

**Maharaja Agrasen's "One Rupee, One Brick" and the Vishva Hindu  
Parishad's (VHP's) Social Philosophy: A Comparative study into  
Community-Based Resource Pooling**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the cultural–institutional bridge between **Maharaja Agrasen's** legendary **"One Rupee, One Brick"** compact—where every settled family aids a newcomer with one coin and one brick—and the **Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)** ethos of **seva** (service) and **community pooling** across health, education, and social harmony initiatives. Framed within **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)**—especially *dāna* (charity), *yajña-bhāva* (cooperative offering), and *kutumba* (enlarged familyhood)—it interprets how a simple social norm became a scalable "social technology," and how modern seva networks operationalize similar values at national scale. Scriptural sources including the **Bhagavad-Gītā** (3.10; 17.20), **Manusmṛti** (4.227), and **R̥gveda** (10.117) provide the ethical scaffolding for non-transactional, cheerful, fitness-sensitive giving. This paper synthesizes public materials from the **VHP** and policy statements from India's **IKS Division (MoE/AICTE)** to situate contemporary practice, and engage recent scholarship that revisits Agrasen's principle for modern development aims. This paper concludes with a practical **A-G-R-A-S-E-N** framework for designing local pooling ecosystems, and proposes evaluation metrics that honour both human dignity and accountability. ([Ministry of Education](#))

**Keywords:** Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS); Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP); Maharaja Agrasen; One Rupee One Brick

**1. Introduction: A Small Rule That Builds Big Belonging**

Imagine arriving in a new town with nothing but hope. Before you can worry about survival, **every household** is bound by a standing rule to give you **one coin and one brick**—seed money and shelter material—no questions asked. In legend, **Maharaja Agrasen** institutionalized precisely this: a *default* pooling arrangement that dignifies the newcomer and inducts them into a cycle of reciprocity. Contemporary reportage and speeches echo this description of **"one coin and one brick"** as a hallmark of Agrasen's governance and social philosophy (The Tribune,

2019). Academic work has begun to revisit its **modern relevance** as a proto-cooperative model for addressing socio-economic inequality (Gupta et al., 2023). ([The Tribune](#))

Parallel to this legendary compact, the **Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)** articulates a **seva-centred** social philosophy delivered through networks of **health projects** (dispensaries, mobile clinics, trained health workers), **education** (from *bal-sanskar* to hostels and schools), and **social/cultural initiatives** intended to strengthen *samarasata* (social harmony) (VHP, n.d.). The **operating logic** is familiar: many small contributions—money, materials, time—aggregate into resilient safety nets that expand opportunity. ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

At a policy level, India's **IKS Division** under the **Ministry of Education/AICTE** explicitly invites translation of traditional knowledge into contemporary solutions, including management, economics, and social organization—precisely the arena where Agrasen's principle and VHP's *seva* intersect (MoE, 2023; IKS Division, 2025). ([Ministry of Education](#)) **Thesis.** This paper argues that Agrasen's "**One Rupee, One Brick**" (a **normative micro-rule**) and VHP's *seva* (a **programmatically macro-network**) express the same dharmic **IKS** logic—*dāna*, *yajña-bhāva*, and *kutumba*—but at different scales and with different governance requirements. This shows how to unify their strengths in a pragmatic, human-centred framework.

## **2. IKS: The Moral Operating System (Dāna, Yajña-bhāva, Kutumba)**

**Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)**, recognized in the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** ecosystem, emphasize integrating classical insights with modern practice—across values, economics, organization, and social well-being (MoE, 2023; IKS Division, 2025). Three IKS pillars anchor our comparison:

### **2.1 Dāna (Charity)**

The **Bhagavad-Gītā 17.20** defines **sāttvic dāna**—the highest quality of giving—as that which is offered at the **right place and time**, to a **worthy recipient**, **without expectation** of return.

**Sanskrit (Gītā 17.20):** *deśe kāle ca pātre ca taddānaṃ sāttvikam smṛtam*

**Hindi/English exposition and commentaries** available via the **Gītā Supersite (IIT-Kanpur)** reinforce this fitness- and intent-sensitive ethic. ([Gita Supersite](#))

### **2.2 Yajña-bhāva (Spirit of Cooperative Offering)**

In **Gītā 3.10**, the Creator establishes humans **together with yajña**—a paradigm of reciprocal offering—and declares, "**By this may you prosper.**"

**Sanskrit (Gītā 3.10):** *saha-yajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā... anena prasaviṣyadhvam*

Standard translations and commentaries emphasize **mutuality** as the engine of social flourishing. ([Gita Supersite](#))

