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Nidhi Rajkumar

Justice Equals Dharma: A Comparative Study of Justice in the *Inferno* and the *Garuda Purana*

What do Ved Vyasa from the Vedic Indian civilization, dated 2500B.C, and Dante Alighieri of fourteenth century Italy have in common? On the face of it they seem to have nothing in common at all and this would be true except for one towering commonality: the *Garuda Purana* and the *Divine Comedy* are texts that deal with the afterlife, hell and most importantly the concepts of sin, justice and divine retribution.

The primary aim of this comparison goes beyond mere academic curiosity and interest; it is to demonstrate in actuality the similarity with which both Dante and Ved Vyasa conceived of and expressed the function, role and importance of justice for man and society. These literary works are similar in that they both address in detail the consequences of actions—good and bad that man must face in the afterlife. To both authors heaven and hell were the same in essence and concept.

A factual background that will give a social, political, theological context for these texts is very useful to an analysis of how societies viewed socio-political concepts like those of Justice and retribution. Therefore, as I outline the factual similarities of the texts and their implications, I deliberately choose to acknowledge the differences because they will greatly lend to providing a factual background, which in turn contributes to the context of the texts and ensures as much objectivity as possible in the analysis. The aspects that differed were in the physical "structure" of the narrative, in the details of the actual characters in the narrative and certain procedural, ritualistic details, which collectively illustrate the separation of the texts in time, place and contexts from each other. Insignificant as these differences are, I think that if these differences are given too much attention, they have the potential to distract from the larger concept of justice and retribution. At the same time, in my opinion, a comparison of the similarities keeping an eye on the differences, holistically demonstrates how remarkable this conceptual mirroring is between these two texts, given how far apart in space and time they were from each other. The idea of earthly sin and resultant divine justice and retribution that becomes the basis for both these works sheds an illuminating light on the influences under which these works were created. It is with the final aim to represent the functions of justice in society that both these authors go into allegorical depictions of each punishment in every gory detail guided by social, political and cultural influences of their respective times.

I begin the process of creating a background with facts on the texts. Introducing Dante's *Inferno* here would be redundant because of the abundance of material already available. It is the *Garuda Purana* that is relatively lesser known and hence needs an introduction.

The corpus of Vedic literature is extremely vast and its significance in the life of a vast majority of the Indian population and societies is so immense that it remains ingrained deep within the Indian psyche even today. Vedic texts comprise of grand bodies of texts¹ like the Vedas and their *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and their *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *Smritis*, the epics and so on. All of these texts were guides upon which society was to be based and was to function; the only thing that differentiated these texts amongst themselves was the specific functions they fulfilled. Even today many of the beliefs and rituals are observed fastidiously across almost all demographics of the Indian population, despite the erosion, and in many cases even the absolute loss of their meanings, significance and functions.

The *Puranas* have been referred to in many ancient texts such as the *Brahmanas*, and even the *Mahabharata*, which has led scholars to believe that the *Puranas* predate almost all Vedic texts. This implies, in other words, that within the Indian cultural context the *Puranas* predate recorded history itself. The *Mahabharata* refers to the *Puranas* as being stories of the gods, while the *Upanishads* refer to them as a historical account, at par with the four main Vedas² This connection with the Vedas runs deep enough that, while at places it has been given the honorary title of being a fifth Veda, in others they are referred to as commentaries on the Vedas. The Puranic encyclopedia has quoted Rangacharya, a great Sanskrit scholar, as defining the *Puranas* as per the literal translation of the word “Purana,” which means “old, yet new.” He says that it is “things which are as good as new though existing from olden times” (*Puranic Encyclopedia* 617).

Vyasa³ wrote (and was part of) the *Mahabharata*, and is also accredited with composing the *Puranas*. This indicates the time period of the *Puranas* and creates a link that physically connects the *Puranas* to the Vedas and to the great epic itself. I am tempted to say that the grandeur of the collective body of texts raises the individual meanings these texts for Indian society and culture at large.

The *Puranas* are divided into three main bodies, one for each of the main gods of the Hindu trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva—and consisted of six *Mahapuranas* each that totaled over four hundred thousand verses. The *Garuda Purana* is from the *Vishnu Purana* and is primarily in the form of the Lord Vishnu answering questions that Garuda has on various subjects like astronomy, medicine, grammar, etc. The first six chapters of the second half of the *Garuda Purana* and the *Divine Comedy*'s *Inferno* are the sub-sections of these texts that deal with hell as a place where the souls of the dead face divine justice for sins committed in life.

