

# Research Innovator

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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Author	Title of the Paper	Page No.
1	Chiya Parvizpur & Fazel Asadi Amjad	The Unconscious Criticality of Wright's Native Son to Capitalism	1
2	B.A. Tina Zahel & Prof. Dr. Franz Josef Gellert	Ageing Workers in SMEs and the Influence on Corporate's Internationalization	12
3	Mimita Sachdeva	Life Skills and the Autistic Child	26
4	Talluri Mathew Bhaskar	The Fire and the Rain: A Myth Retold	29
5	Dr. Ankita Khanna	Assessments beyond Writing: An Attempt to Provide a Fair Chance to the Learners	44
6	Dr. Meetakshi Pant	Total Factor Productivity and Financial Structure of Steel Industry	49
7	Ashish Kumar	Carelessness of Man's Mind: a Study of Albert Camus's the Stranger	62
8	Dr. Manju Lalwani Pathak	Debunking the image of Sindhis as Refugees	68
9	Rita Malache	Approaches of tribal development: A critical Perspective	72
10	Prof. Dr. Patil Vijaykumar Ambadasrao	Wendy Wasserstein's An American Daughter: An Analysis	82

11	Dr. Khandekar Surendra Sakhar	Portrayal of Relations and Globalization in Kiran Desai's Novel 'The Inheritance of Loss'	89
12	Dr. Rakseh Rai	A Study of Social Intelligence among College Students of Tura (West Garo Hills) in Meghalaya	95
13	Prof. Vijay D. Songire	Male Sufferers in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Sula and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things	109
14	Prof. R.Y. Shinde & Dr. Archana Durgesh	Vijay Tendulkar's His Fifth Woman: A Brief Introduction	116
15	Prof. (Dr) Mala Tandon	Alternate Schooling and Teacher Education: Issues, Challenges and Priorities	122
16	Dr. J. Thirumaran	A study on three leading stochastic Optimization methods in simulation	130
17	Dr Tanu Tandon Mr. Durgesh Pathak	Media and Education: Pathways to End Women Violence	135
18	K. Ravi Sankar & Dr. V. B. Chithra	The Inner Awareness of the Human Soul: A Study of the Apprentice	139
19	Dr. Vitthal V. Parab	A Socio-Literary Perspective in the Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri & Bharati Mukherjee	147

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**The Fire and the Rain: A Myth Retold****Talluri Mathew Bhaskar***Lecturer in English, Andhra Pradesh Residential Junior College, Vijayapuri South, Guntur, (A.P.) India***Abstract**

Karnad has been the playwright who impacted the Indian English drama in a big positive way. He has given richness to Indian theatre. Karnad's plays carried a deep sense of Indian orientation and served as an instrument to quench the literary thirst with a new vision. His play **The Fire and the Rain** has humanistic characteristics unfolded. It revolves around revenge, futility of knowledge and fragility of human nature. Jealousy and ego-the two important human aspects dominate the play. The title bears the conflict between two opposite natural elements which are not only related with each other externally but there lies an inner significance in it. It is an obscure story which a certain sage narrates to the Pandavas in **The Mahabharata**. Girish Karnad has successfully reworked the myth of Yavakri to humanize it and present a universally true picture. The playwright, through this play, tries to focus the egotism prevailing in the contemporary society by associating it with the mythological stories of the past.

**Key Words:** Fire, Rain, Jealousy, Revenge, Egotism.

The Fire and The Rain (1995) is a major play in which Girish Karnad deals with the traditional controversy between asceticism and ritual, using as his source an episode from *The Mahabharata*. It would be not be an exaggeration to say that thematically Karnad's whole corpus can easily be divided into two categories: Myth-Plays and History-Plays. In *Naga Mandala*, *Yayati*, *Hayavadana* and *The Fire and the Rain* we find the predominance of mythical element and structure. Karnad employs the myth structure to synchronize the past and the present to blend appearance and reality, to put contemporaneity side by side with history. Karnad exploits myth because myth has spiritual health because they connect past, present and time to come in reference of human relationship. They probe at something, which is not prey to time. *The Fire and the Rain* with its working title as

*Yavakrit* seems to be a most complex play by the playwright. Karnad himself tells about the content of the play:

It is difficult to say...it is probably my most complex play to date. What interested me were these norms of Hindu religion like tapas, doing penance or the fire sacrifice to please the gods. And the people, who do these penances, continuously break the moral norms. A sage who does tapas rapes a woman. Another doing a sacrifice for a temple kills his father. It is weird Indian story that throws up challenges about the human behaviour and the motivation, all happening in the tremendously Spartan atmosphere of a fire sacrifice where people talk of Indra and Varuna. It has the human passion of a Greek play. Ultimately the question

is what pleases god? There are all these paths to god head-tantra, mantra, pooja, tapas, tyag-which one appeals to the divine beings.<sup>1</sup>

