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The concept of a donor in ancient Indian literature

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Abstract

Charity or Dan is an age-old practice meant for the welfare of people. Charity, along with the benefactor's modesty, respect and amicable treatment may bring about a change in the beneficiary as well as in society. The practice of charity promotes the good qualities of both the donor and the beneficiary. There are six elements of charity namely the charitable object, donor, beneficiary, mutual respect, place and time of charity [1]. All these elements need to be discussed elaborately. One of the important charitable things is money. It signifies the livelihood in the form of money which a person earns for survival. Money provides all the comforts of life. Another important aspect is the donor's nature.

Keyword: Society, charity, welfare, respect, donor, beneficiary, charitable objects, place, time, money, donor's nature

Introduction

Donation or Dan is the manifestation of good nature of the donor. It originates from the donor's benevolent nature and his goodwill. Hence it is necessary to discuss the characteristics of a donor. It is also important to discuss who should be the donor and why he is fit to enjoy the fruit for his donation or Dan. The sages associated with Veda were also interested in discussing the virtues of a donor. They realized the existence and importance of donors in the noble scheme of nature. The wise intellectuals of the 20th century also realized the importance of donors. According to Veda, a donor is the person who is desirous of enjoying the heavenly nectar [2]. In other words, a donor is the person who is benevolent, pure and sacred [3]. These four qualities of a donor mentioned in Veda develop his liberal thoughts. The word 'Dan' originated from the word 'Artha'. A donor is the person who donates, defends the life and means of others, removes vices, restores, remains truthful and desires for hassle free life [4].

According to Upanisad, a donor should be respectful, polite, god-fearing, knowledgeable, caring, liberal and selfless [5]. This donor must believe in thoughts expressed in Guruvadanta. The believer in Guruvadanta is always respectful [6]. For this reason, in Upanisad the donor is said to be respectful. Besides, a donor must be polite. Good advice and education impart politeness [7]. According to Upanisad, a donor follows the human ways and remains alive for one hundred years through his charitable activity [8]. He does his charitable works selflessly. As God is present in all the animate and inanimate things of the world, a donor should realize this and by giving up hope to acquire the wealth of others he must expedite his progress. In order to get over misery, greedy men earn a lot of money through his activity and finally rich men use their wealth for the welfare of others. In this way, a donor should be a god-fearing man.

A donor must be affluent and liberal. It requires the liberal attitude of the donor which makes him donate and share his wealth with the beneficiary. He acquires this through his virtuous deeds of the past [9]. In Gita, three types of donor have been mentioned. They are "Satwikdata", "Rajasikdata" and "Tamasikdata". One who donates without expecting any kind of return is Satwikdata [10] and one who donates without being respectful to receiver is Tamasikdata [11]. The donor should be the person of strong character. The donor who considers donation to be his moral duty purifies himself through it. Uttamdata is a sage having pure mind [12]. A donor must not be greedy for the worldly things and he should be kind and non-violent.

A donor must have ability and respect for others. The donation without a sense respect does not benefit the donor. So a donor donates the wealth earned honestly with respect. In this case the donor will have God's blessings.

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The sense of respect of a donor is of three kinds namely Satwik, Rajasik and Tamasik ^[13]. The ability of a donor is an important factor. Ability signifies the surplus amount left to the donor after maintaining himself and providing for his family and relatives. A donor should donate only the surplus amount ^[14]. A donor should be religious, pure and cordial in his act of donation. He must have love and respect for the beneficiary. A donor need to donate only the wealth earned honestly as donation of money earned dishonestly does not benefit the donor. The donor must talk politely because his harsh words may hurt the feeling of the person who receives his donation. He should have the capacity of loving others. Only he who loves all persons can love God properly. By donating happily, the donor elevates himself spiritually. He should have self-respect and the quality of forgiveness ^[15]. Such a donor is respected and admired by all. A donor must not cherish anger. He must be truthful to his promise. The person loses heavenly blessings if he refuses to donate even after making promises.

Besides it, a donor should be very careful and have a pure heart and mind. According to scriptures, a donor should be very careful during charity, worship, study and meditation. Purity is an important quality of a donor without which all his donation, sacrifice, worship and religious services prove to be useless ^[16]. While echoing the idea of Deval, Raghunandan has remarked that a donor must be virtuous, healthy, pure and impeccable. According to Deval, a donor keeps away from sinful activity ^[17]. The religious person who is free from disease and vices and keeps away from immoral activities is a donor in true sense of the term. It has been mentioned in the Vedanta that the deed which keeps people away from sin is encouraged through "Chandryan Brota" ^[18]. If the donor goes through Chandryan Brota, he can free himself from all kinds of vice. He must free himself from anger and lust. Manu has mentioned ten kinds of vice related to anger and ten kinds of vice associated with lust. A national leader and a donor should be free from all these kinds of vice. Ten kinds of sinful habits originated from lust are hunting, daydreaming, quarrel, sexual desire, drinking, keeping the company of courtesans and dancers, aimless wandering and dicing. The vices associated with wrath are envy, revolt, distortion of words, daredevilry, garrulity and condemnation and tyrannical administration. A donor must be free from all these vices ^[19].