### **2.3 Kutumba (Enlarged Familyhood)**

**Rgveda 10.117** praises feeding the **needy and the guest**, warning against hoarding and **eating alone**—a vivid ethics of hospitality and sharing. Multiple verses in the hymn (e.g., 10.117.1, 3, 6) underscore generosity as civilization's glue. ([Wisdom Library](#))

## 2.4 Cheerful Capacity

**Manusmṛti 4.227** instructs: **give cheerfully** (*parituṣṭena bhāvena*) and **according to your capacity** (*śaktiṭaḥ*) upon finding a fit recipient (*pātram*). This adds a **human rhythm** to resource pooling—small amounts from many, offered with joy. ([Wisdom Library](#))

**Interpretive note.** These sources form a **moral OS**: Give **non-transactionally** (Gītā 17.20), **co-operate ritual-economically** (Gītā 3.10), **treat strangers as kin** (Rgveda 10.117), and **give cheerfully per capacity** (Manu 4.227). Pooling, thus, is not merely efficient; it is **existentially fitting**.

## 3. Maharaja Agrasen’s “One Rupee, One Brick”: A Design for Dignity

### 3.1 The Principle

According to legend and mainstream reportage, **Maharaja Agrasen** established a rule that **each resident** would contribute **one coin and one brick** to **every newcomer**. The **coins** seeded livelihood; the **bricks** built shelter—**material security + business start**, embedded in a **universal, low-friction rule** (The Tribune, 2019). ([The Tribune](#))

### 3.2 Contemporary Reinterpretations

Recent scholarship has reframed this practice as an **early cooperative mechanism** that can be repurposed to **tackle present-day inequalities** through **micro-pooling** at the neighbourhood or institutional scale (Gupta et al., 2023). The study highlights potential benefits for **education access** and **organizational adoption** of the “one rupee, one brick” ethos. ([Granthaalayah Publication](#))

### 3.3 Design Features (Why It Works)

1. **Universality → Inclusion.** Everyone contributes something **small**, making **participation the default** (no elite gatekeeping).
2. **Blend of Inputs.** Monetary + material + (implicitly) **moral** contribution (you join a giving culture).
3. **Newcomer Focus.** A **point-of-entry trigger** lowers start-up costs and accelerates social integration.
4. **Reciprocity Loop.** Receivers become future givers—**iterated trust**.

**Humanised takeaway:** If we want strangers to become neighbours, give the neighbourhood a **simple rule** they can enact **tonight**.

## 4. VHP’s Seva Philosophy: Distributed Pooling, Programmatic Scale

### 4.1 Domains of Work

**VHP** publicly describes seva projects across **health, education, and social/sanskar** domains. Health initiatives include **dispensaries** (allopathy, homeopathy, Ayurveda, naturopathy, *panchgavya*), **mobile clinics, hospitals, ambulances, and trained health workers**. Educational initiatives range from **bal-sanskar** to **hostels and schools**, especially for children in **remote areas**. Social/sanskar programmes preserve cultural rites and foster **social harmony** (*samarasata*). ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

## 4.2 Ethic and Language

The moral vocabulary—*seva*, *kutumba-prabodhan*, *samajik samarasata*—seeks to **uplift beneficiaries and re-educate givers**, echoing *sāttvic dāna* (Gītā 17.20) in tone and practice. **Program memos, activity pages, and magazines** emphasize voluntary action, small gifts, and **distributed nodes** rather than singular mega-projects (VHP, 2025). ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

## 4.3 Institutional Realities

Unlike a single norm in a bounded town, a **national network** demands **governance**: staffing, training, selection criteria (who is *pātra*/fit to receive), reporting, and periodic public communication (press releases, web updates). This **system layer** is the modern counterpart to the **automatic transparency** of Agrasen’s “one coin + one brick.” ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

## 5. Comparative Lens: Where the Models Converge—and Diverge

### 5.1 Convergences

- **Non-transactional Duty.** Both embody **duty-first giving**: Agrasen’s rule presumes **no return**; VHP frames *seva* as **obligation to society**, resonant with **Gītā 17.20**. ([GitaSupersite](http://GitaSupersite))
- **Community-as-Family (Kutumba).** Both instantiate **hospitality and sharing** as social glue, echoing **R̥gveda 10.117**. ([Internet Sacred Text Archive](http://InternetSacredTextArchive))
- **Distributed Micro-Pooling.** Agrasen’s **micro-gifts** per household and VHP’s **many small nodes** share the **math of aggregation**. ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))
- **IKS-Compatibility.** The **IKS Division** legitimizes the translation of ancient *dāna/yajña* ethics into **today’s** management and social policy experiments. ([Ministry of Education](http://MinistryofEducation))

