CHAPTER-II
ON UNDERSTANDING CURSE

2.0. The idea of curse is found in almost all the religions of the world. It can safely be said that curse is a subject matter of religion. It is closely related with the term blessing. Blessing always covers the positive aspects like growth, development, prosperity, elevation etc. while curse on the other hand points to the negative aspects like destruction, sickness, evils, poverty, downfall and even finally death. From the destructive consequences of curse it is understood that at the time of cursing the curser has agitated or unsound psychological state and expresses itself in terms of volcanic eruptions of very strong and pinching utterances causing evil upon the victim.

2.1. LEXICAL MEANING OF THE TERM ABHIŚĀPA:

'Curse' is the English translation of the Sanskrit word Śāpa or abhiśāpa. The term 'abhiśapā' is derived from the root Śap with suffix 'ghanī' and with prefix 'abhi'; Śap occurs in the Bhvādi class and Adādi class in pāṇini's dhātupāṭha which means ākrośa. Vāsudeva

1. Pāṇini's Dhātupāṭha, 1.1049. Śap-ākroṣe.
Dīksita while explaining pāṇini’s rule Ślāghhnurīṣṭhāsapārjñīpsamānaḥ p.1.4.34, in his Bālamanoramā commentary on Siddhāntakaumudi of Bhattoji Dīksita, says √Śap means to curse, repremand, reproof, censure etc. (Śapa upālambhe). Bhattoji gives example of √Śap, as ‘gopī smarāt kṛṣṇāya śapate’ Here √Śap denotes tiraskāra (reproof), upālāṁbha (censure or curse).

Bhānuji Dīksita, the commentator of Amarakoṣa of Amarasinīha, while commenting on ‘Śapanām Śapathāḥ pumān’ (P. 66-67) writes √Śap-ākroṣe (Di. U.A.) Lyuṭ, P. 3.3.115. which means reproof, curse, blame, censure etc. and as to the meaning of ‘Śapatha’ he quotes a Lexical treatise ‘Haṁma’, viz. ‘Śapatha-kāra ākroṣe Śapanē ca sutādibhiḥ or ‘sutasparsādibhiḥ śapatha karaṇasya’ that means ‘taking oath by touching one’s offspring’. In the same Amarakoṣa, P. 67 it is mentioned ‘atha mithyābhiṣamīsanamabhīṣāpāḥ’ - Mithyāropasya Surāpānādiṁayasya. Here ‘abhiṣāpa’ means false accusation of subjects like drinking wine. It is clear that Amarakoṣa intends two meanings of the term abhiṣāpa. One is Śapatha - taking oath by touching one’s offspring and the other is ākroṣa - curse, reproof or censure with false accusation.

Amarakoṣa expounds Upālāṁbha √Śap upālāṁbhe, Bālamanoramā commentary on P.1.4.34) in two ways. (1) guṇāvīśkarāṇa pūrvaka upālāṁbha reproof mentioning good qualities like ‘mahākūlinasya tava kimucitamidam’ (is it proper on your part being born of a high race? ) and (2) nindāpūrvaka upālāṁbha - Censure mentioning blame like ‘Vandhakīsūtasya tavocitamidam’ (is
it proper for you the son of an unchaste lady?). Dharani koṣa says
abhiśastiryācāṇāyāmabhiśāpe ca kirtītā (980). Šabdastomamahānīdhi
lays the following as the meaning of śāpa and other words akin to
its sense. Śāpa-√Śap + ghaṇ - aniṣṭam bhūyādityevaṁ ākroṣe śapathe
cia - rebuking and swearing as 'May you be in catastrophe. Abhiśasti
svaṛṇasteyādikamanena kṛtam iti Mithyāpavāde - false accusation
as to this man has stolen gold etc. Abhiśāpa : svaṛṇamanena
hṛtamityādi dūṣaka Vākya Kathane (Censure with the charge of gold
theft) and dvijaguruprabhṛtikartṛke aniṣṭam te
bhūyādityevamanīṣṭasyāśaṁsane (expression of a brāhmaṇa or
preceptor causing harm or otherwise speaking out harm by the
preceptor or a brāhmin) Anekārthasamgraha a lexical treatise refers
Śāpaḥ Śapathā ākroṣe Śisparī (Śīlaṁ) Śruve² kriyocite’(304/P.26).
It also refers to abhiśasti.

abhiśasti³ punarlokāpavāde prārthite’pica, udāsthitaścara
dvāsthedhyakṣye copāhitaḥ punah/ / (103/P.120)

Calumny (public censure), request, door keeper, spy and
accusation.

The lexical meaning of abhiśāpa (curse) as laid down in
Vācaspatyaṁ (P.77) is three fold viz. (i) Mithyāpavāda kathane (false
accusation), (ii) āropita doṣa kathane (ascription of blame), (iii) aniṣṭam
 te bhūyādityākroṣe (to call down something evil as may evil befall

3. Amarakoṣa 260/32. ‘Yācāḥbhiśastiryācanārthanā’ - these four have
the meaning of prayer or request.

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you). It discusses the word *abhiśapta* (cursed). Curse is generally uttered by a preceptor, a brahmin or a sage with an intention of doing evil. It quotes a verse from a purāṇa (name not mentioned) as:

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\text{nā nāma grahaṇam kuryāt janakasya gurostathā/}
\text{bhāryayā' bhiśaptasya kṛpaṇasya viśeṣataḥ//}
\]

It says, not only a father or a preceptor is forbidden to be called by name because the sense of veneration attached to them, but also calling by name particularly of a wife, a cursed and a covetous person is prohibited on account of their low profile. Words like *abhisasti*, *anuvyāhāra*, *abhisarga* etc are found as synonyms of Śāpa or *abhiśapa* in Vācaspatyārī. *Abhisasti* is derived as abhi + śaṁs + ktin, which has five meanings, viz. *abhiśāpa* (curse), *apavāda* (calumny), *hirisā* (injury), *hirisāhetu* (cause of injury) and *Prarthana* (request). It supplies examples also.⁴ *Medinī kośa* reads śāpa ākrośa divyayōḥ (102/11). In another place it mentions ‘*abhiśamīrgaḥ* pulliṅga pārabhavākrośa śapatēsu (25/52). *Abhisamīrgaḥ* which is derived like *abhi + sarīj + ghaṁ* means Parābhava (defeat or censure), ākrośa (curse or imprecation), Śapatha (swearing), Vyasana

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⁴. Vācaspatyārī

(a) *Abhiśāpa*: “*urūṣyā no abhiśasteḥ somah*” (RV. 1.91.5)

“abhiśaste abhiśāparūpā nīndanāt” (Bhāg.)

