

Representation of Sacrifice, Revenge and Ego in Girish Karnad's the Fire and the Rain

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ABSTRACT

The Fire and the Rain is based on the Mahabharata character Yavakrita's tale. The paper discuss the notions of revenge, sacrifice revolves around the clash of egos, revenge, abuse of knowledge and weakness of human nature. It represents Karnad uses myth and folk traditions in his plays to explore themes of alienation, family, and politics in society. The play is profoundly prejudiced by the contemporary concepts of the West but he also possesses a strong sensibility of being an Indian. The fire sacrifice is a symbol of power and that of spiritual and intellectual strength of knowledge. Girish Karnad is one of India's foremost playwrights and an actor is based on a story from the Mahabharata which tellingly enlighten worldwide ideas.

Key words: revenge, sacrifice, clash, egos, revenge, abuse, knowledge and myths

INTRODUCTION

The *Fire and The Rain*, a complex play, revolves on the clash of egos, revenge, misuse of knowledge and the fragileness of human nature. The inflated egos of Yavakri, the son of Bhardwaj, and his cousin Paravasu clash and upset the bonds of tolerance, understanding, love and tenderness in familial relations, and disturb the social order. Bhardwaj and Raibhya are renowned sages. Both are brothers, learned and wise. Both are endowed with spiritual powers. Both have inflated egos and fight for supremacy. Yavakri, Bhardwaja's son, is jealous of Raibhya, his uncle, and his son Paravasu, who has obtained the Chief Priestship for performing the seven year long fire sacrifice. The King performs it so that Indra, the god of rains, is pleased and ends the ten year long period of dry spell. Yavakri is jealous of Paravasu. He feels that his father has been humiliated and has not been giver his due.

He burns with the feeling for revenge and hatred. He says to Vishakha: "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 too went to Paravasu, your husband. Even in the midst of my austerities I wept when I heard the news. For I knew that father would refuse to take offence" (*The Fire and The Rain*)

Yavakri goes to the forest to propitiate Lord Indra, the God of Rains and observes austerities and penance in order to obtain universal knowledge, which he will use for taking revenge on Raibhya and his son, Paravasu. When Indra appears to him for the first time he says that knowledge cannot be mastered through austerities because it comes with experience: "Knowledge is time. It is space. You must move through these dimensions." Indra persuades him to obtain knowledge for public welfare and not for taking revenge and satisfying his inflated ego. Knowledge can be achieved by giving up ego. Indra says: "You can't cross a full stream on a bridge of sand." But Yavakri does not listen to Indra's sage and sane advice: "But knowledge involves control of passions, serenity and objectivity." Motivated by implacable revenge and hatred Yavakri ignores this advice and shouts back: "No, that's not the knowledge I want. That's suicide! This obsession. This hatred. This venom. All this is me. I want knowledge so I can be vicious, destructive!" (*The Fire and The Rain*)

Yavakri is blind with revenge. Revenge alone will satisfy his ego. He misuses knowledge for taking revenge and satiating his inflated ego. He first of all fornicates Vishakha, the wife of Paravasu and instigates Raibhya who is also consumed by jealousy, hatred, lust and inflated ego. He invokes Kriya and a Brahma Rakshasa, a demon soul, to kill Yavakri Raibhya also misuses knowledge for taking revenge and satiating his inflated ego. Yavakri too has consecrated water in his Kamandlu and he is sure to destroy both Kriya and Brahma Rakshasa by sprinkling it over them. He boastfully says: A drop of this water. And the Brahma Rakshasa will become numb Powerless. Uncle's entire threat will turn into a force. "The play has three parallel storylines that revolve around the myth of Yavakri. It explores themes of desire, identity, morality, and the relationship between the individual and society. The play combines supernatural elements with a focus on human emotions and the hero's journey between love, duty, and righteousness" (chayandutta-web)

The desired moment for taking revenge has come. He says to Vishakha: “This is the moment toward which my entire life has rushed headlong. I will not let anything stand in its way. Your father-in-law will die; Vishakha. Let’s see what your husband does then. Will he continue to hide like a bandicoot in his ritual world? Or will he commit sacrilege by stepping out to face me? Look, I am trembling. I am drenched in sweat. Because everything has worked Join just right.” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

Revenge alone, he thinks, will humble Raibhya and Parvasu. If they are spared, they will contemptuously look down upon him as they did with his father. He is so full of hatred and jealousy that he says: “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.” Vishakha pours the consecrated water out of his Kamandlu. Brahma Rakshasa kills Yavakri.

