



**TROPE OF SACRIFICE : A STUDY OF GIRISH KARNAD'S  
FIRE AND THE RAIN**



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**ABSTRACT**

*In this paper I will be discussing about the recurring idea of sacrifice in the play Fire and the Rain. The play was written by Girish Karnad published in 1998. This play tells the myth of Yavakri taken from chapters 135-8 of the "Vana Parva (Forest Canto) of the Mahabharata. This story is narrated by Lomasha to the Pandavas in the time of their exile. The play definitely portrays the conflict between good and evil.*

*I will be dealing with the various forms of sacrifice seen in the play. Fire and the Rain is one such play where the idea of sacrifice is recurrent. The play begins with fire sacrifice and ends with the self sacrifice of Arvasu. The reference of human sacrifice is also seen in the play. At the end of the play we learn the true meaning of sacrifice. The plot of the play is totally influenced by the fire sacrifice. So, fire sacrifice is in the mind of every character in the play. The tension is*

*created by the fire sacrifice. It is resolved by the sacrifice of Arvasu. Sacrifice is probably a invisible character in the play.*

*Here I will be dealing with the psychology behind organizing a sacrifice. The reasons of its failure will be discussed also. I will also discuss how Nittilai and Arvasu become the symbol of true sacrifice. The play is all about the sacrifices.*

*This is a qualitative research. I have taken the helps of essays, articles and books in writing this paper. And I learn that sacrifice plays an important role in preserving humanity. It purifies people. It helps to maintain peace in the society. It teaches the biggest lesson that sometimes we have to be steady and give up things we want the most even our dreams, love for the sake of humanity.*

**KEYWORDS**

*Sacrifice, Fire, Rain, Vedic, myth, Hinduism*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Fire and the Rain* is one of the brilliant plays of Girish Karnad. The play was originally written in Kannada in 1995. The Kannada version of the play was titled *Agni Mattu Male*. Karnad himself translated the play in English and published in 1998. The play was well received by the audience. Karnad gave thirty years of his life in completing the play. The play is full of many rich and complex ideas. The play basically depicts the myth of Yavakri, Parvasu and Raibhya taken from chapters 135-138 of the “Varna Parva” (Forest Canto) of the *Mahabharata*. It is the story that the ascetic Lomasha narrated to the Pandavas who were in their exile at that time. Karnad took the same for his play with some minor changes. The myth is presented by Karnad in such a way that depicts the present scenario. The play is of importance as it helps to understand the present society.

One recurring idea of the play is the idea of sacrifice. “ In *Agni Mattu Male* Karnad reimagines the world of Hindu antiquity and constructs a story of passion, loss and sacrifice in the context of Vedic ritual, spiritual discipline (tapasya), social and ethical differences between human agents, and interrelated forms of performance still close to their moments of origin.” The play revolves around the fire sacrifice. The fire sacrifice was actually a propitiatory ritual. It was held to end the drought. But Parvasu polluted the entire sacrifice by his evil means. The fire sacrifice is the main cause of all the troubles in the play. The sacrifice creates the tension of the play and eventually resolves it.

The concept of Vedic sacrifice is very important if we are to understand the fire sacrifice in the play *Fire and the Rain*. Vedic sacrifice is probably the most ancient form of sacrifice. “For the Vedic people, yajna is not just means to attain some desired end, but it is the end itself. Yajna is not a redemptive act as in other religions but it is also the creative act.” Natural disasters are the consequences of people’s disloyalty to God. These disasters can be stopped by coming in contact

to God. According to Hinduism, sacrifice is one of the mediums through which people can stop such disasters by taking help from gods. “Hence sacrifice is an abandonment of a material for a deity. It is an act by which one surrenders something for the sake of the gods. The rituals offering of food articles were offered to gods which symbolize man’s total dependence on and surrender to them.”

