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Sain Dino Sand¹, Ahmed Uddin Ujjan², Muhammad Khan Turk³, Muhammad Dawood Detho⁴, Muhammad Khan Nizamani⁵, Syed DuaUrooj⁶, Komal Panhwar⁷, Reehana⁸
^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8}Department of English Language and Literature University of Sindh

(PAKISTAN)

Saindino69@gmail.com¹

ABSTRACT

In Greek society there is a great influence of myths on the literature and traditions. People believe that gods have a great role in the making of their fate. People and significant heroes try to escape from destiny but they are generally surrounded by the fate, in order to make them tragic. This can be seen in many Greek dramas like Oedipus Rex by Sophocles. He was a religious person and he was inspired by belief of people in gods that they are most powerful and cruel to the mankind. In Greek mythology, human life was in the hands of gods. Fate was pre-decided and could not be escaped at any cost. Oedipus and so many others, who tried very hard to deceive the destiny, but the cage of tragic and cruel fate was very much tricky so in spite of all preventions taken by them, were led to the final destiny which was pre-decided.

Keywords: Fate, Fatalism, God, Misfortune, Greek Philosophy, Tragic Flow, Tragic Hero

1. INTRODUCTION

Sophocles, a great Greek dramatist, produced his famous work, "Oedipus Rex" about in 450 B.C. It is based on the Greek concept of fate in which a pre-destined child suffers hardships during his whole life, generated by his tragic fate. In the eyes of Aristotle this play is complete tragic story of a hero who everytime tries to deceive his fate but fails again and again. There are two concepts which are given in this play. On the first place it gives the message of the uncontrollable fate and on the second place it points out the tragic flaw. It will be described throughout our research paper that how fate plays a great role in the life of a man as a pre-determined tool. Actually this play shows that how man is powerless in front of his fate. Here the fate of a child is proved to be right on the basis of his own free-will. As like man cannot live without breath, in such a way Greek drama appears no more without the role of fate. Fate has remained the chief theme of Greek drama from its point of beginning i.e. climax to its ending point i.e. conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The play Oedipus Rex was written about 450 BC, which means about 2500 years ago from today, it was produced by Sophocles that is why it has been critically analyzed by so many critics. The majority of these critics falls into two different categories. Some scholars say that due to tragic flaw and free will Oedipus became victim of misfortune and some of them believe that Oedipus was pre-destined by the Oracles, so fate was not escapable at any condition. According to Aristotle Oedipus Rex is an ideal tragedy of Greek time which shows that a tragic hero should possess fatal flaws which finally lead him to his destruction (Dodds, 1966). Sometimes the ignorance of facts and figures lead to judgement error which is also main flaw of the character and this element can be seen in the plays of tragedy like Oedipus Rex of Sophocles, Othello, Hamlet and Macbeth of Shakespeare (Draper, 1965). But according to Alireza (2013) the theory of tragic flaw of Aristotle works only when tragic hero possesses fatal flaws and element of over pride. This element is very much clear in the character of Oedipus. Another critic, Marjorie (2012) suggests that the thematic message of the play is that it seems to be more tragic than fatalistic.

On the other hand, some of the critics have point of view that the whole play revolves around the concept of fate. Man is just only a mannequin which dances according to the wish of his fate. His all actions and decisions are pre-decided. And beside all these characters Oedipus Rex play shows religious reflection of the mind of Sophocles (Guo, 2006). Zachrisson (2012) believes that whole play spins around the concept of self-knowledge. He says that thematic conclusion can be collected that his desire for his own self-knowledge and the curiosity of the discovery of his reality lead Oedipus toward his own destruction.

But being a human we think that why Oedipus was cursed polluted thing for Thebes? The writer of the play does not give any idea that why he was cursed by the oracles but it is well known that once upon a time Laius visited the King of Pisa named as Pelops, where Laius raped Pelops' son, Chryssipus. Due to this reason Chryssipus slaughtered himself. So Laius was cursed by Pelops that his own son would kill him (Parray, 2013).

3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Textual analysis has been used for research method. It can be defined as the method of interpreting and analysing the content during the research in which research scholars have to judge and interpret the subject matter of communication rather than its structure.

3.1 Research Questions

RQ 1: What is role of fate in Oedipus Rex?