*The Fire and the Rain* is a translation of Girish Karnad's Kannada play, *Agni Mattu Male*. The word 'Agni' carries the connotation of holiness, of ritual status and of ceremony. Is is also the name of the god of fire. The title bears the conflict between two opposite natural elements which are not only related with each other externally but there lies an inner significance in it. Its story has been drawn from *The Mahabharata*. It is an obscure story which a certain sage narrates to the Pandavas. What, however, Girish Karnad does is, he transforms it into a master piece of drama by depicting conflicting human emotions through the characters. The play also focuses both on the negative and positive human emotions: Jealousy, betrayal, deceit, as well as selfless love (as evidenced by the hero and the heroine, Nittilai) and sacrifice. The hero, like most of Karnad's hero's is a man torn between moral righteousness, love and duty. It is, in short a splendid culmination of his creative intelligence:

There is one aspect of the idea of divinity in this period to which we should call particular attention, viz. Its intimate association with what is described as Rita. Rita which etymologically stands for 'course', originally meant 'cosmic order', the maintenance of which . . . is the purpose of all the gods; and later it also came to mean 'right', so the gods were conceived as preserving the world not merely from physical disorder but also from moral chaos . . .

This [initially] simple form of worship became more and more complicated and gave rise, in course of time, to elaborate sacrifices as also to a special class of professional priests who along, it was believed, could officiate at them

More noteworthy ... was the change that came over the spirit with which offerings were made to the gods ... What prompted the performance of sacrifices was no longer the thought of prevailing upon the gods to bestow some favour or to ward off some danger; it was rather to compel or coerce them to do what the sacrificer wanted to be done. This change of spirit is explained by many among modern scholars has importing of the magical element into Vedic religion and ... as a sign of the transfer of power from the gods to the priests. [But it would seem more correct to see the power as] transferred from the gods not to the priests but directly to the Veda itself!

It is the sacrificial correctness that constitutes the third meaning of rita... Ritualistic punctilio thus comes to be placed on the same level as natural law and moral rectitude.<sup>2</sup>

Use of Prologue and Epilogue puts Karnad very close to the modern playwrights like Bernard Shaw. The Prologue in *The Fire and the Rain* provides background to the main action of the play. The devices of irony and supernatural elements are introduced in the Prologue itself. It presents some of the main characters like Parvasu, Arvasu, Nittilai, The King, the actor-manager and his brother in the

beginning. An important issue in the play - fire sacrifices versus theatre - comes under focus in the Prologue itself. If we put Prologue and Epilogue together, an independent plot emerges that attains added meaning being related to the rest of the play. The play begins with a Prologue, is divided into three Acts and ends with an Epilogue. The Prologue begins with the ritual of a seven-year long fire sacrifice being held by the King of realm to propitiate Indra, the god of rains. Paravasu is the chief priest who conducts the ceremony. Karnad's uniqueness lies in the revival of the ritualistic and symbolic aspects of drama. Involved in role-playing, rituals in all cultures have a purpose: to ward off and purge the community from all evils. Dressing, singing, dancing, all are aspects of rituals. Standing away from the sacrificial enclosure, in the opening scene, Prologue of *The Fire and The Rain*, the actor-manager declaims theatrically:

ACTOR-MANAGER: Sirs, as is well known to you, Brahma, the Lord of All Creation extracted the requisite elements from the four Vedas and combined them into a fifth Veda and thus gave birth to the art of Drama. He handed it over to his son, Lord Indra, the God of the skies. Lord Indra, in turn, passed on the art of Bharata, a human being, for the gods cannot indulge in pretence. So if Indra is to be pleased and bring to an end this long drought which ravages our land a fire sacrifice is not enough. A play has to be performed along with it. If we offer him entertainment in addition to the oblations, the god may grant us the rains we're praying for. (pp.2-3) (Prologue)

Several texts of history and archaeology acquaint us with the ritualistic routine of Vedic age. The Brahminical legends describe the Indian-Dharmic tradition as deeply ingrained in rituals. The opening scene, Prologue presents the ritualistic details of the 'Yagna' ceremony that is the principal setting where action starts and finally ends in the Epilogue. The scene of the Yagna also includes the Brahma Rakshasa, a Brahmin soul trapped in the limbo between death and rebirth, moving around at the sacrificial precincts, though no human eye can see him. The afternoon session is over and now when the priests are beginning to disperse a courtier arrives with the Actor-Manager. Prologue proceeds to the discussion of whether a drama should be held alongside the sacrifice. The king and chief priest finally agree and permit the Actor-Manager to enact a play in the vicinity of the sacrificial fires. The scene of the fire also includes the Brahma Rakshasa, a Brahmin soul. The Prologue introduces to young characters, Aravasu, the brother of Paravasu and the son of Raibhya, and Nittilai who belongs to the hunting tribe. Aravasu shows his keen interest in performing play, acting and dancing which his priestly tradition does not approve of. The Prologue sets the tone of the play. Aravasu, the brother of Paravasu, pleads with him for permission to stage a play one of the accepted rituals at a 'Yagna'. However it is an accepted practice that Brahmins would not act since acting was considered frivolous and not appropriate to their dignity. Aravasu in a message to Paravasu writes:

ACTOR-MANAGER: A message from a brother: Dear elder brother, you once said to me: 'The sons of



Bharata were the first actors in the history of theatre. They were Brahmins, but lost their caste because of their profession. A curse plunged them into disrepute and disgrace. If one values one's high birth, one should not touch this profession.' And I accepted this. But today I am a criminal. I have killed my father, a noble Brahmin. I already stand tarnished. I may now become an actor. This follows from your own words. So please do not bar the way now. (p.3)

Besides, to placate Indra, a fire sacrifice was not enough. A play had to be performed along with it. Aravasu is exultant at the thought of Paravasu being there to watch the play. Karnad changes the purpose of fire sacrifice in the play. In *The Mahabharata*, the purpose of fire sacrifice is not mentioned but Karnad supplies a motive behind it. In the play, the King is performing the sacrifice to please Indra, the god of rain, as the country is suffering due to draught for seven long years. The idea of famine it seems emerges from the source text where Yavakri dies because he did not get water to purify himself. In this way he moulds the myth to create his plot. *The Mahabharata*, infinitely scripted and re-scripted, is an epic myth of such magnitude that we have never stopped living in its narrative-its narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which trans-cultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted. Karnad senses in the myth of Indra-Vrita, a deep dormant anxiety analogous to the myth of Yavakri in *The Mahabharata*. The self-reflexivity of myth, in brother-brother relationship, the fear of brothers destroying each other

comes clearly in *The Mahabharata*, where the bonding of brothers within the Pandava and Kuru clan is as close as the enmity between the cousins is ruthless and unrelenting. The figuration of these tales in our epics, and the tale of Yavakri, Aravasu, Paravasu, are interesting variants of the theme of fratricide. The fact that the myths affect us is because they inscribe the story of our lives subsuming a continuous plot with a beginning, middle and end. The story of Yavakri is one of the numerous interesting stories of *The Mahabharata* which occurs in 135-38 of Vana Parva(Forest Canto), the third book of the epic. Lomasha tells the story at the bank of the river into which Indra bathed to expiate for the sin of Brahminicide. In the notes at the end of the play, *The Fire and The Rain*, Karnad narrates the original text:

There were two sages, Bharadwaja and Raibhya, who were good friends. Raibhya was a learned man who lived with his two sons while Bharadwaja concentrated on his ascetic practices. Yavakri, Bharadwaja's son, nursed a grievance against the world for he felt his father did not receive the respect and recognition which was his due.

He therefore went off to the forest and did 'tapasya' (penance) so that he could obtain the knowledge of the Vedas from the gods direct. The rigours of his ascetic practise were such that Indra, the lord of gods appeared to him, but only to persuade him that there were no such short cuts to knowledge. Knowledge has to be obtained at the feet of a guru. But Yavakri was so adamant

that Indra ultimately relented and let him have his wish.

Bharadwaja, being a wise man, was anxious lest the triumph turn his son's head and cautioned Yavakri against delusions of omnipotence. But his fears unfortunately proved well-founded. For one of the first things Yavakri did was to corner Raibhya's daughter-in-law in a lonely spot and molest her.

Yavakri's misdemeanour incensed Raibhya. He invoked the 'Kriya' spirit. He tore a hair from his head and made an oblation of it to the fire. From it sprang a woman who looked exactly like his daughter-in-law. From another hair he similarly brought forth a Rakshasa (demon). Then he sent the two to kill Yavakri.

The spirit in the form of the daughter-in-law approached Yavakri seductively and stole the urn which contained the water that made him invulnerable to danger. The Rakshasa then chased him with a trident.

Yavakri ran toward a lake in search of water, but the lake dried up. Every spot with a bit of water in it dried up at his approach. Finally Yavakri tried to enter his father's hermitage. But a blind man of the Sudra caste, who was guarding the gate, barred Yavakri's entry. At that moment the Rakshasa killed Yavakri.

When Bharadwaja learnt from the Sudra how his son had died, he was naturally distressed. Although he knew his son was to blame for all that had happened, he cursed Raibhya that he would die at the

hand of his elder son. And then shocked at his own folly in cursing a friend, he entered a fire and immolated himself.

Raibhya's two sons, Parvasu and Arvasu (spelt Arvasu in the play) were conducting a fire sacrifice for the king. One night when Parvasu was visiting his home he mistook the black deerskin which his father was wearing for a wild animal and unintentionally killed him.

When he realised what he had done, he cremated his father and returned to his sacrificial enclosure. There he said to his brother Arvasu: 'Since you are not capable of performing the sacrifice alone, go and perform the penitential rites prescribed for Brahminicide. I'll carry on with the sacrifice.'

