

The *Pretkalpa* of the *Garuda Mahapurana* as a Reflection of Social History: A Sociological Study of Soul Purification

Shukra Raj Adhikari¹✉, Bhawani Shankar Adhikari², Ganga Acharya¹,
Nisha Pradhananga¹

¹ Tribhuvan University, ✉ shukrarajadhikari3@gmail.com

² Nepal Sanskrit University

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Abstract: This article examines the *Pretkalpa* of the *Garuda Mahapurana* as a source for understanding the moral imagination and social values of ancient Sanatani society. It focuses on the concepts of soul purification, karma, rebirth, heaven, hell, and posthumous reward and punishment as reflected in the text. Using a qualitative design and historical content analysis, this study interprets selected passages from the *Garuda Mahapurana* to explore how the text constructs ethical order and explains the consequences of human action. The findings show that the *Pretkalpa* presents the soul as immortal and places human life at the center of moral choice, where virtuous action leads to purification and favorable rebirth, while sinful conduct results in suffering, hell, and lower forms of existence. The text also portrays fear of punishment and hope of reward as important mechanisms for guiding human behavior. This study argues that the *Garuda Mahapurana* can be read not only as a religious scripture but also as a reflection of social history, because it preserves ideas about morality, ritual practice, and social control in the Puranic period. The article contributes to the study of ancient texts by showing how scriptural narratives functioned as ethical guides within historical society.

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji *Pretkalpa* dalam *Garuda Mahapurana* sebagai sumber untuk memahami imajinasi moral dan nilai-nilai sosial masyarakat Sanatani kuno. Kajian ini berfokus pada konsep pemurnian jiwa, karma, kelahiran kembali, surga, neraka, serta ganjaran dan hukuman setelah kematian sebagaimana tercermin dalam teks tersebut. Dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif dan analisis isi historis, penelitian ini menafsirkan bagian-bagian terpilih dari *Garuda Mahapurana* untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana teks tersebut membangun tatanan etis dan menjelaskan konsekuensi dari tindakan manusia. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Pretkalpa* memandang jiwa sebagai sesuatu yang abadi dan menempatkan kehidupan manusia sebagai pusat pilihan moral, di mana tindakan kebajikan mengarah pada pemurnian dan kelahiran kembali yang lebih baik, sedangkan perbuatan dosa berujung pada penderitaan, neraka, dan bentuk keberadaan yang lebih rendah. Teks ini juga menggambarkan rasa takut terhadap hukuman dan harapan akan ganjaran sebagai mekanisme penting dalam membimbing perilaku manusia. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa *Garuda Mahapurana* tidak hanya dapat dibaca sebagai kitab keagamaan, tetapi juga sebagai refleksi sejarah sosial, karena memuat gagasan tentang moralitas, praktik ritual, dan kontrol sosial pada periode Puranik. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kajian teks-teks kuno dengan menunjukkan bagaimana narasi kitab suci berfungsi sebagai pedoman etis dalam masyarakat.



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INTRODUCTION

Rebirth is a kind of socio-cultural belief of human civilization. It refers to having new life after earthly life, or reincarnation. The rebirth has been perceived differently on the belief of different socio-cultural history. Ideologically, the concept of rebirth has been differently perceived and practiced around the world. Easwaran (2007) has mentioned the concept of rebirth as the core value in Hinduism. Like-

wise, Hume (2003) and Flood (1996) have pointed out the concept of the birth, death, and rebirth system in the Hindu socio-cultural structure. In the same way, Klostermaier (2007) and Doniger (2010) have argued that the scriptures of the Hindu civilization have explored the existence of the soul and the process of soul transformation.

Christianity has also discussed the concept of spiritual transformation, or the renewal of the soul by the Holy Spirit, but it has not mentioned the soul being born into a new body, as in Hindu scriptures. *The Holy Bible* (2011) has explained the renewal of the soul, especially in the narration of John in 3:3–7, in the expression of Titus in 3:5,2, and in the narration of Corinthians in 5:17. Moreover, Grenz (2000) has analyzed the transformation of the soul in Christianity. Likewise, McGrath (2011) has highlighted the renewal of the soul from the concept of rebirth in Hinduism, which focuses on the idea that good karma performers in earthly life are reborn in heaven, and evil karma doers are reborn in hell. But Christianity does not claim the rebirth of the soul in heaven and hell based on earthly karma, as Hinduism has claimed. Similarly, Lewis (1952) has also analyzed the transformation of the soul in Christianity by the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, Buddhism has explored the concept of rebirth in a different line from that of Hinduism and Christianity. Buddhism reflects that all beings go through a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth on the basis of karma or actions (Harvey, 2013). However, unlike Hinduism, Buddhism denies a permanent soul or self that transmigrates, and its goal is liberation from rebirth, called *Nirvana*, which is freedom from rebirth. Similarly, Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005) has mentioned the procedures of birth, death, and rebirth based on karma or actions, and the attainment of salvation from the cycle of rebirth in Buddhism. Moreover, Rahula (1974) and Gethin (1998) have argued that salvation from the process of birth, death, and rebirth is attained on the basis of good action, as Hinduism has focused on good karma for rebirth in heaven. They have also highlighted the importance of performing good actions for the sake of salvation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