Both of these works are allegorical, so any reading of either one needs a reading at various levels of meaning. There is the first level that is at face value, which is the literary and textual aspects of these texts like the narrative techniques of the texts, the details of the “story-line” per se, the physical and geographical organization of hell as a physical place and reality etc. Running parallel, like an undercurrent, concealed yet powerful, are the allegorical aspects of these texts. Hidden within the horrors of hell the authors attempt, in their own ways, to convey to man the idea of sin, divine justice and retribution in their respective cultural and social settings. Vyasa reports hell to his living

¹ The word grand is used here to describe the physical size and cultural impact of these texts. It is meant to indicate a measure of magnitude and impact.

² The four main Vedas are the *Rig (Rig) Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur (Yajus) Veda* and *Atharva Veda*.

³ Also called “Ved Vyasa” because he is the one who is supposed to have reorganized the Vedas into its four parts or volumes.

audience indirectly, and manages to stay aloof and untouched by sin, and or retribution. Dante on the other hand, experiences hell, but he too witnesses it under the guidance of divine protection so he may learn from the sins of those being divinely punished. I will elaborate on this further on, but for now it is important to note that since these horrors and their meanings are inextricably intertwined in these texts, any comparative study would mean understanding these aspects simultaneously.

Structurally Dante's *Divine Comedy* is made up of three parts: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. *Inferno* is in turn made up of thirty-four cantos and tells of the journey of a living, breathing Dante who is in a "death-like" state of sleep (in a dream or vision) going through hell and purgatory as he seeks his final destination, which is the sight of God in paradise. The *Garuda Purana Sarrodhara* (or the essence of the *Garuda Purana*) by Ernest Wood and S.V. Subrahmanyam has divided the second half of the *Garuda Purana* into sixteen chapters. The first chapter begins with the misery and ailments that the sinful mortals must undergo before their souls move out of their physical bodies and onto the after-life journey that in turn will lead to a purification of their souls. Like the *Divine Comedy*, this text also deals with the souls of the virtuous who find heaven and paradise eventually, but the initial section of the account of the afterlife deals almost exclusively with the souls of those who have sinned and how they shall pay for their sins in life. Of the sixteen chapters of this section of the *Garuda Purana*, chapters one through six are devoted to this journey through hell including the ailments and low-births that the sinful must go through as a part of their punishments; chapters seven to thirteen deal with the proper ceremonial procedure for the kin of the departed with an idea to aid the soul of the dying on this onward journey of the soul; chapter fourteen is an account of Yama, the King of Justice (and popularly recognized as the King of the Dead); chapter fifteen is the manner in which the good souls shall be reborn; and the last chapter is devoted to how a soul can strive for and attain salvation.

This brings to light two very striking similarities in Vyasa and Dante's idea of when punishment actually begins. As far as the "when" of justice is concerned, for both Vyasa and Dante the sinner begins his punishment even before actual death. The only difference lies in the fact that for Dante, only some sinners lose their souls before death and their mortal bodies continue to walk amongst the living while being inhabited by demons. In the case of the *Garuda Purana*, Vyasa begins by talking about how *all* sinners shall leave the mortal self in painful and demeaning ways. Punishment for sins does not just begin before death, but sequences of events that befall an individual are a result of the sins committed in either this life or the previous one. Also they both make a point of establishing (albeit in their own ways) that sin is inevitable. Vyasa goes into the two main categories of sin—the intentional mortal sin (*Kama kritamahapataka*) for which the only penance is death and the minor sins that may be nullified through appropriate penance. Dante acknowledges at the onset of the *Divine Comedy* that his life has not been free of guilt: "Midway in our life's journey, I went astray/ from the straight road [...] to find myself /alone in a dark wood" (*Divine Comedy* 16.1-3). Scholarship points to the allegorical significance of Dante's having the vision at the hour of day break: "*the first light of sunrise*" and at Easter time, "*a time of resurrection*" points to the "regenerative peak when the lost soul realizes it has gone astray, for that realization is the beginning of the soul's rebirth" (*Divine Comedy* 16, x). This seems to point to the idea of inevitable sin and to a desire to repent and return to virtue—the idea of rehabilitation that invites less severe punishment. It is intentional sin from which the sinner never does or can return that condemns the soul to the unimaginable horrors of a hellish afterlife. In both Vyasa and Dante, their journeys into hell commence from the moment of death. While Vyasa talks of the deplorable conditions of the dying body of the sinner, Dante