(b) *Apavāda*: “*imāṁ mithyābhiśastim ca kṛṣṇasya Samudāḥṛtaṁ.*” (HV)

(c) *Hirisā*: abhi + śas (hirisāyāṁ Vadhe) + ktin.

Tītikṣante abhiśastim janānāṁ (Rv. 3.30.1) Other two are left as they are not directly related to our topic.
(misfortune) āsakti (attachment) and bhūtādyāvese (coming under the sway of spirit). Abhiṣarīga has also been cited in different texts.⁵

In the third section of the 7th chapter of Daivata kāṇḍa of yāska’s Nirukta,⁶ description of types of mantras are discussed. There ‘athaśapathābhhiśāpau is mentioned, which speaks that some mantras of the veda contain Śapatha (asseverations) and abhiśāpa (imprecation or curse). It is evident from this statement that Śapatha and abhiśāpa are different. Had both the terms been of same connotation two terms for the same meaning would not have been used in a single sentence. By the principle ‘anekārthāḥ dhātavaḥ the root Śap denotes two meanings as Śapatha and abhiśāpa. To explain ‘athaśi śapathābhhiśāpau’ the author of Nirukta refers to the RV. 7.104.15 and AV. 8.4.15 (same mantra).⁷ This mantra contains both oath and imprecation. ‘Adyāmuriya yadi yātudhāno’, portion of the mantra is an oath. It says ‘may I die if I am a juggling demon’. Both promise and consequence are clear in this statement. The

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5. (a) abhišarīgajādam vijājñīvān iti (Raghu)
   (b) tīvrābhiśarīga Prabhavena Vṛttiri (Kumāra)
   (c) Jātābhiśarīga nrpatimśarīgāt (Raghu/2)
   (d) Vinodayiśyantī navābhiśarīgāmī (Raghu)
      (navābhiśarīgāmī navaduḥkhāmītī mallaṁāthaḥ)

6. Nirukta, Yāska : P.133 (Translation and explanation - L. Sarup)

7. RV. 7.104.15, Av 8.4.5.
   
   adyāmuriya yadi yātudhāno asmi
   yadvāyustatapapūrūṣasya
   adhā sa virairdāsabhir vīyūyā yo mā
   mogham yātudhānetyāha//
portion 'adha sa virairdasabhir viyūyā........ yātūdhānetyāha' is exclusively the consequence of imprecation. 'May he be separated from ten heroes, who tells me a demon.' The imprecation part has always been met with evil consequences.

Nānārtha Ratnamālā of Irugapa Dandadhinatha mentions 'Sapathākroṣhayoh Śāpah (line. 681). Sāyaṇa's commentary on Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (Ait. Br.) 33.6 and SpBr. 1.6.1.16-18 explains the term 'anuvyāhāra' as curse. Commentators like Dakṣiṇāvarta nātha, Bharata Mallika and Pūrṇa Saraśvati have tried to explain the term Śāpa (curse) in their commentaries on Meghadūta of kalidasa. Dakṣiṇāvarta nātha writes 'nigrahavacanam śāpah'. Bharata Mallika says 'Śāpena nigrahavidhinā' and Pūrṇasarasvatī shows no difference from the two by explaining 'Śāpo nigrahavacanam'. What appears from the intentions of these commentators is that every body agrees with the sense nigraha vacanam. Nigraha means danda or punishment and vacanam is speech or utterance. Thus 'nigrahavacanam' implies speech or utterance of punishment. When punishment or danda deśa is the subject under discussion, naturally it comes to the mind as to who is authorised to inflict punishment? From the ancient times till date, kings have been held as the centre of power and are authorised to punish the wrong doers. Kings and administrators have been seen passing orders of punishment of various types, i.e. death sentence, imprisonment, forfeiting property, mutilating hands and legs etc. inorder to maintain peaceful law and order situation and balance in the society. But contrary to the authority of this royal
class we also find Brahmins and sages in vedic, epic and purānic literature, possessing powers to punish the offenders. They did not have any machinery to execute orders of punishment against any wrong doer or enemy. Utterance of words intoned with malefic intentions could bear the desired result.

It is some what clear that 'nigraha vacanam' though means ordering punishment, has difference in the manner in which it is inflicted. There is incomparable difference between the consequence of punishment of a king and a Brahmin or a sage. The curse of a sage can reduce a king even to a negligible form of a serpent (as evident in the episode of Agastya cursing Nahuṣa to be serpent) which a king can never perform. However in the Vedic literature, Epics, purāṇas and classical literature, whenever a brahmin or a sage is found cursing, it is explicitly clear that the person pronouncing curse is not an ordinary individual. He is endowed with something potential which may be called brahminic lusture or the power of penance. As opposed to the power of punishment of kings or ksatriya race in whose hands administrative power rests, curse is the weapon of brahmins and sages devoid of royal authority. By this two edged weapon they harm their enemies, bring catastrophe on hostile forces; drive away diseases and calamities and at the same time protect themselves from malefic forces. When viewed in its broader aspect curse includes many things as discussed in lexical treatises like Vācaspatyam. Nigrahavacanam or punishment is one of its aspects. Abhiśāpa as a vākśastra (weapon of speech) approximately complies
with the sense of curse. Cārītrabardhana commentary on kalidasa explains Śāpa as kopavacaḥ. Curse involves ‘Kopa’ or anger. In wrathful state a sage or a brahmin pronounces a curse. But it does not ensure cursing by any layman in his state of agitation. So kopavacaḥ fails to supply the exact meaning of curse. On one point it may be agreed that curse (śāpa or abhiśāpa) is a broader term of which kopavacahaḥ, nigrahavacanam, daṇḍādēsa, anuvyāhāra, ākrośa, mithyābhish昂tsanam etc. are particular aspects and curse or abhiśāpa is the general term for them.