The concept of rebirth, either in heaven or hell, based on the good and evil karma of earthly life and the purgation of the soul, has been more distinctly interpreted in Hindu scriptures than in Christianity and Buddhism. In this regard, the concept of purification of the soul and the procedure of rebirth of the soul has been believed to be carried out from generation to generation from the primi-

tive era in Hinduism, but for the sake of rebirth, it is required to have the purification of the soul through good *Karma* according to the focus of Hinduism. There are many scriptures that have reflected the socio-cultural values, beliefs, and practices as sources of social history, such as the *Veda*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita*, the *Puranas*, and the *Dharma Sutras*, within the Hindu and Sanatani traditions. Among them, the *Puranas* have been concerned with the soul and soul purification.

The *Puranas* have been established as one of the ancient social structures' produced documents of literature, and the *Puranas* have been guidelines of Sanatani culture, serving as vital scriptures that have provided a factual glimpse into the society and culture of their time. According to Smith (2003), the *Puranas* have been revered as sacred repositories containing stories, legends, and religious information. In this respect, Singh (2007) has suggested that these ancient narratives originate from the synthesis of Vedism, Upanishadic thought, and the influence of Buddhism on Brahminic culture. The Puranic lore, as described by Singh, is a religious tale crafted by Brahminic scholars to elucidate the *Shruti*'s principles through captivating stories. They have functioned as a means of mass education and religious instruction. Singh has emphasized that the *Puranas* endorse the doctrine of *Karma*, emphasizing sin and retribution. Likewise, Berry (1971) introduced the *Puranas* as a distinct form of writing and as new scriptures, asserting their primary position in the post-Vedic literary landscape, particularly in relation to epics like the *Mahabharata*. According to Berry, the *Puranas* were composed over an eight-hundred-year span, from the fourth to the twelfth century. Similarly, Radhakrishnan (2004) has noted that the *Puranas* encompass topics such as the creation of the world, deeds of gods, heroic figures, genealogy of gods and patriarchs, reigns of Manus, history of royal families, festivals, prayers, worshipping methods, and caste's duties. Furthermore, Rengarajan (1999) has defined the *Puranas* as works written in verse, primarily presented as dialogues and observations. The eighteen *Puranas* are complemented by eighteen other sub-*Puranas* or subordinate works of the *Puranas* (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2024). The eighteen *Mahapuranas* and their other eighteen sub-*puranas* have presented their different perspectives incorporating various socio-structural discourses based on the social and the religious grounds, the way the society has been formed, and the society has got its deep-rooted beliefs (Kane, 1992). Though the *Puranas* convey tales and karma from the primitive era, they contain

different content reflecting the socio-cultural beliefs of the ancient period. The *Puranas* have been categorized into the *Mahapuranas* and sub-*Puranas*. The *Garudamahapurana* is a type of *Mahapurana* that emphasizes deep faith in rebirth and the soul in Hindu culture (Kaudinayan, 2005).

The aforementioned literature discussed only the concepts of soul and rebirth, and the *Puranas* as reflections of social history. The issues of the process of soul purification, hell and heaven, the results of *Karma*, and the punishments and rewards of *Karma* remain unanswered. In this context, this research has been focused on identifying the soul purification process for rebirth and hell and heaven as the punishment and reward of the *Karma* of earthly life, based on the historical content of the *Garudapurana* as the source of social history of Hindu and Sanatani traditions.

METHOD

This research has aimed to explore the processes of soul purification, *Karma*-wise rewards and punishments, hell, heaven, and the rebirth of the soul, as reflected in the *Garudapurana*, a source of social history from the ancient period. To achieve the objective, there is no possibility of observing the ancient historical context of the Puranic period. The literature from that time acts as a crucial source of socio-cultural information of that period (Adhikari, 2020b). From a sociological standpoint, literature is seen as a product of its social context and mirrors the socio-cultural environment of its era (Adhikari et al., 2024a; Adhikari et al., 2024b). Various ancient scriptures serve as sources for ancient social history. They have explored various dimensions of human life. The themes of rebirth and soul purification have been explored in the *Garudamahapurana*. So, this scripture has been selected purposefully. Based on the aforementioned concept, the epistemology of this research is intended to be a qualitative research design. The study does not focus on a specific geographical location. It is concerned with hermeneutics. So, the data has been collected through the *Pret Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana* as the source of social history of the ancient period. Thus, the research has been guided through a qualitative research approach. Various methods, including historical content analysis, are applicable within the qualitative research design (Adhikari et al., 2024c; Adhikari et al., 2024d). Qualitative data have been gathered through historical content analysis of the *Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana*. In this context, the content analysis method is more applicable for analyzing qualitative data (Adhikari,

2020a). Thus, a content analysis method is employed to analyze the collected data to gain the objective of this research.