There are various forms of sacrifice in the play *Fire and the Rain*. There are fire sacrifice, human sacrifice and self sacrifice. The fire sacrifices in the play resemble to the ancient Vedic sacrifice. Karnad very finely discusses how a sacrifice gets polluted and how it can be purified. At the end of the play the audience or the readers learn what sacrifice actually is.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What is the psychology behind organizing a sacrifice?
- Why the fire sacrifice was a failure in the play *Fire and the Rain*?
- Does the fire sacrifice influence the plot of the play *Fire and the Rain*?
- Are Arvasu and Nittilai a symbol of true sacrifice in the play *Fire and the Rain*?
- Is purity a central part of sacrifice in the play *Fire and the Rain*?
- What do we learn about the idea of human sacrifice in the play *Fire and the Rain*?

### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The researcher wants to seek the psychological reason behind the organization of a sacrifice. Many forms of sacrifice are seen in the play. The researcher wants to deal with human sacrifice, fire sacrifice and self sacrifice. The fire sacrifice failed to bring rain apparently. So, the researcher wants to seek the reason why it failed to bring rain. He searches if the plot of the play is influenced by the fire sacrifice. He wants to deal with true form of sacrifice seen at the end of the play. There is a great similarity between the Vedic sacrifice and the fire sacrifice shown in the play. The researcher wants to deal with every aspects of sacrifice shown in the play. Sacrifice is an ancient concept. Sacrifice is the soul of the Vedas. Presently the true form of sacrifice is lost to humanity. So, the researcher wants to revive it through his analysis of sacrifice in *Fire and the Rain*.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For seeking the answers of the research questions, the researcher adopted the methods of qualitative research. It is basically a historical research based on the analysis of the research works done already in this field. In the very beginning the researcher discussed the topic of the

research with his guide. Then the title was finalized. After that the researcher collected articles, essays and books on sacrifice and *Fire and the Rain*. While doing so internet helped the researcher a lot. Internet was the main source for the collection of the secondary data. So, he reviewed the existing literature done this field. He then developed research questions and objectives of his research. He read the play *Fire and the Rain* carefully and sought the answers of his research questions. Finally he started writing this paper.

### **SURVEY OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE**

The play basically depicts the myth of Yavakri, Parvasu and Raibhya taken from chapters 135-138 of the “Varna Parva” (Forest Canto) of the *Mahabharata*. It is the story that the ascetic Lomasha narrated to the Pandavas who were in their exile at that time. Karnad took the same for his play with some minor changes. The myth is presented by Karnad in such a way that depicts the present scenario. The play is of importance as it helps to understand the present society. This sacrifice is the centre of all the actions in the play. There is drought for almost ten years. This is the reason that the King has organized fire sacrifice to end the drought by propitiating Indra, the God of rains. Parvasu, the elder son of Raibhya, is selected as the Chief Priest for the sacrifice. The sacrifice is continuing under his supervision. One day an Actor-Manager comes with a courtier and requests the King and the Chief Priest to grant permission for organizing a play. The Actor-Manager tells that fire sacrifice is not enough to propitiate Indra. He says that a play must be acted to propitiate the God of rains. The play begins and ends with the fire sacrifice. Even the main incidents of the play are related to the fire sacrifice. Yavakri becomes jealous as Parvasu is selected the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice. This is the reason that Yavakri seduces Vishakha for taking revenge on Parvasu. Yavakri thinks that his father Bhardawaja should be the right man for the post of the Chief Priest. But that goes to Parvasu. So, fire sacrifice actually has implanted the seed of jealousy in the mind of Yavakri. Yavakri himself says: “My father deserved to be invited as the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. But that too went to Parvasu, your husband. Even in the midst of my austerities I wept when I heard the news.” For this reason Yavakri seduces Vishakha and this decision has changed the entire plot.

Raibhya is jealous of his son as he is the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. So, he kills Yavakri to disturb Parvasu. But this incident changes the life of Arvasu. Arvasu has to meet the elders of the Nittilai’s village. He gets late as he has to cremate the body of Yavakri. Indirectly Arvasu’s

life is spoiled by the fire sacrifice. Arvasu has to lose his love. On the other hand, Nittilai has to marry the man she doesn't love. Her life is also influenced by the fire sacrifice.

