

Portrayal of Death Rituals in The Preta Kalpa of *The Garudamahapurana*

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Abstract

The Garudamahapurana, one of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas, encompasses a variety of rituals and mythological stories. Within this, The Preta Kalpa addresses death, the journey of the soul after death, and the rituals intended to ensure a peaceful passage for the departed soul. Investigating the death rituals outlined in this text reveals their integral role in preserving cultural traditions, offering insight into how ancient Hindu society understood death and the afterlife. These rituals are seen as essential for maintaining both social and cosmic harmony. According to Hindu philosophy, the soul - Atman- is eternal, and the rituals in The Preta Kalpa are crucial in facilitating the soul's journey in the cycle of reincarnation or its attainment of liberation moksha. The importance of these rituals lies in their ability to support the soul's transition between realms, reflecting a profound grasp of the metaphysical concepts of life, death, and rebirth. Additionally, death rituals serve a sociological function by organizing community life and reinforcing societal norms. Research has explored how the rituals prescribed in The Preta Kalpa promotes social cohesion by ensuring that the deceased's soul is honored in accordance with their social standing and other roles within society. The research aims to explore *The Garudamahapurana* and analyze the implications of gender dynamics within the socio-cultural framework of Hindu death rituals with the theorists like Judith Butler, Raewyn Connell, Candace West & Don Zimmerman, and Kimberlé Crenshaw. The required stanzas from The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana have derived as the source of primary data and the other referential articles from different journals have been used as the secondary data to analyze and in exploring death rituals described within *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*. As for the exploring gender dynamics, in The Garudamahapurana, gender shapes who does which death rituals. Men—especially the eldest son—are expected to perform the main rites, like lighting the funeral pyre and helping the soul continue its journey. Women

usually take supporting roles, such as preparing offerings or mourning at home, and they are often not allowed to do the central rituals. These practices come from old ideas about duty and purity. Today, however, many families adjust these customs, and women sometimes take a bigger part, showing that gender roles are changing.

Keywords: cultural practices, death ritual, Pindas, puranas, sesame, soul

Introduction

The Preta Kalpa section of *The Garudamahapurana* provides detailed accounts of death rituals, focusing on the rites and practices that are essential for the peaceful transition of the soul after death. This part of the text emphasizes the importance of performing proper funeral rituals to ensure the departed soul reaches its desired afterlife, avoiding suffering as a preta (a restless spirit). Rituals such as offering food, water, and prayers are prescribed to aid the soul's journey and mitigate its potential torment in the intermediate state. The Preta Kalpa underscores the belief in the importance of dharma - righteousness- in death rituals, outlining the specific duties of the family members and priests in guiding the soul's liberation.

Rituals play a crucial role in transmitting religious beliefs and cultural values across generations, ensuring the continuation of socio-cultural practices in Hindu society. In Hindu tradition, death rituals are performed to wish the deceased a blissful afterlife. The Puranas, which reflect ancient Hindu culture, guide these rituals, with various Puranas providing insights into different aspects of life and death. Among them, The Garudamahapurana holds significant importance, particularly in relation to death rituals. The text outlines three Kalpas, with the Pret Kalpa specifically addressing the rituals associated with death. As such, The Garudamahapurana is a key text for understanding the socio-cultural and religious beliefs surrounding death in Hinduism. However, there has been a lack of sociological analysis of both the Puranas and death rituals. This research aims to explore The Garudamahapurana and analyze the implications of gender dynamics within the socio-cultural framework of Hindu death rituals.

The Puranas, which are regarded as a key scripture in Hindu culture, offer valuable insights into the society and culture of the times in which they were composed. According to David Smith, the Puranas serve as sacred collections of stories, legends, and other religious teachings (Smith, 2003). Each Purana generally centers around a specific deity, such as Vishnu, Shiva, or the Goddess, and can be seen as a form of

scripture dedicated to the worship of that particular deity, much like the Bible for its followers.