### 5.2 Divergences

- **Scope & Structure.** Agrasen’s rule is a **local custom** for **newcomer settlement**; VHP is a **national network** spanning **health/education/culture**. ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))
- **Eligibility.** Agrasen’s trigger is **universal to newcomers**; VHP emphasizes **needs-based targeting** (*pātra*), aligning with **Manu 4.227** and **Gītā 17.20**. ([Wisdom Library](http://WisdomLibrary))
- **Accountability Tools.** The **simplicity** of “one coin + one brick” breeds **built-in transparency**; a national *seva* portfolio must rely on **public pages, reports, and oversight**. ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

**Synthesis.** The **heart** is the same; the **hardware** differs. One makes generosity **automatic** (rule-based), the other makes it **systematic** (program-based).

## 6. Scripture Deep-Dive: Why Pooling Feels Right (and Works)

### 6.1 Bhagavad-Gītā 3.10 — The Cooperative Engine

**Sanskrit:** *saha-yajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purā uvāca prajāpatiḥ | anena prasaviṣyadhvam eṣa vo ’stviṣṭa-kāma-dhuk ||*

**Meaning (plain English):** At creation, the Lord established beings **together with yajña**, telling them: “By this may you **thrive**; this shall be your fulfiller of cherished aims.” **Pooling** is thus not charity alone; it’s **mutual provisioning** that **stabilizes prosperity**. (Gītā Supersite, IIT-Kanpur.) ([Gita Supersite](http://GitaSupersite))

## 6.2 Bhagavad-Gītā 17.20 — The Quality of Gift

**Sanskrit:** *deśe kāle ca pātre ca taddānaṃ sātṭvikam smṛtam*

**Meaning:** Sāttvic giving is **timely, place-sensitive**, and oriented to the **fit recipient, without** expectation of return. This captures both Agrasen’s **entry-timing** and **VHP’s needs targeting**. (Gītā Supersite.) ([Gita Supersite](#))

## 6.3 Manusmṛti 4.227 — Cheerful Capacity

**Sanskrit:** *dānadharmaṃ niṣeveta... parituṣṭena bhāvena pātram āsādyā śaktitah*

**Meaning:** Practice charity **cheerfully** and **per capacity** when a **worthy** recipient is found—ideal for **micro-contributions** from many. (Wisdom Library, Jha trans.) ([Wisdom Library](#))

## 6.4 Ṛgveda 10.117 — Hospitality as Social Glue

Selected lines celebrate **feeding the hungry**, warn against **eating alone**, and praise **generosity** for forging **friendship**, providing an early **psychology of sharing**. (Wisdom Library; Sacred-Texts.) ([Wisdom Library](#))

## 7. Caselets: Translating Ethos into Practice

These vignettes are **illustrative composites** based on publicly described activity types (e.g., mobile clinics, hostels, health workers) and the Agrasen rule’s logic, without claiming to represent a single documented site. They are meant to show **how** the principles can be enacted.

### Caselet A — “Entry Kit” Pooling in a Migrant Ward (Agrasen-style)

- **Trigger:** New families arriving seasonally for work.
- **Rule:** Each existing household contributes **₹100 and one building input** (a brick, tool-hours, roof sheets, or skilled labour hour).
- **Process:** A **rotating committee** (with women’s representation) validates newcomer status, posts **transparent lists**, and schedules **community build days**.
- **Outcome:** Newcomers move from **tarpaulin shanties** to **stable modules** over two weekends, and they **pledge** to contribute **once settled—receiver-to-giver transition** embedded into the ritual.

**Why it works:** **Low friction, public ritual, micro-pledge → fast trust**. (Agrasen’s norm; ethical fit with Gītā 17.20 & Manu 4.227.) ([The Tribune](#))

### Caselet B — “Seva Node” for Preventive Health (VHP-style)

- **Trigger:** High incidence of **untreated diabetes/hypertension** in a peri-urban cluster.
- **Action:** A local **seva node** sets up a **weekly mobile clinic**, staffed by a doctor and **trained health worker**; **small donations** fund strips and BP cuffs; **diet/fitness** sessions run in the temple courtyard.
- **Outcome:** **Coverage** of routine checks increases; referrals to public hospitals become timely; **peer groups** keep people on track.

**Why it works:** Many **small givers, volunteer time, trained workers, mobile clinics**—all match VHP’s described health project profile. ([vhp.org](#))

### Caselet C — “Hostel Ladder” for Remote Learners (VHP-style)

- **Trigger:** Tribal hamlets are far from **secondary schools**.



