

**THE RELEVANCE of GARUDA PURANA IN MODERN SOCIETY:  
AN INTER-DISCIPLINARY STUDY**

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**Abstract**

*Modern society is in dilemma with regard to knowledge. The scriptures of Hindu religion are thought to be vestigial and obsolete due to lack of research and analysis. The present study aims to find out the relevance of one of the eighteen Mahapurana of Hindu religion – Garuda Purana—in Modern society. The present study uses the interdisciplinary approach to analyse Garuda Purana. This paper uses Hindi, English and Sanskrit version of Garuda Purana for close reading. Through Inter-disciplinary study, the correlation has been found between Garuda Purana and Modern Science on many subjects like Embryology, Cosmology, Law, Jurisprudence etc. The paper discusses considerable relevance of Garuda Purana in social, political, educational, economical and legal domain of modern society. The paper also discusses the need of further research on Garuda Purana in modern perspective. The paper contends that academicians need to reconceptualise the relevance of Hindu Scriptures in modern society.*

**Keywords:** *Modern Society, Hindu Religion, Garuda Purana, Modern Science, Inter-disciplinary study.*

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- Ajay Sharma

**Introduction**

**O** Tarksya, those who delight in sin, destitute of compassion and righteousness, attached to the wicked, averse from the true scriptures and the company of the good, Self-satisfied, unbending, intoxicated with the pride of wealth, having the ungodly qualities, lacking the divine attributes, Bewildered by many thoughts, enveloped in the net of delusion, reveling in the enjoyments of the desire-nature,--fall into the foul hell. (Wood and Subrahmanyam 2)

This quote from translated version of *Garuda Purana* fits so well with the nature of man of 21<sup>st</sup> century who is so much intoxicated by the charm and vanity of modern world that he cannot see what his Karma are yielding. But ultimately the cosmic energy is so powerful that such a wicked man will also get the punishments of his wrong deeds. Modern Indian Society is getting confused about which values and ethics should be followed. This is due to intrusion of western philosophy in India. Indian philosophy and knowledge is so vast that it talks about every aspect of life but deciphering of *Puranic* knowledge is very necessary in order to cope up with the dilemma of the society and to have Indian resolution of any social conflict. Should we call it an obtuseness of Indian Law makers or scholars that they did not even try to decode the texts of Hindu Philosophies which were direct revelations by supreme intelligence.

This study endeavours to decipher some of the basic tenets of one of the eighteen Puranas of Hindu religion and to study the relevance of these tenets in the modern society. The goal of the study therefore is to recognize the importance of *Garuda Purana* in modern world.

The method of comparative literature research is applied by comparing *Puranas* which is a subject matter of religion with modern disciplines of studies like Science, Law etc. Thus the research is an inter-disciplinary study of *Garuda Purana*.

*Garuda Purana* is one of the eighteenth *Puranas* of Hindu religion. Although with the passage of time, the relevance of this *Purana* among youth and new generation diminishes but still it shows humanity the path of virtue and values. Through its more than 5,000 shlokas, the text has the qualities of spiritual awakening, which is also the need of the hour for every soul of universe. The texts like *Garuda Purana*, through its enlightening verses could imbibe the values in human being.

*Purana* is a Sanskrit word which literally means ancient or old. It is a vast genre of Indian literature about a wide range of topics, particularly myths, legends and other traditional lore. There are 18 *Puranas* in Hinduism. These *Puranas* are written in Shlokas or verses which are basically fragments of knowledge and morality.

*Puranas* were written to popularize the religion of the Vedas. They contain the essence of the Vedas. The aim of the *Puranas* is to impress on the minds of the masses the teachings of the Vedas and to generate in them devotion to God, through concrete examples, myths, stories, legends, lives of saints, kings and great men, allegories and chronicles of great historical events. (Sivananda)

Bringing peace through fear is one of basic elements in *Garuda Purana* which if deciphered in modern scenario could yield excellent results in bringing peace in the society. The society is moving towards the destruction neglecting the values of native Holy Scriptures. This is not good for the global society. The importance of *Garuda Purana* could also be understood by comparing it with modern legal system that has codified penalties for social wrongs. *Garuda Purana*, therefore, like modern legal system has a deeper philosophy about virtuous deeds in the society as well as the wrong deeds and the fruits they yield.