Singh, in *Philosophy and Religion*, discusses the origin of the Puranas, noting that their roots can be traced to the blending of seemingly contradictory elements from Vedism, Upanishadic thought, and the influence of Buddhism on Brahmanic culture (Singh, 2007). He highlights that Puranic narratives were created by Brahmanic scholars to convey the teachings of the Shruti through engaging stories and explanations. These stories were an effective method for public education and religious instruction. Singh also notes that the Puranas incorporate the doctrine of Karma, emphasizing sin and its consequences.

Thomas Berry introduced the Puranas as a new form of sacred text, placing them at the forefront of scriptures for the new era, following earlier works like the Vedas (Berry, 1971). He observed that the Puranas share significant thematic and spiritual connections with the epics, particularly The Mahabharata. According to Berry, the Puranas were composed over an 800-year period, from the 4th to the 12th century, and they cover a wide range of topics, including the creation and destruction of the world, the actions of gods, the genealogy of royal families, festivals, prayers, worship practices, and caste duties (Berry, 1971).

Rengarajan defined the Puranas as follows: 1. The formation of the universe, 2. The universe' annihilation and renewal, 3. The genealogies of the divines and patriarchs, 4. And the ruling of the Manus, which are marked as periods called Manwantaras, and 5. And the histories of the sun and moon dynasties. All Puranas are composed in verse, typically following a dialogue format interspersed with the observations of other characters. There are eighteen major Puranas, along with eighteen Upa-Puranas, which are supplementary works (Rengarajan, 1999).

The *Garuda Mahapurana* is considered one of the significant Mahapuranas within Hindu tradition, emphasizing core beliefs such as rebirth and the essential aspects of Hindu culture. It primarily offers guidance on death rituals and outlines the journey of the soul after death, aiming for rebirth in a heavenly realm. This Purana is recited during the *Garuda Kalpa* and centers on the divine bird Garuda, the son of Vinata. As noted by Rengarajan (1999), the *Garuda Purana* derives its name from this connection. Furthermore, the *Brihad Nepali Shabdakosh* defines it as the Mahapurana that contains

detailed descriptions of hell and the prescribed rites associated with death(Pokharel & Pokharel, Balkrishna, 2040).

Mentioned literature is limited to only introduction and type of *Purana* and *Garudamahapurana*. The scholars have analyzed and interpreted through the perspectives of theology rather than socio-cultural lens. So, this research has focused on socio-cultural analysis of the rituals of The Preta Kalpa in The *Garudamahapurana*.

Statement of Problems

The researchers of *The Garudamahapurana* have explored from the theological perspectives but it still lacks the socio-cultural aspects of the research regarding the death rituals. It is; therefore, the following research questions have focused on revealing the socio-cultural aspects of the death rituals and the gender dynamics that have been found in the practical aspects of the society.

- A). What are various death rituals prescribed within *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*?
- B). How do they function in gender dynamics in shaping the social order and ritual culture in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*?

The Research Objectives

The research objectives are aimed:

- A). To explore the various forms of the death rituals prescribed within *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*.
- B). To trace out the function gender dynamics in shaping the social order and ritual culture within *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*.

Research Methodology

To meet the objectives of this research, historical data has been gathered through content analysis, with primary emphasis on *The Preta Kalpa* section of *The Garudamahapurana*. This primary source is further supported by secondary materials from scholarly journal articles. The study employs a library-based methodology for historical data collection—a technique highlighted by Hamzah (2019) as particularly effective for qualitative research and for gaining insight into theoretical frameworks. Kurniawan et al. (2023) similarly used this method to explore historical contexts. In line with these approaches, the present research applies the same strategy to investigate

historical interpretations of social hierarchies and gender disparities as presented in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*.

Additionally, thematic excerpts from primary data of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana* have been compiled, focusing on parts that are pertinent to the research objectives. These literary excerpts serve as crucial qualitative data. Furthermore, primary data was also gathered through in-depth, one-on-one discussions with a carefully selected group of experts. These experts, chosen for their expertise, include historians, literary scholars, professors, and researchers with special knowledge in social history, particularly regarding the 9th-century emphasis on the son's dominant role. These discussions aimed to explore the socio-structural factors related to gender inequality within the identified themes.