GUESS WORK ON THE AFFINITY OF SANSKRIT ‘KRUŚ’ AND ENGLISH ‘CURSE’:

Śāpa and abhiśāpa, both the words are derived from the same verbal root √Śap. In both Bhvādi and Adādi class √Śap denotes ākrośa. Śap+ghan - śāpa. Abhi + Śap(ākrośe) + ghan = Abhiśāpa. Ākrośa is derived as a + kruś (āhvāne to call out) + ghan. Āhvāna is also formed out of the verbal root √Hveṅ (spardhayāṁ sābde ca - to challenge, to call) Now śāpa = ākrośa = spardhā + āhvāna. Śāpa is translated as curse in English, Hence curse may mean to challenge or call out evil. In the dictionary the english rendering of śāpa or ākrośa is curse which is the second pronounciation of Kūrs⁸ (to callout or cryout misfortune or evil). If transposition in ‘kūrs’ to make it ‘krūś’ is done we can get the similar skt root √kruś which has almost the same meaning of curse. Curse means the expression of

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a wish that may misfortune and evil etc. befall another. The adjectival 
form of curse is ‘cursed’, kūr/sid, and ‘kūrst’ - meaning under a 
curse, hateful, abominable, deserving a curse etc. By application of 
transposition (varṇa vyatyaya) we can have the form ‘krūst’ from 
‘kūrst’. In skt. by adding suffix ‘kta’ to ṛkruṣ (kruṣ + kta) we also get 
the adjectival form ‘krūṣṭa’ having the same meaning of cursed. The 
form ‘kūṛsid’ is morphologically akin to ‘cursed’. It appears from the 
morphological and semantic affinity that Sanskrit ṛKruṣ has influenced 
the English ‘kūṛś’ and ‘curse’ because of its antiquity. This can be 
observed as follows:

(1) (2) (3)
Skt. Eng. 1st Pronounciation Eng. 2nd Pronouciation
Kruṣ CURSE Kūṛs
KRUṢṬA CURSE-D KūṛST/Kūṛ’SID
(kruṣ+kta)

(4) Eng. Second Pronounciation with transposition of ‘u’ and ‘r’

Kūṛs - KRUS
KūṛST/Kūṛ’SID KRUST/KRU-SID

2.2. Causes of Curse

Ancient Indian thinkers have hardly given any scientific 
discussion as to the causes of curse. But from the study of the epics 
and the purāṇas we come to know that anger (krodha) jealousy 
(asūyā), dissatisfaction (asamitoṣa) agitation (asamādhāna or kṣobha) 
etc. are at the root of curse. Causes that are instrumental for the
expression of curse are different. They are break of penance, breach of vows, violation of order, breach of promise, breach of modesty (*śīlabhaṅga*), loss of kingdom, loss of wealth, childlessness, killing, death of dear ones, destruction, burning, insult, loss of position, nonperformance of duty, falsehood, desire for a woman, obstruction in cherished desires etc. for which curse is pronounced.

"Curse may be supposed to be a congenial impulse leading to an immediate consequence"9 This impulse may be stimulated by any one of the three faults of the Naiyāyikas, viz. rāga (attachment), dveṣa (aversion) and moha (delusion). Gautama10 points to these faults as the cause or impelling force of action. Rāga or attachment is the love or inclination for things that give pleasure. Dveṣa or aversion is the hatred for things that does not give pleasure. Moha or delusion is the false understanding of an object (*vastuparamārthaparichhedalakṣaṇo mithyā dhyavaśāyo moḥaḥ*). In the Nyāyavartika, the author Udyotakara while Commenting on Nyāyasūtra 4.1.3. explains various causes of action under attachment. They are kāma (sexual craving) matsara (jealousy), sprhā (desire to appropriate other’s wealth), trṣṇā (hankering for continuation of life after death) and lobha (greed). To this list māyā (fraudulence) and daribha (boastfulness) are added by Viśvanātha. Praśastapāda, the commentator of the Vaiśeṣika sūtra mentions five kinds of aversions (dveṣa) to be the cause of actions. They are krodha (anger), droha

10. *Nyāyasūtra* 1.1.18.
(malevolence), manyu (impotent rage), akṣamā (intolerance) and amarṣa (anger of humiliation). Patañjali\textsuperscript{11} also hints at some of the above instincts in his description of five fold klesas. The Jainas also regard rāga, dveṣa and moha as the basic springs of action which have the causes of bondage and enumerate most of the above instincts. ‘Curse which is a peculiar emotional excitement also springs from any one of the above mentioned causes. However the most apparent cause of the curse is anger (amarṣa or Krodha). A number of acāryas and commentators have tried to define anger. Rāmānuja’s definition is more comprehensive. From his point of view anger is perversion of mind caused by another conscious agent which is the cause of separation from cherished objects or persons and encounter with hostile objects or persons.\textsuperscript{12} Anger is invoked by a person who is the cause of non-attainment of the object desired.\textsuperscript{13} As to the emergence of karma (action) B.Gītā says actions are the outcome of triguṇa (sattva, rajas and tamas) born of prakṛti (māyā).\textsuperscript{14} Srikṛṣṇa says to Arjuna that nobody can escape action as it is the triguṇa which forcibly binds one to action. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas are the three mental dispositions. They overlap each other being predominant

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Yogasūtra 2.3.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Rāmānuja’s Commentary on B.Gītā 11.56.
\item “Priyaviśeṣāpriyāgamanaheṣubhūta cetanāntaragata duḥkhahetubhūta Sva manovikāraḥ krodhaḥ.”
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 11.62. - “Kāme Vartamāne Viṣaye Cāsannihite Sanihitān puruṣān Prati ebhirasmadistām vihatamiti krodho bhavati.”
\item \textsuperscript{14} B.Gītā. 3.5. - Nahi kaścit kṣaṇamapi yātu tiṣṭhathyakarmakṛt/
Kāryate hyavaśah karma Sarvāḥ Prakṛṭijair guṇaǐṭḥ//
\end{itemize}
over other two. When sattva is predominant, a person is inclined to perform pious and righteous works which bring mental satisfaction (manāḥ prasāda). When rajas dominates sattva and tamas, a person does series of functions which bring anger and sorrow as the ultimate result and when tamas predominates the other two inertia (ajñāna) and unwillingness to work are the consequences. Now we can presume rajas as the cause of curse. We see that the sages are purehearted and righteous. When they curse, their sāttvic state of mind gets agitated as rajoguṇa predominates the sattva guṇa. Mental perversion is caused and in a state of anger they pronounce words inflicting serious harm, misfortune and even death to those who are the cause of this mental perversion.

