, sons have got the only one medium of getting salvation of earthly life.

Son as Supreme

Son has been regarded as the superior to all other things in the family. The superiority of the son has been argued in stanza twenty in twenty-nine chapter in The Preta Kalpa of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has argued that when the father is in the death bed, at that time the gifts made by the son surpass the advantage that one earns by performing a Sraddha at Gaya. The son prospers by his gifts to his father in death bed and the family of the son pleases (VedaVyasa, 2012, Garuda, stanza 20). This stanza has claimed that sons have been taken as the superior ones for the happiness and joys of the family members. The fathers who are in the death beds gain greater fruit of releasing from the unnecessary trouble and suffering of their earthly committed sins if their sons provide the gifts to them. The merits of sons' gifts to their fathers in their death beds exceed the merits gained by performing a ritual called Sraddha at Gaya, the holy place of India, that is regarded as the most essential to perform the Sraddha for the deceased persons by the sons for their salvation. If the sons offer the gifts to their fathers during the time of their last hours, the entire family members get delighted and the gifts provider sons too gain prosperity in their lives. In this respect, sons are taken as the superior ones to any things for the parents and the family in The Preta Kalpa of *The Garudamahapurana*.

Son as Performing Sixteenth Sraddha for Salvation from Ghost- hood

Son's Sraddha has been said as the only one way of releasing the ghost-hood of the parents. If the sixteenth Sraddha is not performed, then the ghost of his parents never gets liberated. This belief has given in the stanza one hundred and thirty-one in thirty-four chapter in The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana. The stanza has mentioned that if the sixteenth Sraddhas are not performed for the dead person, then his ghost-hood becomes permanent and it cannot be released from the position of the ghost even if hundreds of Sraddhas are performed in the favor of him (VedaVyasa, 2012, Garuda stanza 131). This stanza has claimed that the sixteenth Sraddha -Soraha-Sraddha-is a must for releasing the deceased persons' spirits from the ghost. If this sixteenth Sraddha is not performed mainly by the son, then even hundreds of Sraddhas performed in other time cannot liberate the spirit of the deceased person from the condition of the ghost.

Son as Blessing Receiver

The son is the sole person to receive the blessing from the three generations of his father, grandfather, and great grandfather for his act of performing Sraddha. This kind of belief has been expressed in the eleventh stanza in chapter thirty-five in The Preta Kalpa of *The Garudapurana*. The stanza has mentioned that the father blesses the Sraddha performer for the birth of sons, the grandfather blesses for the cattle wealth and grandfather blesses for the coins of gold (VedaVyasa, 2012, Garuda stanza 11). This stanza has even given the process of receiving the blessings to the sons who performs the

Sraddha for his father, grandfather and great grandfather. The father blesses him for the birth of sons and grandfather blesses him cattle and wealth and the great grandfather blesses the coins of gold. But this stanza has not said that the daughter would get the blessing from the father, grandfather and the great grandfather. Hence, the blessing of the deceased father, grandfather and great grandfather is received only by the sons who has got the rights to perform the Sraddha. In this sense, the performer of the Sraddha and the receiver of the blessings would be only the sons.

On the contrary, women are not allowed to perform the Sraddha for her deceased father, grandfather and the great grandfather except to perform the ritual of Sraddha for her dead husband. Performing Sraddha for her husband is only for his everlasting welfare but the Sraddha performed for the father, grandfather and the great grandfather by the son means even receiving the blessings from them to the sons but no blessing to the women from them as the sons deserve to obtain such blessings. This kind of disparity between male and female is called gender discrimination found in *The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana*.

Conclusion

In *The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana*, men are consistently depicted as holding superior status and are accorded significant respect and responsibility in familial ritual practices. Notably, the acts of Sapindikarana and performing Sraddha for deceased parents are exclusively undertaken by male members of the family. It is firmly believed that the release of the spirits of the deceased is contingent upon the due execution of these rituals by sons, elder and younger brothers, or close male relatives in the absence of direct descendants. Furthermore, the presence of sons is deemed essential to absolve parents from earthly transgressions, thereby enforcing a patriarchal social structure that aligns with Marx's assertion regarding the production of knowledge. Consequently, this research affirms the applicability of patriarchal hegemonic assumptions, thus framing the theory of patriarchy as a pertinent analytical lens for gender studies within *The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana*.

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Implication:

The comprehensive research findings have proven to be an invaluable resource for scholars and enthusiasts of the Puranic period of social structure, offering a critical and analytical perspective on the subject matter. Additionally, the research will play a pivotal role in shaping policies to minimize the longstanding gender disparities prevalent across different periods. By delving into the historical context, the research has effectively brought to light the intricacies of gender parity and its evolution, thus it will enhance public awareness of the importance of addressing these issues.

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