

# IMPURE REVENGE, PURE SACRIFICE: A STUDY OF GIRISH KARNAD'S PLAY *THE FIRE AND THE RAIN*

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1) *Revenge can only be found on the road to self-destruction.*

- Wayne Gerard Trotman

2) *"Jesus was able to die on the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world".*

- (John 1: 29)

## **Abstract**

*This paper is an attempt to discuss the notions of revenge and sacrifice as depicted in Girish Karnad's famous play The Fire and the Rain. The sacrifice is a major ceremony to appease gods in most of the religions all over the world. From ancient times this idea of sacrifice is prevalent. Even in pagan societies when religions were not developed in the sense we perceive today, then also humans practice offerings of animals and sometimes humans too to the supernatural power to please and to have blessings.*

*Revenge is more of a psychological and emotional state that gets activated automatically and provides a strong drive in people who feel they have been wronged by another. Yavakri, Raibhaya, Parvasu, husband and brother of Nittilai are the characters in the play who are burning in the fire of revenge for various reasons. They think that they have been wronged and killing of their opponent is only the way to solve the problem.*

*The death of Jesus on the cross has been considered as the greatest sacrifice. Jesus gave his life to clean the sins of society. Girish Karnad uses the mythological story from Mahabharata, in his play the Fire and the Rain to discuss the concepts of revenge and sacrifice in which the purity of Arvasu life and his sacrifice delivered the state from drought and there is Rain. The title is symbolic when rain stands for hope, life, flora and fauna, blessings, creation, radiation and rejuvenation and fire stands for purification something that is crude in us is to be burned out. Even fire also represents passion, hatred, jealousy, revenge and prejudice. Yavakri wants to take revenge, so he goes for the penance to get power to take revenge on his uncle Raibhaya. Parvasu left the fire sacrifice to remove his own father which is a threat to the fire ceremony he is performing. The brother and husband of Nittilai take revenge on her for running away by killing her.*

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**Keywords:** *Sacrifice, Ritual, Fire, Rain, Purity, Revenge, Love*

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Girish Karnad, an Indian playwright has written plays based on mythology and history as a medium to deal with the present day problems of identity crisis, love and humanity. Actually a literary work of art speaks always about the predicament of humans. The existential questions trouble human mind from time immemorial for example who am I? What is the purpose of my existence? What is good and evil? What is love? And so on and so forth. The whole branch of philosophy deals with all such issues.

The play *the Fire and the Rain* was originally written in Kannada. Later on Girish Karnad translated it in English. It was performed in India and abroad and appreciated by both people and critics. The themes of sacrifice and revenge are at the centre of the play. It has been said almost in all the society that one doesn't get anything without sacrifice. If you want success you have to sacrifice your comfort. You have to sacrifice all other pleasures and interests in order concentrate on the particular area in which you want to excel.

All religious books all over the world are abundant with the examples of sacrifice for the sake of god, religion, society, love and much more. People sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country. And human history books are full of incidents of revenge and colored in red color of blood. The dynasties, kings and queens, wars and battles, quarrels and murders, massacres are an outcome of revenge.

Action of the play is at the backdrop of a drought stricken Kingdom. Parvasu is busy in rituals to appease the Rain god. Arvasu is the protagonist of the play, he is only pious and pure in his wants so must be most eligible for sacrifice. His way of life is beyond any orthodox institution like caste, religion, profession or family ties. His

religion is of love and humanity. When all around him are so much tied by 'ethics' and 'morals' but behaving exactly opposite of what they preach. Arvasu emerges a true hero to save the village.

About Yavakri and source of the play Aparna Dharvadkar says in an introduction to collected plays of Girish Karnad Volume Two. ( O U P, New Delhi,2005 )

*"The story of Yavakri in chapters 135-8 of the Vana Parva in the Mahabharata is a cautionary tale about the misapplication of powers that human beings receive from the gods after great penance. Yavakri, the son of sage Bharadwaja, acquires knowledge of the Vedas from Indra after years of Tapasya, but uses it to molest the daughter-in-law of sage Raibhaya, whom he resents. Raibhaya in turn creates demon (Rakshasa) and a spirit in the form of his daughter-in-law, both of whom pursues Yavakri and kills him. Bharadwaja places a curse on Raibhaya- that he will die at the hands of his own son-and then kills himself in remorse."*

Raibhaya and his brother Bharadwaja are not in good terms with each other. Yavakri a son of Bharadwaja thinks that his father is more talented yet he doesn't get credit because of political and selfish motives of Raibhaya, so he goes to Jungles to do austere penance so that he will prove his mettle. He wants to take revenge on all of them who discredited his father. Yavakri opens his heart to Vishakha and tells her why he hates Parvasu's family and how he will take revenge of insult of his father.