In line with Abidin and Laskar's (2020) perspective, this study underscores that analyzing historical texts requires not only a detailed reading of the content but also an interpretation of its deeper meanings. It is also essential to align the analysis of the texts with their historical and contextual contexts for a more comprehensive understanding of their significance. In this light, *The Garudamahapurana* serves as an important resource for examining the social structures that upheld the son's dominance of the primitive societies. It has applied thematic interpretation, drawing through primary data and supporting through secondary data, in undertaking a profound investigation.

In addition, this research is not limited to any particular geographic area. Instead, it draws primarily from *The Preta Kalpa* section of *The Garudamahapurana* as its main source. To support and enrich the analysis, secondary sources are also utilized, including academic publications, library materials, texts on gender studies, and other relevant literature such as various Puranic texts. The research approach remains primarily library-based. The Puranas, such as *The Garudamahapurana*, reflect an ancient social structure where men held dominance and women were marginalized, offering insights into society circa 900 B.C. Given the infeasibility of directly observing these historical structures, the study assumes that all social systems have their origins in history. Data was gathered through content analysis of *The Preta Kalpa* and secondary sources, following the methods described as Hamzah (2019) and Kurniawan et al. (2023), which are effective for qualitative research and revealing theoretical foundations.

This study applies a qualitative method to explore the portrayal of gender roles within *TheGarudamahapurana*. The approach is grounded in the analysis of both primary and secondary sources, focusing on interpretations of death rituals as depicted in the original text and supported by scholarly articles and research discussions. This methodology aligns with the qualitative research strategies employed by Adhikari (2024a, 2024b) and Guragain et al. (2024). Similarly, Guragain and Adhikari (2024) have utilized a comparable research framework in their own in-depth analysis of textual data, reflecting the approach adopted in this study.

Apart from it, the gender dynamics have analyzed as the theorists like Judith Butler argues that gender is not a fixed identity but a repeated performance shaped by social norms. Gender dynamics therefore emerge through ongoing acts that reinforce or contest societal expectations (Butler, 1990).Raewyn Connell's theory of *hegemonic masculinity* explains how power structures privilege certain forms of masculinity over others. This hierarchy shapes gender relations by sustaining dominance and marginalization (Connell, 1995).West and Zimmerman propose that gender is an ongoing social accomplishment enacted in everyday interactions. Gender dynamics occur as people "do" gender in ways that align with or challenge social accountability expectations (West & Zimmerman, 1987).Kimberlé Crenshaw highlights that gender cannot be analyzed in isolation from race, class, and other social categories. Gender dynamics thus reflect overlapping systems of power that produce unique experiences of inequality (Crenshaw, 1989).

Significance of the Research

The Garudamahapurana, one of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas, contains various rituals and mythologies, and within this, the *Preta Kalpa* is concerned with death, the soul's journey after death, and rituals meant to ensure the peaceful passage of the departed soul. Exploring the death rituals described in this text has illustrated how these rituals are integral to maintaining cultural practices, offering a glimpse into how ancient Hindu society has viewed death and the afterlife. The rituals are a means to maintain social and cosmic order.In Hindu philosophy, the soul -Atma- is eternal, and the rituals in the *Preta Kalpa* play a crucial role in ensuring that the departed soul continues its journey in the cycle of rebirth or attains liberation -moksha. The significance of these rituals lies in their power to aid in the soul's transition from one realm to another, which highlights a deep understanding of the metaphysical concepts of life, death, and rebirth.Death rituals also serve a sociological function in structuring community life and reinforcing societal norms. Researchhas examined how the prescribed rituals in *Preta Kalpa* create

a form of social cohesion, ensuring the deceased's soul is honored according to social status, and other societal roles.