Jealousy and ego also dominate the relations between Raibhya and his son, Parvasu. Raibhya and Parvasu clash due to inflated egos. Raibhya had the ambition to be the Chief Priest of the seven year long fire sacrifice but the king preferred his son, Parvasu, because the king thought “a younger man safer” for seven year sacrifice. At this revelation Raibhya, a saint with inflated ego, insults and humiliates Parvasu: “So you measured my life-span, did you - you and your King? Tested the strength of my life line? Well, the sacrifice is almost over and I’m still here. Still here. Alive and kicking. Tell the king I shall outlive my sons. I shall live long enough to feed their dead souls. Tell him the swarm of dogs around my daughter-in-law’s bottom keeps me in good shape” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

He is disgusted with Parvasu and Vishakha. Parvasu, a great Vedic scholar, seethes with hatred and jealousy against his father. One night he intentionally kills him. He justifies his murder: “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 further” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

Parvasu discloses his father’s death to his younger brother, Arvasu and asks him to perform penitential rites. Arvasu, who has great regard for his learned brother, is deeply hurt. Puffed up with jealousy, hatred and ego Parvasu rudely misbehaves and insults Arvasu as a Brahmin killer. He asks the royal guards not to allow Arvasu to enter the sacrificial enclosure and to throw him out of the place. The tussle of supremacy presents the theme of hatred between two brothers. “The intellectual majesty of Mahabharata depicting the eternal drama of human existence, with all its ironies and intricacies and complexities and cadences and susceptibilities, psychological heights, and emotional depths, is equally unrivalled in the range of world literature” (Krishnamachary 146)

The Fire and The Rain deals with jealousy, hatred, clash of inflated egos, violence, betrayals, pride, jealousy, misuse of knowledge and anger. These negative feelings have been the cause of conflicts, clashes and destruction in the world since times immemorial. Karnad affirms in this play that knowledge without love, compassion, understanding and humanity can lead to inflated egos, jealousy and complete destruction. Aparna Bhargava Dharvadkar writes: “It is a dense, intellectually ambitious, autumnal play structured around ideas, and a plethora of tangled relationships which unfold with a rare economy and intensity of words and emotions” (Girish Karnad 2005)

The Fire and The Rain is a play of sacrifice and expiation. The play begins with the seven year long fire sacrifice (Yajna), which is being held to propitiate Indra, the God of Rains. It has not adequately trained for ten years. So drought has gripped the land. Several step-like brick altars have been constructed. The priests are offering oblations to the fire in these altars and are singing prescribed hymns in unison.

The priests, dressed in long flowing seamless pieces of cloth and wearing sacred threads, are performing the fire sacrifice. The King is also dressed like them but his head is covered. Parvasu, the Chief Priest, conducts and supervises the sacrifice. The sacrifice or Yajna is performed inside a sacrificial enclosure in order to protect it from disruption of any kind. The disruption may come from outside, either from a human agency (unruly audience, mischief mongers, intruders, those unable to understand what is happening, demons) or from a more general calamity (rain, storm, upheavals). Commenting on Yajna or Fire Sacrifice Karnad quotes from *The Sacred Thread: A Short History of Hinduism*.

“In Vedic thought, as in Iranian tradition, there was a conception of the world as due not to a chance encounter of elements but as governed by an objective order, inherent in the nature of things, of which the gods are only the guardian..... The sacrifice (Yajna) is performed on behalf of an individual householder, technically called the sacrificer, accompanied by his wife, but all the ritual acts are performed by the priests, varying in number from one to sixteen and ultimately seventeen officiants in full.....sacrifice..... A special area is consecrated for each performance of a ritual and the sacrificer

undergoes a consecration setting him apart from the profane world. In essence, the sacrifice can be regarded as a periodic ritual by which the universe is recreated, with the sacrifice like his prototype incorporating the Prajapati” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

The ritualistic conception of the sacrifice has been clarified. The term sacrifice has been used in wider connotation. It also implies the sacrifice of the varied manifestations of human relationship. Sacrifice and expiation are fused together in this play.

Yavakri, has undergone terrible ordeals in the forest for ten years for observing penance and austerities in order to gain universal knowledge and spirituality. He sacrifices the pleasure of his life at the altar of revenge. He feels that his father Bhardwaj, the most learned man and the most brilliant mind in the land, was humiliated by Raibhya and his son, Parvasu. His father deserved to be the Chief Priest at the fire sacrifice but Parvasu grabbed it. His sacrifice is based on the misuse of knowledge. Indra who imparted knowledge to him after the completion of ten year long penance advised him to be humble and modest. Indra says: “You are ready to receive knowledge. But knowledge involves control of passions, serenity, and objectivity.” 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 as destructive!” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

Yavakri sacrifices the real purpose of knowledge and makes it an instrument of taking revenge on his uncle Raibhya and his family. Yavakri coaxes Vishakha to have sex with him. Her husband, Parvasu, who has been appointed the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice has been away for seven years. The fortune of humiliation, isolation and privacy turns her emotionally dry and shattered. She says: “I have known what it is to grow heavy, burst open, drip and rot, to fill the world with one’s innards.....Alone I have because dry like a tender. Ready to burst into flames at a breath” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