This research assumes that human beliefs and values are historically constructed, as reflected in ancient scriptures. The primitive scriptures reflect the social history of that period. The *Garudamahapurana* is one of the vital scriptures among the ancient scriptures. It explores the relationship between the rebirth of the soul under the ancient Sanatani society. This kind of ontology is related to the multiple realities of the soul purification process. Thus, it has demanded an interpretive approach to epistemology. The interpretive approach is oriented to a qualitative research design. Hence, this research has been guided by a qualitative research design.

This research has been guided by the *Karma* (function) theory of the *Mahabharata*. In Hindu Sanatani philosophy, punishment is based on an individual's actions in their earthly life. According to the *Mahabharata*, "Yena yena sarirena yada yada karma korotiya: tena tena sarirena tat-tat phala mupasnute" (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Mahabharata*, 5449), this means that a person experiences the results of their deeds according to the body they perform them with, whether it is large or small. Those who commit evil deeds face punishment in various forms, such as suffering in hell, being reborn into lower forms of life, or becoming ghosts, all based on the sins committed during their earthly existence.

SOUL PURIFICATION, KARMA-WISE REWARD, PUNISHMENT, AND REBIRTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GARUDAMAHAPURANA

Immortality Of The Soul

The soul of the man never dies with the death of the body. What happens to the soul after the demise of the body is its transformation from one body to the next. The concept of where and how the deceased body transforms the soul has been interpreted in the eleventh and twelfth stanzas of the forty-ninth chapter of *The Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana*. The eleventh stanza has argued that the departed souls of the deceased men enter the insentient objects, wombs, birds, animals, men, deities and the like but when the souls are released from the bodies of the dead persons, they do not enter any object or of the any bodies of men or other animal's bodies at all (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 11). This stanza claims that the souls of the deceased persons enter insentient objects but do not enter visible objects or bodies directly. From the

insentient objects, the life of the various forms is gained in the process of conception. It has been argued that the souls do not die at all, together with the bodies. And the same soul is reborn based on its purification through good karma in the earthly life.

In the same way, it is argued that the human body is obtained after passing thousands of lives, and the human body acquires the knowledge due to virtuous acts by which liberation is achieved. This type of concept is given in stanza twelve in the forty-ninth chapter of *The Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has argued that by passing from four types (- *Anjdaja*, *Swedaja*, *Udhvija*, and *Jarayuja*-) of bodies according to their *Karma* and quitting one body after the other a thousand limes, takes birth in human form and acquires the knowledge due to good deeds, the man obtains release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 12). This stanza clarifies that in eight million and four hundred thousand life cycles of birth, death, and rebirth, four types of bodies are essential to go through. These four kinds of the bodies means twenty-one hundred thousand life cycle in the bodies of *Andaja* (life germinated through eggs), twenty-one hundred thousand life cycle in the bodies of *Swedaja* (life from the sweat as the life lice), twenty-one hundred thousand life cycle in the bodies of *Udhvija* (life emerging through the plants as trees) and twenty-one hundred thousand life cycle in the bodies of *Jarayuja* (life emerging through embryo as mammals' like man) based on their karma. Leaving one body after the other a thousand times, the birth as a human being is obtained only in the last form. The life of a human is the life with knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong, virtues and vices, and such knowledge, as well as the consciousness of the human conscience, helps to release from the recycling process of birth and death. It is the knowledge that enables mankind to become conscious about the good deeds to perform in earthly life for achieving salvation. It has focused on utilizing the knowledge gained through the medium of human life.

The *Garudamahapurana* delineates the life cycle of birth and death, mentioning eighty-four hundred thousand *Yonis* since the inception of the Earth. This comprehensive classification primarily consists of four forms: *Udabhijja*, depicting life sprouting from the soil as plants; *Swayedaja*, illustrating life emerging through sweat, giving rise to creatures like lice; *Andaja*, representing life originating from eggs, observed in birds and serpents; and *Jarāyuja*, signifying life emerging through em-

bryos, observed in both humans and animals (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 163). This kind of eighty-four hundred life cycle has instilled a sense of psychological insight in human beings to do only good deeds and to achieve a better, as well as heavenly, life after life on Earth. Such a life cycle has been described in stanza forty-two in the thirty-first chapter of *The Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has claimed that the Lord Vishnu has already created eight million four hundred thousand varieties of creatures (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 42). This concept of birth, death, and rebirth offers a kind of right path to navigate earthly life, avoid pain and suffering, and escape the punishment system of life after earthly life. It becomes possible only through the purification of the soul through good karma in earthly life.