Results and Discussion

Concept Regarding Dead-Body

The concept of the dead body has got its rule of avoiding eating and drinking anything by the entire villagers as soon as someone is found to be dead in the village. If someone eats anything and drinks even water or any liquid, then it has been regarded as evil to those who eat or drink before taking the dead body to the burning ghat for the cremation. This kind of rule has been mentioned in 44th stanza of chapter 35 in page 811 of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. If a dead body lies in the center of the village and someone knowingly consumes food, that act is considered equivalent to eating the flesh of the deceased, and drinking water is seen as drinking their blood. Therefore, no one should eat or drink until the body has been taken away (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 44). It has been the rule of *The Garudamahapurana* prescribed to follow by all about the concept of the dead body and the tasks to be performed to remove the dead body to the cremation before eating food or drinking water (Pattanaik, 2022). If it is done so, then it has been regarded as the inhuman act of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the deceased person.

Act in the Dying Stage

When a person reaches in the dying stage by the age and in the eleventh hours of life, the ritual acts are to be performed for his or her release from the sins of the earthly life. Such acts have been mentioned in 8th stanza in chapter two of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. When a person is nearing death, they are laid on a surface that has been purified with cow dung and strewn with Darbha grass. This ritual act is believed to free the dying individual from sins, which no longer remain attached to them (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 8). Darbha grass is thought to aid in the soul's journey to heaven, and placing it beneath the person is said to ensure their passage to the afterlife. Once the body has been removed, the Darbha grass used during the process must also be discarded (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 9). It has been said that the Darbha grass has to be taken out of the place as soon as the dead body is removed from the place.

The ground has to be besmeared in making the earth pure and if it is not besmeared to the ground, then it is regarded as the impure one. If the ground has not been smeared, it is considered impure. Even if it has already been smeared once, it should be purified again through reapplication to ensure proper sanctity (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 10). It has

claimed that the earth becomes impure unless and until it has smeared by the cow-dung and besmearing the corpse by the Darbha grass and such rituals have to be performed for the releasing of the sins and the evil condition even after the earthly life.

The only one reason of smearing the dead body by the cow-dung is just to keep the evil spirits away from entering the corpse. When a dead body is placed on ground that has not been purified, it is believed that evil spirits may enter the corpse (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 11). It has claimed that the corpse has to be protected from the attack of the evil spirits.

Sesame as a Destroyer of Evil Spirits

The dead body should be covered by the sesame so that the corpse cannot be destroyed by the evil spirits. This kind of ritual tasks has been explained in 16th, 17th, and 18th stanzas in chapter two of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. Sesame is considered holy, as it is believed to have originated from the sweat of Lord Vishnu, and it is thought to possess the power to ward off malevolent spirits (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 16). The sesame has been taken as the sacred producing from the body of the lord Vishnu and it can protect the dead body from the negative influence of the spirits.

Furthermore, sesame has got of any kinds of the color and it can even burn any kinds of the sins committed by the dead person in his or her earthly life. Sesame seeds may appear white, black, or yellowish like cow's urine, and they are believed to have the power to cleanse all the sins of the departed soul (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 17). Offering the sesame to the dead body is the sacred act of performing the death ritual for the betterment of the soul of the dead person.

Moreover, offering the single sesame to the dead person's soul is just like offer a great gift. Even a single sesame seed offered with the intention of providing water for the departed, or any act of charity or sacrifice performed for their benefit, is believed to yield results as abundant as those from a *Drona-kalasha* in merit (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 18). The value of the sesame has been highlighted in the death rituals in the process of protecting the corpse from the unnecessary attack of the evils.