RQ 2: How far Oedipus is a victim of fate or free will in the play Oedipus Rex?

4. DISCUSSION

With reference to RQ#1 which is regarding the role of fate in Oedipus Rex, it is believed by many critics that the character of Oedipus is not real but a mythical one. Greek people were believers of myths and they used to consider them not fictional but the real stories of their gods and people. Basically the word myth is coined from Greek word mythos. It is multidimensional word, sometimes it has been translated into English as "story" or "speech" (Houle, Michelle, 2011). And sometimes it also can be used as an expanded term for tales which are connected with the gods and also with the relationships of mankind with gods (Morford, Mark, and Lenardon, 1999). Myths are stories which are transferred from one generation to another generation by the words of mouth but also can be spread by the written words or in the musical form. The subject matter of myths varies also from nation to nation but mostly they are related to the natural phenomenon and the natural events and their existence also is main part of myths. They can be about flowers and their fragrance or they can be about world customs and tradition (Houle, Michelle, 173). It is also true that these mythological stories are not real but usually are hypothetical tales which are most probably based on fictitious places in fictitious time but their setting might or might not be real.

In order to get answer of first question we have to learn about the concept of fate in Greeks. Fate can be defined as a phenomenon that there is a prevailing power that is supernatural which predetermines the events of human life and even it also can fix the day of death. Human beings who have belief on God believe on fate, which is unchangeable and unescapable, so whatever preventions and cautions would be taken it will be faced by humans. As Greek people were very much fatalists that is why they believed that human life is under the control of fate and all mortals are only puppets in the hands of destiny. The fate which is called by them as Moira, is considered ruler of human destiny. It is their firm belief that it is most ferocious and frightening fact of the life that there is no escape from fate. It is so powerful that sometimes gods also were helpless against the fate. Although they were aware of their fate but could not change it (Articles and musing on the concept of Fate for the ancient Greeks). So it was uncontrollable and supernatural phenomenon for Greeks. As in Oedipus Rex, Prophet very clearly admits that it is impossible to overcome upon fate, so by pronouncing "what will be, will be", he drops his guns and fully rely on the favoritism of fate. According to Greek philosophy, humans get their fate in their inheritance and it is predetermined thing.

But the concept of fates in Greek Philosophy is very much vague. In Hesiod's Theogony, fates have been presented in starting as daughters of Night. She bore Atropos, Clotho, and Lachesis, but by reading whole poem we come to know that they are attributed to Zeus and Themis (Roman, Luke, and Roman, 1999). But second option is widely acceptable in the world that Themis was the goddess of the necessity and she gave birth to her three daughters namely Klotho, Lachesis and last one was Atropos. They collectively are called fates. Klotho had to construct the spin of human life, which was used to measure by her second sister Lachesis with the help of her measuring rod and was finally cut by the third one called Atropos (Solomon, 2003).

Now it is time to come back to the answer of our first question. As literature is the reflection of age, so Sophocles also had been attracted by the theme of fate used by other writers in his age. By portraying sketch of fate in plays, he made them tragic. He is great writer of tragedy in all ages, his tragic play Oedipus Rex is his masterpiece about role of fate in human life. In this play king Oedipus is the protagonist, who is victimized by his kismet. In this way he became an arrow in the eyes of fate. So in order to avoid the fate, when Oedipus was born, Luis and Jocasta decided to kill the newly born baby. Therefore, they gave their son to the Shepard of Thebes for killing. But here fate took action and Shepard showed his mercy upon him and he gave baby to the second Shepard who belonged to the Corinth. The second Shepard gave this baby to the king of Corinth Polybius as he was infertile. He was no one other than Oedipus himself. He was brought up by the nominal parents, whom he was considering as real one. When he became adult enough to prove prophecy true by the help of fate he was told by a drunker man that he is not a real son of his parents but they have just adopted him. At the ignorance of his question by his parents he went to Delphi, in order to know reality.

Instead of reality god Apollo told him that he will kill his own parents. It is fate that encircles him again and he therefore leaves his nominal parents. It is his first step which Oedipus unconsciously takes toward his pre-decided fate in order to avoid it. It is also irony of predestination that when Oedipus meets with his father and others on the way, he kills them. It is also strange that how only one person can kill a group of people having no single wound. But it is only power of fate which has saved the life of Oedipus second time. It is the occasion at which half of the prophecy has come out true but Oedipus is still not aware of his own karma. Every step taken forward to the Thebes by Oedipus, is actually being decided by his fate, not by himself.