The donor should not lead immoral life and he must overcome his impulses. Restraint comes from learning. Kautilya has said that "Vidya vinay hetu indriya joy" or education makes one polite and develops restraint ^[20]. Besides, through education one can overcome lust, anger, greed, pride, vanity and desire for sensual pleasures. Lust results from infatuation with another person's wife, anger leads one to violence, greed signifies the desire to acquire the property of others, overestimate of one's learning and wealth causes pride, high opinion of oneself gives birth to vanity and pleasure derived from getting the desired object brings joy. A donor must give up these vices which are the enemies of man. In ancient time the kings like Rajadandak, Karal, Janamejaya, Taljangha, Ilanandan, Ajabindu, Ravana, Duryadhana, Umbodvab, Batapi and Brishtisanga were dethroned due to these vices. So it is said that the donor will also be ruined if he does get rid of these vices. For this reason, an honest donor must abstain from leading immoral life.

Besides this, according to Deval, a donor should maintain purity in his body, mind and words. We know that all the auspicious and inauspicious deeds are performed with body, mind and words. A donor should perform good deeds and

keep away from evil deeds. The evil mental deeds include becoming jealous of the property of others and thinking about snatching it. The wrongs done with words include telling a lie, using harsh words and finding fault with others. To obtain things which are not given is also an evil deed. Making immoral relationship with other women is a misdeed committed physically. A donor should avoid these misdeeds and maintain purity with sacred deeds ^[21].

A donor should be free from disease. No good deed can be performed with a sick body. In Arogya Sastra, it has been mentioned, "Sarirmadya khela dharmasadhanam arogya mulang hitat". Kalidas also said this in Kumarsambhav. It means a healthy body is required for a religious service. So a donor has to maintain physical, mental and verbal purity ^[22].

The sage Atri has said that a donor should have a sense of respect and devotion. A donor must be respectful to the recipient of his donation. The sage has instructed the donor to be respectful in offering the bronze plate containing ghee to the recipient. He has also instructed the donor to offer the recipient the pot containing oil with a sense of complete devotion ^[23]. He has instructed donor to emulate gods. Gods offer gift and accept offerings. I has been noted that gods like Aditya, Varuna, Vishnu, Brahma, Chandra, Agni and Lord Mahadeva too paid compliments to the land-donor. In this way, a donor emulates god by virtue of his own merits and nobody is displeased with him ^[24].

The sage Vishnu has remarked while describing the qualities of a donor that one who does not offer charity for fame, for fear and for any selfish gain is an actual donor. According to him, a donor must not be completely absorbed in music and dance. He has pointed out these four things about a donor. He has also pointed out that charity purifies even an extravagant person. The sage Manu also has expressed similar idea ^[25].

According to Yajñabalk, self-conscious person also may be a donor. A self-conscious person does not donate anything to an undeserving man. He has also said that sometimes an evil-doer may be the donor. However, an unchaste woman, an impotent person, a sinner and an enemy cannot be a donor. According to Yajñabalk, one can accept milk, meat, flowers, curd, bed and such other things from even an evil-doer ^[26]. Sambarta has said that a sacred soul and a great scholar may be a donor. Such a donor offers donation to a learned Brahman with a strong character ^[27]. In the opinion of Vyasa, one who offers donation respectfully is a donor in real sense. He does not think that a wealthy man can be always a donor. He has remarked that not all Brahmins accept an elephant or a horse as some of them believe it to be insubstantial. He thinks only one among many Brahmins becomes a scholar and only one among millions of them becomes an orator, but it is not certain whether a donor is born at all. So only study does not make one a scholar, a talkative person is not always a good speaker and one cannot become a donor only by virtue of one's wealth. Only he who can restrain his impulses becomes strong, He who performs religious service becomes Pundit, he who can please others with his words becomes a good speaker and he who makes donation with a sense of respect is a donor. Vyasa has also pointed out that he who makes donation out of affection, fear and monetary benefit cannot be a true donor. Such type of prejudiced donor has been likened to a Brahmin-killing sinner ^[28].

It is found in the Mahabharata that a donor must offer charity without expecting any return. Yudhisthir has said in the Mahabharata, "I do not make donation with the hope for a gain, I offer charity because I am charitable by nature ^[29]." According to the Mahabharata, the wealth of a donor is spent

not only for his own pleasure, but it is also spent for donation. A donor provides relief to the poor. When a donor makes donation, he realizes the worth of his wealth. Hence it may be said that one who is prone to charity heartily is actually a donor. Yudhisthir says in the Mahabharata, "I wish my heart inclined to devotion, charity and truth" [30]. Donation makes the inner self of a donor truthful, benevolent and beautiful. He feels heartily the misery of others. In "Book of Effort" of the Mahabharata, it is said that the person who does not regret after making donation and who offers donation to the deserving recipient with a heart free from anger and lust is a donor. This kind of donor is Uttamdata who has self-knowledge, patience, loyalty to religion and a heart for making donation [31].