2.3. Means of attaining the power to curse.

The concept of curse and boon originates in magical rites and their power of application is obtained by the power of penance. Hence a brief discussion on magical rites, sacrifices and penance is necessary for the understanding of curse and its working.

**Magic**: It is believed that each and every object possesses a hidden power which is otherwise known as its magical power. Those who possess the knowledge of this power are known as magicians or yātudhānas. The demons are supposed to know this hidden energy and hence they are called yātudhānas. Due to the knowledge of this power they could be able to assume any form of any object they wished. This invisible power which inhere in each and every substance of the universe can be roused to action through the correct chanting...
of the mantras and desired objects can be obtained through that. This is the process involved in magic. The early man accepted magic as one of the basic principles of his life.

They had full faith on the secret and unconceivable power. They did not have any idea of god to whom they could please through devotion. Hence concept of god, worship, different ways of worship, yajña (sacrifice) etc. originated with gradual cultural development. By correct pronunciation of the mantras, the will power of a person gets invigorated is a fact. There is no question of getting favour from any source. There was no place for seeking favour or dissatisfaction of gods and no question of morality in magical considerations. What was ritually correct was ethically right.

The primary phase of religion is the magical power. Magic (Yātu) is the forerunner of science says Frazer. Though religion or science both believe in the natural energy of every object, yet the means or agent through which this energy gets harnessed is different. Scientists rely on observation and experiment to reach the truth. There is much exercise of intelligence. Where as in Magic Mantra, tantra are of primary importance. Superstition, secrecy, dullness are primary concern of magic. Frazer rightly says, “Legitimately applied they yield science; illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science”¹⁵ The spheres of magic and religion are different. In religion propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to men,

¹⁵. Quoted by R. Bhide, Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa - ‘Śāpa āṇi Vara’,

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which are believed to control and direct the course of nature of human life is dealt with.\textsuperscript{16} Hence religion consists of belief in powers, higher than man and an attempt to propitiate them. The belief in these powers may take the form of gods like Agni, Indra, Śiva or Viṣṇu, which is implored by devotees to favour them with prosperity of men, cows, horses etc. by means of offering sacrifices along with recitation of prayers. It is the sweet will of the deity thus pacified, which confers such favours on the devotee. In magic on the other hand there are invariably the mistaken applications of one or other fundamental laws of thought, namely, the association of ideas by similarity and association of ideas by contiguity in space or time. Thus, there is a belief, though wrong in laws of uniformity and causation in the nature.\textsuperscript{17} The magician believes that by means of the spells, which he recites while the magical acts are practised; the desired effect is produced owing to the fact that the like causes produce like effects. In magic the desired effect does not depend on the capacity or sweet will of the deity as in religion, but is bound to take place on account of the mysterious power arising out of the acts and spells of the magician. In ancient times the early people were fulfilling their desires by such magical performances. Magical performances include all \textit{abhicāra karmas}. They are in the AV. popularly known as \textit{satkarmāṇi} viz. killing (māraṇa), protecting (tāraṇa) bringing under control (vaśikaraṇa), exciting or making


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid}. P.221, quoted by N.J. Shende, Opct P.1.
restless (uccātana), hypnosis (sammohana) and withdrawing
witchcraft (krtyāpratiharaṇa). In primitive folk religion curse is
connected with magical rites. Magic is of two types. That which is
based on similarity is called Homeopathic magic and the other which
is based on contact is called contagious or Heteropathic magic.¹⁸
The magician employs the magic spells from a distant place. He cuts
the branches of a tree if he intends to deform the limbs of a person
and cuts the trunk of the tree if he wants to kill the person. Here the
tree has been identified with the body on the basis of similarity. In
case of contagious or Heteropathic magic, the hair, nail, cloth, food,
dust etc. which are already in contact of the person targeted are
collected for abhicāra or magical rite and it is believed that the
victim suffers injury. Thus curse being a spoken wish could be
inflicted by the magicians or shamans or priests along with magical
rites. Magic constitutes a part and parcel of almost all the religions
of the world. Magic creates miracles and every religion of the world
believes in miracles. Efficacy of human will is the basic principle of
magic.

**Sacrifice**: - Magic and sacrifice represent two different aspects
of man's effort to accomplish his desires. They are essentially distinct
and are felt to be so in the higher faiths. But in primitive religions the
elements lie side by side in no strongly felt differentiation.¹⁹ The

¹⁹. Keith, A.B. : *“The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads*;
Vol.11. P.379 (Foot Note - 3)
pre-Aryan people were mainly depending upon magical performances for the fulfillment of their primary needs, but the medium which the Vedic Āryāns preferred was called yajña or sacrifice. The method followed for performing sacrificial rites was no doubt prompted in the light of magical performances. In other words the process of performing vedic rites was almost the same as magical rites. Andrew Lang, the famous anthropologist says, “On the whole the religion of the Rsis is practical, it might also be said, is magical. They desire temporal blessings, rain, sunshine, long life, power, wealth in flocks and herds. The whole purpose of the sacrifices, which occupy so much of their time and thought is to obtain good things. The sacrifice and the sacrificer came between gods and men. On the man’s side is faith, munificence, a compelling force of prayer and intenseness of will, the sacrifice invigorates the gods to do the will of the sacrificer.20

Etymologically ‘yajña’ (sacrifice) is derived from the root ‘yaj’ meaning to collect or to unite (sarīgati karāṇa), giving away (dāna) and worshipping god (deva pujā). It means worshipping those like gods who are virtuous, uniting together those who are equal in status by love and to offer something as gift to young ones. In other words, showing respect, togetherness and giving gift are called sacrifice. Raising a feeling of dutifulness for ownself and towards the society is the sole intention of sacrificial rites. Hence yajña is

always teemed with selfless actions or in other words selfless action is yajña. 'It was believed that sacrifice was originally produced for gods, and that the gods tried to keep it away from men. But the sages however with their toil and penance could find it out and spread it among men.'  