finding himself at the “dark wood” in the third line of the first Canto depicts the moment in ways that mirrors death very closely, both in language and spirit. He writes, “I find myself /alone in a dark wood [...] / Its very memory gives a shape to fear/ Death could scare be more bitter than that place!” (*Divine Comedy* 16.1-6). For both Vyasa and Dante sin is inevitable; however, they both believe that what is within the control of man is free will, realization (in time and during life) and true repentance, which to both authors is the highest form of penance.

As far as the narrative techniques are concerned, Dante and Vyasa have both adopted different styles to achieve a similar end. Both styles are ones that are, for the readers and believers, hard to ignore. Dante uses the easily relatable “first person” it-happened-to-me technique of a fellow former sinner and sufferer, while Vyasa uses the all powerful, undeniable “word of God” way. The idea was the same in both: to make the reader sit up and pay attention. Dante’s narrative is a first person account of his journey through hell, and it moves along with him giving his account of what he sees, the spirits he meets, speaks to and interacts with and his perceptions, emotions and sensations during this journey. In other words, this is a very personal account of Dante’s experience and is presented from a rather intimate point of view. This personal touch is further highlighted by the fact that in each circle of hell and in almost each of the thirty-four cantos of *Inferno*, Dante mentions people he has known either personally by name, or who are well known personalities of his times. He is bold enough to name them, and seems to realize his fantasy of seeing them punished for sins he believes or knows them to be guilty of during their lives. The impersonal element in *Inferno* is Dante’s ability to divorce personal admiration from the severity of the punishment being inflicted on even those he seemed to have thought highly of. There are moments when he sheds tears on the plight of some of the spirits whom when on earth were known to him and held by Dante in high esteem. In the introduction to the *Divine Comedy*, Archibald T. MacAllister, referring to this personal aspect of Dante’s narrative and the *Divine Comedy*’s allegorical aspect, writes it is a “special type of allegory wherein every element must first correspond to a literal reality, every episode must exist coherently in itself” (6). He goes on to write that while it is a “description of the ‘state of the soul after death’ [...] it is peopled with Dante’s contemporaries and [...] is torn by the issues and feuds of the day, political, religious and personal” (6). He concludes this thought by saying that while this work handles the issues of “good and evil, man’s responsibility, free will and predestination,” all is handled in a way that “is intensely personal and political, for it is written out of the anguish of a man who saw his life blighted by the injustices and corruptions of his times” (6). Allan Gilbert believes that the allegory of *Inferno* lies in:

representing evil men as they actually live on earth. [Through symbolism] [...] he permits us to see the reality of evil in the lives of ourselves and other men as we go about our business and pleasure. Hence every punishment is an allegory of the evil and the unrepentant life the sufferer actually lived; as no sinner manifests any desire to escape from hell, so men in this world live in satisfaction with their unrighteous lives. This [...] teaches that divine justice operates among living men by making each evil life its own punishment, lived without hope in genuine, though perhaps concealed, misery. (*Dante’s Conceptions of Justice* 74)

Vyasa on the other hand is entirely impersonal as there are no explicit mentions of any names, places or events that Vyasa might have had any personal knowledge of or connection to. The specific characters that do appear in the narrative like Chitrugupta and Yama for example are not personal acquaintances of Vyasa’s. They are well known

mythological figures that like Minos and Satan fulfill their duties in their official capacities as authoritative functionaries of hell. The content within the *Garuda Purana* reveals that it is as much a critique of its times as *Inferno* was designed to be, but the absence of any specific references by Vyasa have kept the discourse at a more philosophical, moral, theological and general plane. It seems to be a record of the Hindu idea of hell with negligible (if any), personal references that might have influenced the work in any capacity.