*Garuda Purana* is based on the exchange of cosmic knowledge that took place firstly between Lord Vishnu and his mount, Garuda, an eagle like bird. This knowledge then

reached to to *Kashyapa Rishi*. *Kashyap Rishi* in turn gave this knowledge to *Veda Vyasa*. Through *Veda Vyasa* this knowledge reached *Romaharshana*. In *Garuda Purana*, a Saint *Sutaji* is describing this cosmic truth to some other saints. Some Philosophers believed that *Sutaji* is actually *Romaharshana*. According to Hindu Philosophy, *Suta* means knowledgeable saint who is the son of Brahmin father and Kshatriya mother.

*Garuda Purana* is divided into two *Khandas*—*Purva Khanda* and *Uttar Khanda*. There are 19000 shlokas in total in the *Purana* devoted to the Cosmic Knowledge. The knowledge in *Garuda Purana* is the knowledge of everything. It covers the basic domain of knowledge like Who am I? What happens after death? Who is God? What is Soul? Every question is wonderfully answered alongwith vivid details about Path covered by Soul after the death of body. The description of punishments given to bad soul by *Yama* is vivid, gothic and horrendous. *Veda Vyasa* described the true nature of Lord Vishnu through *Garuda Purana*.

### **Cosmology in Garuda Purana**

*Garuda Purana* talks about Cosmology in detail. It goes even beyond Science to reveal the creation of Universe, life and even senses. Modern Scientists nowadays are searching for God Particles in Universe the evidence of whose existence has already been proved by *Garuda Purana* in its *Shlokas*.

According to this *Purana*, the cosmic sense, *Mahat*, was also created by the Supreme Deity, Vishnu. The Creation process by Vishnu in the form of Brahma then went like this: Firstly *Mahat tattva* was created which is the gross quality of Lord Vishnu. Brahma then created other *tattva* like *Panch Tanmatras* which are five Earth, water, Fire, Air and Sound. He then created *Vaikarik Sarga* comprising the creation of all the sense organs. (The *Garuda Purana*)

'Every particle in the Universe (perceptible or imperceptible) is nothing but a medium through which Lord makes his presence felt' (The *Garuda Purana*). Modern science also talks about Big Bang theory and Higgs Boson which are also called as God

Particle. The Particles mentioned in *Garuda Purana* are similar to the Higgs Boson or not is the question to be studied further. But surely they have many similarities in character.

## **Human Embryology in *Garuda Purana***

It is rather astonishing fact that Embryology is mentioned in *Garuda Purana* in an elaborative manner. The stages of development of embryo is given in the *Purana*.

Vishnu Said: I will tell you how the mortal is born when the male and female elements are bound together by the union of man and woman. In the middle of the menstruation period, in the three days on which Indra incurs the sin of Bramicide, the body of the sinful begins to form. The creature, in obtaining a body, according to karma, the divine eye, enters the womb of a woman, which is the receptable of a man's seed. (Wood and Subrahmanyam 46)

Then Lord Vishnu goes on telling the different stages of development of fetus in womb:

In one night it becomes a lump; by the fifth night round; by the tenth day like the fruit of the jujube tree, and after that an egg of flesh. By the first month the head, by the second the arms and other parts of the body are formed, by the third occurs the formation of nails, hair, bones, skin, linga and other cavities; By the fourth the seven bodily fluids, by the fifth hunger and thirst arise; by the sixth, enveloped by the chorion, it moves to the left of the womb. The bodily substances are formed of the foods and liquids of the mother, and the creature at the time of birth lies in the disgusting hollow of the loins, amid faces and urine. All its limbs bitten constantly by hungry worms, it swoons away repeatedly through excessive pain, as they are very tender. From the beginning of the seventh month, though he gains consciousness, he who is in the womb trembles and moves about because of the parturition winds, like a uterine worm. (Wood and Subrahmanyam 46)