The fire sacrifice is in the centre of the plot. It influences every incident of the play. Raibhya is jealous of his son Parvasu as he is selected the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. Raibhya doesn't want the sacrifice to be successful as he is not the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. He kills Yavakri to disturb his son so that he cannot complete the sacrifice. But, ultimately Parvasu kills his father. He even puts the blame on Arvasu's shoulder for killing their father. For which Arvasu is almost beaten to death by the King's army. The entire bloodshed is the effect of the sacrifice. Thus, Vishakha once advises Arvasu to live his own life and forget about the sacrifice: "Let it go to ruin. Does it matter? There has been enough bloodshed already."

Finally Nittilai has to sacrifice herself to teach Arvasu the true meaning of life. Parvasu realizes his guilt and sacrifices himself. So, rain comes with the realization of the true sacrifice. So, fire sacrifice created the tension of the play. And self sacrifice of Arvasu resolves everything.

## **SACRIFICE**

As my study is on the idea of sacrifice, so I think it is extremely important for me to discuss the idea of sacrifice in detail. The word 'sacrifice' has a close relationship with the word 'religion'. "The meaning of sacrifice differs depending on the religion and culture." The most acceptable definition of sacrifice is "an offering of a sensibly perceptible, external thing in recognition of God's majesty and lordship and our subjection to him"

### **Sacrifice in General**

According to Wikipedia, sacrifice is the offering of food, objects or the lives of animals or human to a higher purpose, in particular divine beings, as an act of propitiation or worship. Etymologically the word sacrifice comes from 'sacrum facere' which means 'to make something sacred.' So, the term generally means to make something sacred by dedicating ourselves to God. While describing sacrifice Thomas Aquinas states "a true sacrifice is any act that is done in order that we may cleave in a holy union to God." Sacrifice is such an activity through which we come near God, in which the intermediary plays a significant role. It helps people come near God. According to E. Masure, "sacrifice is the expressive and if possible, efficacious sign of man's willed and suppliant return to his God who receives it."

Sacrifice is basically the internal expression of us through external rituals. Our internal feelings have to be expressed in concrete actions and rituals. And sacrifice helps us do so. Presently

people always associate negative things with the word sacrifice. The word probably has lost its ancient value. But whatever may be fact, even now in many cultures sacrifice is established practice.

We must always keep in mind that sacrifice is a form of worship. We try to please our gods through sacrifice. “The worship is a man’s reaction and response to the personal experience of the sacred and almighty power. The sacrifice and prayers which are man’s personal means to communicate and associate with the supernatural power are the fundamental acts of worship.”

An atheist will never participate in a sacrifice. This is a hard fact. So the sacrifice is the result reciprocal bonding between the human and the superhuman. This is such a form of worship through which a strong relationship is built between the two. Sacrifice acts as a bridge like criticism does in literature. According to Levi, “sacrifice can be compared to a ferry-boat between heaven and earth to make links and contact with each other.” Augustine says that “true sacrifice consists of the work performed in order to adhere to God in an intimate and holy fellowship.”

### **The Concept of Sacrifice in Hinduism**

If we discuss sacrifice in context of Hinduism, and then we must discuss what Vedic people thought of sacrifice. Vedic people thought that sacrifice is not a medium to “meet the desire end, but it is the end itself.” They thought that sacrifice had power to create something. Yajna is the Sanskrit word for sacrifice. The word yajna comes from the Sanskrit word ‘yaj’ which means to worship or sacrifice. The word ‘Tyaga’ is associated with yajna. A yajna is impossible without tyaga i.e. without renouncing something. So, sacrifice is renouncing something for God to come in contact with him. “Yajna was the soul of Veda”

Sacrifice is a part of Vedic rituals. Gods and goddesses are highly praised through such sacrifices. These rituals are performed by the priests. It is a medium of communication through which priests communicate certain meanings and messages. In doing so they need to take the helps of gestures, recitation, postures etc. people offers foods and their dedications to God through such rituals. “It is an act by which one surrenders something for the sake of the gods.”