Another trick played by fate is the solution of riddle by Oedipus. So many wise people were there but it was he who was chosen by fate to answer the riddle of Sphinx. It was asking question, but everyone was unable to give answer of its question but it was Oedipus selected by his karma to answer the question and save the Thebes in order to make possible his marriage with queen Jocasta. The prophecy came out true and Oedipus was no more than dancing doll in the hands of fate. He was awarded with ex-wife of Laius Jocasta by the people of Thebes. Now again due to involvement of fate, she did not deny to marry, although she was aware of all prophecy but she also remained silent. So in short, the answer of the RQ#1 can be summarized that there was no choice for Oedipus in order to escape from fate. Every step taken by him was actually leading him to his pre-decided destiny. There is proverb which infect suits here to the conditions of Oedipus, "a man can surely do what he wills to do, but he cannot determine what he wills" (Schopenhauer cited in Reddy, 2014)". So in the story of Oedipus this proverb comes true. Oedipus has been trying his best in order to avoid prophecy but he fails and fate wins because all was predestined as in the last of the play Oedipus himself pronounce that it is Apollo who is main cause of his destruction. If there was no role of fate, then whole play would be aimless and would not exist.

Now as for as RQ#2 is concerned, can be answered in this way that in spite of the involvement of fate, there is a tragic flaw and pride which lead Oedipus toward the verse conditions. In so many places in the play his pride has been revealed by Sophocles. Basically the concept of tragic flaw has been discussed by Aristotle in his Poetics. According to him the best fitting hero is the one, who has qualities of a great man but due to the element of judgmental error, he will suffer and make such decisions which will lead him toward his downfall (Peter, 2003). So these qualities can also be seen in the character of Oedipus. In the beginning of the play the character of Oedipus has been shown as an ideal tragic hero. In order to save his people, he tries his best but at the same time his character shows that he is actually fighting against himself. He starts search for the cursed polluted thing which has become the main cause of destruction of the city. In order to save his pride and popularity in Thebes, he becomes very much frustrate person. His speech with Prophet Tiresias reveals that he is the actual killer of his father but due to tragic flaw he does not stop searching until he finds the reality. Not only this but in the second scene, when Oedipus blames on Creon about conspiracy against his kingdom he does not consider the words of Prophet but against of this, he put blames on the Creon and Prophet. Because of his anger and pride, he calls Prophet as blind and evokes him to let the cat be out of the cage. As the play moves forward we come to know that due to pride and his own free will, Oedipus has made mistake so many times in the past. When he meets with people where three roads meet, due to pride he does not pay any attention on their commands and starts fighting with them and in the last kills them (830-840). When he solves the riddle of Sphinx, he gets queen as a gift, but he ignores her age. It is possible that she may be his mother because she is as old as his mother can be.

When Shepherd reveals that he is not originally from Corinth, he seems to be shocked and again starts an investigation, in order to know the reality. His curiosity for self-identification does not let him to go far from reality. Being a self-determent person he neglects even his beloved wife Jocasta, who tries to stop him from the inquiring facts and figures about his reality because she knows all. In the last, when Shephard of Thebes refuses to reveal the truth, Oedipus abuses him and even he puts influence on him to tell the truth. So the answer of RQ#2 can be concluded in this way that it was his self-investigation about himself which leads him toward his own downfall. If he did not investigate any thing, then he would not be banished from Thebes and might be living with his beloveds.

5. CONCLUSION

Fate is pre-determined and unchangeable. People cannot deny it either they agree with it or not. As Oedipus' fate was already written so how can he deny it? If something is written in our fate it will happen like in Oedipus Rex. When fate is pre-dominant than all things support it consciously or unconsciously. Nature, our conscious, incidents and man himself help fate and then whatever is written in our fate becomes true because "what will be, will be". Beside the role of fate, it seems very clearly in the play that there is some sort of flaws in the character of Oedipus which help him in the fulfilment of his tragic fate. He in spite of being intelligent could not solve his own riddle as Prophet teases him that why he does not correct his own mistake as he is very much wise in the riddle solving. So if we remove the tragic flaw from his character, it will only show the helplessness of human kind against the gods.

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