Arvasu did his brother's bidding. But when he returned to the sacrifice, Parvasu turned to the King and said: 'This man is a Brahmin-killer. He should not be allowed to enter the sacrificial enclosures.'

The king promptly ordered his servants to throw Arvasu out, although the latter kept protesting loudly that he was innocent.

Arvasu retired to the jungle and prayed to the Sun God. When the gods appeared, he asked them to restore Yavakri, Bharadwaja and Raibhya back to life and make Parvasu forget his evil act. The gods granted him the boon. When Yavakri came back to life, the gods reprimanded him on his folly and asked him to pursue knowledge in the right manner. (pp.63-65)



In Act-1, Nittilai's (A hunter-girl) and Aravasu's love is described. Aravasu, being a Brahmin, is prepared to sacrifice his caste and community to marry the low-caste Nittilai, a hunter's daughter. Their conversation shows this:

NITTILAI: (Scandalized.) Let go of me! Let me go! What'll everyone say?

ARAVASU: Why? Don't I have my rights--?

NITTILAI: Not until we're married. Until then the girl is not supposed to touch her husband-to-be. That's our custom-

ARAVASU: Mother of mine! I'm about to jettison my caste, my people, my whole past for you. Can't you forget a minor custom for my sake?

NITTILAI: It's a nice custom. Sensible. Worth observing.

ARAVASU: All these days I couldn't touch you because Brahmins don't touch other castes. Now you can't touch me because among hunters, girls don't touch their betrothed. Are you sure someone won't think of something else once we're married?

(She stops him and points. They are at some distance from the hermitage of Yavakri's father. A blind man, called Andhaka, who is a Sudra by caste, is sitting by the gate. Arvasu nods, signals to her watch. Then proceeds towards the hermitage, moving zig-zig, trying to camouflage his walk.) (p.6)

The play also explains Yavakri's return after ten years of rigorous penance to seek the gift of universal knowledge from Indra. He was granted the boon, though unwillingly by Indra. It is seen in the conversation of Andhaka and Nittilai:

NITTILAI: I only said I didn't know why Yavakri had to spend ten years in the jungle-

ANDHAKA: He was seeking God so he could ask for Universal Knowledge?! And gods don't yield to men so easily. He had to mortify himself, practice austerities, fast, meditate, pray.

NITTILAI: I know but-

ANDHAKA: Ten years of rigorous penance. And still Lord Indra would not oblige. Finally, Yavakri stood in the middle of a circle of fire and started offering his limbs to the fire-first his fingers, then his eyes, then his entrails, his tongue, and at last, his heart-that's when the god appeared to him, restored him limbs, and granted him the boon.

NITTILAI: (Simply, with no offence meant.) Did he tell you all this, Grandfather?

ARAVASU: Don't be silly. A man of his stature wouldn't talk about himself-

NITTILAI: Then how does everyone know what happened in a remote corner of the jungle-miles away from the nearest prying eye?

ANDHAKA: Every Brahmin on the face of this earth wants to gain spiritual powers. But few succeed. In my lifetime I have known only two who did. Your uncle and your father,

Arvasu. But they got their knowledge from human gurus. By diligent study. Yavakri has gone beyond even them. He received his knowledge from the gods, direct! Your uncle was sure he would fail. How he tried to dissuade the boy from taking his ordeal. But I said to him, 'Master, let him go the jungle. You don't know your son. I do. I brought him up on this lap of mine. He will succeed in anything he tries, you make my words!' If my master had listened to me, he would be alive today. But he died of a broken heart. (Pause.)

I waited. Right here. For ten years. I took care of his hermitage for the day when my Yavakri would return home. And now he has come back. In triumph. The whole world is at his feet. (pp.9-10)

Yavakri deliberately seduces Vishakha, one's his beloved now his cousin Paravasu's wife, and makes sure that Aravasu and Raibhya, Vishakha's father-in-law and his uncle, are aware of the fact. Yavakri's egoism and his carefully orchestrated plan of vengeance are well exemplified in this chapter. Yavakri tells Vishakha:

YAVAKRI: Oh Vishakha! It's so wonderful to have you here. Because you used to console me-don't you remember -when we are young? I cried at the humiliations piled on my father. He was one of the most learned men in the land. Probably the most brilliant mind. But he was scorned while this unscrupulous brother of his grabbed all the honours.