This difference in narrative technique has resulted in a difference in their organizations. While Dante has maintained a straightforward narrative that has the reader move along in a simple and linear fashion as a witness to Dante's experiences, the *Garuda Purana* has a far more complex structure and often resorts to verses that have imbedded within them tabular structures, something akin to an information table in a modern day catalogue. As far as the narrative structure is concerned, the *Garuda Purana* is primarily in the form of a discourse by Lord Vishnu and Garuda. Garuda seeks his Lord's knowledge on various subjects like astronomy, medicine and the after life, yet the structure of the narrative is a rather complex one. It begins with the description of a ceremonial sacrifice that was conducted in Naimsa⁴, conducted by sage Suanaka and which lasted twelve years. From the sacrificial fire rose Suta, the son of Vyasa (conceived and born through divine means) who in turn tells of Vainateya's (the son of Garuda) conversation with Vishnu, who in turn recounts his conversation with Garuda, which forms the body of the *Garuda Purana*. The primary purpose would appear to be the establishment of this account of the afterlife in the cultural and social structure of Indian mythology in as firm a manner as possible. This ties in with the overall purpose of texts such as these, which was to establish and maintain a strong foundation upon which society would be forced to conduct itself in an orderly and civil manner. In Gilbert's words "these sinners were not merely vile in themselves, but guilty of dragging down all human nature by sinning against the public order, in which alone human virtue can reach its perfection" (86).

This idea of personal versus the impersonal is further highlighted by the identity of the main "characters" of these two texts. In *Inferno* Dante employs a whole host of characters that range from ancient Greek and Roman mythology, well known contemporaries of his time right up to people that were personally known to him. Since the whole of the *Divine Comedy* is allegorical, each character is literal and is also symbolic of something they were directly associated with in life (actual or mythical). Farinata and Cavalcante, for example are spirits whom Dante meets just within the walls of Dis. They are both not just themselves but are symbolic of the followers of the Epicurean belief. Marguerite Chiarenza argues that these figures have "little to do with heresy in the narrow sense." She further explains that the "souls in the group they approach are referred to as followers of Epicurius, a Greek philosopher [who] [...] strongly opposed all belief in the afterlife." They are therefore "eternally condemned to the tomb, where they believed life would end" (*Tracing God's Art*, 39). Brunetto Latini is a teacher much admired by Dante on a personal level for his intellect and wisdom, yet he suffers the tortures of burning rain on the burning sands individually and symbolically for all those guilty of "violence against nature," which as Chiarenza believes is a vice that is "probably, although not explicitly, homosexuality" (41). There are several other crimes—Guido is symbolic of insincerity; Ulysses of deceit; Piergo delle Vigne of suicide—described by Dante as being "just, unjust to myself" (13.72) and so on. Gilbert cites the examples of Mahomet, Ali and Fra Dolcin as representatives of those who by rupturing

⁴ Naimsa is modern day Sitapur, a district in the state Uttar Pradesh in modern day India.

the structure of the church caused several to commit vices that they would otherwise have never done. Pier da Medicina, Curio and Mosca have done the same by disrupting the structure of the state, while Bertram dal Bornio is representative of those who created vice by disrupting the fabric of the family unit. The ultimate allegory is Satan because he is the culmination of the “depth of corruption” (*Tracing God’s Art* 53), having been an angel once, he now symbolizes the ultimate loss, having lost the most himself. Of the mythical characters there are Charon, the ferryman of the dead souls in classical mythology; Minos the son of Europa and Zeus from classical mythology who is the “dreaded and semi-bestial judge of the damned who assigns to each soul its eternal torment” (*Inferno* 46); Geryon, the mythical king of Spain who robbed and murdered strangers he lured into his kingdom and is the “prototype of fraud, although in radically altered bodily form” (*Inferno* 138); the centaurs; Medusa; and the list goes on. The classification seems clear. Dante used all of the mythical creatures in their capacities of dispensers of divine justice in hell while he used the people to symbolize real evils of the world of the living. Their outcome is a validation and exercise of the ultimate good, that is God’s divine justice. Even though guilty, each of these figures is in hell as a consequence of a sin in life. They are inflictors of suffering rather than sufferers themselves seemingly because not being real makes their punishments unreal as well. Their torment lies in their job of inflicting pain and dwelling in the putrid atmosphere of hell for all time.

