



## Sacrificing son/daughter in world myths

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**Abstract.** Sacrifice has been a custom and a tradition that has accompanied humans from primitive men to modern men. They used to make offerings to God in order to secure His satisfaction or to be immune from His punishment. These ceremonies started to take different forms in different religions. The point to be made in this regard is that sometimes such offerings could be one's son/daughter because people tended to offer their most valuable things in life. Examples of such offerings can be found in myths and legends although it gradually was replaced by offering animals as sacrifice.

**Keywords:** Sacrifice, son/daughter, killing son/daughter, father, God

### Sacrifice

'Ghorban' and 'Ghorbani' are two words which mean sacrifice. They are infinitives according to Dehkhoda Arabic dictionary which mean 'to get close to god or something that can be offered to god for being closer to Him'. This concept is equivalent to 'sacrifice' in Latin.

Sacrifice ceremonies have long been severely connected with life, ideology and believes of men and few tribes can be found to not having such ceremonies. 'Avamadha' which means sacrificing hoarse to gods represents a very old ceremony common among veda.

Sacrificing has always been a custom by which men sought closeness to God. They did so in a great variety of ways with different sacrifices ranging from objects to animals and humans'. But today sacrifice implies killing an animal as an offering to God through them methods that have been recommended by religion. This word tended to include a vaster concept, to a degree that even humans were beheaded as an offering to gods. Even in some cases victims accepted such a fate with deep consent. 'Primitive tribes always sought instruments that enable them to take control of spiritual forces for the purpose of employing them to their advantage. However they began to realize that such forces are sometimes too strong to be easily controlled. There is a great world behind such mysteriously strong forces that protect them from being controlled. Alternatively they can be encouraged and persuaded to serve humans by expressing weakness and plead. This has been a main sources of emergence of what is known as 'religious rites'. These rites originally began by offering presents including sacrifices no matter it was an animal of a human. All these have been meant by men to gain control of marvelous natural forces for the purpose of using them to meet their needs. Of course making a present is certainly accompanied by certain enchantments designed to secure gods' satisfaction (Nas 22, 1995).

Son/daughter sacrifice for gods is a particular form of sacrifice. As we know, Abel and Cain conflict began as a result of God's acceptance of sacrifice done by Abel. Since they had to sacrifice their most precious thing in life they chose to sacrifice animal because they had no child/daughter. This is a main reason to sacrifice son/daughter because it is the most precious and valuable thing in one's life to offer to God.

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Such offerings although originally sought closeness to God, could be made for some other reasons as well, including evading God's anger, vow, testimony etc. such offering was thought to be best means to secure Gods consent and ease His anger.

'in Mesopotamia it was thought that gods approbated human sacrifice, but it gradually turned into animal sacrifice' (Soleymani 2003, 165). Some believe 'primitive men employed magic to take control of forces of nature but they began to discern that some of these forces are too strong to be controlled. That was how they tended to sacrifice in order to ensure they have secured consent of such forces (Nas, 22, 1991).

Sacrifices of men has precedent in Iranian epic literature: in the book 'Garshasb Nameh' written by Asadi Tousi, human sacrifice has been mentioned in relation to Noushyar-Anbarsi war. When Noushyar moves to battle against Anbarsi and eventually turns out to be victor managing to destroy Anbarsi, King of Kabul becomes upset, sad and angry. He starts to seek dead body of Anbarsi. When finding it, he cries so much and decides to burn it as Indians did by their customs. He burns a number of others with it as sacrifices (Asadi Tousi, 229, 2010).

It seems such decision was made based upon a custom that came from Indian culture or from Iranian culture as no similar things can be observed elsewhere but Iranian epics.

Sacrifice is a custom that can be considered as the main base of human sacrifice. Humans have long thought of offering their most valuable things in life in favor of securing closeness to God. Domestic animals were chosen as good sacrifices in old times because of their undeniable role and value in human life. This was extended beyond to cover family members (as sacrifice). It seems humans took precedent over animals in choice of sacrifice during old times.