“The idea of purity is the central to the Hindu rituals. Anyone who undertakes the responsibility of performing ritual has to free himself from pollutions and sins.” Only the brahims are allowed to perform the rituals. The low caste people are not allowed to enter in such ceremonies. The whole process of sacrifice will be polluted if the performing priests are polluted. And God will

not respond to such yajnas. God is pure and holy and if people are to reach God, then they also have to be holy. Otherwise all the efforts will be futile.

“For Vedic people the sacrifices were more powerful than gods. The gods could be pleased or displeased by the sacrifices.” It is for sure a very powerful medium of communication. Had sacrifice not been powerful, it could not have pleased or displeased God. It has the power to call the gods on earth. After the interaction with God people are benefited with their boons.

According to the Vedas, the balance and the order of the universe is maintained by sacrifices. In the ancient times many sacrifices were held for the well being of the human beings. “The efficiency of the sacrifice depends on the kind of offering made”

Sri Aurobindo, one of the influential Indian philosophers, talked about sacrifice. According to him, “true sacrifice is the complete and undeserved self-giving to the eternal without any expectation in return.” He gave more importance on the ‘self-giving’. Self-sacrifice is the most genuine form of sacrifice. Our love deepens for our gods through self-sacrifices. “The result of the self-sacrifice is the realization of the Divine and closeness to the Divine.”

### **Sacrifice in Christianity**

References of sacrifice can be seen both in New Testaments and Old Testaments. Christianity also believes that sacrifice is a gift submitted to God for good of the submitter. Like Hinduism, Christianity also believes that sacrifice helps us to be in contact with God. “In the Old Testaments the important means by which one expressed his interior feelings is the sacrifice.” So, in the Old Testament sacrifices were actually giving one’s own food items to God with the expectation of blessing in return.

The New Testament is focused on one sacrifice in particular, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament sacrifices were all about pleasing gods through various means. Jesus always helped and encouraged people to witness the supreme truth. He believed that there is only one and single truth. Jesus taught people that they are the creature loved by the Father most. “His (Jesus) death on the cross was a great sacrifice for the salvation of the whole world. Hence the cross is the revelation of the love of God.”

### **Sacrifice in Islam**

In Islam sacrifice is an act of reverence and devotion. Animal or food items are part of ritual only. In the Islamic festival Eid-UI-Adha the Muslims usually sacrifice animals with four legs. On that occasion the Muslims perform the Sunnat of Prophet Ibrahim by sacrificing animals. The

Muslims do so in the memory of their beloved Prophet. And a share of meat of the sacrificed animal is distributed to the poor. So, this is also done to help the poor. Quran says about sacrifice in Chapter No- 22, Verse No-37, “It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches God. It is your piety that reaches Him...”

## **DISCUSSION OR ARGUMENTATION**

### **Psychology behind organizing a sacrifice**

“Redemption of mankind from greater evils requires or necessitates the sacrifice of innocence and virtue. Good and evil co-exist. Without the death of innocence, there can be no death of vice.”

There is always a balance in the universe. Good and evil exist in a balance. This is the reason that Evil is accepted as a part of Good in Indian aesthetics. Goddess kali in Hinduism symbolizes the two opposite side of the universe, the Prakriti and Purusha. With the end of winter there will always be spring. Spring will never be far behind. Actually this is the nature of the universe. And nature always likes symmetry.

So, Evil will only die if Good is sacrificed. Otherwise the symmetry will not be maintained. Both White side and Dark side exist in a balance. When the impact of Dark side increases, oppression starts. Then the white side has to sacrifice itself to maintain the balance. The sacrifice of the White side will promote goodness. This promotion of goodness will help wiping out the Evil. It is only through sacrifice that the spread of the Evil can be stopped. Sacrifice is an act of surrender. Thus, it promotes goodness and rejects hatred. “Tyaga” is associated with sacrifice. So, sacrifice teaches people to give up the most valuable thing in need. It teaches people to surrender. First and foremost sacrifice is an act. Sacrifice gives more importance to acting than speaking.