The characters of the *Garuda Purana* are without exception all characters from Indian mythology alone. They are divided into two categories. The first are the generic characters like the messengers of Yama, the Shravanas, the shravanis etc. The messengers of Yama, for example, are assigned the specific task of leading the dead to Yama and to the site of punishment. The second type is specific names, but as in *Inferno* they are mythical and are present in their official capacities. For instance, Chitragupta is assigned the task of keeping an account of all thoughts and actions of every individual. He achieves this with the help of a huge group of Shravanas and Shravanis⁵. It is Chitragupta who leads the one to be judged to Yama who in turn pronounces the sentence based on the crimes. Vyasa is careful to specify that even though Yama is feared and revered as the dreaded Lord of the dead and of justice, he is fearful only to the sinful. To the virtuous he appears as an old friend and death is as a consequence not something to be feared, but welcomed as a reunion of long lost friends. Ved Vyasa also makes it clear that Yama, though the dispenser of divine justice, can only pronounce judgment and can in no way alter the punishment of his own wish for any person or crime. The punishment is solely determined by the sins of the person who stands in judgment. It is from here that the spirit departs to where the sentence shall be executed. Here the punishment will cleanse the soul and give it another chance at spiritual immortality. This crucial difference between the reformatory nature of the Hindu hell and the purely punitive nature of Dante’s hell seems to find roots in the difference in Christian and Hindu belief of a cyclical versus linear existence of the soul. Another noteworthy difference is that while in Dante’s *Inferno* hell is an inversion of heaven as Satan is an inversion of God, in the *Garuda Purana* hell exists independent of heaven and while the Gods rule heaven, there is no central overlord of hell. Hell as conceptualized by Vyasa is only opposed to heaven in that it is a place of punishment, not reward and is a place of pain, torture and misery as heaven is that of bliss and happiness. Moksha or salvation is eternal bliss, while hell is temporary and a means to win Moksha at some point in time. So while the mirrors of heaven and hell in Christian faith demands the presence of a king of hell (as

⁵Shravanas and Shravanis are divine beings that are said to wander amongst the living, spying and recording each thought and action.

God is the king of heaven), Vyasa's eighty-four hundred thousand hells do not need any symbolic ruler as an antithesis to a final and single Supreme Being.

As structures within the texts go in the *Garuda Purana*, Yama's abode has a definite structure. His kingdom has four gates, one in each quadrant through which the dead enter his city. This city, however, is very unlike Dis and is a place that is prosperous and filled with happy people, even though it also has within it an area where all diseases reside, each in its own allotted mansion. It is decorated and carries about it an air of constant celebration. The virtuous enter via the north, east and west gates, while the sinners enter via the southern gate.

Another striking similarity is Dante and Vyasa's belief in the existence of a hell as a physical place that is "south" of where society/man is. The only aspect that differs is in the understanding of what "the south" means to them. In Dante's *Inferno*, on one hand, it is a place that is physically located in the center of the Earth or the geographical south of the Earth's surface at a point where Jerusalem is located. On the other hand, Vyasa's hell is located in the cartographical south of the Earth, which is the South Pole. In both these hells the everyday business of carrying out sentences are done in very similar ways in that justice is rather poetic. The spirit is tortured in a same manner in which it committed its sins and in many cases the one inflicting the sin is the one who was sinned against. The difference in these hells amongst others is their difference in organization and structure. These differences are however results of a different narrative style and different structural, cultural and theological beliefs. As far as the durations and purposes of the tortures go, Dante's hell is a place of eternal damnation where the unrepentant shall suffer endlessly. Vyasa's hell on the other hand is reformatory and educative. In *Inferno* Virgil does mention that there exists a sliver of hope that as some have been rescued from hell in the past; a few more will receive divine pardon at the hands of Christ on the Day of Judgment, even though this hope is hidden from the sinners themselves. In Dante's *Inferno* we are told that hell is a place where the sinners suffer for crimes committed in life and the period shall be indefinite. The logic behind this finality of punishment lies in the ideas that influenced Dante's conception of justice. Allan Gilbert explains this eternal punishment in *Dante's Conception of Justice* by associating the permanence of torture with the finality of evil within the soul.