VISAKHA: Why are you bringing up all these grievances now, Yavakri? It's hardly the time -

YAVAKRI: Grievances! You don't even flatter me with 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 too went to Paravasu, 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 Paravasu on the honour, embrace and bless him.- (p.22)

After his return, Yavakri learns that his youthful love Visakha is married to Paravasu and that Paravasu has been appointed the chief priest for the king's ritual instead of his father. Yavakri avenges his jealousy by seducing Visakha. Resentful of Paravasu's abandonment of her for seven years to be present at the king's fire sacrifice, Vishakha becomes an easy prey to Yavakri's vile design. The Yavakri-Vishakha-Paravasu-Raibhya situation reveals an uncanny similarity with Agamemnon-Clytemnestra-Aegisthus plot in *Oresteia*. Karnad describes that the plot naturally fell into three parts like a trilogy, each part with its own central action and lead character. The action in Act-1 is quickly followed by Act-2 and that in a rapid succession describes the emotional meeting and mating of Yavakri and Vishakha. In Act-II, the imminent betrothal of Aravasu and Nittilai does not take place. Paravasu kills Raibhya intentionally. He aims his arrow at Raibhya and shoots it. Raibhya collapses without a sound. Paravasu says to Vishaka:

PARAVASU: You didn't need to. 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. (p.33)

We witness the gruesome killing of Yavakri by Raibhya by means of a supernatural agent; Brahma Rakshasa (a demon soul). The action grows even more sinister and cold blooded when Paravasu is forced to make a brief return to the hermitage and there he kills Raibhya, his father. The tragic action reaches its highest point when his brother accuses the innocent Aravasu of patricide. The tension in the play further intensifies with characters of opposed natures. Nittilai is a humane and compassionate character in contrast to the likes of Yavakri and Paravasu. Yavakri is a revengeful and cruel man who is bent upon using his knowledge against nature and humanity. Nittilai has a sympathetic nature and proves it by helping Aravasu when he is badly beaten up and is thrown out from the sacrifice premises by the King's soldiers. They kick him, drag him and tear his shroud calling him a demon. It is only Nittilai who nurses his wounds and helps him with fruit etc. she cares for him like a true beloved.

The course of the drama, however, suddenly takes a bizarre turn with Paravasu's killing of Raibhya in cold blood and sombre exterior, there lurked a vicious and convoluted impulse that drives him to kill his father and dispose of his brother making him a scapegoat. He does not reply to his wife Vishakha's several questions. The last of which is:

I was sure you wouldn't come home even if I were on my deathbed.

(No reply.)

But my fornication was reason enough, wasn't it?

(No reply.)

Whatever you heard about Yavakri and me... was no rumour.

(No reply.)

Yavakri and you. How much you resemble each other. You both go away when you feel like it. Come back without an explanation. As though Indra is explanation enough! He isn't. Not for me. Why did you go away like that. (p.31)

Paravasu's rejoinder reveals that even the seven years of incantations and chanting could not edify his demonic single minded will:

PARAVASU: One can practise austerities like your fool, Yavakri, to coerce the gods to bend to one's will. Stand in a circle of fire. Torture oneself. So many techniques, all equally crass, to make the gods appear. And when they given, what do you do? Extend the begging bowl: 'Give us rains. Cattle. Sons. Wealth.' As though one defined human beings by their begging- I despise it. I went because the fire sacrifice is a formal rite. Structured. It involves no emotional acrobatics from the participants. The process itself will bring Indra to me. And if anything goes wrong, there's nothing the gods can do about it. It has to be set right by a man. By me. That's why when the moment comes I shall confront Indra in silence. As an equal. For that, it is essential that one shed all human weakness. Be alone.

Absolutely on one's own to face that moment. Become a diamond. Unscratchable. (pp.31-32)

Obviously Paravasu shall not react to his wife's adultery as he as to match the superhuman status of Indra. And yet he must kill his father to dispel any possibility of further obstruction to the Yagna. Vishakha's story, true or false, aggravates paravasu's hostility against his father's. Paravasu lies to Aravasu in explaining the death of his father. In the dark, he mistakes him for a wild animal. He orders them (Vishakha and Aravasu) to cremate the body right then and to take care of the penitential rites:

PARAVASU: Yes, the sacrifice must go on. You know that. And only I can ensure that-

ARVASU: But the blood-on your hands-

PARAVASU: Yes, that has to be washed. We must atone for Father's death. I know I should perform the rites of penitence. But I have to return. Immediately. So there's only one person who can do that. You. As his son, its your prerogative and your duty.

(Vishakha and Arvasu react in the horror.)

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

ARVASU: But, Brother-

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

(He starts to leave.) (p.35)

Moreover as Raibhya's son it was Aravasu prerogative and duty to cremate the body of his father and concentrate on the

penitential rites. There after the spectacle of Paravasu's encounter with the Brahma Rakshasa is apparently comic but is loaded with grim tragic implications. The Brahma Rakshasa begs Paravasu to release him from his torment. But Paravasu refuses. On his way back to the sacrificial precincts the Brahma Rakshasa intercepts him:

PARAVASU: Ah! Not the Brahma Rakshasa himself! What a pleasure.

BRAHMA RAKSHASA: How did you recognise me?

PARAVASU: I was expecting you. Where else could you possibly go?

BRAHMA RAKSHASA: Help me. Please.

PARAVASU: Don't ask me. I don't help anyone.