These are the reasons that sacrifice is very important to humanity. There are instances in the play *Fire and the Rain* that conveys the same idea. In the play Parvasu, brother of Arvasu, is polluted. Not only Parvasu, Raibhya and Yavakri are also corrupted. Parvasu is corrupted after killing his father. It is because of Parvasu that Arvasu is beaten by the King’s army. Eventually these incidents led Arvasu to hold a kind of hatred towards his brother Parvasu. Bad-deeds always promote bad-deeds and are promoted by bad-deeds. So, a vicious act can never do well to humanity. Rather it will spread evil in the society.

Arvasu is corrupted by the bad-deeds of Parvasu. Finally, Nittilai has to pay her life to correct Arvasu. Arvasu is purified after the death of Nittilai, a symbol of innocence and humanity. Arvasu realizes the true meaning of life after the death of Nittilai. The sacrifice of Nittilai purifies Arvasu completely. So, with the death of innocent and good Nittilai, the anger and hatred of Arvasu dies. Innocence has to die to kill the vicious. Karnad writes, “She lies there, her eyes open, bleeding, dying like a sacrificial animal. The commotion dies away as Arvasu stares numbly at Nittilai.”

After that Arvasu asks the release of Brahma Rakshasha from Indra. It is a virtuous act. It is self-sacrifice. The self-sacrifice of Arvasu is reflection to the sacrifice of Nittilai. So, the sacrifice of Nittilai and Arvasu reestablishes the balance of Good and Evil. The act of goodness of Nittilai, i.e. to save Arvasu, promoted goodness. Thus, the balance is established with the death of innocence.

### **Reasons behind the Failure of the Fire Sacrifice**

First of all it is worth mentioning that sacrifice is not an easy task. There are many rules and regulations of a sacrifice mentioned in the Vedas. If those rules are not followed properly, then probably the sacrifice may not be accepted. It is an act of devotion and surrender. So, any kind of corruption may spoil a sacrifice. “The order and the system in the universe were also maintained or preserved by the sacrifices.”

“The essence of sacrifice is to surrender one’s possessions and substances to God with a sincerity of heart and faith.” Without sincerity of heart and strong faith a sacrifice can never be a successful one. But the picture of sincerity of heart and strong faith cannot be seen in the fire sacrifice of *Fire and the Rain*. As it is seven-year long sacrifice, the conducting priests were tired and bored chanting mantras and the other things. They couldn’t hold their sincerity for long. This seven-year long sacrifice has become ‘dreary’ to the conducting priests. This indicates their lack of devotion towards the sacrifice. This could be one of the reasons that even a seven-year long sacrifice could not bring rain. To quote the conversation of the priests:

PRIEST THREE : These endless philosophical discussions, metaphysical speculations, debates. Every day! Surely, a sacrifice doesn’t have to be so dreary.

PRIEST TWO : We need a play to freshen our minds.

PRIEST ONE : Fortunately this troupe is here-

PRIEST FOUR : Do let them perform, Your Majesty.

Paravaasu, the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice, is one of the reasons behind the failure of the fire sacrifice. The entire sacrifice is under his control. But irony is that he is most polluted of all. How can a fire sacrifice bring rain if the Chief Priest of it is corrupted? Paravasu kills his father intentionally. He didn't love his wife. He used his wife as an experimental tool. He betrayed his honest brother Arvasu by putting the blame of patricide on his shoulder. He even broke the rule by leaving the sacrificial enclosure before the completion of it. He had always been hard and tough throughout his life. So, it was obvious that Indra would not interact with such corrupted person.

His hypocrisy is proved when he lies to Arvasu. He says: "I mistook him (Raibhya) for a wild animal." But Vishakha corrects Arvasu by saying that "he killed his father." Paravasu is a jealous and revengeful person. He is such a person that can do anything for a post. Thus, he talks about his father: "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."