In Vyasa's conception of hell, the soul, once cleansed through the punishments that are its fair share and in keeping with its crimes, comes back reincarnated with another chance at making good in life and attaining the final prize—salvation. The introduction to the *Garuda Purana* states that while the punishments in hell are forgotten, what does remain is the effect of the punishment on the conscience. The *Garuda Purana* says that the "natural" or inexplicable fears in the presence of temptation and of sin, is the born of the finer development of the conscience, and which is the consequence of the punishment it underwent in the torture chambers of hell. This "reward" of these tortures are the lessons learnt by the soul, lessons it will never forget in the ages to come. That is the "permanent gain" of "passing through the bitterness of the valley of Yama—the merciful ruler of Hell."

The other significant difference is in the organization of the respective hells and is very closely related to the narrative style of the two literary works. As Dante moves from the dark woods and down into hell, what is revealed is that hell is arranged in a very definite pattern based on the simple logic of an inverted hierarchy. It begins with minor sinners like the opportunists and the virtuous pagans who live in the vestibule of hell and the first circle of hell respectively. As Dante and Virgil move further down into their descent of hell, the greater physical depths mirror the greater depths to which the sinners had themselves fallen to in life and hence are subject to more severe tortures. Hell for

Dante is based on Christian beliefs, which structures it in a pattern that is the mirror image of heaven. In the Christian idea of hell everything is the same as heaven, only just the opposite. Just as heaven is the highest point in the stars, almost like being at the top of an upright pyramid of light, hell is like a conical pyramid that is standing on its head, with Satan at the very “top” (inverted “top” becomes the lowest depth) of this inverted pyramid of darkness. There are a series of concentric circles that exist one level below the pervious one and each is the site of a specific punishment for a specific sin, which finally culminate in the frozen wastes of Cocytus. Gilbert presents the logic of Dante’s hell on the relationship between justice and the human will and power of reason. He writes that this relationship to Dante’s belief in the connection between justice, human will and reason is obvious. He explains:

The incontinent sinner, hurried away by passion, is not so fully determined to do evil as is the man who sins under the influence of reason. Hence, as is explained, with a reference to Aristotle, in the *Inferno* 11, the incontinent sinners occupy the higher and less dismal circles of hell, while those who sin with dispassionate volition are assigned to lower circles.

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Just as God rules the heavens, the center of hell is the prison-throne for Satan who himself is a parody of what God is believed to be. He is a three-headed (a play on the concept of the trinity), gigantic, furry beast, with leathery bat wings that beat continuously and furiously as the Devil tries in vain to free himself from his eternal icy kingdom, that is also his prison. He is as much the greatest sinner, suffering the greatest punishment, as he is the greatest dispenser of God’s divine justice. He tortures the greatest sinners against God (Judas) and Country (Brutus and Cassius) by chewing endlessly on their writhing bodies. Hell in the *Garuda Purana* is structured very differently. The lack of a specific personal story, combined with the fact that Vyasa has tried to cover as much general ground as possible has resulted in a hell that is so vast in scope and detailed in description that a neat structure like that of Dante’s *Inferno* is virtually impossible to achieve. While *Inferno* has nine circles of hell and seventeen sub circles that total twenty-six levels in all, the *Garuda Purana* has eighty four hundred thousand hells with twenty-eight main (most fearsome) hells. Again connected to the absence of a specific story line is the fact that in the *Garuda Purana* the journey per se is rather different. In the *Garuda Purana* all souls on leaving the physical body must first journey to the kingdom of Yama. The journey from the place of death to Yama’s Hall of Judgment is to the sinner a precursor of all the punishments to come, a trial and sample set as it were. As he moves through this preliminary journey he is subjected all kinds of tortures and degradations, which are neither the actual sentence nor the main hell for that particular sin or sinner. The spirit reaches its site of punishment, or specific torture chamber, only once Yama has passed sentence on the sinner based on his crimes after this initial journey. Once their sentence is pronounced, they are sent to the appropriate hell for a specific duration. The journey to Yama is undertaken by the soul clothed in a body (Jatana Deha) that, though a replica of the physical self in life, is made of subtler matter and is subjected to all kinds of tortures like blazed by the heat of twelve suns (II, 4.2), pierced by cold winds (II, 5.2), made to walk on razors (II, 9.2), attacked by creatures – fearsome like lions, tigers, dogs (II, 6.2) and loathsome, like leeches, and are thrown in molten copper, mounds of embers (II, 11.2). The list goes on and both the narratives attempts to outdo themselves with every new punishment described. Yet, despite the relatively insignificant structural differences between these two depictions of hell, the common logic between Dante and Vyasa are strikingly similar. They seem to say that since it is the compulsions of the physical self that drives man to sin, and it is the