According to some the term ‘yajña’ can be derived from the root ‘yāc’-to pray, because in yajña gods are invoked to bestow property. When the underlying tremendous power of Agni was discovered a revolution usurped in the human life and Agni became deified. Various worships set in to appease Agni. It was believed that Agni, when pleased, fulfills wishes. This feeling awakened faith and love for him and when displeased does harm, created fear in the minds of the people. This gave rise to a new method to satisfy Agni and other gods, which is ‘yajña’ or sacrifice. Oblations offered in the fire in favour of the gods reached them and thereby wishes were fulfilled, was firmly believed. The idea behind sacrifice was not only to give and take but also of strengthening the power of the gods. Bhagavad Gītā advocates this view in chap 3.11.

The word ‘bhāvayantaḥ’ in the verse means ‘to make powerful’. The concept of give and take found in the RV is also teemed with the spirit of making one capable or powerful. Gods pleased by the oblations fulfill the desires of the sacrificers.

22. B. Gītā. 3.11: “Devān bhāvayatānena te devāḥ bhāvayantu vahī// Parasparāni bhāvayantaḥ śreyāḥ Paramavāpsyatha”//
According to Sp.Br. sacrifice is of twofold nature. One is prākṛta i.e. natural and the other Krtrima, i.e. the artificial. Natural sacrifice is incessantly operating in nature. Artificial sacrifices are performed in their imitation. Nirukta defines the artificial sacrifice (krtrima yajña) as follows:

Why is it called Yajña? It involves act of worship or prayer or it is performed with an intention of getting result say the etymologists; it is performed by yajus spells. Aupamanyavas say it is having many black antelope skins or yajus mantras lead it. But the definition of yajña which Sp.Br. supplies, includes both type of Yajñas. ‘When it is pressed it is killed. When it is expanded it is produced. √Yan means to produce. As it is expandingly produced, hence it is Yajña.’ Sp.Br. includes Vāk (speech), Puruṣa, prāṇa, Prajāpati and Viṣṇu as yajña (sacrifice). As a creator, in prajāpati desire was born and then got multiplied. Being multiplied again it is born and for this reason Prajāpati is yajña (sacrifice). From this point of view vāk (speech) is also called yajña. Vāk, in the Nighantu, is reckoned as Nivīt (mantra) and rk. According to the Brāhmaṇas (explanatory treaties) when


24. Sp.Br. 3.9.4.23 : ’Atha Yasmāt Yajño nāma. ghnaṇī vā’ enametadyabhiṣUNTanti tadyadentamī tanvate tadenāmī jānynti sa tāyamāno jāyate Sa yan Jāyate tasmādyaṇṇo yanjiṇo ha vai nā maitadyadyaṣṭā jñāṇa iti.’

25. Sp.Br. 1,5,2,7; 1,7,1,15
oblation is offered in the fire with the incantations of Rk and yajus, the sacrifice attains perfection. When speech (mantra) through mind turns in to action becomes perfect yajña. This sense is also intended in Sp.Br. 3,2,1,26 where yajña (sacrifice) and vāk (speech) are conceived as pair or couple. B. Gītā says actions performed as a duty free from self interest is yajña. Giving up for the sake of adorable persons is also yajña. Religious conceptions came to be associated with sacrifice. Presence of God in the sacrifice is essential for He regulates the cycle of creation. The living beings are created from food. Parjanya (rain) produces food. Yajña produces Parjanya. Actions (karma) produces yajña and Brahma (and Prakṛti) produce actions (karma) and from the imperishable has risen Brahma (Veda). Hence all pervading Brahma (veda) is centered in the sacrifice.

Veda gives importance on the performance of rites according to scriptural prescriptions for purification of the mind. Yajña is the very first action that was performed for the creation of this universe. It is the main stay of the society. Sacrifices of individual character are performed for mundane happiness and prosperity. In a similar manner some sacrifices were instituted for social welfare, the fruits of which were enjoyed by more than one in the society. The aims of sacrifices were the wellbeing of the family, society, country, the universe, for rain, curing diseases, protection from hostile forces, freedom from losses etc.

26. Ait. Br. 1,4,13,16; 'Etadvaiyajñasya Samrddham Yadrpam Samrddham yat Karma Kriyamānam rgyajurvābhivadatiti.'

27. B.Gītā. 3/14, 15
Bhagavad Gītā speaks of three types of sacrifices in the chap. 17th. They are Sāttvika, Rājasika and Tāmasika. In Sāttvika sacrifice there is no desire for the fruit. It is done for duty sake. In Rājasika sacrifice there is desire for fruit. It is propelled by self interest and ego. Tāmasika sacrifices are performed without following the scriptural injunctions. It is devoid of mantras and Śraddhā. Dr. S.R. Gadgil says that the edifice of sacrifice is erected on the strong foundation of magical conceptions, that lordship over the natural forces can be acquired by performing special rites by application of special mantras. In magical performances conceiving the form of merciful god is not required for the attainment of goal. The same thing also happens in case of sacrifice. Fulfillment and non-fulfillment of desires do not depend on the will of the gods. Rather it is the flawless performance of sacrifice that determines the success. In yajña institution, Brahmā priest is there to rectify the short-comings if any. He is entrusted with the responsibility of flawless performance of sacrifice. There is no room for devotion, for the gods have no power to bestow fruit. God is only for name sake. Gadgil quotes Dr. R.N. Danedkar’s view in support of his opinion: ‘Sacrifice is regarded as possessing a mystical potence superior even to gods who, it is sometimes stated attained to their divine rank by means of sacrifice.’ Divinity is attained by gods due to sacrifice, is believed everywhere. Tarka Tīrtha Lakṣman Sastry Joshi does not agree entirely with Dr. Gadgil. He speaks of devotion as a distinctive feature of

love. It is a peculiar type of loyalty. In the sacrifices referred to in the Rv. is expressed this devotional love. According to the Anthropologists vedic sacrifices are not exclusively magical performances, because magical rites are always done with a view to keep under control the natural forces, where as in sacrifices devotion and surrender before the natural forces dominate. But in both magical process is involved.

