



Problem Solving In Puranic Way: Insights From The Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is deeply rooted in a rich and diverse tradition that encompasses various fields of study, including Philosophy, Science, Mathematics, and Arts. The Puranas, a group of ancient texts in Indian literature, are often considered as repositories of cultural, spiritual, and scientific knowledge. While their primary focus is on mythological stories and historical narratives, the Puranas contain profound wisdom that can be applied to modern-day problem-solving, particularly in the realms of ethics, governance, interpersonal relationships and in mathematics. This paper aims to explore the significance of the Puranas within the broader context of the Indian Knowledge System and illustrate their relevance to contemporary problem-solving especially mathematical modelling through case studies and examples.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System, puranas, Corporate Leadership, Conflict management

1. Introduction

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is one of the oldest and most comprehensive intellectual traditions in the world. It includes a wide range of concepts, methods, and fields that are spread throughout several fields such as Spiritual Wisdom, Social Governance, Medicine, Mathematics, and Astronomy. Among the many texts that make up IKS, the Puranas hold a unique place. The Puranas, which are ancient religious and historical texts, are not only of mythological importance but also contain wisdom that can be applied in addressing practical problems of everyday life. Even though they were not explicitly mathematical discourses like the Sulba Sutras [1] or works by Aryabhata or Bhaskara II, their contribution lies more in indirectly promoting mathematical thinking, embedding numerical knowledge, cosmology, and metaphysics in mythological and narrative frameworks.

The Puranas, traditionally considered as a group of 18 texts [2], offer stories, teachings, and solutions to complex societal, ethical, and personal issues. Although they are often dismissed as mythological or purely religious, their deeper meanings provide valuable insights into human behavior, decision-making, and governance. This paper investigates how Puranas can be seen as a significant source of knowledge and problem-solving in the contemporary world.

2. The Puranas: Structure and Content

The Puranas are a diverse collection of texts that blend mythology, philosophy, history, and ethics [2]. These texts were composed over many centuries, with their earliest portions dating back to around 300 BCE to 1000 CE. Despite their diversity, they share common themes and structures, often centered on the exploits of Gods, sages, and kings. Of the 18 puranas, some of them provide guidance related to various topics related to modern life other than culture, devotion, rituals etc., include Vishnu Purana, Bhagavata Purana, Matsya Purana, Padma Purana, Brahmanda Purana, and Agni Purana [3][4][5]

The Vishnu Purana is a significant Hindu scripture that focuses on the God Vishnu and his roles in creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe. It's one of the eighteen Mahapuranas and contains a wealth of information about cosmology, genealogies, and the stories of various deities and heroes. It Contains detailed descriptions of cosmic time cycles commonly referred to as yugas with large number computations, ratios, and geometrical models of the universe. The Vishnu Purana strengthens problem-solving by training the mind to think ethically, remain resilient, understand the big picture, and cultivate devotion and humility which are essential tools not just for spiritual growth, but also for practical decision-making in life [6][7].

Bhagavata Purana celebrates Lord Krishna and presents teachings on devotion, ethics, and spiritual wisdom. Krishna's advice to Arjuna in Mahabharata emphasizes the importance of duty and righteousness even in the face of overwhelming challenges. In modern contexts, the teachings of Krishna can be applied in decision-making when individuals or leaders face moral conflicts, such as choosing between profit and ethics, or personal desire and societal welfare. Just like Vishnu Purana, it also elaborates cosmic structures including nested time cycles, scales of distances, and calendrical mathematics.

Matsya Purana includes the story of the great flood and the preservation of knowledge. It also gives measurements for temple architecture, city planning (layout), and altars — involving geometry, proportions, and arithmetic.[8]

The Padma Purana offers a detailed description of the geographical divisions of ancient India and the world, including the seven continents (dvīpas) and oceans (samudras), structured in a cosmological framework. It outlines sacred rivers, mountains, and pilgrimage sites, emphasizing their spiritual and physical significance. This geographical cosmology served both religious and educational purposes, helping encode spatial knowledge in a symbolic form [9].

The Brahmanda Purana explores the concept of the universe (brahmāṇḍa or cosmic egg) and contains references to solar and stellar radiations affecting life and cosmic order. Though not scientific in modern terms, it metaphorically describes the Sun as the source of energy and life-sustaining rays, hinting at an early understanding of cosmic influence. These ideas laid a philosophical foundation for later explorations of space, energy, and cosmological forces [10].

The Agni Purana includes extensive sections on raja dharma (duties of kings), statecraft, law, and administration, drawing parallels with the Arthashastra. It outlines judicial processes, duties of ministers, war strategies, and ethical governance, aiming to create a just and stable polity. This integration of law and politics within a religious text highlights the holistic nature of governance in the Indian Knowledge System [11].