physical body through which these undeserved fruits are procured and enjoyed, it shall be the same physical form that shall suffer the consequences. It is interesting to note here that like Dante, Vyasa also envisions this experience in the form of a linear journey. On this journey to Yama, the spirit passes through sixteen cities, the difference being the nature and function of these cities. Yet, for all their differences each works at furthering the torment it causes the sinner, either by infliction or exclusion. The idea of exclusion is illustrated by two cities of these sixteen, the beautiful city of Saumya and the peaceful city of Krurapura. By excluding the sinner they serve as a reminder to the sinner what his sins in life have cost him. As far as the geography of most of these cities and the circles of hell are concerned, Ved Vyasa and Dante both employ the imagery of nature to very similar ends. The worst of nature is the topographical landscape of hell in *Inferno* and the *Garuda Purana* alike. They both have dark forests of trees with razor sharp leaves that cut and offer no shade, that are inhabited by the most fearsome and vicious creatures that hunger for human flesh. Both *Inferno* and the *Garuda Purana* have terrible rivers that flow through them. The rivers of *Inferno*, the Acheron, Styx and the river of boiling blood of the seventh circle of hell are all found in the terrible *Vaitarani*, of the *Garuda Purana*. While all the dead shall equally encounter this river, Vyasa specifies that it is only to the sinners that she shall be terrible—full of boiling blood, urine, excreta and puss.

This similarity in the use of nature as one of the primary devices of torture finds reflection in the nature of punishments that are meted out. There are similar sins and punishments in both texts; the only difference is that the sins and their punishments have been matched differently. Here are some examples of punishments from the *Garuda Purana* that have identical counterparts in *Inferno*, which will be followed by examples of how similar sins are punished differently in both works:

- The *Kalasukram*, listed as fifth in the list of the twenty-eight main hells, is a place where the tortured have to continuously run on burning hot sands under a fierce sun. The sin committed is disrespect to elders and teachers. This is similar to the hell of *Inferno*'s Circle seven: Round three, Canto XIV, where the ones guilty of violence against God, art and nature are punished on the plains of burning sands under a slow rain of fire.
- The *Vaitarani* River, the fourteenth of the twenty-eight main hells, is where kings guilty of violating the shastras (holy texts) are immersed in this river of boiling blood. This is similar to the hell of *Inferno*'s Circle seven, Canto VII, where those who were violent against their neighbors are dealt with in the similar manner. It is a coincidence though that the people Dante mentions here are kings as well.
- *Puyodakam* is similar to the previous punishment; the only difference is the crime is that the brahmins who committed the sin of intercourse with lower caste women were to suffer a similar fate. They were to be immersed in a well full of a similarly repugnant concoction.

The punishments go on and these include everything from being eaten alive by leeches, insects and animals, to flogging, dismemberment, being attacked by reptiles and specifically snakes of all kinds. The list of similar sins reads in a similar way:

- The Sin of Theft: In *Inferno* the guilty are punished in Circle Eight Bolgia Seven, Canto XXIV. They are bound by monstrous reptiles and upon being bitten by other flying reptiles burst into flames, turn to ash and painfully reform again. In the *Garuda Purana* the thieves (of property, wives or children) are all beaten senseless. Once they revive the beatings start again.
- The Sin of Adultery: In *Inferno* those who have sinned carnally are swept

forever in a tempest in Circle Two. Here we see the example of Paolo and Francesca who are guilty of lust for each other even though Francesca was married to Paolo's brother. In the *Garuda Purana* the sin of adultery is differentiated into specific acts. While adulterous and incestuous crimes mean having to embrace red-hot figures while being flogged from behind, those inclined to unnatural sexual practices are made to embrace statues of diamond needles, or are immersed in and made to drink human refuse.