The life cycle and immortality of the soul are dealt with in the last chapter, forty-nine, of *The Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana*. The Lord Vishnu narrates to the Garuda about the immortality of the soul in the third stanza of the last chapter of *The Preta Kalpa*. The stanza has clearly stated that the creatures are dwelling in many bodies in the process of being born and dying, and this process does not have any end (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 3). This stanza has argued that the principle of birth and death repeats itself, and human beings have multiple births and rebirths based on the karma they have performed in their earthly life. Those who commit sins and crimes on the earthly life suffer the punishment of multiple life cycles of eight million and four hundred thousand one after the other and the last one would be the life of man to do good deeds and to get salvation of havin the rebirth in heaven but after the end of heavenly life, the soul has to be reborn in the form of man again. It has become possible only through the purification of the soul.

Purification Of Soul

It has already been mentioned that the soul is always immortal. It adopts a new form after the death of its previous body. But it has been believed to be difficult to adopt in a new body without a specific refinement procedure for the soul. The soul has refined gradually through various processes. It is known as the purification process of the soul for rebirth. The life of man is advocated as the only form of gaining knowledge and performing good deeds to escape the life cycle of eight million four hundred thousand life cycle. Such a concept has been prescribed in stanza thirteen in *The Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has

claimed that in the eight million and four hundred thousand bodies of the creatures, no one acquires the true knowledge anywhere unless one is born as a man (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 13). This stanza emphasizes that the life of a man is rare, and that it involves knowledge of right and wrong, and the consciousness of conscience, which helps him perform only good deeds to escape any type of punishment after earthly life. In this sense, the life of the man is given by the Almighty for the knowledge of knowing the difference between right and wrong and avoiding the other eight million four hundred thousand life cycles again after the earthly life. This is the procedure of rebirth without the purification of the soul. Suppose the soul is purified through good deeds or *Karma*. In that case, the purified soul does not need to go around the eight million four hundred thousand life cycle of birth, death, and rebirth because the purified soul gets birth either in the form of man, or the soul gets birth in paradise.

The man has to work hard for the salvation when the man gets the life as the man on the earth. The life of a man is rare, and it is an opportunity to perform virtuous deeds to liberate the life cycle from birth and rebirth in various forms of life. This type of idea is given in the fifteenth stanza in the forty-ninth chapter in *The Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana*. The stanza advocates that the man, having obtained the rare human form of life, ought to make a great endeavor for salvation from the birth, death, and rebirth cycle of life. If the man does not endeavor for the *moksha*-salvation-no greater sinner can there be in the world again (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 15). This stanza has pleaded with all human beings to comprehend human life as a path to salvation, with birth, death, and the system of eight million four hundred thousand rebirths. If the man does not endeavor the salvation of all the sins committed before and within the earthly life, then there would be no greater sin found in the life of the man.

The life of man is filled with virtues and vices. No man is free from the sins and virtues, but the difference is a matter of the quantity of sins and the quantity of virtues. The man who performs more virtues in his actions can be born into a less suffering type of life, and the man who has committed more sins deserves to be born into a more painful, suffering life in the rebirth process after the earthly life. This kind of principle has been expressed in the ninth stanza in chapter forty-nine in *The Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has said that the men are controlled by the virtues and the vices in the form of bliss and sorrow. The bodies of

the men have come from different castes, ages, and enjoyment based on their different actions (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 9). This stanza has argued that men do have both virtues and vices, and their lives are controlled by these qualities that they have, and they do gain both bliss and sorrow based on their actions. Likewise, the men get the fruit of their pleasures from their various actions that they have performed in their earthly life.

Rebirth

Rebirth has been assumed as the core belief of Hindu and Sanatani social history and tradition. The soul is assumed to be an immortal thing; it transfers from one body to another but does not die. Obtaining the new life of a human being is regarded as the outcome of virtue. It is said that the life of man is too complicated to gain without good deeds in the entire life cycle of eight million four hundred thousand forms. Such an idea has been given in stanza fourteenth in chapter forty-nine of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has said that after eight million and four hundred thousand life cycles of births, death, and rebirths, a creature obtains human form only sometimes due to the aggregate of virtue (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 14). This stanza has pointed out that human life is obtained only because of the aggregate virtue of the thousands of crores of births. It is impossible to meet the goal of releasing from the life cycle. Moreover, the human body has been defined as the only medium for performing good actions in the seventeenth stanza of the forty-ninth chapter of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza claims that without a human body, it is impossible to attain the supreme goal. So, man should be very conscious of guarding the wealth in the form of the human body and performing good actions (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 17). This stanza identifies the human body as the only supreme medium for achieving the supreme goal of liberation through eight million and four hundred thousand life cycles. It has been emphasized that the human body must be guided on the right path, free from evil deeds in earthly life. The human body needs to be properly and consciously guided toward virtuous actions and released from unnecessary suffering, pangs, pain, agony, and the torturous life cycle of earthly life. It becomes possible only through the process of the purification of the soul via good karma in earthly life.

