**Introduction of Hrafnkel’s Saga**

Hrafnkel’s Saga is one of the oldest Icelandic family sagas dealing with a feud. The saga is particularly unusual in its directness and simplicity. It has a straightforward structure focusing directly on the feud and eliminating all issues extraneous to it. In this manner, it emphasizes its conclusion’s tragic inevitability. The saga is supposed to be written in the late thirteenth century due to the fact that it is based on eastern Iceland during the first half of the tenth century. However, some of the researchers also believe that the saga is more recent based on the ground that the earliest surviving manuscript of the text contains fragments dating back to fifteen hundred.

**Understanding of Althing and Justice**

The plot of the saga revolves around a lawsuit. For this reason, it is particularly important for the readers to understand the channel of justice service at the town. It primarily went through the Althing, i.e., the Icelandic General Assembly. In the tenth century, it used to meet once in a year for making laws and judging suits in an open-air legislature. Iceland has four administrative quarters; all of them had a court at the Althing. At least nine *godi* represented each quarter. They were both priests and chefs, and also responsible for appointing the judges for quarters. All men of standing used to put themselves under the *godi’s* protection. Also, these men of standing could only be sued for the court of their particular *godi’s* court. If under any situation, one of the men of standing wanted to sue the *godi*, he could only do it through another *godi* only if he would agree to do so, i.e., by accepting the man’s loyalty towards himself (Jones, 1999).

Hrafnkel’s saga revolves around the *godi* named Hrafnkel who had a rich farm called Adalbol. He also had a horse named Freyfaxi; it was his most priced possession. Hrafnkel loved his horse to the extent that he had sworn to kill any man who would ride Freyfaxi. Also, he had hired a shepherd for his farm named Einar. One day, despite all warning, Einar rode Freyfaxi for chasing some escaping sheep. Hrafnkel calmly killed Einar for being bound by his oath. However, he felt guilty on his killing. Therefore, he did not leave the dead body out in the open for the wild animals to eat. Instead, he buried it in the ground and raised a cairn of the grave. Einar’s father Thorbjorn, on coming known to the matter, asked for compensation. Hrafnkel refused the compensation and offered plenty of milk in the summer months and plenty of meat in the winter month that was then rejected by Thorbjorn. Additionally, Hrafnkel refused to meet Thorbjorn in the court for it would imply the situation that both were equals. However, in his character Hrafnkel remained a gentleman primarily due to the fact that he offered a decent compensation to Einar’s father. It also shows the elements of remorse and guilt in his personality (Pálsson, 1971).

Facing the situation, the concerned father Thorbjorn turned to his nephew named Sam, who happened to be a skilled lawyer. The situation was complex because Hrafnkel was their *godi*. Therefore, the two men decided to find another *godi* who would support their suit at the court and give them protection thereafter. It proved to be a difficult step for Thorbjorn and Sam due to the fact that Hrafnkel was a formidable foe and no one dared to stand against him. Eventually, the two became successful in convincing another *godi* named Thorgeir. He was a successful and powerful *godi,* who finally managed to get Hrafnkel convicted at Althing, the Icelandic General Assembly. He was sentenced to outlawry. Primarily, as pointed out earlier, Hrafnkel was a gentleman. His personality also showed the elements of remorse and guilt for killing Einar. Additionally, the kind of compensation he offered also showed the kind side of his personality as well as the fact that how much in deep sorrow he was for the unfortunate killing of Einar that he did not agree to give a one-time compensation but wanted to remain committed for the rest of his life. For these reasons, he was not given any harsh punishments (Kellogg, 2001).

Although Thorgeir advised Sam to kill Hrafnkel but he refused. Sam took all property of Hrafnkel while him along with his family was turned out of the town. Hrafnkel later brought his lift together and bought a farm on credit. He became wealthy again through hard work and persistent through that rundown farm. He also became *godi* again by obtaining the sworn loyalty of all the people living in that town. However, later in the saga, Hrafnkel killed Sam’s brother named Eyvin while he passed by the farm. Before Sam could gather the forces and attacked Hrafnkel for revenge, he ascended on the Althing with seventy men and captured Sam. He gave him the same choice that he was given. Sam moved back to his old farm. Sam could never get the support to avenge himself on Hrafnkel again.

**The Theme of Justice in Hrafnkel’s Saga**

Scholars have been interested in Hrafnkel’s Sage for its interesting theme. Firstly, there is the danger of pride. Faith plays a significant role across the narrative. Hrafnkel had power because he was intimately linked with his hold on faith. He performed endless rituals and was also able to erect a temple in the middle of the town in honor of his duty and piety due to his faith. However, he lost grip on his faith and became an atheist when he was humiliated. Also, his temple was destroyed and he was turned out of town. All of these details point towards the societal values of the Icelandic people in the early tenth century. They lived a ritualistic live led by faith.

The saga’s political implications are of great interest to the scholars. It gives rise to several questions such as if justice could only be achieved through the use of force and if the men of standing were above the law. Also, the element of revenge overshadows the concept of justice in the sage. The concept of revenge is conflated with that of justice but it is quite distinct. For instance, Thorbjorn went for justice to Althing for his son’s murder by Hrafnkel. However, his other acts explained later in the saga such as destruction of Hrafnkel’s temple point towards revenge instead of justice.

However, justice remains the major theme of the saga. Hrafnkel, despite his regret and guilt of killing Einar remained unable to provide justice to his father Thorbjorn. Moreover, Thorbjorn remained in find of a kind of justice that Hrafnkel was unable to provide, i.e., he refused to accept the compensation offered by him. Instead, he worked for taking over the property of Hrafnkel as blood money of his murdered son. Although in the end of the saga, Thorbjorn remained successful in getting that justice as Hrafnkel was striped of his power and glory, it was never enough for him. He destroyed Hrafnkel’s temple, and Sam took over his property as revenge.

This revenge plays a key role in main theme of the saga, i.e., justice. Firstly, Thorbjorn and Sam took revenge in the same of justice on Hrafnkel. They turned him out of the town, destroyed the temple that Hrafnkel built in honor of his piety and power, and Sam took over the farm of Hrafnkel. All of these acts were performed as revenge despite the fact that the Althing had convicted him of his charges. However, later when Hrafnkel was able to come back to the town with seventy men and take over the reign. He gave the same choice to Sam. He did not kill him. Rather he gave Sam the choice to move back to his farm and claim down his possession on farm named Adalbol that previously belonged to Hrafnkel. In this way, justice prevailed in the Iceland of the tenth century and Hrafnkel was able to re-establish his identity.

During the prevalence of justice in this saga, it is worth noticing that the element of innocence was given due importance in deciding the punishment for any person. Hrafnkel was proven to be innocent in his act for several reasons. For instance, he had to kill Einar due to his oath. Otherwise, his oath would have been broken. Also, he constantly showed the elements of remorse. He did not leave the dead body out in the open for the wild animals to eat. Instead, he buried it in the ground and raised a cairn of the grave. It showed that he wanted to give Einar a proper burial. Also, he offered a generous compensation to Einar’s father Thorbjorn, i.e., plenty of milk in the summer months and plenty of meat in the winter month. It showed that he was so remorseful on his grudging act that he wanted to remain committed to it for the rest of his life. All of these actions indicated that Hrafnkel was not only legally innocent but also morally expiated his sins.

**References**

Jones, G. (Ed.). (1999). *Eirik the Red and other Icelandic sagas*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Pálsson, H. (1971). *Art and Ethics in Hrafnkel's saga*. Munksgaard.

Kellogg, R. (2001). *The Sagas of the Icelanders*. Penguin UK.