Penance (Tapasyā):

Tapas or penance is a significant aspect of Indian culture. That which inflicts pain or heats is tapas.²⁹ The author of ‘Sarvalakṣaṇa Sarīgraha’ says, ‘Tapas is to endure pairs of opposites like hunger and thirst, cold and hot, pleasure and pain etc.’ Human life will be pure and stainless if it is heated in the fire of penance. Everything is held in Tapas which is the best. Rta, Satya, Śrta, Śānta, Dama, Śama, Dāna, yajña etc. are all tapas. Mahānārāyaniya upaniṣad says that the worship of Brahmā is Tapas. Upaniṣadic thinkers consider ‘tapas’ as an integral part of ascetic life. The tranquilled (śānta) and wise (vidvān) persons who repair to the forest, subsist on alms and with all faith practise penance. Getting purified they attain the immortal, immutable puruṣa through the path of Sun. Concentration of mind and senses is great tapas and it is the best of all virtues, say the Smṛtis. Everything which is difficult to surpass (dustara), hard to attain (durāpa), inaccessible (durgam) and hard to accomplish (duışkaram) can be attained by penance (tapas). Hence tapas is

²⁹. Śabdakalpadruma.
hard to perform says Manu. All men gods and demons perform penance. Affliction of body though constitute a part of doing penance, still the concentration of mind is of greater importance. Bodily pain is not the end in itself. It is a means to an end, i.e. the penance. Controlling breath, muttering mantras, counting beads of rosary, singing devotional songs accompanied with musical instruments etc. are limbs of penance. The greater the extent of bodily affliction and period of penance, sooner becomes the mind concentrated. There are various ways of practising penance. One can practise it by standing on a single foot, lifting both arms up and staying in that condition for a longer period, remaining in bare body in heavy rain, looking to the noon-sun staitionioned amidst fire on all sides in hot summer, remaining neckdeep inside water in the coldest winter, acute fasting, subsisting on air etc. The greatness of penance is well illucidated in the *Mahābhārata (Mbh.)* Non-violence, speaking the truth, sense control, abstaining from bad deeds and non-injury etc. are also penance. There is no other sacred effective means like penance. By tapas man attains divinity. There is nothing in this universe which can not be achieved by penance; says Vyāsa.

Bhīṣma explained the significance of tapas to Yudhiṣṭhira in the 161st chapter of the Śāntiparvan of the *Mbh.* The seers got the vedas by tapas. The creator creates by means of penance. Foods of

30. *Manu Smṛti:*

"Yad dustaram yaddurāpani yad durganī yaśca duṣkarani/ 
tat sarvāṇi tapasā Sādhyam tapo hi durati kramani/"

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[35]
all types are the product of penance. The great saints (siddhas) attain the power of beholding the three worlds by penance. Sinners are said to be extricated from their sins by doing penance. The eater of forbidden food, the foetus killer and defiler of preceptor’s wife can be freed from sin by doing penance. Asceticism is a great penance by itself. Divination is also possible by the practice of penance. Gods, sages, men, demons, pīṭras, animals, birds and the entire living and non-livings do penance. Worship of the gods, brahmins, preceptor and the wise people, purity, righteousness, celebacy and non-violence are bodily penance. Speaking the truth, speaking agreeable and beneficial to one are said to be verbal penance. Serenity of mind (maṇaḥ prasāda), gentleness (saumyatva), silence (mauna), self control (ātmāsamyama) and purity of disposition (bhāva samśuddhi) are called mental penance. Thus B. Gītā narrates about various penance in chap. 17th.31 Penance is also of Sattvika, Rājasika and Tamasika in nature. The penance which is performed with utmost śraddhā, without any desire for fruit is called Sattvika. Penance which is done with pride for obtaining self respect, honour and reverence is called Rājasika. That austerity which is observed with foolishness (mandagrāheṇa maṇasā) with self torture or for the

31. B.Gītā. Chap. 17th. / 14, 15, 16

"Devadviṣṭāguru Prājiṇa Pūjanāṁ Saucaṁāṛjavardhaṁ/ brahmaṇaryamahīṁsā Ca
Śārīrāṁ tapa Ucyate."//(14)

(Ibid) (15) ‘Anudvegakaranī Vākyāṁ Satyaṁ Priyāhitāṁ ca yat/
Śvādhyāyābhyanāṁ Caiva Vārīmayāṁ tapa Ucyate//

(16) Maṇaḥ Prasāda Saumyatvarāṁ maunāmaṁta vinigrāhaḥ/
bhāva Samśuddhirityetattapō maṇasāmucyate//’
purpose of doing harm to others is declared to be Tāmasika penance. Tāmasika penance enables one to inflict magical curse (ābhicārika śāpa). There is difference of opinion as to the fact of worthiness of doing penance. Doing penance is free for all. A person having control over his sense organs and mind has right to Practise penance even if he is a śūdra said Parāśara to king Janaka. Sage Nārada speaks about the worthiness of persons for doing penance in different ages. According to him Brahmins are entitled to do penance in Satya yuga, in Treta age Brahmins and Kṣatriyas; in the Dvāpara age vaiśyas along with the former two and in Kali age the Śūdras.

In the vedic age Śūdras were observing austerity. Even some persons among Śūdras were seers. But in course of time prohibitions were ordained and they were deprived of the privilege of doing penance.

Penance is a two edged weapon. It is both useful and destructive. The asuras employed their boon for destructive purpose. We find many examples of boons having been misutilised in the Mbh. Ambā practised penance for the downfall of Bhīṣma. It is believed that curse destroys the power of penance. Many plans have been chalked out for breaking one’s penance. Rambhā and Menakā were deputed to break the penance of sage Viśvāmitra. Five nymphs were sent to obstruct the penance of a brahmin. But they had to take the form of crocodiles due to the curse of that brahmin.