Death must not be the consequence of a sacrifice after all. Sacrifice helps to maintain and preserve the order of the universe. It is done for the good of humanity. Sacrifice is a way of asking help from God for the preservation of the universe. But the opposite of it can be seen in the play *Fire and the Rain*. Murders have been committed in the name of sacrifice. Yavakri is jealous of Paravasu as he is the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice. Raibhya is jealous of his own son for the same reason. Out of these kinds of jealousies Yavakri seduces Vishakha. Raibhya kills Yavakri so that his son gets disturbed and cannot complete the sacrifice. Paravasu then kills his own father out of revenge. So, the sacrifice is the centre of the plot in this play. We cannot reach the destination with the bridge of dead bodies. These lines from Vishakha will express the jealousy of Raibhya towards his son Paravaasu: "Something died inside your father the day the King invited you to be the Chief Priest. He's been drying like a dead tree since then. No sap runs in him."

### **The Impact of the Fire Sacrifice in the Plot of the Play**

The fire sacrifice controls the entire plot of the play in the play *Fire and the Rain*. The play begins and ends with the fire sacrifice. Even the main incidents of the play are related to the fire sacrifice. Yavakri becomes jealous as Paravasu is selected the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice. This is the reason that Yavakri seduces Vishakha for taking revenge on Paravasu. Yavakri thinks that his father Bhardawaja should be the right man for the post of the Chief Priest. But that goes

to Parvasu. So, fire sacrifice actually has implanted the seed of jealousy in the mind of Yavakri. Yavakri himself says: “My father deserved to be invited as the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. But that too went to Parvasu, your husband. Even in the midst of my austerities I wept when I heard the news.” For this reason Yavakri seduces Vishakha and this decision has changed the entire plot.

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The fire sacrifice is in the centre of the plot. It influences every incident of the play. Raibhya is jealous of his son Parvasu as he is selected the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. Raibhya doesn’t want the sacrifice to be successful as he is not the Chief Priest of the sacrifice. He kills Yavakri to disturb his son so that he cannot complete the sacrifice. But, ultimately Parvasu kills his father. He even puts the blame on Arvasu’s shoulder for killing their father. For which Arvasu is almost beaten to death by the King’s army. The entire bloodshed is the effect of the sacrifice. Thus, Vishakha once advises Arvasu to live his own life and forget about the sacrifice: “Let it go to ruin. Does it matter? There has been enough bloodshed already.”

Finally Nittilai has to sacrifice herself to teach Arvasu the true meaning of life. Parvasu realizes his guilt and sacrifices himself. So, rain comes with the realization of the true sacrifice. So, fire sacrifice created the tension of the play. And self sacrifice of Arvasu resolves everything.

### **Arvasu and Nittilai are the Symbols of True Sacrifice**

Fire sacrifice is not the one and only type of sacrifice seen in the play *Fire and the Rain*. Apart from fire sacrifice there is human sacrifice and self sacrifice. The fire sacrifice done in the play is very much similar to that of Vedic sacrifice. But the fire sacrifice of the play gets polluted for various reasons. Karnad has shown us the best and the worst version of sacrifice in his play *Fire and the Rain*. The play is not all about the fire sacrifice and its failure. The play is also about the true sacrifice of Arvasu and Nittilai and its success. Both the forms of sacrifice are presented side by side. The true form of sacrifice is presented through the characters of Arvasu and Nittilai. Actually it is them who make the biggest sacrifices in the play.

“According to Thomas Aquinas, a true sacrifice is any act that is done in order that we may cleave in a holy union to God.” The sacrifices of Arvasu and Nittilai were the perfect ones. This is the reason that Indra appeared to Arvasu and granted his boon. It was the true sacrifices at the end of the play that eventually brought rains.