Vishakha: *Why are you bringing up all those grievances now, Yavakri? It's hardly the time-*

Yavakri : *Grievances! You don't even flatter me with the word 'hatred'. But it doesn't matter. What matters is that I hate your husband's family. My father deserved to be invited as the Chief priest of the sacrifice. But that went to Parvasu your husband. Even in the midst of my austerities I wept when I heard the news. For I knew Father would refuse to take offence. I knew he would go and congratulate Parvasu on the honor, embrace and bless him-*

Vishakha: *Yes, he did that.*

Yavakri: *(enraged): Why? I despised him for it. He was one of the reasons I fled to jungle.*

Vishakha: *Do we have to talk about it now? The past is gone.*

Yavakri: *The past isn't gone. It's here inside me. The time has come to show the world what my father's son is capable of. This is my moment.*

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Yavakri : *...they would have turned their backsides on me with contempt if I'd let them – as they did with Father! There was only one way to force them to confront me. Catch Parvasu by his scrotum. Squeeze it so that he couldn't even squirm ...*

Yavakri is so much troubled and full of vengeance. He is in such an anger to take revenge. All his knowledge he has earned to take revenge, the fire of revenge is likely to burn him. He is going to pay the price of his pride. Even when God Indra visits him he says for what purpose he needs the power.

Yavakri : *... One night in the jungle, indra came to me and said : 'You are ready now to receive knowledge. But knowledge involves control of passions serenity, objectivity' and I shouted back No, that's not the knowledge I want. That's not knowledge. That's suicide! This obsession. This hatred. This venom. All this is me. I'll not deny anything of myself. I want knowledge so I can be vicious, destructive!*

This hatred and anger for Parvasu's family becomes self-destructive for Yavakri. He wants knowledge to fulfill his vicious wish. He pays heavy price. He burns in his own hatred, jealousy and revenge. Raibhaya kills him by creating Brahmaraaksha. In his urgency Andhaka blocks Yavakri's way to his father's hut where he can save himself, but not recognizing his steps Andhaka stops him and he gets killed.

There is a huge contrast, we do find in brothers Arvasu and Parvasu. Arvasu likes theatre which is not the vocation of Brahmins, he likes wandering life like a hunter girl Nittilai. Where as his brother Parvasu has learned everything to be a 'good' Brahmin. He is well versed in Vedas and other holy scriptures, that's why king of the region appoints him as a chief priest of the fire ceremony. Arvasu wants only love of Nittilai. He is ready to get marry to her. He is prepared to become an outcaste for the same. When Andhaka raises the doubts that his brother Parvasu will not agree for such marriage then he says he will do anything to get her.

Andhaka: *And what if he forbids you now ?*

Arvasu : *I'll tell him. 'I can't give up Nittilai she is my life. I can't live without her. I would rather be an outcaste.'*

Arvasu respects his brother and he also knows that his brother is doing the fire sacrifice from last seven years so he does not want to disturb him Raibhaya father to Parvasu and Arvasu hates both of his sons because Arvasu who doesn't follow any precepts of Brahmanism and Parvasu because he pretends to be smarter. Arvasu has

broken a Brahmin tradition and takes part in performances of the play, becomes an actor and falls in love with a hunter girl Nittilai. He hates his son Parvasu, as the King of the province chooses Parvasu for a seven year long fire sacrifice instead of him. Raibhaya's ego gets hurt. The reason behind choosing Parvasu over Raibhaya was that Parvasu is young and Raibhaya is old, if Raibhaya dies before the completion of a seven year long fire sacrifice that will be a problem. When Raibhaya comes to know about this fact related to the choice of the king for Parvasu, he becomes angry and vows that he will survive and cremate his sons.

Raibhaya: *So this is your usual insolence. Willful transgression of the rules-*

Parvasu: *If I am back there before dawn, no one need know.*

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Parvasu: *The king often says he would have preferred you to be the chief priest . But it was seven year rite. Thewy thought....a younger man safer.*

Raibhaya : *I see. So you measured my life-span, did you – you and your king ? Tested the strength of my life-line? Well then sacrifice is almost over and I am sytill here. Alive and kicking.tell the king I shall outlive my sons. I shall live long enough to feed their dead souls.*

Then for Parvasu all his knowledge, expertise and experience to perform a fire sacrifice are at stake. Raibhaya continues to burn with the fire of revenge being at home and he dislikes his daughter- in- law Vishakha, who used to love Yavakri, a son of Raibhaya's brother. But she has married to Parvasu as Yavakri has deserted her and gone to woods for austere penance to get super power from Lord Indra to fulfill his revenge. Raibhaya comes to know that his daughter-n-law, Vishakha has betrayed her husband. He becomes angry and spells out a curse to destroy Yavakri. Arvasu tries to save Vishakha but in vain.