32. Ibid. 17,18,19
Magical rites, Yajña and penance are mainly performed for the growth of happiness and removal of sorrows. Magical performances are based on mantras. Favour of the gods is the basis of the sacrifices (Yajñas). Both magic and sacrifice are interdependent. Though grace of gods is necessary in penance, yet it depends upon the performer of penance to achieve it. Penance ends when the goal is achieved. So in comparison to sacrifice (yajña) and magic, penance is more effective. Bhagiratha could bring down Gaṅgā on the earth from the heaven by Penance. Viśvāmitra could attain Brahminhood by penance. magic and Yajña are means to ends and penance is a mental process.

2.4. Who is rightful to curse:

The power of cursing and blessing is believed to be acquired by performing sacrifices and penance. Ordinarily curse can be defined as spoken words uttered to punish those who commit crimes, bad deeds or who hurt others without any cause. When inflicting injury is intended by spoken words it is curse and on the other hand when favour is intended through words it is boon. Three factors are responsible in making a curse effective. They are (1) Strong will power, (2) Mode of expression and power and (3) rightful person (who can curse). In the absence of any of these factors cursing is rendered ineffective. Ordinarily desire is expressed through utterance of words. It has also exceptions. Wishes can also be ventilated through other means. Pulastya only looked at the daughter of Trṇavindu and she was afflicted by curse. Such type of curse are found in the Vālmīki’s Rāmāyaṇa. In the Mbh. it is found that a crane
was reduced to ashes at the angry look of a penancing kauśika.
Cursing is not complete by only strong will power.

The mode of expression is also very significant. Power of askesis wanes by cursing. So in most of the cases sages refrain from cursing. Viśvāmitra desisted from cursing demon like Virādha in Rāmāyaṇa for his power of penance might get lost. Thus we find two types of curses. One is pronounced and the other is unpronounced one. Whether cursing or blessing, it requires a worthy employer (adhikāri). Because cows never die by the curse of a Crow. This saying implies that powerless or weak person can not curse. Though weak people have strong desire, yet it cannot be considered as curse. When one rebukes another that you will suffer from so and so and die. in such a case the person never dies. But the rebuker only ventilates his internal displeasure through words which is just an ineffective effort. But when sage Bhṛgu says to Damśa, 'O vile one! you will go to hell and will live on wine and phlem there,' this becomes a curse, because Bhṛgu has the power (of askesis) to curse. King parikṣit died of snakebite within seven days due to the curse of Šṛṅgī. Gāndhārī's curse to krśṇa became effective after 36 years. Curse and blessing never get futile. In otherwords that which is falsified and made ineffective can not be a curse or blessing. But in the Mbh. we see three curses which have been partially or completely rendered ineffective. Gaṅgā's curse to Ambā became ineffective for half of her body. Curse of Dhanuṣākṣa to Medhāvī and sages' curse to Sunda and Upasunda were completely made futile. The effects of a curse
can not be altered or the inflicter of a curse can not with draw it. Still then sage Nārada and Parvata tried to withdraw their reciprocal curses. Uttanka requested king Pauṣya to nullify his curse. Pauṣya's unwillingness to accept his prayer has different cause. The severity and duration of curse can be lessened by counter action or pacificatory measures. In the 'Abhijñāna Śākuntalā' sage Durvāsas cursed Śākuntalā. But when propitiated by her two friends, the sage told that she could be free from the effects of the curse, only when she would produce a recognition.

Sages and ascetics, on account of their power of penance, are entitled to inflict curse and offer boon. In some places though the gods are capable of doing so, still they have to perform penance. Brahmā, Śiva and Umā are seen to have practised austerity. In order to enhance the power of cursing and blessing, men, gods and asuras are found toiling hard. Many demons in the epics are found to have acquired many boons by doing rigorous penance. But nowhere it is mentioned that they have cursed or blessed. Gods are more inclined to offer boons than to inflict curse. In the Mbh. blessings of the gods outnumber curses. In case of sages any trifling cause is sufficient for cursing. It would not be an exaggeration, if it is said that some sages curse without any reason. Now it is clear that cursing or blessing depend on the mental dispositions like sattva, rajas and tamas of a person.
2.5. Curse and boon:

Curse and boon are the two sides of the same coin, but they are not identical. Curse explains the destructive aspect or the negative side, when blessing explains the positive aspect. In the process of cursing and blessing a strong feeling arises in the mind. But their form, course, expression and consequence differ from each other. Curse originates from anger and blessing arises out of mind's pleasure. At the time of cursing mind gets deeply agitated and the person loses control over himself. Mental stability is destroyed and he becomes forgetful. The more the anger, the greater becomes the mental imbalance. Anger gives rise to confusion or stupefaction (sammohā) and stupefaction leads to oblivion. From oblivion accrues contamination of intelligence and loss of intelligence causes death.33

A person fails to scale the degree of loss that is caused at the time of cursing. Affliction becomes violent. Words are to be uttered with all terribleness at the time one curses. On the other hand when blessing or boon is accorded, mind becomes clear, calm and free of tension. A feeling of magnanimity or broadness pervades and the person gets scope to think in coolness. Before expressing a boon one can guess the consequence. In blessing the force of the words is greater, where as in cursing thought is more important.

2.6. Medium of curse:

Westermark writes: The efficacy of a wish or a curse depends not only upon the potency which it possesses from the beginning, 33. B.G. 2/63.
owing to certain qualities in the person from whom it originates, but also on the vehicle by which it is conducted just as the strength of an electric shock depends both on the original intensity of the current and on the conduction of the conductor. As particularly efficient conductors are regarded blood, bodily contact, food and drink etc. A wish of a person can be easily transmitted to another by touching his body. Touching acts as a good conductor which transmits the desire from one person to another in a greater degree than any other medium. Vibration arising out of touch, very well expresses the intention or feeling of a person. Mothers' touch expresses the feeling of love and affection, by reciprocal touch of husband and wife erotic feeling is expressed. Pride, fradulence and falsehood etc. can be felt through physical contact. Blessing is accorded by placing the palm on the head. Similarly hand is lifted while cursing somebody. However in Indian tradition the most powerful medium of curse is water. Water is taken in hand while pronouncing a curse and the curse water is believed to be very powerful. In such a case the water probably acts like a thunderbolt. Throwing water towards the enemy with the utterances of magical formulas is an important black magical practice in the domestic ritual of Vedic tradition. It is known as Udavajraprāharana or hurling of water-thunderbolt. Most possibly this is the reason for the identification of water with the dreadful heavenly weapon thunderbolt which we often find in the Vedic texts.