Sesame, Darbha Grass and Tulasi as the Ways of Reaching to Vishnu Loka-Paradise

The death ritual has claimed that sesame, Darbha grass and Tulasi are three means in taking the souls of the dead person in Vishnu Loka-paradise where the lord Vishnu dwells-because these objects perform the role of protecting the souls of the dead

persons against their misfortunes. Sesame and Darbha grass are sacred and so is Tulasi (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 25). This concept has been described in *The Preta Kalpa* in chapter two and more details of these objects have been clarified in 26th and 27th stanzas. Darbha grass is believed to protect the deceased from misfortune. According to Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 26, it is instructed that the grass should be placed in the hands of the dying person and later removed after death. The body should then be laid on the ground, which must be sprinkled with water for purification. As death nears, placing Darbha grass in the hands of the person is considered essential. It is said that even those not initiated into Vedic knowledge can attain Vishnu Loka if their body is laid upon Darbha grass (Vyasa Garuda, stanza 27). The death rituals of using the Darbha grass, sesame and Tulasi for the corpse has been focused highly for the protection of the corpse from the evil spirits and it has the belief that no evil spirits can come and stop the souls of the dead souls from going to the Vishnu Loka- if these acts are performed by the performers of the death rituals.

Dying Person's Position

The process of positioning the dying person's body has been directed in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The feet of the person nearing death are placed firmly on the ground with the toes pointed upward. In this vast ocean of worldly existence, which holds little lasting value, sins are atoned for through the sacrifice symbolized by the body as holy fire. Before this, the ground is purified by smearing it with cow dung, and a mattress of Darbha grass is laid out for the dying individual (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 29). It has clarified that the earth must be purified by smearing by the cow-dung and spreading the mattress of the Darbha grass for the dying person and when the person is dead, his or her feet should be kept on the ground and his or her toes must be kept raising upward. It is the death ritual and the person who performs the death rituals must follow the process guided by the rules prescribed within *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*.

Salt's Use in Death Ritual

Salt is considered a powerful agent for cleansing the sins committed by a person during their lifetime. The use of salt in death rituals is detailed in the second chapter of *The Preta Kalpa* from the *Garuda Mahapurana*. Salt is believed to be highly effective in purifying sins. It is recommended to offer salt to the ancestors, as it pleases them and helps guide their souls to heaven. For the living, salt is said to fulfill their wishes (Vyasa, Garuda, stanzas 30 and 31). Salt has been used as the means of destroying the sins committed by the deceased person while performing the death ritual by the performer. It

has the belief that the dead person turns out to be sins-less for going to the heaven and hence the salt is used in the death ritual.

It has further focused on using the salt to depart the soul of the dead person from the dead body. It is believed that at the moment of death, the soul remains attached to the body. Regardless of whether the dying individual is a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya, or Sudra, male or female, offering salt on their behalf helps the soul to depart from the physical body and immediately enter the gates of heaven, which open for them (Vyasa, Garuda, stanzas 33 and 34). These stanzas have clarified that the souls of the deceased persons do not leave the dead bodies and the souls linger on the dead bodies and it has become essential to use the salt to release such souls from the corpse and when the salt is applied in releasing the souls of the deceased bodies, then the souls immediately gain the opportunities of entering the paradise through the doors of the celestial zones. These rules of the death rituals can form the social structure and order on the basis of the social status while it has been followed and performed properly by the performers of the rituals of the deceased relatives mainly the sons, brothers, grandsons and the great-grandsons. These rituals are the cultural practices and they form a kind of social harmony and following such cultural practices lead the society accordingly.

Rules for Death Ritual Performers

The death ritual performers have to remain away from the activities of pleasures and they need to act as the rituals have guided them during the period of their performance for thirteen days as it has been described in fifth chapter withing *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*. The ritual performers have to wear dirty clothes, move with downward faces and avoid all pleasures. They should avoid washing the body, hair, and similar cleansing practices. Meals should be taken only in earthenware or containers made from dried leaves. On the day of cremation, or for an extended period during the time of impurity, they are advised to observe fasting (Vyasa, Garuda, stanzas 6 and 7). The death ritual performers have to dedicate for the dead persons' souls' liberation from their sins that they have committed in their earthly life and the performers need to mourn for them according the rules prescribed by the rules of the death ritual. The death rituals have functioned a kind of the rules and orders to be followed from generation to generation. It has maintained the social order and the beliefs of the death rituals prevent people to go against the prescribed rules and values of the society. It has kept the society in a kind of disciplined form to be confined to all. In the Garuda Mahapurana, gender plays an important role in death rituals and responsibilities.