'Sacrificing animals had been a deeply old custom. It was considered as a covenant with a god initially by Hebrews and subsequently by Romans. It was originally held to be a gift to celebrate New Year and spring festivals in Mesopotamia. For this purpose, cows, goats and that sort of animals were chosen to be sacrificed. This action was taken to ensure the year ahead would be prosperous. Ritual portrait which depicts Mitra as sacrificing a cow shows that wheat grains start to grow from blood of the cow. Dionysus ceremonies with Kants – servile women to Dionysus, Bakous, madly kill the animal and start to eat its meat. This carried a mysterious symbol: they were the god itself and drank its blood as wine. Cow's sacrifice set that god free and transferred it to the worshippers (Hall 2011, 86). In most of the times, sacrifice and gifts were presented to clergies instead of doing so directly to gods. 'Babel people used to resort to druids for securing prosperous in life and made their offerings of sacrifice and gifts to them and made their enchantments to starts and played music' (Nas 1991, 74).

In Mitraean believes, shedding cow's blood symbolized land prosper; that is why cow sacrifice was deemed critical for them.

'Sacrifice' rite has always been a common ground of divine faiths and an act of worship for securing consent of God. This effect had existed in non-divine religions as well. It was a way to get closer to god and keep disasters off and ensure a prosperous future. Sacrifice could be chosen from three classes: plants, animals and humans. Sacrifice was made particularly when men were in trouble and risk so feeling God's help. By this, they sought to offer their most valuable thing in life to evade such circumstances. Sometimes a son/daughter was deemed the most valuable thing in life, so it was chosen to be sacrificed. In divine faiths, such as Ibrahim religions, we observe that Abdolmotaleb decides to sacrifice his son instead of an animal although it has been discouraged and denounced by divine faiths. Koran has certain verses that denounce it.

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One of objectives for sacrificing has been giving thank to God:

Al-Kauthar 2: Therefore turn in prayer to your Lord and sacrifice (to Him only).

An'am, 118: So eat of that (meat) on which Allah's Name has been pronounced (while slaughtering the animal), if you are believers in His *Ayat* (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.).

In Islamic ideology, the word sacrifice is sometimes replaced by 'Hibah' (gift). Hibah literally means presenting something to somebody in return for no consideration. It has also a common meaning that refers to presenting one's most valuable person to God and also a covenant by which someone pledges to give a life as a present.

In ancient religions, Hibah meant losing a life particularly that of one's daughter/son in favor of religion. This was known as Hibah among druids and was conducted in a particular place designed for that purpose. In Islam, Hibah means giving life in favor of God so women who presented themselves to Prophet Muhammad and married with him were known as Hibah.

'in Indian myths, sacrifice had the philosophy that it could increase gods power and a way to ensure fortune. In later myth of rig vedae, Porousheh was known to symbolize the first sacrifice in which Mano's son was known to be the first sacrifice (Zomorodi 2006, 327).

Sacrificing was conducted in two ways: burning and non-burning methods.

'it is permissible to make sacrifice only cow, sheep or goat if it is being made in favor of God'. If it is chosen to make sacrifice through burning, it must be cow in healthy condition. It is conducted in this way: first of all the cow is brought to the place designated for that purpose and some worship rites are being conducted. The person who brings the cow must put his hand on its head. This is a way to show that the cow is a sacrifice and is meant to ensure God will forgive sacrificing persons' sins (Scripture, Lavian, verse 1:41).

'in Chinese myths, blood of a sacrifice, whether human or hoarse, protects magical power of swords which comes from mountains that is source of power in the world. Such protection of power upholds power rulers' (Zomorodi 2006, 328). 'many people are used to sacrifice for God in order to ensure they will do well in their everyday life.' (Movahed 2006, 94). 'Everybody who eats remainder of sacrifice's food will attain closeness to God because such food is holy. Sacrifice is for attaining to God' (Movahed 2008, 99).

Everybody who gives up attachments he attains knowledge in God and every deed he does is righteous. Such a person, when making a sacrifice, his goal is God. He makes his sacrifice for God only.