Indeed, Parvasu sacrifices Vishakha at the altar of his own reputation and achievements. Yavakri’s tender words and caresses arouse the woman in her and she surrenders to him. When she returns to her cottage, her father-in-law, Raibhya, abuses her and she silently accepts all humiliation and insult. When she comes to know that Raibhya has invoked Kritya and has sent Brahma Rakshasa to kill Yavakri, she runs to inform Yavakri to stay within his father’s cottage because his life is in danger. Yavakri tells her that he had meticulously planned everything to take revenge on Raibhya and his family: “Do you think all this happened accidentally? You think I would have anything to chance? How do you think? Arvasu happened to arrive at the river-bank at the right moment? Who called your father-in-law back?” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

He frankly tells her that her father-in-law will die and her husband, Parvasu, will hide “like a bandicoot in his ritual world” or “he will disillusioned and humiliated. She realises her fault and repents for commit sacrilege by stepping out to face me”. At this revelation she feels yielding to him. Vishakha is twice sacrificed. First, her husband sacrifices her for his fame and pleasure, and secondly, Yavakri her former lover, sacrifices her at the altar of revenge. Yavakri has outraged her female modesty and dignity. She sprinkles the consecrated water from Yavakri’s Kamandalu. He has sanctified the water to destroy Kriya and Brahma Rakshasa. He is now helpless and powerless. Brahma Rakshasa kills him. Vishakha sacrifices Yavakri for outraging her feminine modesty deceptively.

Parvasu nurtures inplacable hatred for his father Raibhya, who insults and humiliates him. His wife Vishakha tells him that he is jealous of his son’s progress and reputation. He is so lustful that he rapes her in his absence: “On the one hand, there’s his sense of being humiliated by you. On the other, there’s lust. It consumes him. And old man’s curdled lust. And there is no one else here to take his rage out on but me” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

Parvasu kills his father one night. Justifying his murder he tells Vishakha: “He deserved to die. He killed Yavakri to disturb me in the last stages of sacrifice. Not to punish Yavakri, but to be even with me. I had to attend to him before he went any farther. Parvasu sacrifices his father at the altar of his hatred” (*The Fire and The Rain*)

Parvasu is selfish. He cares only for his own popularity. He is so self centred that he does not even hesitate to accuse Arvasu, his younger brother, of patricide and Brahminicide, a crime that he himself has committed. He keeps the truth a secret because if “anyone gets wind of what’s happened here, the fire sacrifice is ruined”. Had there been no fire sacrifice, he would have atoned for father’s death and should have performed the rites of penitence. So he shrewdly enjoins upon Arvasu the duty of cremating their father’s dead body and performs the penitential rites. Parvasu, thus, sacrifices Arvasu at the altar of his own reputation and good will.

Arvasu assumes demonic role in the play within play, which ultimately leads to the desecration of the Yajana sight. Parvasu silently watches the chaos and does not resist it at all. He gets up without a word calmly and walks into the blazing enclosure. He, it seems, feels the pricks in his conscience for killing his father and for accusing innocent Arvasu for patricide. So he gladly chooses death within the sacrificial enclosure as an act of expiation. Karnad “went back to myths and legends, and then made them a vehicle of a new vision. By using these myths he tried to show the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions and conflicts and man’s eternal struggle to achieve perfection.”(Gill 16)

Nittilai is a selfless character who sacrifices her life because she “cannot resist her human impulse to rush to Arvasu’s aid when the enclosure erupts in flames, even though she is hiding from her tribe.” The play ends with the final redemptive act of “Arvasu’s ‘real life’ decision to sacrifice his own happiness with Nittilai for the sake of Brahma Rakshasa’s release.”(*The Fire and The Rain*)

The Fire and The Rain, says Aparna Bhargava Dharwadkar, “is a drama of sacrifice and expiation. The fire sacrifice is a propitiatory ritual intended to end the community’s suffering, but it is corrupted in multiple ways by Parvasu: his death is a form of personal atonement, but the communal crisis is resolved through other painful resignations. Parvasu also offers up Vishakha’s life, first to his sensual appetite and then to his lust for fame while Vishakha unwittingly sacrifices Yavakri to her very love for him. Nittilai dies for the sake of Arvasu, and Arvasu surrenders Nittilai for the common good.” (Karnad, Girish 2005)

CONCLUSION

This play by one of India’s foremost playwrights and actors is based on a story from the Mahabharata which tellingly illuminates universal themes. Protagonist is the confused Brahmin Arvasu who is in love with Bedara girl. It is complex and layered play that draws inspiration from the Mahabharata and explores themes of desire, passion, retaliation, and betrayal. The Play represents the curse of slavery and the role that it plays during this time period. The play highlights the theme ego, passion, curse and desire. It portrays the characters struggle with their desires, which cause problems and outcomes.

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