Traditionally, men—especially the eldest son—are expected to perform the main rites, such as lighting the funeral pyre and carrying out the rituals that help the soul move on. Women usually take on supporting roles, like preparing offerings or mourning within the household, but they are often not allowed to perform the core rituals themselves. These customs reflect older social ideas about duty, purity, and family roles. Today, many families adapt these practices, and women sometimes participate more fully, showing how gender dynamics continue to change over time.

Offering Ten Pindas -Rice-Pudding's Balls-for the Deceased Persons' Souls

The death ritual has guided the performers to offer ten Pindas -one each day- for ten days for the deceased soul. The Pinda must be offered in peace of mind after the bath as prescribed in the fifth chapter within *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*. The *Preta-Pinda*—an offering to the departed soul—should be presented outdoors, placing the leftover grass toward the northeast, after taking a bath with a composed and peaceful mind (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 17). This act must continue for ten days and the performers can become pure only after offering the ten Pindas- for ten days. After offering the tenth *Pinda*, a person is considered purified once the ninth night has passed. This person may be either *assagotra* (an indirect relation) or *sagotra* (a direct relation) of the deceased man or woman (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 19). Offering Pinda to the deceased person's soul to gain various parts of the next new body and the Pinda must be offered with the flowers and incense bearing objects and it need to be offered in silence. The *Pinda-Praseka* ritual must be performed quietly, accompanied by flowers, incense, and similar offerings. On the tenth day, a bath should be taken outside the village boundaries (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 27). These tasks are to be followed as the social culture and customs as guided by *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*.

Formation of Body through Offered Pindas

Three Pindas have to be offered on the day of the death and ten Pindas in other ten days of ritual as it is prescribed in chapter fifteen in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna*. Three *Pindas* must be offered: the first at the moment of death, the second midway between the place of death and the cremation site, and the third beside the funeral pyre (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 40). These three Pindas are given as the serial order of Brahma, Vishnu and the messenger of Yama and these Pindas are given by the sons of the deceased person.

The Pindas offered for ten days are divided into four parts as it has been prescribed in chapter fifteen in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. For ten consecutive days, the son or descendant performs the *Pinda* offering, dividing it into four portions

each day(Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 65). These four parts divisions of the Pindas are for four different purposes as prescribed furthermore in clarification of its purpose. Two portions of the *Pinda* contribute to forming the deceased's new body, the third is offered to Yama's messengers, and the fourth is consumed by the performer of the rite(Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 66). Thus, the Pindas have been divided for different purposes in the death ritual. The detail formation of the bodies through the ten Pindas have been summed up in chapter fifteen in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. After cremation, the departing soul begins to form a new body. The *Pinda* offered on the first day gives rise to the head; on the second day, the neck and shoulders take shape; the third day's offering forms the heart; the fourth develops the back. The *Pindas* of the sixth and seventh days create the waist and reproductive organs; the eighth day forms the thighs; the ninth shapes the palate and feet; and by the tenth day, the sensation of hunger is born(Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 69, 70 and 71). These stanzas have provided the detail functions of the Pindas offered to the dead person's soul for the process of transformation into the life of another being.

Releasing the Bull

After the ten Pindas of the ten days in the death ritual, the bull should be released for soul of the deceased person as this has been described in the fifth chapter within *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*. As stated in Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 40, the soul of the deceased cannot attain liberation and remains in a ghostly form if a bull is not released on the eleventh day as an offering, regardless of how many *Shraddha* rituals—even up to a hundred—are performed. This verse underscores the critical role of dedicating a bull in the name of the departed to free the soul from eternal unrest. Without fulfilling this ritual, even the offering of ten *Pindas* may become spiritually ineffective. In situations where a real bull is not available for the ritual, the text advises creating a symbolic bull using Darbha grass. Should Darbha grass also be unavailable, a substitute bull should be fashioned from mud. This alternative practice is detailed in Chapter Five of *The Preta Kalpa* within *The Garudamahapurana*.