But those who do evil acts and do wrong deeds in their earthly life directly go to hell and suffer abundantly. Such an idea is explained in the

fifty-second stanza in chapter forty-nine in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has argued that the people who are on the wrong path do not distinguish between good and evil, and these men deserve hell. In other words, those men who are engaged only in filling up their bodies, they deserve the hell (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 52). This stanza clearly points out that the men who follow the wrong paths after having earned human bodies must go through the life cycle of birth, death, and rebirth over and over. Those who only engage for their bodies, they go nowhere but to hell after the physical death of earthly life. The life of a man is the life of knowledge, and the life without knowledge is an animal. Such an idea is given in the stanza fifty-third in chapter forty-nine in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has said that sleep, fear, sex, and food are equal for all creatures. The man who possesses knowledge is a man, and he who is without knowledge is an animal (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, stanza 53). The stanza has narrated that it is only the knowledge that distinguishes between man and the animal. Other things like having a sexual relationship, sleeping, and having fear in the conscience are the common and similar features of the life of man and animals, but it is through knowledge and conscious conscience that man is distinguished. Hence, the knowledge must be properly utilized to lead a life on the right path, and evil deeds must be avoided. Such ideas are based on the principle of the immortality of the soul prescribed in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*.

The *Garudamahapurāṇa*'s *Preta Khanda* is regarded as the act of offering flowers to the dead souls to achieve mental consolation. Dowman (1994) mentions in *The Flight of the Garuda*: But service to sentient beings, generosity, regular offerings of the followers in the temple, frustration, visualization, and mantra are all skillful means to the attainment of *Dzokchen*, and any of them can provide the psychic environment in which initiation, or sudden liberation into one's true condition, is achieved. (Dowman, 1994) Similarly, Subedi (2013) discusses the souls that inhabit bodies by offering "Pinda" for the ten days after the death of the body. The teachings of *The Garudamahapurāṇa* concerning the creation of the body from the souls of the deceased. It elucidates the purpose behind offering the "Pinda" (a rice-pudding ball) to the departed soul, a ritual observed for ten days following the person's demise. Each day's offering contributes to the development of specific bodily components, such as ears and eyes on the second day, throat,

shoulders, hands, and chest on the third day, naval, sexual organs, and anus on the fourth day, and so forth. The process culminates on the tenth day, providing the departed soul with complete satisfaction of hunger and thirst. These rituals are the procedures of purification of the soul for a better form of rebirth.

This data illustrates the dedication and generosity of individuals who serve humanity through regular, devoted flower offerings at the temple, resulting in mental satisfaction. Despite its association with the temple, the process involves experiences of frustration and visualization, emphasizing the pursuit of mental contentment through ritual activities that purify the soul for rebirth in a better form.

Hell as the Tool of Fear Creation

The Garudamahapurāṇa provides a comprehensive depiction of the concept of hell, aiming to instill fear in individuals and discourage them from engaging in wrongful activities during their lifetimes. Chaturvedi (2012) articulates this as the central theme of the text. The whole idea behind this lucid description of details is to raise the fear of committing a wrong and unrighteous act. The recitation of this *Purāṇa* after a person's death in the traditional Hindu household is recommended only for instilling this fear in the hearts of the listeners, so that even if they are on the wrong track, they may still mend their ways. It is the negative way of leading people onto the righteous path (Chaturvedi, 2012). He illustrates how traditional Hindu teachings remind individuals to avoid criminal activities, aiming to deter them from a negative life and guide them towards the right path.

Subedi (2013) further elaborates on the concept of a person's virtuous deeds, which spare them from going to hell after death. This notion centers around the practice of engaging in ritual activities during the final hours of one's life to secure a favorable posthumous existence. An individual with strong moral principles should conduct final ritual donations to a priest in old age. Immediate donations are imperative, and worship of the deity Vishnu is crucial. The chanting of holy mantras and the recitation of divine names, such as "Om Namo Bhagate Bashudebaya," are essential. In a specific example, Ajlmira, during the eleventh hour of his life, called out the name of his son, Narayan, seeking familial connection, only to realize that it was the name of God, leading to his ultimate spiritual salvation.

If one reverently utters the name of God, all accumulated sins can be washed away; according to Hindu philosophy, invoking the name of God at the time of death is highly recommended. Even sinners,

when they sincerely invoke the name of God, Hari, are granted forgiveness and released from their sins. The divine messengers of death are instructed to exclusively take sinners to hell while sparing the righteous individuals on Earth. Those who recite the names of deities such as Achut, Keshav, Ram, Narayan, Krishna, Damodar, Bashudev, Hari, Shreedhara, Madhav, Gopikaballara, Janakinayak, and Ramchandra are exempted from being taken to hell by the messengers of death. It is emphasized that those who fail to remember or invoke the names of Gods, especially Vishnu, will not find liberation from sins. Those who exclusively chant the name of Krishna (God) are assured of not encountering hell or experiencing suffering there. They are spared from encountering the deity of death, "Yamaraj," even in dreams, and are exempt from navigating the treacherous "Vaitarni" River filled with bones, skins, flesh, and boiling blood. Subedi, through this, provides a pathway to escape the torments and agony of hell (Subedi, 2013). He added solely on the concept of invoking God's name for redemption in this worldly life and the prospect of attaining heaven in the afterlife.