- **Action:** Community pooling + donor contributions support **hostels (chhātrawās)** run with **discipline + cultural grounding**; **mentors** visit on weekends.
- **Outcome:** **Attendance and completion** rise; older students become **peer tutors**—the **reciprocity loop** appears in education. (Aligned with VHP’s education page.) ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

#### Caselet D — “Festival of Giving” (Yajña-bhāva ritualized)

- **Trigger:** The annual local fair.
- **Action:** Every stall pledges **1% of takings** to a **neighbourhood welfare fund**; contributions recorded on a **public board**; a **citizen jury** allots funds to **widows’ pensions, school libraries, emergency relief**.
- **Outcome:** Giving becomes **celebratory, visible, and fair**; **stories** (not just sums) are displayed to keep the **joy** alive. (IKS + community pooling logic.) ([Ministry of Education](http://Ministry of Education))

### 8. Designing for Dignity and Scale: The A-G-R-A-S-E-N Framework

**A — Anchor in Dharma.** Begin with a **pledge** grounded in **Gītā 3.10 and 17.20**: *we give together, we give wisely, we expect nothing in return*. Read a **śloka** aloud at launches; display it on the noticeboard. ([Gita Supersite](http://Gita Supersite))

**G — Govern in the Open.** Use **public lists** of donors and recipients (with consent), simple **eligibility** (newcomer/needs-based), and **rotating citizen juries** for allocations. Publish **monthly summaries** (rupees, materials, hours; **stories** + photos with consent). (VHP’s national presence illustrates the need for transparent systems.) ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

**R — Ritualize Giving.** Declare a monthly **Dāna-Diwas**. Encourage quick, **micro** commitments (₹100 + 1 hour). Draw on **Manu 4.227** (*cheerful capacity*) so gifts remain joy-centred and **sustainable**. ([Wisdom Library](http://Wisdom Library))

**A — Amalgamate Inputs.** Blend **money + materials + man-/mind-hours**. In a digital age, a “brick” can be **skills time, cloud credits, used laptops, or pro bono** consults.

**S — Seed Enterprises.** Earmark a fraction for **micro-enterprise kits** (tools, starter inventory), plus **mentorship** from local traders—faithful to Agrasen’s **coin-for-commerce** intuition (The Tribune; Gupta et al.). ([The Tribune](http://The Tribune))

**E — Evaluate Gently.** Track **access** (how many helped), **resilience** (reduced distress outcomes), and **virtue** (repeat giving, receiver-to-giver transitions). Keep dashboards **human-readable**.

**N — Network the Nodes.** Connect **seva nodes** across villages for **bulk procurement, tele-medicine, shared playbooks, and peer audits**. (VHP’s structure hints at the benefits of federating local units.) ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

### 9. Measurement Without Killing the Spirit

#### 9.1 Virtue Metrics (“Sattva Index”)

- **Cheerful giving rate** (self-reported joy).
  - **Receiver-to-giver transition rate** within 12–18 months.
  - **No-strings intent** checks (e.g., no publicity demands).
- This aligns with **Gītā 17.20** (fitness, timing, non-expectation). ([Gita Supersite](http://Gita Supersite))

## 9.2 Access Metrics

- # **Entry kits** disbursed; **time-to-shelter**; **clinic footfall**; **hostel occupancy**. VHP's health/education pages illustrate practical *modes* of access (dispensaries, mobile clinics, hostels). ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

## 9.3 Resilience Metrics

- Reductions in **medical bankruptcy**, **distress migration**, **school drop-out**.
- **Micro-enterprise survival** at 12/24 months.

**Design principle:** Publish **stories** + **numbers** so dashboards **motivate** continued giving.

## 10. Risks, Ethics, and Guardrails

1. **Free-Riding vs. Gatekeeping**. Agrasen's **universal newcomer** trigger is inclusive but gameable; VHP's **pātra** focus mitigates abuse but risks bias. Use **clear criteria**, **citizen juries**, and **appeal windows**. (Manu 4.227; VHP's needs focus.) ([Wisdom Library](http://Wisdom Library))
2. **Politicization**. Large networks attract **labels**; keep **audit trails**, **third-party reviews**, and **open village sabhas** for allocations. (Press transparency illustrates the need.) ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))
3. **Fatigue**. Ritualize **small, regular** giving; rotate volunteers; celebrate **milestones** to keep **joy** central. (Manu's *parituṣṭena bhāvena*.) ([Wisdom Library](http://Wisdom Library))
4. **Plural Access**. Enforce **non-discrimination** in beneficiary access; include **women** and **minority voices** on committees; publish **grievance channels**. (VHP pages emphasise social service and harmony.) ([vhp.org](http://vhp.org))