Releasing the bull is regarded as the most significant rite among all death rituals. According to Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 42, this act is to be performed for the benefit of the deceased by close family members—such as the son, wife, grandson, father, or daughter. Furthermore, Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 44 explicitly states that if a real bull cannot be offered on the eleventh day, a bull made from Darbha grass must be used. If even that is not possible, a bull formed from mud and grass should be released on the same day, ensuring that the essential ritual is fulfilled (Vyasa, Garuda, stanza 46). If this

ritual is not performed for the dead soul, then the soul of a deceased person remains trapped in a ghostly existence indefinitely, even if a hundred *Shraddha* ceremonies are performed. This verse emphasizes the importance of releasing a bull in the name of the departed to ensure their spiritual liberation. The offering of ten *Pindas* may become ineffective if the ritual of releasing the bull is neglected. If an actual bull cannot be provided, then a substitute made of Darbha grass should be used. If that too is not possible, a bull crafted from mud must be created, as instructed in Chapter Five of *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*. No ritual surpasses the significance of this act, which is to be carried out by the son, wife, grandson, father, or daughter of the deceased (Vyasa, *Garuda*, stanza 42). Furthermore, if a real bull is unavailable on the eleventh day, a bull made from Darbha grass should be offered (Vyasa, *Garuda*, stanza 44). In the absence of that as well, a bull formed from mud and grass must be released on the same day (Vyasa, *Garuda*, stanza 46). These stanzas have focused on that leaving the bull for the deceased person is a must and all other death rituals can go in vain if the bull is not released for the deceased person on the eleventh day of the death ritual.

Conclusion

It has been found that the death rituals prescribed within *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana* have guided the socio-cultural structure in the society from the ancient period to the present era. It has been identified as the social and the cultural norms to be engaged for the departed souls of the late forefathers, parents and the relatives respectively with the due reverence and tribute. The death rituals have somehow managed the melancholic mindsets of the bereaved family members to forget the pain and mental agony with the acts of performing the death rituals as guided by *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana* and such concepts have empowered death ritual performers to be psychologically strong enough while being engaged in the tasks and even the performers feel that they have done something good for the departed souls of their family members. This tradition and culture of the society have maintained the cultural beliefs and systems to be performed in maintaining the social order. In the *Garudamahapurana*, gender plays an important role in death rituals and responsibilities. Traditionally, men—especially the eldest son—are expected to perform the main rites, such as lighting the funeral pyre and carrying out the rituals that help the soul move on. Women usually take on supporting roles, like preparing offerings or mourning within the household, but they are often not allowed to perform the core rituals themselves. These customs reflect older social ideas about duty, purity, and family roles. Today, many families adapt these practices, and women sometimes participate more fully,

showing how gender dynamics continue to change over time. It is not only the traditional roles of performing death rituals only by the eldest son of the family but even the daughters have initiated to perform the death rituals with the change of time. Most of the families do not have sons and they have only the daughters and in such cases the daughters have been performing the death rituals of their deceased parents. The roles of the sons and the daughters have become equal in performing the death rituals and it is the outcome of the gender dynamics that have been accepted by the society with the change of time. Hence, the theory of gender dynamics has become analogue with the research.

Implication

Various rituals described in the *Preta Kalpa* are designed to maintain cosmic harmony. These practices are believed to influence not only the fate of the deceased but also the living, creating a balance between the spiritual and material worlds. By focusing on the ethical dimensions of these rituals, a research paper can investigate how death rituals are seen as a moral and spiritual responsibility, ensuring the welfare of both the departed and the community.

For further Research

The Garudamahapurana also emphasizes the roles of deities and ancestors in post-death rituals and the importance of these relationships in fostering family continuity and spiritual wellbeing.

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