BRAHMA RAKSHASA: Please, don't say that. I beg of you. You are my only hope.

PARAVASU: Hope of what?

BRAHMA RAKSHASA: I admire you. You aren't scared of me. You are tough. Your father gave me a new birth. We two are brothers.

PARAVASU: I don't need any more brothers.

BRAHMA RAKSHASA: You have no choice. Look, when I lived my 'human-life', I-how shall I put it-I was bad. I'll spare you the details. But the result was that after my death I was not reborn, as an ordinary mortal would do. I became a Brahma Rakshasa. A sole locked in nothingness like a foetus stitched up inside its mother's sack. You can't imagine the horror of that existence. Nothing to look forward to: no birth, no death; nothingness stretching endlessly. Your father plucked me out and put me back in time, in order

to kill Yavakri. I didn't want to, but I obeyed. And as a result, now I have something new. Hope. Of release-release from this state- (pp.35-36)

Karnad changes the purpose of fire-sacrifice in the play. In *The Mahabharata*, the purpose of fire sacrifice is not mentioned but Karnad supplies a motive behind it. In the play, the King is performing the sacrifice to please Indra, the god of rain, as the country is suffering due to drought for seven long years. The idea of famine, it seems, emerges from the source text where Yavakri dies because he did not get water to purify himself. In this way he moulds the myth to create his plot. Parvasu, a villain in the myth and also in the play too, is depicted by Karnad with a difference. He leaves his wife alone, kills his father by mistake and treacherously puts the blame on Arvasu. This betrayal of the brother facilitates the writer to make him a real devil in the play. A priest cannot resort to such heinous act of asking his brother to perform penance meant for himself and his devilish act reaches its zenith where he orders Arvasu to be thrown out of the sacrificial enclosure. One may observe in the play how one by one, those who stand equal to Parvasu, are giving way to him. Raibhya, his father, Yavakri, his cousin, Bharadwaj, his uncle are among them. Now only Arvasu is left as innocent competitor of his. Interpreting the depth behind all these incidents, Karnad has redrawn Parvasu's character in this form. The entire play deals with violence like bloodshed, betrayal, jealousy, pride, false knowledge and anger. There have been many interpretations of myths in the art and literature but whenever a story from *The Mahabharata* appears, it reflects

the qualities and temptations of our predecessors. N.V. Krishnamachary, in introduction to his book *Mahabharata*, an English version, extols the virtues of the ancient text:

The intellectual majesty of **The Mahabharata** depicting the eternal drama of human existence, with all its ironies and intricacies and complexities and cadences and susceptibilities, psychological heights, and emotional depth is equally unrivalled in the range of world literature.<sup>3</sup>

In Act-3, Nittilai, who by now is married to another leaves her husband to nurse the badly beaten Arvasu back to health. Parvasu's treacherous betrayal had nearly killed Arvasu at the hands of the King's soldiers. Nittilai is the gentle counsellor who restrains Arvasu from seeking vengeance against Parvasu. She says:

NITTILAI: Leave that to gods, Arvasu. Look at your family. Yavakri avenges his father's shame by attacking your sister-in-law. Your father avenges her by killing Yavakri. Your brother kills your father. And now you in your turn want vengeance-where will it all end? (p.43)

The act ends with Arvasu putting on the mask of the demon, to be enacted Vritra at the precinct of the fire sacrifice. Actor-Manager enters with the costumes and the mask of Vritra:

ACTOR-MANAGER: Here. This is the mask of Vritra the demon. Now surrender to the mask. Surrender and pour life into it. But remember, once you bring a mask to life you have to keep a tight control over it, otherwise



it'll try to take over. It'll begin to dictate terms to you and you must never let that happen. Prostrate yourself before it. Pray to it. Enter it. Then control it.

(Aravasu opens the bundle of clothes and dresses, almost in a trance. The stage darkens. Nittilai's brother and husband melt away in the darkness. The audience, including Parvasu and the King, occupy their places and watch.) (p.52)

The play consists of three acts and it presents:

...Three kinds of description, the three kinds of excitement or the three kinds of love.<sup>4</sup>

The Epilogue approaches the final moments of revelations and coincides with catastrophe. In motifs of 'play' within the play, the analogue between Indra-Vritra and Parvasu-Aravasu is made to appear tellingly. The masked performance and stylized gestures stir life in the mythical story. Richard comments on the significance of mask performance in the dance drama of aborigines:

It is thought that when a man wears a mask he is animated by the spirits, which are derived from myths. The spirit moves only when a man is in the mask. Conversely, a man dances well only when the spirit moves him to symbiotic existences support each other. Men freely exchange masks animating and being animated by many spirits in one day.<sup>5</sup>