Arvasu and Nittilai are probably the most humane characters in the play *Fire and the Rain*. They are also the symbols of love and humanity. Arvasu is an eighteen years old Brahmin boy. He loves Nittilai, a fourteen years old tribal girl. For the sake of marrying Nittilai he is even ready to transgress the caste hierarchy. So, he is always ready to sacrifice his caste identity for the sake of Nittilai. He is a peace-loving person. He acts according to the demand of the situation. He tries to save Vishakha from the anger of Raibhya by lying to him. In the epilogue of the play Nittilai dies for saving Arvasu. There is no meaning left in his life. He wants to burn himself along with along with the body of the Nittilai in the sacrificial enclosure. But suddenly Indra, the God of rain, appears to him. Indra is ready to grant any boon Arvasu wants. Arvasu first asks the life of Nittilai to be brought back. He wants to do so as he holds himself responsible for her life. Through his conversation with the Brahma Rakshasha he realizes the truth of the universe where death is an inevitable factor. Brahma Rakshasha tells Arvasu: “If you bring her back, you’ll have destroyed what made her such a beautiful person.” Arvasu asks the release of Brahma Rakshasha from Indra. He sacrifices his love for the release of Brahma Rakshasha. This selflessness of Arvasu eventually brings rain on the earth.

Nittilai is a very smart and intelligent girl. She loves Arvasu very much. She transgresses the caste hierarchy by loving a Brahmin. She is a rebel. She doesn’t believe in orthodox Hinduism. She knows that Brahmins are hypocrites. She even questions Yavakri’s Universal Knowledge. She says: “But what I want to know is why are the Brahmins so secretive about everything?”

She always instructs Arvasu in his everyday decisions. She wants to marry Arvasu but cannot as Arvasu fails to attend the elders’ meetings. Thus she has to marry a man of her own community. But when Arvasu is beaten by the King’s army, she saves him running away from her home. She nurses Arvasu like his mother and cures him. She sacrifices everything for Arvasu, her love. She has to sacrifice her life at the end of the play to save Arvasu. Actually it is through Nittilai’s sacrifice that Arvasu learns the true meaning of sacrifice. She becomes the symbol of humanity. It is for her sake that Arvasu asks Brahma Rakshasha’s release from Indra. Nittilai would have

done the same, had she been alive. Thus, at the end Arvasu says: “Nittilai would have wanted it so.” It is for Nittilai’s sake that Arvasu makes his self sacrifice.

These two sacrifices are the real sacrifices of the play. There is selflessness in both the sacrifices. There is ‘tyaga’ without the expectation in return in both the sacrifices. Whatever Nittilai and Arvasu have done, have done for the sake of love for each other and humanity. There is selflessness and truth in both the sacrifices. There is no pollution in their sacrifices like in the fire sacrifice. This is the reason that Indra is both impressed by Arvasu and Nittilai.

### **Purity Is a Central Part of Sacrifice**

“The idea of purity is central to the Hindu rituals.” Purity plays an important role in sacrifice also. Purity has to be maintained if we want to make the sacrifice successful. Corruption spoils all the efforts of sacrifice. So, the success of a sacrifice depends a little bit on purity. In Vedic sacrifices purity was given enormous importance. The fire sacrifice in *Fire and the Rain* has many similarities to Vedic sacrifices. This story is a myth taken from *Mahabharata*. So, the idea of purity is like that period in whose context the play is written. It is worth mentioning because the idea of purity has changed over periods of time.

Purity is also important as it influences the plot of *Fire and the Rain*. There are some certain rules and restrictions which have to be followed. Without of which the purity will be spoiled and the sacrifice will be corrupted.

In the Prologue of the play we see that the Actor-Manager is not allowed to come near the sacrificial enclosure. In Vedic periods and in the time of the Mahabharata actors were considered outcasts. They had a very low position in the caste hierarchy. Thus, it is obvious that the entrance of an actor in the sacrificial enclosure will pollute the entire sacrifice. This is the reason that the Actor-Manager has to talk from a distance. Parvasu, the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice says in the Prologue: “You may shout out whatever you have to say, but please face away from the sacrificial enclosure so you don’t pollute it.” So, this is an indication to the fact that purity is important for the success and failure of the sacrifice.