The *Garudamahapurana* comprehensively addresses the entire life system and the actions individuals take on Earth. Acharya (2004) explores the rebirth process, detailing how a person's actions on Earth influence their form in the next life after physical death. For instance, those who engage in adultery or theft may be reborn as solitary devils in the forest or in lower castes, respectively. The thoughts a person entertains at the moment of death determine the symbols manifested in their body during rebirth. The text encourages cultivating positive thoughts even in death, advocating for moral deeds and a consistently virtuous stance throughout life. It is also a ritual for purifying the soul.

Acharya (2004) elaborates on the correlation between earthly actions and subsequent forms of rebirth in *The Garudamahapurāna*, explaining the types of births a soul may take after the death of its current body. For instance, a person who consumes a meal without reciting the sacred "*mantra*" is destined for a rebirth as a crow, while someone who pilfers household goods may find themselves reborn as a vulture. Similarly, individuals who steal fruit will be reborn as vultures, and those who steal cows will be reincarnated as oxen. The act of stealing fire is said to result in the next life as "*bagala*," signifying a foolish existence.

The findings conclude that hell was envisioned as a controlling mechanism within the social

system during the Pauranic period. It aimed to regulate the actions of those who were welfare-less and engaged in malevolent activities. The fear of hell has influenced people's karma, leading to a tradition of reciting the essence of the *Garudamahapurana* during death rituals in contemporary society.

Evil Deeds and Way of Vaitarni River

The Sanatani society believes that the soul transfers into the next form of body after the death of earthly life, through rebirth. It has been believed that, on the basis of the *Karma* of human beings' earthly life, the soul goes to hell or heaven. To reach heaven, human beings should cross the *Vitarni* river. If earthly activities became evil, human beings could not cross the *vaitarni* River. There is compulsion in the purification process of the soul to reach heaven after crossing the *Vaitarni* river. Chaturvedi (2012) describes the horrific scene of hell, especially at the time of crossing the *Vaitarni* River.

Mid way he also comes across a river called *Vaitarni* which is extremely frightening even to look at. This river is two *yajan* broad, filled with pus and blood, and its embankments are made with bones. It is very deep, and very few are able to go across. It has thick, deadly algae and abounds with ferocious gladiators. The meat-eating birds, especially, remain all around it. The sinners often fall while crossing it (Acharya, 2004). Acharya depicts the gruesome imagery of the *Vaitarni* River, presenting it as a macabre waterway filled with blood and pus. The riverbanks are formed by a boundary of bones, creating an ominous and terrifying scene. Sinners are unable to traverse this river, and it stands as a symbol of horror and dread, where those who have committed sins are destined to fall and endure suffering. However, an even more chilling depiction of the *Vaitarni* River is provided in the subsequent account by Chaturvedi (2012). He further clarified that butter boils when heated by fire, so this river's fluids boil at the sight of an approaching sinner. The insects with sharp tongues remain ever ready to prey on the approaching sinners. When the being is consigned to this river, he often cries bitterly, remembering his kith and kin. This river has only pus and blood to quench the thirst and decomposed flesh to sate the hunger. Falling into the vortex of the eddies, the being often goes down and comes up. Not even for a moment can he remain at rest. This river has been wrought only for torturing the sinners. It is so huge and wide that nobody can see the other bank. This way, crying and wailing, yelling for succorers, the sinner crosses this river and reaches the *Yamaloka* (hell, the world

of Yama) (Chaturvedi, 2012, p. 19). Unpurified souls get rebirth in hell, and hence purification is essential to escape the painful life in hell.

Chaturvedi's (2012) depiction of the *Vaitarni* river instills greater terror in the minds of the sinners. It conveys the notion that, akin to butter boiling under the heat of fire, the *Vaitarni* River simmers with intensity upon witnessing the approach of a sinner. Within the river, numerous insects armed with sharp tongues are poised to prey upon the sinners. In the throes of suffering, the sinner often reminisces about their relatives, intensifying the anguish. Bitter cries echo from the sinner as they endure considerable pain. The only means for the sinner to alleviate their thirst is by consuming the river's blood and pus. Despite sinking into the depths of the *Vaitarni* River and resurfacing, the sinner finds no respite. This expansive river serves as a purposeful instrument of torment for the sinner, its width obscuring the view of the opposite bank. The sinner, engulfed in cries, lamentations, and pleas for relief, descends into hell amid the physical agony and suffering. When the priests depict the harrowing scene of the *Vaitarni* river and the anguish endured by the sinners in hell, the relatives and family members engage in various rituals to alleviate the suffering of the deceased, even in the afterlife. Those who hear these descriptions are made aware of the severe torments in hell, motivating them to avoid committing sins during their earthly existence. This approach employs the negative tactic of dissuading citizens from engaging in criminal behavior by instilling fear and apprehension about the consequences in the afterlife. The purification procedure of the soul has been performed even by the priest after the earthly life of the deceased person.