Raibhaya: *So there was someone else there, wasn't there ? Who was it ?*

Arvasu : *( finds hard to lie): No one, Father, Nittilai and I went there-*

Raibhaya: *(pointing to Vishakha): Was she alone ? Or was there anybody else with her?*

Arvasu: *No, there was no one else. She was feeling faint-and fell down- so I helped her. I must go-*

Raibhaya: *You want to run away, do you All right. Go. But where will she go?*

*(To Vishakha)*

*Tell me who was there. Tell me.*

*( He grabs her by her hair and starts beating her. Kicks her. Arvasu cant bear to see it. He rushes to her help. Holds Raibhaya back)*

Arvasu: *Stop it, Father. Please. Go away, sister-in-law. Go- please-*

Raibhaya: *Where can she go? I want the truth and I'll kill her if necessary. Let me go! I know how to handle her-*  
*(struggles to get out of Arvasu's hold)*

Vishakha: *Let him go, Arvasu.*

*(Calmly)*

*Yes, there was somebody else there. Yavakri! And he had come to see me. Alone.*

*( Long pause, They stare at each other)*

Raibhaya : *"You whore – You roving whore! I could reduce you to ashes – turn you into a fistful of dust – with a simple curse. But let that husband of yours handle you. Parvasu, Chief Priest of the sacrifice! Let him clean up his own shit! Yavakri – so this is what ten years of austerities amount to! So be it. So Yavakri, now it's between you and me. Where is that pot of water? Bring it her-.*

Vishakha tells Parvasu how his father gets insulted by the very fact that Parvasu has been appointed as Chief Priest by the king.

Vishakha : *..... Something died inside you father the day the king invited you to be the chief priest. He's been drying up like a dead tree since then no sap runs in him*

Arvasu loves Nittilai and wants to get married to her. He has planned to go to meet parents and elders of Nittilai. He lingers behind just to have a word with his cousin Yavakri who has just returned after getting super power as an outcome of his penance that he did for seven years Almost seven year of fire sacrifice is about to come an end. Arvasu is supposed to ask hand of Nittilai to her parents and to elders of her tribe. Even meeting time and venue have been finalized. Just Arvasu has to go there, meet the people and ask for her hand and they will get married and Arvasu will do acting in the plays. He is ready to be one of them and live happily with his love.

But situation turns unexpectedly and Arvasu could not make himself to reach Nittilai's home and elders who waited for long time as per the custom of their clan Nittilai has been married to a boy from the same tribe who was ready.

Yavakri has returned from austere penance. Arvasu wants to have a word or two with him. Yavakri has had carnal desire for Vishakha, who comes out to fetch water. Raibhaya come to know about the incident and created 'Brahmarakshsa' to kill Yavakri. Yavakri is full of pride despite warning from Vishakha he doesn't pay attention. She empties kamandalu and asks him to take refuge in his father's hut, he runs but Andhaka, an old guard stops him and Brahmarakshsa kills Yavakri.

Arvasu has to perform the rites of diseased so he could not reach in time to Nittilai. In mean time Parvasu sneaks from fire ceremony to home because he feels strongly that his father will create hurdles in the completion of fire ceremony. Vishakha thinks that he has come to take her life for her adultery. But Parvasu has smelled that his father is a big problem, if he survives he may spoil the fire sacrifice of last seven years. He takes a bow and an arrow and changes the direction from Vishakha towards his father and kills him.

*(Raibhaya's steps are heard in the distance, as he returns)*

Vishakha: *Here it comes. The crab! Scuttling back to make sure I don't defile the Chief Priest as I did Yavakri. Grant me this favour, please. Kill me. For all your experiments you haven't yet tried the ultimate. Human sacrifice! You could now.*

Parvasu: *You're right. I must.*

Thus Parvasu has taken revenge on his father whom he calls a human sacrifice needed to fulfill the fire sacrifice. As he will disturb the ordeals of the fire sacrifice.

Parvasu : ... *He deserved to die. He killed Yavakri to disturb me in the last stages of the sacrifice. Not to punish Yavakri, but to be even with me. I had to attend to him before he went any farther.*

After killing father Parvasu asks Arvasu to perform cremation of a dead father and he goes to attend the fire ceremony. Vishakha warns Arvasu not to take responsibility. Vishakha is practical she understands the problem. Parvasu her husband is sneaking away from his primary duties in the pretext of the fire sacrifice.