'some Yougis present sacrifices to gods but there are some other people who throw themselves into fire and deem it as a sacrifice to gods (the same, 2006, 97). 'in primitive societies including Australian ones, circumcision was regarded as a form of sacrifice and was part of religious rituals. in ceremonies they held for this purpose, they used to wrap boys in blanket which symbolized death and a rebirth. Then women started to dance beside them until men came in and start to keep them unmoved for circumcision process. After this process, the boys were wrapped in another fabrics to imply a new life for them. Then they were put to education for attaining knowledge and wisdom ' (Young 2013, 210). In pre-Christianity epoch, when drought and famine took place, emperor raised hand to prayer and undertook people's sins and urged God to punish him on behalf of his people. Then the hair of the front part of his head was cut and was clang to forefront of a black cow and then they sacrificed cow instead of emperor' (Mostafvi 1990, 58). This custom even is observed in rain prayer that is common among local people in southern Iran.

Such prayer is thought to urge God to send rain. As a part of the ceremony, a well-known person who was known to be good man undertook to secure rain from God in a particular deadline that was set, otherwise people could punish him.

in some stories in which someone decide to kill his family members but he fails, there is a third character who emerges and saves the potential victim. This third character does so for a variety of reasons and motivation. A motivation is that the saved person could serve as a protagonist or antagonist. Although it is more evident in sacrificing one's son/daughter, no mention is made about sacrificing son/daughter in such stories.

### **Sacrificing King of Moab (a Jewish myth)**

'when Moab king rose to Israel king by disobeying to pay ransom, the latter moved his army to defeat him. He decides to do so by keeping water from the city and putting siege on it. As a last resort to evade this crisis, Moab king decides to sacrifice his first son who could succeed him for a idol. By observing this scene, Israelis are terrified and quit war and return to their land' (scripture, kings, 27-20-3). This story has a structure similar to that of what Ibrahim (peace be upon him) did in sacrificing his son and the story of Jewish Yaftah, although with some differences. In this story, a father decides to sacrifice his son just as a resort to evade foe's raid, while in Ibrahim's story the foe is not in outside but is in inside. In Yaftah's story, daughter is sacrificed for a promise that father has made for God.

### **Yaftah Sacrificing his Daughter (Jewish myth)**

'when Yaftah comes back from house of Safah, his lonely daughter was cheering and dancing came to welcome her father at the door. When father met his daughter he became so sad. 'oh my daughter' he sighed, 'you make me sad, because I have promised to God to sacrifice you for Him. Now what can I do but to fulfill my promise?' 'oh father, be sure to fulfill your promise because it was God who made you triumphant over your foes. But before you fulfill your promise I ask you to give me two months until I can go to mountains and have a time with my friends who live there. I pledge not to marry or cry' she said. Father agreed with her and after the deadline expired he did as he had promised to God. From then on, it became a widespread custom among people in Israeli tribes: they took girls to countryside four years each year to mourn Yaftah's daughter who was sacrificed (scripture, verses 250:11).

This story is to some extent similar to Agamemnon story. The only difference remains that it is father who chooses his daughter for being sacrificed. In Ibrahim's story, it is not father who makes choice to sacrifice his son. Agamemnon made this choice for consent and agreement of Artemis, god of wind, while in Yaftah's story, sacrifice is made after war and after he saw him as victor of the battle. In Ibrahim's case, the sacrifice is made out of satisfaction and Ibrahim is quite calm in doing so. It is different from other stories just mentioned in terms of mystical points.

### **Ibrahim Sacrifices his Son, Ismael**

In the book 'Mojmal Al-Tawarikh', the story has been cited in this way: 'now it was time for Ismael to be sacrificed. Ibrahim suddenly fell asleep. In his dream, he was ordered by God to take his son to the mountain and behead him by knife. when Ibaham rushed to obey his god's order, Gabriel appeared with a sheep to tell him the new message of God: leave your son and sacrifice the sheep. Prophet Muhammad's father was Abdullah. Abdullah's father – Abdulmotalleb- had promised God that if He blessed him a son he will sacrifice him for God. When the time approached to fulfill promise, a druid persuaded him to sacrifice a camel instead of his son' (Mojmal Al-Tawarikh 2004, 192).

It must be noted that sacrificing one's son/daughter was common at the time of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and maybe a main reason for prophets' mission had been toppling such a cruel custom and encouraging people to sacrifice animals instead of humans.

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In Jewish ideology, sacrifice custom was stronger than any other ideologies. It tended to be symbolic among Christians who believe Jesus sacrificed himself for saving his people from being punished by God for their sins.