Table 1: Correlation between *Garuda Purana* and Modern Embryology



GARUDA PURANA	MODERN EMBRYOLOGY
1 <sup>st</sup> night it becomes lump	2 cell stage
5 <sup>th</sup> night become round	Blast cyst
10 <sup>th</sup> day jujube fruit	Probably a lot smaller than Jujube fruit
Ist month head is formed	The various processes from which face develops can be identified at the end of 4 <sup>th</sup> week
2 <sup>nd</sup> months arms and other part of body	By the 50 <sup>th</sup> day the elbows and knees are established, and the finger and toes are free
3 <sup>rd</sup> month, formation of nail, hair, bone, skin, genitalia and other body cavities	The first hair to be produced by the fetal hair follicles, an it usually appears around 16 weeks of gestation, primary centers of ossification of long bone is seen around 8 weeks. Prostate begins to develop at the end of 3 month and vagina is canalized by 5 months.
5 <sup>th</sup> month hunger	Does my unborn child feel hunger
7 <sup>th</sup> month, fetus gain consciousness	The brain structures necessary for conscious experience of pain do not develop until 29-30 weeks, while the conscious processing of sounds is only made possible after the 26 <sup>th</sup> week.

Source: (Wood and Subrahmanyam; Inderbir Singh).

Interestingly, there is a correlation which is accurately linked between modern Embryology and *Garuda Purana*. The astonishing link between scientific truth and several years old mythological truth makes the *Purana* more interesting and relevant for today. The need of the hour is to relook at the *Purana* in accordance

with present scenario so that maximum benefit to humanity could be yielded by this *Purana*.

## **Pathology and *Garuda Purana***

The other most important field of modern science that finds its place in *Garuda Purana* is Pathology. Pathology is the science of causes and effects of diseases, especially the branch of medicine that deals with the laboratory examination of samples of body tissue for diagnostic or forensic purposes. Chapter CXLVI of *Garuda Purana* translated by Manmatha Nath Dutta deals with the description of the *Nidanam* (cure) of all the diseases.

Dhanvantari said: - O Sushruta, now I shall deal with the nosology, Pathology, Pathogeny and symptomology of all the diseases as related by the holy *Atreya* to the sages of yore. The five categories in respect of a disease may be described as its *Nidanam* (pathology), preliminary or incubative stage (*Purvarupa*), manifestation of characteristic indications (*Rupa*), amelioration (*Upashaya*), location (*Samprapti*), Diagnosis (*Vijnanam*). (422)

There is a lengthy detail of *Nidanam* of particular diseases in *Garuda Purana*. The text is corresponding to any present day medical literature that deals with the cure of any deadly disease. There is therefore a dire need to study closely the *Purana* in order to serve the modern society. Take an example of the following quote from *Garuda Purana* that deals with determining the location of the disease:

The genesis or appearance of a disease in a particular part of the human body, either through the upward, downward, oblique, or transverse movement of the morbid principles, such as the deranged nerve force (*Vayu*), deceptive metabolism (*Pittam*), or disordered secretory or excretory process (*Kapham*) concerned in the case of determining location of the disease, is called its *Samprapti* (Pathogeny). (Dutta 423)

In *Garuda Purana* the Pathological survey of many diseases has become source of Science of *Ayurveda* that goes hand in hand with Allopathy to cure diseases. It cannot be denied that Allopathy has limitations just like *Ayurveda*. Therefore the need of today is collaborative study of the *Purana* and Modern Medical science because the denial of

anyone's greatness ultimately hampers the growth and development of human being. Thus relevance of Garuda Purana in today's world cannot be ignored.

## **Divine Jurisprudence and Legal Jurisprudence in Garuda Purana**

The Modern world which is busy in finding the solution of social conflict through sciences should once read *Garuda Purana* to get answers related to human problems in modern scenario. *Garuda Purana*, basically, is based on the idea of Divine jurisprudence which is greater philosophy of Natural law coming straight from the mouth of God (Vishnu). This Purana defines Sin and prescribes punishment of many sins related to this world.

Jurisprudence is a study of laws, logic behind them and their administration. Law, according to Austin, is a command of sovereign (quoted in Tripathi ). In Garuda Purana, Law is command of God whose sovereignty is acknowledged by the entire world in different scriptures. Punishment is a part of any Legal command by the sovereign, which is prescribed for the smooth implementation of any statute. Thus Punishment is an important aspect of Jurisprudence. Divine Jurisprudence in Garuda Purana mentions several sins and punishments for them. Whether a particular act is sin or not is decided by Almighty and whether a particular act is an offence or not is decided by the state. Mostly, the area of sin includes the offences prescribed by the state.

In *Garuda Purana*, sins are defined specifically and punishment prescribed for each sin is harsh and has a deterrent effect more than any punishment prescribed for offence in any criminal justice system. The Hell which is mentioned in *Garuda Purana* is the most horrible place and has 21 different sections where punishments are given to the sinner according to his sins (Chaturvedi 26). The modern-day prisons, gas chambers or places of executions are not as dreadful as those mentioned in the *Purana*.