Aravasu suddenly discovers in the prospect of plain Vritra - imitating the humiliation and subsequent anger of Vritra, an objective correlative of pain and grief inflicted by Parvasu. The memory of

recent event flashes back to him when he was forbidden to stand by the sacrificial precincts on the patently falls charge of patricide. Insults of the most brutal kind were hurled at him and he was thrashed to death, mercilessly at the injunctions of his own brother in spite of his obedience and innocence. The treacherously trapped Vishwarupa - the victim of conspiracy represented the story of Aravasu. Aravasu puts on the mask. The Actor-Manager dressed as Indra enters the stage. In Vritra persona Aravasu being is ready to be animated by the spirit of the mythic character. Indra jealousy of Vishwarupa and Vritra simultaneously presents a variation of Zeus' jealousy of Dionysus. Warmed up by the spectators growing enthusiasm, Aravasu's mind is initially distracted by the thought of Nittilai's selfless love. Vritra-Aravasu watches Indra luring innocent Vishwarupa to the sacrificial pavilion upon the stage. Vishwarupa in the ritual of pouring oblation to the fire is oblivious of the sinister design of Indra. Indra laughing silently moves behind, takes up his thunderbolt takes aim and plunges it into Vishwarupa's back. Vishwarupa screams:

INDRA: (Laughs.) Come, come. I shall welcome you properly. Come and sit by the altar and offer oblations to the gods.

(Vishwarupa mimes sitting down and pouring oblations in the fire. Indra laughing silently, moves behind him, takes up his thunderbolt, takes aim and plunges it into Vishwarupa's back. Vishwarupa screams. Parvasu, who has been watching impassively until now, jumps to his feet. The Brahma Rakshasa appears



next to him. The rest of the people on stage freeze.) (p.55)

The audience freezes in fright and pity and to their astonishment sitting at the forefront, Paravasu reacts in recognition. The dramatic propriety of this moment handled with consummate skill diverts the audience to take note of Paravasu's terror. Paravasu, no longer remains a passive onlooker but becomes a part of the scene enacted on the stage:

*PARAVASU: No. No. Wrong! That's wrong!*

*BRAHMA RAKSHASA: What's wrong?*

*PARAVASU: They understand nothing, the fools. Indra didn't mean to kill him-*

*BRAHMA RAKSHASA: Then what happened?*

*PARAVASU: He was panic-stricken.*

*BRAHMA RAKSHASA: Why?*

*PARAVASU: He saw a face by the altar. Whose face was it? The face of my dead father? Or of my brother, who is a simpleton, yet knows everything? Or was it my own face? Cold fear tore through him. He stood paralysed. When he came to, he heard a voice asking: 'Who are you?' His own voice. There was no choice now but to go on, to strike. But to think that the fear had lain coiled inside him and he wasn't even aware - (pp.55-56)*

With guilt and fear Paravasu utters. This moment of recognition, as in Hamlet's play within a play is crucial for it alone gives drama its truth and significance. Even the Brahma Rakshasa despises him now and rejects his offer of help. But Paravasu's shout acts as a catalyst for

Aravasu. The symbolic mask of Vritra slips and he cries out to Indra. Vritra attacks Indra. When the Actor-Manager dressed as Indra runs, Vritra pursues him:

*VRITRA: You can elude me, Indra. But you can't escape me. Even if you fly like a falcon across ninety-nine rivers I'll find you. I'll destroy you. I'll raze your befouled sacrifice to the ground.*

*(He pounces on a guard standing nearby and grabs a torch from his hand and rushes towards the real sacrificial enclosure.)*

*I'll burn down the sacrifice - (p.57)*

Aravasu becomes Vritra, the demon in search of vengeance. Aravasu's earlier mask of deference and obedience is now replaced with a realistic representation of an actual empirically verifiable reality outside the literary text. The sacrificial fire is desecrated by the hungry villagers who greedily snatched the food and drinks offered to the gods. In the ensuing confusion, Paravasu, in an act of final defiance, walks calmly into the blazing enclosure and immolates himself. Aravasu feels that Paravasu has finally won and he tells Nittilai:

*ARAVASU: I lost, Nittilai. And Paravasu won. He went and sat there in front of the altar, unafraid and carried on with the sacrifice. I couldn't destroy him... (p.58)*

This is followed by Nittilai's death at the hands of her husband and brother. Aravasu decides to kill him, to be able to go with her into the other world where nothing would keep them separate and where nothing mattered-neither her goodness nor

his stupidity, nor is the world evil; where the fire would have reduced everything to ashes. But this was not to be. Indra, pleased with Aravasu earlier challenge, grants him a boon. Indra says that favour could also be the result of the god's pleasure with Paravasu's sacrifice and Nittilai's humanity. While the crowd screams for rain, Aravasu selfishly only wants that Nittilai's should come back to life. This creates complications. Indra explains:

*INDRA: It's no great matter to bring Nittilai back to life. But once the wheel of Time starts rolling back, there's no saying where it'll stop. Along with Nittilai, others too many return to life-your brother Paravasu, your father, even Yavakri-*