35. *Sp. Br.* 3.1.2.6; 7.2.1.17; 12.9.2-6, 13.8.4.5; *Tai Br.* 3.2.4.2., *Kauśika Sūtra* 78.2. etc. The word Udavajra is found to be discussed in other texts like
So this Udavajra Praharana in the vedic literature refers to one of the ways of black magical practices by means of water. Though in the whole of Sanskrit literature water is spoken of as an agent of purification and has the benevolent aspect, there was the malevolent use of water in the Vedic literature where water is described to be harmful.

It would not be out of place to discuss the nature of water. The apotropic use of water is well known.36 It is said that water is the killer of evil beings and it removes evil spirits. *Āpo vai raksoghnih* is a statement from the vedic text37 and which leads to another statement that Rākṣasas do not cross water.38 Diseases which are believed to be caused by evil beings can be cured by the use of water. According to Kauśīka Sūtra (kau. Sū) (25.34) when a man is possessed by piśācas the medicine man or priest should make him sip water and sprinkle water on him while reciting one of the *Catana* hymns given in Kau.Sū. 8.25. This indicates the power of water to eradicate and destroy the evil beings and the cause of this attribution of power to water lies in the belief that the water has close affinity to those evil beings. Some evil beings are said to reside in the waters. For example,

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*Aṣṭādhīyāyi* of Pāṇini. It gives a Sutra *Manthaudana*...... *gāheṣuca* (6.3.60), according to which the word *Udaka* is optionally substituted by *Uda* before the words *mantha, Odana* etc. in compound and we get the word *Udakavajra* as well as *Udavajra*. In the Šiṣupāla vadha of Māgha a verse (8.39) Contains the word Udavajra.

37. Tait. S. 2.6.4.4; Mait. S. 4-8-5; Tai Br. 3.2.3.12;
38. Mait.S. 4.8.5.
the apsaras (those who cause harm to persons) stay in waters according to the Atharva Veda 4.37.3. There are piśācas in waters and the plant *ajaśṛigī* is used in a rite to expose those who shine in water.\(^{39}\) The flesh eating demons lie concealed in drinking waters and cause injury to the persons who drink it.\(^{40}\) The demons namely kāla kanjas are said to have their birth in waters.\(^{41}\) A similar belief prevailed in Babylon. There people believed that the water would dispel demons and in that sense waters were regarded as an agent of destruction. They also believed that some actual and mythical creatures dwell in waters of which some are beneficial and others maleficent.\(^{42}\)

Water is connected with abhicāra rites or some such harmful ritual. It is addressed to bring harm on the enemy directly. Thus in a hymn from AV. 2.23.1-5. it is desired that the waters with their heat, rage, gleam, burning and brilliancy should take away all these things from the enemy and make him powerless.\(^{43}\) So far the use of water against the enemies is concerned we see sometimes it is prescribed to be touched, sprinkled or thrown away accompanied with the recitation of mantra or utterances of prose formulas. The evil intention of the performers are expressed from these verbal utterances. Throwing water accompanied with formula appears to

\(^{39}\) *AV.* 4.3.7. 10;  
\(^{40}\) *Ibid.* 5-29.8.  
be an indication of inflicting sin and impurity on the enemy by means of water. Hence water is used as a medium of transference of evil. Probably this idea lies embedded in the process of cursing a person with water in hand. Moreover water is a divine witness against wrong and that is why according to Hopkins, one who curses or takes an oath touches water.⁴⁴ There are usages like śāpāmbu, śāpodaka etc.⁴⁵ which mean water used in formularies of cursing.

Thus in the Rāmāyāna, being cursed by Vaśiṣṭha the angry king Saudāsa took hold of water in hand to pronounce a reverse curse. But however his wife forbade him to do so. So he dropped the water on his own feet and became kalmāsa pāda:

\[\text{tatah kruddhastu saudāsastoyam jagrāha pāninā/}
\text{Vaśiṣṭham Āśvamedhe bhāryā cainamavārayat/}
\text{rājan prabhuryato’smākari Vaśiṣṭho bhagavānṛṣiḥ/}
\text{pratisaptum na śaktastvam devatulaym purodhasamī/}
\text{tatah krodhamayam toyam tejovala samanvitanī/}
\text{vyasarjayata dharmātmā tataḥ pādau siṣeca ca/}⁴⁶

In the Mahābhārata, Śrīgīn, the son of Śamīka, touches water before he pronounced a curse on parīkṣit:

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⁴⁶ Rāmāyāna, 7.65.29-31.
Another reference to water being an effective medium of curse is found in the Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇa. It is stated that king prṣadhra killed the cow of his preceptor Maulī. mistaking it for a bison. Maulī’s son Bābhṛavya was the care taker of the cow. Seeing the Sacrificial cow being killed by the king, he cursed him to be a Śūdra. Hearing the degrading imprecation the king wanted to retaliate by recursing him. He held water in his hand to pronounce a curse. In the meantime sage Maulī interfered and put an end to the matter.

There is another episode narrated in the Skp.49 where a pious brahmin named Upādhyāya has wielded water in his palm and cursed Yama to be childless and unworshipable, for he was rendered childless by Yama, in his old age due to the death of his five year old son.

47. Mbh. Ādi. P. 41.11
48. Mark. P. 109.11:
    evami śapto nṛpah kṛddhastaccāpa Paripiditaḥ/
    Pratiśāpaparo vipra toyanī jagrāha Pāṇinī//
49. Skp. 6.139.7: ādāya salilāṁ haste Śucirbhūtvā Samāhitaḥ/
    Pradadau dāruṇant Śāpam dharmarājāya duḥkhitaḥ//