There are various ways through which a sacrifice gets polluted. “Anyone who undertakes the responsibility of performing ritual has to free himself from pollution and sins.” So, purity of a sacrifice lies in the purities of the performers. In the play the *Fire and the Rain* Parvasu, the Chief Priest gets polluted by killing his father Raibhya, a powerful sage. Parvasu’s impurity is definitely one of the reasons behind the failure of the sacrifice. This again proves the importance

of purity in a sacrifice. Parvasu commits other sins apart from killing his father. He comes home from the sacrificial enclosure before its completion which is again a crime. He puts the blame of murder of Raibhya on Arvasu's shoulder. He says at the end of Act II: "patricide-patricide! What is he doing in these sanctified precincts? Throw him out-out! Demon!" He calls his brother demon. Parvasu again treats his like an instrument. There are many sins that Parvasu commits in the play. Thus, the fire sacrifice results in a failure as the Chief Priest of it is impure.

It is worth remembering that purity is liked by gods always. It is the purities of Arvasu and Nittilai that eventually impresses Indra. Purity is a godly thing which human being possesses. And it is through this quality only that we may come in contact to God.

### **The Idea of Human Sacrifice in the Play**

"The basic element of a sacrifice is the gift (daksina) and the essence of it is the faith that offerer has in his heart. The efficiency of a sacrifice depends on the kind of offering made." Human sacrifice is probably the boldest form of sacrifice. It is because nothing is more precious than human beings. Everything is futile if there are no human beings to hold them. So, in this context it can be said that it is the most powerful form of sacrifice. Human sacrifice is always effective than others as the offering of it is very precious.

There are instances in the play Fire and the Rain where we see the references of human sacrifice. The words "human sacrifice" is first mentioned by Vishakha in Act II. When Parvasu, Vishakha's husband is not responding to her, she speaks those words. She speaks that she was treated as a tool. Now she has committed a crime. So, she asks her husband to make a 'human sacrifice' by killing her. She thinks that this might help her husband to meet Indra. But sacrifices are not like that. If someone kills someone out of anger, then it will not be considered a human sacrifice. In such a case there is no 'tyaga'. And without 'tyaga' there cannot be a sacrifice.

At the end of the play we see that Nittilai sacrifices her life for saving Arvasu. This is a real human sacrifice as Nittilai 'tyags' her love as well as her life to save her love. There is emotion in it i.e. love. Nittilai is the most virtuous character in the play. Her sacrifice of her life for love is quite shocking. This is the reason that this impressed Indra. Indra himself says in the Epilogue: "We loved the way you challenged Indra and pursued him...in the play. But it could also be because of Parvasu's sacrifice or Nittilai's humanity." Whereas fire sacrifice failed to bring rain on the earth, human sacrifice did.

Arvasu also in the Epilogue wants to sacrifice his life as his reason of living was no more. He wants to go to the sacrificial enclosure and burn himself. Then through the sacrifice of Nittilai Arvasu learns the true meaning of life. He after that sacrifices his love for the release of Brahma Rakshasha and that eventually brings rain. So, we see the power of human sacrifice at the end of the play.

## CONCLUSION

Sacrifice is such a powerful act that has the power to please or displease God. It requires lots of devotion. Now-a-days people are self-centric. They don't think of others. The real meaning of sacrifice is lost to humanity. Sacrifice is such an act that promotes peace. In the present time many people are suffering from mental disorders. People are very depressed. They find no solution of it. But, I think the solution lies in history when people used to be happy. We have to look at our scriptures through which we can get the answers of many mysterious problems.

Human Nature is something that is unchangeable. We must learn that there is pleasure in 'tyaga' also. Humanity can be preserved through compromise and 'tyaga' only. Otherwise there will be no peace, only we will see destruction. This is a mental state. We have to learn and practice it. It is act of surrender to God. Helping and loving are the parts of a sacrifice because without of which a will not be a sacrifice. We can say that sacrifice is doing good to others without the expectation of anything in return.

It was practiced in ancient times, in Vedic periods. But I think it is the time we need the practice of self sacrifice the most. There is corruption and pollution because there is no sacrifice. In present times people only think of profits. With the intention they are even ready to commit sins. Thus it disturbs the balance of the universe.

So, we can do well to people only when we will not be self-centric. We have to learn to give up for others. Parvasu was self-centric in the play Fire and the Rain. On the other hand, Arvasu teaches us the true meaning of life through 'tyaga' and 'love'.



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