- The Sin of Bearing False Witness/Counterfeiters: In *Inferno* they are in Circle Eight: Bolgia Ten (Canto XXX), and called the "Falsifiers of Words." They are afflicted by disease and unbearable thirst. In the *Garuda Purana* the impersonators and those who bear false witness are punished in *Avizi*. Here the guilty are repeatedly hurled down from high mountains. As their bodies are smashed after each fall, they painfully reform only to go through the whole process over again.

Again, these parallels go on. What does stand out in all of the accounts of the sins and their punishment is that they are all allegorical depictions of the understanding of the authors' conception of justice. Allan Gilbert, while pointing to the allegorical nature of the punishments, writes that since "each punishment is an allegory, Dante is obliged to adapt each one to the sin involved"(75). He continues that it is towards this effort of making "his punishments suitably allegorical, Dante naturally makes them such as to exemplify the principles of justice he had learned from his masters"(76). These "masters" that Gilbert refers to, he believes, would have been several but of them all the main influences on Dante's ideas of justice would have been "the fifth book of Ethics of Aristotle" and "the works of St. Thomas" (3). Gilbert argues that in these works justice bears a close link to aspects such as charity, acceptance of one's "fair share of evil" (8), following of law (both Divine and man-made) etc. Justice is not so much related to the action per se, but is determined by the end of the action. Gilbert writes, "[Dante's] penalties start with the counter passion, but he does not stop with the external aspect of an offence; he enquires into its effects on society, and devises the penalty with the ultimate importance of the sin in view" (76). Gilbert quotes St. Thomas from the *Summa Theologica*:

There is a particular justice not only concerning external things, but also because of the pleasure that follows from gain, for the sake of which a man may sometimes get more from others than he ought to. (15)

Therefore greed is immoral because it means man's exceeding his allotted measure of things and, since justice defines that measure, to exceed it is being unjust. The sin of gluttony is an example and this holds true for both Dante and Ved Vyasa. Gluttony in Dante's time was conventionally described in terms of asocial and anti-social behavior such as neglecting the poor. The punishment that Dante envisions for them is that as they threw fragments of their ample feasts to the dogs, so shall the demonic dog Cerberus be the instrument of their eternal torment. In the *Garuda Purana* the sin for similar antisocial behavior is found in the hell of *Srameyasnam*, where the sinner shall be endlessly devoured by a pack of seven hundred demonic dogs.

The "key" that unlocks the meaning behind the images is in understanding and accepting the *justice of the punishments*. What Gilbert writes of Dante is equally true for Vyasa as well, that these visions are "morally and intellectually acceptable [...] and [...] depend on the truth and fitness of the treatment accorded to men by the divine government" (67). In both these works the central themes are divine justice, and both aim to "convince (the reader) of the folly of a wicked life and assures him of the wisdom of righteousness. Not by a single biting personal stroke [...] but by a presentation of all

human life through a great variety of examples” (Gilbert 68). It is to gain this experience that Dante literally goes to hell and back, while Vyasa attempts to compile as detailed an account of the afterlife as possible. Gilbert points to certain functions that *Inferno* aims to fulfill and what he says of *Inferno* again applies equally to the *Garuda Purana*. Both of these works have certain common functions that they aim to fulfill. One, they must subscribe to and faithfully follow a definite concept of justice that appeals to the common intellect. Two, the idea of divine justice is not just for or applies only to the dead, but is equally (if not more) applicable to the living, since it is in life that man will have a chance to exercise free will and more crucially it is the actions of the living that affect the structure and stability of society on every level as a whole. Finally, the third function demonstrates not just the appropriateness of the punishment at a superficial level but must also exemplify this concept of justice as a vindication of the overriding patterns of sin and divine justice. While it is impossible to say where a study such as this might lead, I firmly believe that the scope of this analysis, in terms of its function per se is as wide-ranging as it is far reaching. Beginning at academic curiosity, it can initiate inquiries that range from historical examinations that compare societies, to raise and answer questions on humanity across time and space as social, political, psychological beings. I believe that encoded in the images of the *Gauruda Purana* and the *Inferno* are the blueprints to a basic understanding of man across time and space, across cultures and languages. These blueprints, it seems to me, have the potential to navigate the labyrinth of the basic, primeval, unchangeable mind of man, complete with his fears, his hopes and his motivations.

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