### **Iphigenia Sacrifices Agamemnon Daughter (a Greek myth)**

Human sacrifice was aimed to be immune from God's anger and/or being immune from nature punishment. By giving their valuable thing (a member of family), human sought satisfaction of natural forces. A prime example of such sacrificing was Iphigenia's sacrificing Agamemnon's daughter in Greek myths. 'when Greek army moved to Trava, it confronted with fierce winds and violent waves that did not let ships move forward. Army becomes frustrated. At this moment, a predictor predicts that these challenges are due to the anger and revenge of Artemis, goddess of anger and revenge. He prescribes that a virgin girl must be sacrificed to appease the goddess. This virgin girl is chosen from king's family, Agamemnon's daughter. After the girl is sacrificed the challenge starts to fade away' (Hamilton 1997, 248). This story is much similar to the story of Esfandiar in Shahnameh, when he moves towards Sistan. He orders a camel be sacrificed. The main difference between these two stories remains that the former sacrifices his daughter while the latter does so with a camel. Sacrificing one's son/daughter has no precedent in Iranian epic. In relation to Agamemnon's story, some sources claim that when Agamemnon started to sacrifice his daughter, Artemis sent him an animal and so the girl was saved (Kendi 2011, 126).

### **Hissonah, Laemdon's Daughter is Sacrificed (A Greek myth)**

'Herkoul beside a sea hears a girl mourning. When he looks around he finds a girl enchained. When asked her about it he is replied that 'I am put here to face a sinister fate for a sin that I have never perpetrated. My name is Histoneh, my father I Laemdon – king of Trava.'

Seemingly Posidon and Apolon appeared in the form of two workers and built Trava's walls. My father had promised them to give remarkable wage for their effort. But when they had finished their work, my father broke his promise and paid them nothing. Instead he threatened them to immediately leave Trava otherwise they will be punished severely. At this time, the two appeared as two divine creatures and sent a disaster that threatened the whole city. My father pledged to sacrifice me for evading such situation by giving me to a huge snake as a food. Sir. You seem to be strong enough. Can I ask you to save me because I guess the snake will appear now.' He decides to meet her father. In his meeting he asks him what he will pay for saving his daughter. He says if you save her you can marry her. He accepts and manages to save her and marry her (Green 2013, 134).

### **Arkas, Lokaon's Son is Sacrificed (a Greek myth)**

'Lokaon is Adardia's king, son of Plasgos, father of Kalisto and the founder of Lokosora city. He was the man who created the custom of sacrificing child. He did so with his own son. Then he held a party for gods and cook a meal for them with the meat of his son. However, Zeus refused to eat the meal and got furious for this cruelty. To punish them he turned him and his sons into wolf.' This is a story similar to one other in which a dispute is created between humans and gods. For each sacrifice, a man is turned into wolf for a period of nine years in which he must withhold eating human meat (Kendi 2011, 338)

There are two points to be made about this mystical story: Greek mystical gods take human-like characters or trans-human characters who have also human qualities. Gods of eastern nations are far more different from those of Greek and Romans.

### **Hiawata's Daughter (king of Irakoubis)**

Irakoubis were a nation in modern US over whom Hiawata ruled. Natives of this area have god known as Tarinawagon for whom girls are presented and sacrificed: ' a horrifying sound arose from sky, a sound like thunder. Then a huge mysterious bird emerged from the heart of clouds which later on it used to carry Hiwata's daughter on its back. Before he entrust his daughter to it, he put his hand on the head of the girl as a symbol of blessing. Hiwata was so sad for losing his daughter such that he got into a Chita's skin and remained there for three days to keep mourning. He never disclosed this secret to his people (Birlin 2013, 257). In this story the sacrifice is a sort of present for the purpose of securing immunity from gods anger.

### **Neji Kita is Sacrificed (an Indian myth)**

A sacrifice which is meant to be a present to gods may be either a plant or an animal or a human. When it is chosen to be a human it must be a member of family. Such form of sacrifice is mean to get satisfaction and blessing of gods.