It is also found in the Mahabharata that a donor is a man of talent. According to scriptures, a donor must be truthful, polite and inclined to charity [32]. He always wishes for the welfare of others. He is born in a noble family which promotes charity, religious sacrifice, study of Vedas, and meditation. A donor always tries to add to the reputation of his family by his activity [33]. He must not be ill-tempered and show others the way of salvation. One who is ungrateful, immodest and unwilling to honour commitment cannot be a donor. He must not be proud of being a donor [34]. It has been mentioned in the Mahabharata, a donor does not support violence. One who pays God's debt through religious sacrifice [35], pays the debt of sages by the study of Vedas, pays debt of Brahmin through feeding Brahmins and pays guests' debt through hospitality is a donor. He is a respectable person and remains always helpful to others. A donor is free from vices and is eager to offer his favourite object to others. Only the person who offers livelihood and help to the needy is a donor. He collects information about the wants of others through messengers and helps them by providing food and clothes and houses [36].

On who offers charity to the deserving Brahmins and pays them due respect is really a donor. He must not be angry and greedy for anything. A donor is considered to be the savior of men. A donor should have resources enough to offer charity to satisfy Brahmins the knowledgeable persons and Brahmins stay in the house of a real donor willingly for a long time [37]. A donor must not be found languishing and he offers donation gladly. The fame of a donor spreads all around and he goes to the truthful Brahmins and sages himself to offer donation. A donor does not earn for himself and shares his resources with Brahmin beneficiaries. He dedicates himself for the service of others keeps him free from ego [38].

According to Markandeya, one who is free from jealousy and does not boast of his donation is a real donor. He has added that a donor is ready to offer in charity his wife, son and himself [39]. It has been stated in Skandapurana that a donor should be free from disease, religious-minded, charity-prone, free from addiction, pure and impeccable [40]. Such a donor donates things which he earns himself. It has been said too that a donor must not be intricate, impudent, restless, shameless, coward, drowsy and untruthful. This kind of Tamasdata should be avoided. A donor does not regret after offering donation and must not be angry with Brahmins after offering donation at any cost. In both Rigveda and Purana, it has been mentioned that Dan dharma or offering donation is the chief attribute of man. Charity makes a bridge between man and his community. It combines the self with others. A donor becomes non-violent and truthful and an embodiment of kindness, peace and charity.

Explanation

According to scriptures, Brahmin, Vaisya and Khatriya can be a donor. Brahmins are Satwikdata, Khatriya is Rajasikdata and Vaisya and others are Tamasikdata. Hence there are three kinds of donor namely Uttamdata, Madhyamdata and Adhamdata [41]. Among all, Brahmins are considered to be the superior kind of donor. They are the guides of society in India. They are well-versed in religion, moral, science, Purana, philosophy and literature. It has been stated in the Mahabharata that one who is kind, meditative, truthful, charity-prone and eager to forgive is a Brahmin. So far as Khatriya king is concerned, his duty is to look after his subjects. A king has the authority to punish offenders. According to Pundits, the fear of punishment keeps man upright. According to Manu, only an impartial king, who has the authority to punish offenders, is good for people. A king should be truthful, pure, knowledgeable, intelligent and helpful [42]. According to Manu, meditation in Satyayug, religious sacrifice in Treta, study or Adhyan in Dwapar and Charity in Kaliyug is the only religion [43]. Since a Khatriya king serves religion, he is an actual donor in Kaliyug. A Khatriya is Tamasikdata as he is endowed with Tamogun. According to scriptures, a Khatriya may be a donor, but he is not entitled to receive donation. A Khatriya is always a Madhyamdata. So far as a Vaisya is concerned, he may be a donor, but he cannot receive donation. Their occupation is farming, animal rearing and trading. A Vaisya is a Tamasikdata and Adhamdata [44]. According to Manu, a Vaisya must be engaged in earning money honestly. In ancient India, certain portion of their wealth went to royal treasury and some of it was offered as charity. It has been stated in the Book of Forest of the Mahabharata that charity is their religion and so most of the inns, temples, monasteries and hospitals were built by Vaisya in ancient India. As the members of Vaisya constitute the source of wealth in society and they earn money in different ways, they are often said to be Tamasik Rajasik Misritadata.

Conclusion

Although a Sudra has no right to be a donor or data, yet it has been stated in Brahmapurana that he can offer charity from his laboriously earned wealth. So we see that a donor may be a Brahmin or a Khatriya or a Vaisya or a Sudra. It has been mentioned in Asramdharma that a Grihasthasrami person can be a donor. Harit has also expressed the same view. According to him, a household person should offer donation in accordance with his capacity. Sanka said "Data saiva grihastha."

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