The Puranas contain extensive narratives about the creation of the universe, the deeds of gods, demons, and sages, as well as moral stories that offer lessons on leadership, dharma (righteousness), and personal conduct. These moral and philosophical lessons often provide solutions to problems in governance, ethics, and interpersonal relations, making them highly relevant for problem-solving.

3. Puranas and Problem Solving

The Puranas may not be textbooks in the modern sense, but they offer profound insights into human behavior and problem-solving strategies. These texts present multifaceted challenges faced by individuals and societies, and their narratives often provide solutions through the actions and decisions of their protagonists. The following sections highlight how the teachings from the Puranas can be applied to real-life problem-solving [12][13].

3.1 Problem Solving through Ethical Decision Making

One of the central themes in the Puranas is the concept of dharma which refers to righteousness or moral duty. The Puranas often depict dilemmas in which characters must make difficult decisions that balance personal interests with societal welfare. These dilemmas reflect real-world ethical issues, providing lessons on how to make decisions that align with moral values and contribute to the well-being of society [14].

Vishnu purana has a philosophical, and ethical sense rather than as a direct manual for everyday challenges

3.2 Conflict Resolution and Governance

The Puranas also provide numerous examples of governance and conflict resolution. In many stories, the role of a king or ruler is portrayed as one of responsibility and wise decision-making, often requiring the ability to manage conflict, make strategic alliances, and navigate complex societal issues [15].

In the Vishnu Purana, for instance, the rule of the righteous king Prithu is depicted. His ability to lead with wisdom, justice, and fairness is central to maintaining peace and prosperity in his kingdom. Prithu's role as a leader is not just that of a ruler but of a mediator and problem solver who resolves issues for his people, showing how leaders can effectively govern by adhering to principles of justice and compassion. This concept of rajadharma (the dharma of a ruler) from the Puranas can be applied to contemporary governance and leadership practices, where the ruler or leader must seek solutions that balance the needs of the state with the welfare of the citizens.

3.3 The Role of Wisdom and Knowledge

The Puranas frequently highlight the importance of knowledge, learning, and wisdom in solving problems. Characters like the sage Narada and the god Brahma embody the pursuit of knowledge, showing how wisdom can offer solutions to seemingly insurmountable challenges.

A key example can be found in the 'Markandeya Purana', which features the story of the goddess Durga and her victory over the demon Mahishasura. This mythological story symbolizes the triumph of good over evil and the importance of knowledge in overcoming ignorance. The solution to the problem lies not in brute force, but in the wisdom of the divine feminine energy, which brings insight, clarity, and perseverance. This can be interpreted as a lesson in modern problem-solving: often, the best solutions to difficult problems arise not from conflict but from insight and wisdom [16].

4. Case Study: Application of Purana Wisdom in Contemporary Contexts

This section illustrates how the teachings of the Puranas can be applied to real-world problems

4.1 Corporate Leadership and Ethics

A CEO in the modern corporate world may be faced with decisions regarding business practices that conflict with ethical values. Drawing inspiration from the teachings of Lord Krishna in the Bhagavata Purana or King Prithu in the Vishnu Purana, the leader could prioritize dharma over mere profit, ensuring that the company operates with integrity, fairness, and responsibility toward its employees and the environment.

4.2 Conflict Management in Society

In a society where tensions often arise between different cultural or religious groups, the stories of conflict resolution found in the Puranas—such as those between gods and demons or between different royal families—offer insights on mediation, diplomacy, and the importance of upholding righteousness in resolving disputes. Leaders and mediators can take guidance from these stories, emphasizing tolerance, dialogue, and the pursuit of peaceful solutions.

4.3 Personal Decision-Making

Individuals often face personal dilemmas regarding career choices, relationships, or ethical decisions. The moral stories in the Puranas, such as the narrative of the sage Vashishta and his disciples or the stories of Dhruva and Prahlada, offer examples of overcoming adversity through perseverance, faith, and righteous living. These examples can serve as guides for individuals making difficult decisions in their personal lives.

5. Conclusion

The Puranas, while often seen through a religious or mythological lens, hold deep philosophical, ethical, and practical wisdom that can be applied to modern-day problem-solving. From ethical decision-making and governance to conflict resolution and personal dilemmas, the teachings of the Puranas provide timeless solutions that are just as relevant today as they were in ancient times. By integrating the lessons of the Puranas into contemporary thought and practice, individuals and societies can tap into a rich reservoir of knowledge to navigate the complexities of modern life with wisdom and righteousness. This paper presents an in-depth exploration of the role of the Puranas in problem-solving, demonstrating their timeless relevance to contemporary issues in ethics, governance, and personal decision-making. The integration of these teachings can lead to more thoughtful, ethical, and effective solutions in modern contexts.

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