Luitel and Ghimire (2013) extensively cover the origins, development, and resolution of diverse human life issues in *The Garudāmahapurana*. They delve into various medical systems and treatment methods for different ailments. The depiction of the frightening fate awaiting souls in the *Vaitarni* River after their physical departure from Earth, attributed to the sins they have committed, is a prominent aspect discussed in the text. It discloses that the *Vaitarni* River spans a vast distance of one hundred "Yojan," or miles. Its foul odor makes it impassable for the sinners who are gripped by fear upon encountering it. The river is composed of pus and blood, with scattered pieces of flesh adding to its gruesome nature. As sinners' approach, a sense of dread encompasses them. Comparable to the intensity of twelve suns, those who have transgressed on

Earth are cast into the *Vaitarni* River, where they weep in remorse. Individuals who harbor hatred for their parents and teachers find perpetual refuge in this dreadful river. This vivid portrayal serves as a powerful deterrent, dissuading those who are aware of the consequences from committing injustices or mistreating others on Earth. Only those ignorant fools, oblivious to the ordeal of crossing the *Vaitarni* River, indulge in hatred and misconduct towards their parents and teachers during their earthly existence, inevitably facing suffering in the hellish waters of the *Vaitarni*. But the purified souls by good karma in the earthly life do not suffer in hell. Luitel and Ghimire (2013) also assert that only those who have committed sins traverse the *Vaitarni* River to reach hell, a distant and agonizing hell, experiencing despair. It posits that individuals who engage in sinful activities during their lifetimes end up in hell. However, Luitel and Ghimire do not emphasize the role of fear in deterring sinners from malevolent actions and steering them towards a righteous path. The primary function of *The Garudāmahapurana* appears to be acting as a moral code, maintaining societal order through the apprehension of posthumous punishment.

The data presents varying perspectives across contexts, discussing how the *Garudāmahapurana* depicts the punishment of sinners in the *Vaitarni* River, characterized by boiling blood and pus, and the ensuing suffering. While all sinners face similar forms of punishment in hell, critics fail to specify the destination and the nature of punishment for five distinct types of sinners: thieves, adulterers, liars, corrupt politicians, and the avaricious. Their general consensus is that the *Garudāmahapurana* aims to raise awareness among people, cautioning against engaging in nefarious activities on Earth to avoid the dire consequences of punishment in the afterlife. However, critics do not delve into which specific types of sinners are admonished to cease their transgressions, how these individuals can avoid sin, and, consequently, how they can lead meaningful lives in the afterlife. Moreover, the critics do not explore the concept of the fear of purification of the soul embedded in the text, which serves as a guiding force for sinners to follow the right path in life, a dimension this research seeks to address. Purification of the soul through good karma in earthly life does not require rebirth in hell but in heaven.

Punishment for the Sinners

Who performs the evil work and activities known as bad karma becomes a sinner. The data of *Garudamahapurana* reflects the punishment sys-

tem for human beings as sinners. Simon (2015) points out that the punishment systems for the five sinners—thieves, adulterers, liars, corrupt politicians, and the avaricious. Similarly, Chaturvedi exclusively discusses the *Garudamahapurana*, asserting that its purpose is to instill fear and guide people onto the right path of life. The primary objective of *The Garudamahapurana*, as argued by Chaturvedi, is to shape human behavior through punishment systems and instill fear, thereby adopting a negative approach to steer people in the correct direction (Chaturvedi, 2012). The *Garudamahapurana* shares a close connection with *The Mahabharata* and *The Manusmriti*. The foundational principles of *The Garudamahapurana* provide insights into Hindu philosophy.

