

ROLE OF DESTINY IN THE GREEK MYTH (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE STORIES OF ‘PERSEUS AND MEDUSA’ AND ‘OEDIPUS’)

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Abstract: Myth is a narrative of traditional folk stories related to the distant past. Myths are beyond the reach of history. The Greek mythology is very resourceful. In Greek mythology, destiny is found to be always active in every narrative. In the primitive stage of human beings it was believed that every stages of human life were controlled by some hidden power. That hidden power was destiny. There are various aspects of the Greek myth which invite academic discussion. But here in this paper humble attempt is made to concentrate on the role of destiny with the help of two such myths – ‘Perseus and Medusa’ and ‘Oedipus’. The objectives of this paper are to focus on the role of destiny in the Greek myths.

Keywords : *Myth, Destiny, Prophecy, Greek mythology.*

Introduction :

Myth is a narrative of traditional folk stories related to the distant past. These narratives are based on various concepts of the creation and destruction of the universe. Myths are beyond the reach of history. Hence the myths are supernatural in nature as well as in content. It is “a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.”(*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, page. 946). So far as the Greek myths are concerned destiny plays the all-important role.

Objectives :

The objectives of this paper are to focus on the role of destiny in the Greek myths. In fact the whole myth is, by and large govern by destiny. Destiny creates supernatural environs in the Greek myth leading to a kind of dramatic end. The study of destiny helps a lot to have and over all understanding of the Greek myth.

Scope and range :

There are various aspects of the Greek myth which invite academic discussion. But here in this paper humble attempt is made to concentrate on the role of destiny with the help of two such myths.

Source and method :

This study is based on several books written on myth. At the same time a few dissertations are helped taken in to account. The relevant websites are also visited.

The analytical methodology is adopted in this paper.

1.00 Introduction to the Greek mythology :

The Greek mythology is very resourceful. In fact the ancient Greek civilization has and enormous influence on history, culture and literature all over the world. The Greek mythology concern the origin and the nature of the world, the lives and activities of the deities, Heroes and mythological creatures. These myths were initially found in the form of oral-poetic tradition.

The role of destiny in Greek myth :

The concept of destiny :

Destiny is a hidden power which is believed to control events determining the future of a person or persons. In Greek mythology, destiny is found to be always active in every narratives. Destiny gives some signals of something evil in coming days. In the primitive stage of human beings there were know the developments of logic and reasons. While struggling for survival our fore-fathers.had to believe on the super naturals. If was believe that stage of human life is controlled be some hidden power. That hidden power was destiny. Not to speak of human beings the gods and goddesses were not free from destiny. In Greek mythology, all these things found expression. Destiny is found in Greek mythology sometimes in terms of luck and sometimes in the form of accident.

The role of destiny in the myth of Perseus and Medusa :

Acrisius, the king of Argos, had a daughter named Danae. It so happened that it had been prophesied that Acrisius would be kill by the son of Danae. Being afraid Acrisius kept Danae in a confinement. So that, she did not come into contact with any man. One day Zeus heard the wailings of Danae while flying over the confinement. Zeus was highly impressed by the beauty of Danae and in guise of rain he entered into the confinement. In this way, Zeus and Danae came into physical contact and consequently Danae gave birth to a male child named Perseus. Acrisius threw Danae and the new born into the sea and they were rescued by Dictys, a fisherman. Perseus was brought up by Dictys. In course of time Polidectus, the king of Cherrifaswanted to marry off Danae. But Perseus was obstacle for the king. The king hatched a conspiracy. He sent Perseus to bring the head of Medusa. Medusa was very beautiful but monstrous. She had the power to turn a man into a stone by dint of eye side. But Perseus inherited the devine power of Zeus. So, Medusa could no harm to him. Perseus faught valiantly against Medusa and he cut off her head. He brought the head to Polidectus. Polidectus was turned into a stone while keeping eye to eye with Medusa. Perseus became a the king of Cherrifas. Incidentally, he attacked the kingdom of Argos. Acrisius fled away in disguise. Perseus came to know about the prophesy from his mother and he wanted to meet his grandfather. On his way, he took part in sports in a playground. Acrisius was present there but Perseus did not know about it. While throwing discus by Perseus it fell on the head of Acrisius and he died. In this way, Acrisius was killed by Perseus and the prophasy came true.

The whole story of Perseus and Medusa is pre-destine. All the attempts of Acrisius to negate the prophesy went in vain, On the other hand, Perseus never wanted to kill his grandfather. He came forward to meet his grandfather but ultimately he became the murderer of his grandfather. It was the destiny of Perseus.

The role of destiny in the myth of Oedipus :

The myth of Oedipus is yet another example to show that nobody can escape from the jaws of destiny. King Laios and queen Jocasta of Thebes learned from the oracle that their son would kill his father and married his mother. To escape from the prediction they gave their new born baby to shepherd and ordered to leave the infant to die on a lonely mountain. The ankles of the baby were pinned together. The shepherd felt pity to the baby and he gave the baby to a Corinthian shepherd, who gave the baby to the king and queen of Corinth. The baby was named Oedipus and they brought him up as their son. In course of time Oedipus came to know about the prophesy. In order to get rid of the prophesy he ran away from Corinth. When he was lonely wandering Oedipus met an old man who challenged him on the road. Oedipus became very much angry and he kill the old man and he arrived in the capital of Thebes. There he encountered the sphinx, a terrible monster. The sphinx terrified the travelers who were going to the city and challenged them to answer a riddle. Those who give the answer correctly were spared but those who could not were devoured by the sphinx. The riddle was like this- what creature goes on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening. Oedipus gave the answer that the creature is man. On hearing the correct answer the sphinx leaped off a high rock. The people of Thebes welcomed Oedipus and he was made the king in the absence of Laios. According to the custom of Thebes the widowed queen Jocasta married Oedipus. After many years a plague struck Thebes. In course of time, it was discovered that Oedipus was the son of Laios and Jocasta. As soon as the horrible truth was discovered Jocasta killed herself and Oedipus punished himself by taking out his eyes. The above story of Oedipus proves once again the fact that the Greek mythology is based on destiny. Laios tried to escape from destiny but he could not. He was killed by Oedipus . Similarly Oedipus ran away from Corinth to evade from the prophesy but he could not. As it was pre-destine Oedipus became the murderer of his father and husband of his mother.

Conclusion :

Destiny is super natural power. It is beyond the reach of logic. The primitive people were govern by destiny. So it is natural that in Greek mythology destiny is driving force. The mythology represents the psychology of the primitive people therefore Greek mythology can be regarded as a true reflection of the ancient Greek. The dramatic end of the story of a myth is nothing but the play of destiny. The characters are less important than the supernatural elements.

Findings :

- ▼ In Greek myth destiny is primary and characters are secondary.
- ▼ ○ Destiny is found sometime in terms of luck and but very often it appears in the form of accident.
- ▼ Destiny and prophesy are inter-linked.
- ▼ Destiny is so powerful that not to speaks of human beings the gods and goddesses are also the victim of destiny.
- ▼ The destiny in Greek mythology is repeatedly soon through various supernatural happenings.
- ▼ No human beings can evade prophesy in spite of conscious attempts to get rid of destiny.
- ▼ The weakness of the characters, both human and divine, is shown as pre-destined. No characters can be blamed for their faults and misdeeds.

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