*Garuda Purana* describes that for sins like killing a cow, hitting a woman that cause abortion, the sinner will get drowned in the river.

Those who steal divine property, usurp a woman's property, eat up a child's share keep on coming to Yama's realm day in and day out. That that take the loan but don't repay,



indulge in betrayal, treat people to food mixed with poison, adopt to other's vices, feel jealous against those that are virtuous, move in bad company and avoid the noble one, the calumniators of the sacred texts, the guru, the Brahmanas and the gods; who detest holy places; that take delight at other's distress, that speaks harsh words, that don't pay regard to the learned scholars, that deem themselves to be erudite scholars, without themselves, knowing anything also keep coming to Yama's realm through that southern gate only. (Chaturvedi 26)

The being after his death reaches the Realm of *Yamaraja* after one year's journey. This is the place where he is charged like in Modern-day criminal administration and sent to hell for suffering punishments for his bad deeds. The officers of the court of *Yamaraja* are: *Shravan, Chitragupta, Dharamadhwa*. *Yamaraja* finally gives his verdicts like a judge in modern courts pronounce judgement and send the accused to jail. Likewise Yama gives verdict and says, "go to hell you ruthless sinner" (Chaturvedi 24).

The scene of hell is much dreadful: hanging bodies of sinner tied with branches of a fire-raging tree which has sharp-edged leaves, the messengers who keep on beating the sinners with spears, iron staffs and maces, beastly dogs bite them and being cries but gets no relief.

And there is a huge list of torture suffered by being, a sinner, for his ugly deeds. Modern legal jurisprudence prescribes four kinds of punishments: imprisonment, fine, life imprisonment and death punishment but on the other hand Divine Jurisprudence in *Garuda Purana* prescribes dreadful and horrendous punishments for various kinds of sins. Undoubtedly, the deterrent effect the reading of *Garuda Purana* could have over the mind of human being is miraculous. But it cannot be denied that rational philosophers or even legal luminaries reject *Garuda Purana* as an authentic text. Many Judges of the Supreme Court like former Chief Justice Markandeya Katju even rejects the religious philosophies.

The sins mentioned in *Garuda Purana* are not new; in fact they are same deeds which are described as ethical wrongs in our Indian and many other societies in the world. But the punishments prescribed in *Garuda Purana* actually have symbolic importance. Even

the thinking of such punishments could bring fear in the conscience of a person who recites *Garuda Purana*. Therefore, the recitation of Purana should not only be confined to the days after the death of a person in a house but it should be made an important part of scholarly life of a student, literature lover, religious scholars and in government funded projects. More scientific studies should be conducted on *Garuda Purana* in order to have concrete and thorough understanding of the Purana.

In the end, it can now be scientifically and logically said that *Garuda Purana* is a very relevant text if it is studied scientifically not only in academic domain but also in social domain as a part of modern ethical text. There needs to be continuous efforts from the side of government and society in reestablishing its social relevance in modern world so that peace and prosperity could be established in the world which is turning into a battle-yard by other philosophies which are yielding hatred in the global society. Overall, the stagnant point in the study of Hindu scriptures should be removed in order to increase the world knowledge.

There is, therefore, a wide possibility of research on *Garuda Purana* keeping in mind all the hindrances and shortcomings. The most important thing is the use of modern tools, critical theory in analyzing the text of *Garuda Purana* which was also not the part of this research. There are therefore many unexplored areas of *Purana* like the development of the text, how is it boon for the society? What are its shortcomings? What are the areas which it deals with? There is an ample opportunity for young scholars who want to conduct research in Hindu scriptures.

To sum up, modern society can make use of *Garuda Purana* as a source of law, medical science, cosmological study, study of divine jurisprudence, and other source of knowledge for satiating the need of human intellect and mind. 'Garuda Purana concludes with Garuda, having obtained answers to all his questions, touches Lord Vishnu's feet and expresses his gratefulness to the Lord for having imparted to him the most secret knowledge about a soul's journey after its exit from the body' (Chaturvedi 91). So like Garuda attained knowledge of the world, reader of the Purana could satiate him by

attaining knowledge through Garuda Purana and implement them in his life for attaining salvation.

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