Parvasu: *Cremate the body right now. And then concentrate on the penitential rites.*

Arvasu: *But, Brother-*

Parvasu: *But? What do you mean 'but'? Can't you see what is at stake? You must do it.*

*(He starts to leave)*

Vishakha: *Say 'No'. Arvasu.*

Arvasu: *Sister-in-law-*

Vishakha: *Refuse. He killed his father. Let him atone for it. Don't get involved in it.*

Arvasu: *But then-what about the sacrifice?*

Vishakha: *Let it go to ruin. Does it matter? There has been enough bloodshed already. Enough tears. Live your own life.*

Parvasu: *(as though she hasn't spoken): Don't rush through the rites. Perform them with care. Every detail has to be right.*

Arvasu: *(lost) Bless me, Brother.*

Arvasu doesn't have a choice but to follow the orders of his brother, It his goodness and purity of his heart that never allows him to say 'No' to his brother. He is thinking about larger good, the good of the society. He doesn't want to crop up any hindrance in the fire sacrifice. The region is without rains from last almost tern years. The completion of the fire sacrifice is essential for the survival of the people and of the village. So Arvasu's doesn't deny the word of elder brother. And he was late to report at Nittilai's place. Waiting for Arvasu till the setting of the Sun, Nittilai's relatives, parents and villagers take decision to give Nittilai hand to a boy from the same tribe. Arvasu has been beaten badly by the villagers for disgrace of the community. After that he goes to ask Parvasu why he did behave the way he behaved, instead of getting answers from Parvasu, kings men beat him badly and throws him in grave yard.

Arvasu: *My father died. I've just completed his obsequies-and the expiation.*

Parvasu: *Why the expiation? Tell us. Why?*

Arvasu : *He was killed -*

Parvasu : *At whose hands?*

*(long pause)*

Arvasu : *At the hands of his son.*

*(the gathering breaks out into commotion)*

Parvasu : *Patricide - patricide! What is he doing in these scarified precincts? Throw him out - out! Out! Demon.*

Arvasu: *But-but why, Brother, why?... Why?*

Arvasu has been dragged out of the 'holy' place so that he will not 'pollute' and 'contaminate' the sacred ceremony of the fire sacrifice.

He has been bitten badly till he become unconscious and thrown into deserted place. Nittilai comes to know about the fate of Arvasu and runs away to help leaving her newlywed husband to help Arvasu. Her husband and brother are after her. They find her and take revenge by killing her Arvasu loses Nittilai forever. Parvasu enters fire out of sense of guilt. The Rain god appears and asks Arvasu what he wants, Arvasu asks for Nittilai's life first, at the same time Brahmarakshsa was pleading for release from limits.

Arvasu has to make a choice. The god says if he wants Nittilai's life then the wheel of time has to be moved backward and it will bring everyone to life and the same story is likely to be repeated. Brahmarakshsa seeks release from his state as he is 'brother' to Arvasu, he has to release him.

Crowds: *Rain! Arvasu, ask for the rains! Water-*

Arvasu: (slowly) *Lord Indra , I want Nittilai back. Alive. That's all I want in my life. Grant me that. Nittilai-my gentle Nittilai-I killed her. I want her back*

Crowds: *Water, Arvasu, ask for the rains!*

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Brahmarakshsa: *....what are you asking Indra to condemn Nittilai to a hell-hole much worse than the one I'm in. Think, Arvasu, you're wiser now-*

*(Arvasu is silent. The souls make a strange moaning noise.)*

Indra: *Arvasu have you decided?*

Arvasu: *Lord Indra-*

Indra: *Yes-*

Arvasu: *Grant this Brahmarakshsa his release. Let him go.*

Indra : *You are sure you wanted that ?*

Arvasu: *Nittilai would have wanted it so.*

Arvasu sacrifices his love for the sake of society, for the sake of people and asks to move wheel the way it moves forward to release Brahmarakshsa and to have Rains. The god said, "as you wish" (Tathastu), and the land is poured with water and king, people, remaining priest rejoice to the boon of the god The pure sacrifice of Arvasu's love over scores impure revenge.

Girish Karnad very dramatically has wrought intricacies of human aspirations desires, love, revenge, adultery, jealousy and sacrifice is this plays in which many die out of revenge and Arvasu has to pay the price indeed very heavy price of his love for the life of others. It is his sacrifice fulfills the need and successful completion of it.

## WORKS CITED

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