## 11. Policy Context: NEP-IKS and Civic Pooling

India's **IKS agenda** envisions **research, education, and dissemination** across disciplines, with **centres, internships, and courses** scaling across HEIs. This policy scaffolding legitimizes **IKS-grounded** social innovation—i.e., the adaptation of **Agrasen's rule** and **seva nodes** into modern **civic pooling** projects. (MoE NEP IKS page; IKS Division site.) ([Ministry of Education](http://Ministry of Education))

**Implication:** Municipalities and HEIs can **partner** to pilot neighbourhood **entry-kit pools**, **preventive health nodes**, and **hostel ladders**, with **student internships** helping measure impact—turning **IKS from content to practice**. ([Ministry of Education](http://Ministry of Education))

## 12. Extended Ślokas (Text + Transliteration + Meaning)

1. **Bhagavad-Gītā 17.20 — Sāttvic Giving**  
**Sanskrit:** देशे काले च पात्रे च तद्दानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम्  
**Transliteration:** *deśe kāle ca pātre ca taddānaṃ sātṭvikam smṛtam*  
**Meaning:** “That gift which is given at the proper place and time, to a worthy recipient, without expectation of return, is deemed sāttvic.” *Design cue:* fit the **who/when/where**, remove **strings**. (IIT-K Gītā Supersite.) ([Gita Supersite](http://Gita Supersite))
2. **Bhagavad-Gītā 3.10 — Cooperative Offering**  
**Sanskrit:** सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्ट्वा... अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वम्  
**Transliteration:** *saha-yajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā... anena prasaviṣyadhvam*  
**Meaning:** “Having created beings together with yajña, the Creator said: ‘By this may

you prosper.”” *Design cue*: build **ritualized reciprocity** into institutions. (IIT-K Gītā Supersite.) ([Gita Supersite](#))

3. Manusmṛti 4.227 — Cheerful Capacity

Sanskrit: दानधर्म निषेवेत... परितुष्टेन भावेन पात्रमासाद्य शक्तिः

**Transliteration**: *dānadharmaṃ niṣeveta... parituṣṭena bhāvena pātram āsādyā śaktiḥ*

**Meaning**: “Practice charity cheerfully, to the extent of your capacity, upon finding a worthy recipient.” *Design cue*: **micro-contributions** by **many**, sustained by **joy**. (Wisdom Library.) ([Wisdom Library](#))

4. Ṛgveda 10.117 — Hospitality/Sharing

**Selected sense**: “He is generous who gives food to the distressed; the one who eats alone is condemned; generosity turns adversaries into friends.” *Design cue*: **pooling feeds friendship** and **deters hoarding**. (Wisdom Library; Sacred-Texts.) ([Wisdom Library](#))

13. Discussion: From Legend to Playbook

Agrasen’s compact is a **rule** that anyone can remember and practice, forging **belonging** via a minimal task. Its **genius** lies in **default generosity**: contributions are **tiny**, **universal**, and **immediate** at the **point of need** (entry). VHP’s **seva**, by contrast, is a **portfolio**: thousands of micro-sites, volunteers, and programs activated by **needs** (health risks, education gaps) and coordinated through **organizational scaffolding** (training, logistics, public updates). Both map cleanly to **IKS**: *yajña-bhāva* as cooperative offering; *dāna* as fit, non-transactional gift; *kutumba* as shared fate. ([The Tribune](#))

**Bridging the two**: Communities can **codify** an **entry-kit rule** (Agrasen style) and **federate** it across wards or villages (*seva* style). Municipalities and HEIs—buoyed by the **IKS policy moment**—can **host dashboards**, **train juries**, **integrate internships**, and **match-fund** transparent pools. This is how an ancient ethic becomes a modern **civic infrastructure**. ([Ministry of Education](#))

14. Conclusion

Hold a **brick** and **coin** in your hands: the brick stands for **shelter**; the coin, for **confidence**. The **compass** is the **śloka set**—give **together** (Gītā 3.10), give **wisely** (Gītā 17.20), give **cheerfully** (Manu 4.227), and **share** like kin (Ṛgveda 10.117). Maharaja Agrasen’s compact made generosity **automatic**; VHP’s **seva** tries to make it **systematic**. Unified thoughtfully, they offer a pragmatic path to **community-based pooling** where **no newcomer starts from zero** and **no neighbour falls through the cracks**. ([Gita Supersite](#))

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