'in Indian mythology, there is a Brahman known as 'Viashrava' who was in misery. His farms were did not yield crops and his cows and stocks had turned old. He aimed to give a sacrifice to gods but had nothing for that. He talked about it with his wise son, Niji Kita. He accepts to be sacrificed for Yameh, god of the dead. So he sat for three days until his father's wish was fulfilled and Kita was dead (Bierlin 2013, 303).

### **Ibrahim Adham (reflection of sacrificing one's son/daughter in mythology)**

Ibrahim Adham leaves his family just when he has a baby infant. When he is grown-up he comes to Hajj pilgrimage with his mother. They search for his father and eventually find him a worker who carries firewood to earn his living. Mother suggest the son that they meet him after pilgrimage rituals. Ibrahim who had instructed his followers not to stare at others when you are performing hajj rituals starts to stare at a young man. When asked about it, he answers that when I was leaving my family I had an infant. I guess he is my son.

'when his wife met him she became impatient. 'my son, he is your father' she told her son. A very emotional scene emerged suddenly. Everybody was crying. Son approached father. 'hello' said he to father. Then they took each other to arms. 'what is your religion?' asked father. ' I am Muslim' he answered. Father was glad to hear such answer (Attar Neishabouri 2005, 119). This story is important from mythological point of view. It reminds the story of Sidartai who lived in India and abandons his family an earthly attachments until he becomes Budha. Many of our myths prescribe to abandon earthly attachments to rise. It must be noted that Ibrahim's decision to sacrifice son is quite different from the story of others who decided so. Ibrahim's story is to some extent similar to the story of Rostam and Sohrab: but the difference remains that Rostam kills his son for his land and name while Ibrahim does so for closeness to God. There are other similarities in these two stories. In both of them, son is accompanied by a group of people. In both, fathers suffers from nostalgia. When Ibrahim looks a little body who was performing Hajj rituals he remembers his own son. This is also experienced by Rostam before war (Kazazi 2006, vol. 2, p. 124)

### **Lokaon (Greek myth)**

'Lokaon is Adardia's king, son of Plasgos, father of Kalisto and the founder of Lokosora city. He was the man who created the custom of sacrificing child. He did so with his own son. Then he held a party for gods and cook a meal for them with the meat of his son. However, Zeus refused to eat the meal and got furious for this cruelty. To punish them he turned him and his sons into wolf (Kendi 2011, 338)'. Here in this story, killing the son is deliberate and seems to be similar to Tantalous story. The difference remains that in the latter, Tantalous did not have an intention to sacrifice but his intention was to deceive gods.

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It was believed that meat and blood of sacrifice is god's meal. So eating and drinking them was deemed as an act of obedience. In pre-Islamic Arabian tribes, it was common to splash blood of sacrifice to door and wall of Kaaba, as a gift to God.

Fasting is a typical sacrificing custom among Jewish and Christian people: they deemed it as a means by which God may forgive their sins. Sometimes sacrifice could take a collective form, similar to Garshasnameh story as mentioned earlier. In sacrificing custom, it was common to choose the older son for that purpose. But sometimes a group of humans may have been chosen to be sacrificed. Fathers used to be glad and their sons used to accept willfully.

### **Ferisksous is Sacrificed (a Greek myth)**

Ferisksous is a Greek myth with great similarity to the story of Ismael. ' Atamas- king of Urkman- marries with Nefleh and has two children: Heleh, his daughter and Ferisksous, his son. After a long time of matrimonial life, king gets separated from his wife and decides to marry with Ino. Ino is a wicked and sinister woman who kept trying to destroy Atamas' children. He took some actions to ensure grains and wheats of the land are destroyed. This brought about famine and drought. Then she blamed the king's son for such disastrous situation. king asked monk about it. She tempted him to tell the king that he must sacrifice his son to help prosper recover in his land. When he decides to do so, a sheep emerges from the divine which has golden wools and can speak to people. It tells that it is sent by lady of clouds. It then took both children of the king into sky (Sonnat 2011, 97 and 98). There are many fundamental similarities between this story and the story of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). In both, not only the narrative structure is the same but many details remain alike. Moral force is the main source of decision of fathers in both stories. A divine force is involved in both and sacrifices accept their fate willfully. Characters match very much: Ibrahim and Atamas, Ismael and Ferisksous, Satan and the wicked woman, Ibrahim's God and Zeus's God.

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