*ARVASU: Yes, let them. Let them.*

*(Strange music fills the air. The souls of Nittilai, Paravasu, Raibhya, Yavakri, Andhaka as well as a host of other dead people enter the stage silently and come close to Arvasu. He looks at them and calls out.)*

*ARVASU: (Happily.) Nittilai! Nittilai! Brother! Father-and who are all the others, the Lord?*

*INDRA: Those who died all over the earth at the same time as your family. If the wheel of Time rolls back they come back to life too-*

*ARVASU: Yes. Yes. Let the world be as it was-*

*INDRA: But then won't the entire tragedy repeat itself, Arvasu? How will it help anyone to go through all that suffering again?*

*ARVASU: No, it won't. Lord, I have been an ignorant fool all my life. My stupidity contributed to the tragedy-fuelled it on. But after all that I have*

*been through, I'm wiser. I can now stop the tragedy from repeating itself. I can provide the missing sense to our lives-*

*INDRA: Are you sure?*

*ARVASU: Yes, I am.*

*INDRA: Well then-*

*(At this moment a shout is heard from afar. It is the voice of the Brahma Rakshasa.) (pp.59-60)*

The intervention of the Brahma Rakshasa resolves the complication. The demon exudes a benign influence on Aravasu by dramatically manifesting Aravasu's unconscious conflict between desire and guilt. The demon begs Aravasu to free him from his torment. He says that it is Aravasu's father who has involved him. Aravasu's father ordered him to kill Yavakri. Now, he has done his duty and seeks the help of Aravasu in getting himself released from this torment. Aravasu finally chooses to release the Brahma Rakshasa, for according to the latter; if Nittilai lived again she would be tormented by the knowledge that her resurrection would have condemned the demon to a life beyond salvation. Mercy triumphs, love triumphs and Aravasu transcended the limitations of his individual ego and asked Indra to release the demon. With this comes the longed-for rain. Aravasu's renunciation of Nittilai and Nittilai's sacrifice spring from positive virtues. True sacrifice is that of love, especially that which is for the benefit of humanity. It cleanses and purifies, like gentle rain, the fallen state of this world. Even the gods are not impervious to this display of divinity within man. Unlike the Aravasu of the prototype, myth of *The Mahabharata*, Karnad's Aravasu cannot seek from Indra the reversal of time to

make Nittilai alive. The wheel of time should not be rolled back lest others-all those who are dead-too may return to life. Time falling back could also mean the entire tragedy repeating itself shunning all possibilities of redeeming mankind from suffering and therefore Aravasu as a tragic hero is burdened with a choice. Aravasu's recognition brings about a painful change from ignorance to knowledge. Purged from the whirlpool of emotions, he emerges triumphant. The play depicts the playwright's interest in all almost every aspect of the drama-it's philosophical and social relevance, the problem, the composition as well as its presentation. *The Fire and The Rain* is commonly viewed as myth retold from a modern perspective. Karnad makes a very intelligent use of the Yavakri's story and Indra-Vritra story from *The Mahabharata*-the two complimentary myths on the brotherhood, betrayal issue-by converting into plays performed at the precincts of the fire sacrifice. Karnad's postmodernist attempts to highlight and romanticize the suppressed categories (such as the lower castes, the demons, the artists) are not effective with women's question. The two women characters-Visakha and Nittilai-became victims of the male paradigmatic struggles. Both get caught between the real and the romantic and they are reduced to nothingness. One is to insanity and the other to death. Visakha is exploited by her husband, father-in-law and by her lover. She becomes a sexual weapon in the hands of the male to avenge each other and the male search for knowledge and power suffocates her. Visakha suffers from

Brahminical patriarchy and Nittilai becomes a victim of another kind of patriarchy, the tribal patriarchy. The Brahminical Patriarchy in the play reduces the women to sexual exploitation and neglect by men vying with one another for knowledge and power. Simple as it may appear to be, the tribal patriarchy also proves to be lethal towards women who do not abide by the community rules framed by the male elders. They become scapegoats for the male pursuit of universal good. Nittilai at least manages to secure lip sympathy from Paravasu for her sacrifice, Visakha's end is unsung by the dramatist. The title of the play, *The Fire and the Rain* reinforces the above argument because it suggests a closure of meaning in terms of its male romantic perception: Fire, symbolizing solemnity and Rain simplicity. The play seems to convey the message that rain rather than fire brings prosperity to life. *The Fire and the Rain* plays symphony of desire in its matrix, no single rhythm, no single character dominates. Girish Karnad has successfully revoked the myth of Yavakri to humanize it and present a universally true picture. The picture being one which reveals that love is the only redeeming force in life and that the conflict within man is due to a careless pursuit of his own obsessions. This conflict can only be settled when man chooses to forgo his obsessions and embrace humanism. *The Fire and the Rain* is relevant to all the times and it transcends all kinds of barriers of language. It is a drama which has a universal appeal. The play is a translation of Girish Karnad's play, *Agni Mattu Male*.

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