In the second section, known as *Dharmakande* or *Pretakhande*, of *Shree Garudamahapurane Uttar khande*, the nature and essence of the *Garudamahapurana* are elucidated. The narrative unfolds in the *Naimisaranya* region, where *Suta* imparts knowledge to the sages, including *Saunakadi*, who are in a state of repose. As the initial narrator, *Vishnu* engages in a dialogue with *Garuda*, *Binata's* son and *Vishnu's* vehicle. *Garuda*, the mythical bird, traverses three realms—*Yamaloka* (hell), *Bhūloka* (earth), and *Satyalo* (heaven), acquiring insights into the human body's formation through the five elements known as *Panchamahabhut* (*Prithivi*/soil, *jāl*/water, *teja*/light, *bayu*/air, *Aakash*/sky). While exploring Earth, *Garuda* encounters various sinners—thieves, liars, adulterers, the avaricious, politically corrupt individuals, cheaters, betrayers, murderers, the visually impaired, speech-impaired, misers, physically challenged, diseased persons, arrogant and self-esteemed individuals, and those laden with vices. Witnessing the suffering and anguish of these individuals on Earth, *Garuda* is moved. The first chapter of the *Dharmakande* (*Pretakhande*) delves into the salvation and liberation of these afflicted souls. Seeking a solution to the diseases and afflictions observed during his journey, *Garuda* inquires of *Vishnu* (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, pp. 158–159). Originating in *Mithila*, the *Garudamahapurana* is believed to have been composed in the 8th or 9th century A.D., with its themes grounded in the principles of *The Mahabharata* and *The Manusmriti*, particularly the concept of karma. The perpetual cycle of birth and death is expounded in *The Garudamahapurānam*, specifically in the 104th and 105th stanzas of the third chapter in *The Preta Khanda*. The text delineates four distinct types of births, as follows: The *Yonis*, constituting the various processes of life, amount to

eighty-four hundred thousand from the inception of Earth. These are classified into four primary forms: *Udabhijja*, manifesting as plants sprouting from the soil; *Swayedaja*, involving life emerging through sweat as lice; *Andaja*, characterized by life emerging from eggs, akin to birds and serpents; and *Jarāyuja*, denoting life emerging from embryos as humans and animals (Vedavyāsa, 2012, *Garuda*, p. 163). The origin of life is intricately tied to the four *Yonis* or modes of birth, namely *Udabhijja*, *Swayedaja*, *Andaja*, and *Jarāyuja*.

The succession of eighty-four hundred thousand births for an individual persists based on their virtuous or malevolent deeds in their earthly existence. This perpetual cycle of birth and rebirth forms an unending, cyclic order in the continuum of life. The concept of reincarnation in Hindu philosophy is founded on the idea that life can manifest in various forms: *Udabhijja*, where life sprouts from the soil as plants; *Swayedaja*, where life emerges through sweat as lice; *Andaja*, where life arises from eggs like birds and serpents; and *Jarāyuja*, where life takes form through embryos as humans and animals. If the soul is purified through good karma in the earthly life, rebirth occurs either in *Jarayu*, in the human form, or in heaven.

CONCLUSION

The Garudamahapurna, an ancient text that serves as a source of social history, has been reflected in a guide to purifying the soul through various activities in life. It has been emphasized that the importance of performing good deeds, or karma, during one's earthly existence. According to this belief, failure to do so will lead to severe punishment for the soul after the individual's physical death. It has reflected the vital role of the social control mechanism in Pauranic times. It has been emphasized that the importance of performing good deeds, or karma, during one's earthly existence. According to this belief, failure to do so will lead to severe punishment for the soul after the individual's physical death. It has reflected the vital role of the social control mechanism in Pauranic times. The concept also entails the immortal nature of the human soul, which takes on multiple forms of life based on its actions in previous incarnations. The consequences, whether positive or negative, of these deeds shape the soul's experiences in subsequent lives. This belief serves as a moral compass for society, encouraging individuals to engage in virtuous actions and discouraging them from wrongful deeds. During death rituals, the narrative of *The Pretkalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna* is recounted to compel wrong-

doers to transition from evil behavior to virtuous conduct. We can conclude that punishment and reward are like hell and heaven for earthly deeds, aiming to influence individuals to reform their ways through moral reflection and an understanding of the karmic consequences of their actions. It also underscores the idea that human souls are eternal and that their subsequent births, deaths, and rebirths are determined by the accumulated karma from their previous lives. The ramifications for sinners are classified based on their karma, showcasing the intricate relationship between actions and their consequences. Furthermore, it has delved into the various forms of life, heaven as a reward, and hell as the punishment that follows death, shedding light on the roles individuals play during their lives on Earth. In essence, *the Pretkalpa of the Garudamahapurana* serves as a comprehensive exploration of the theory of karma, presenting a detailed account of the intricate interplay between actions, their repercussions, and the eternal nature of the soul. The *Garudamahapurana* has guided *the earthly life* toward the purification of souls and rebirth through Karma and ritual performances. In contrast, Christianity has emphasized the purification of the souls through the confession of guilt and crimes to God. Buddhism has focused on the renewal of the soul through good karma in earthly life and attaining salvation. So, the purification of souls and rebirth have been distinctly found in the Sanatani society through *the Garudamahapurana* than in Christianity and Buddhism, which is analogous to the theoretical interpretation of the Karma theory.

Human beings are increasingly influenced by negative actions and attitudes in contemporary society, particularly due to a focus on profit. Every individual needs to seek moral guidance to develop an ethical character. This research will help guide people to lead lives that are not only right but also moral, ethical, and virtuous. By engaging in positive actions, or "Karma," individuals can strive for their rebirth in heaven after their physical life ends. This research has also provided information to researchers studying ancient texts on the social history of the ancient period and on moral values.

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