

THE IMPORTANCE OF LAW AND JUSTICE IN AESCHYLUS TRILOGY THEORESTEIA

R.Mythili

Ph D Scholar, Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore

Dr.Aseda Fathima, M.Phil., Ph.D.,

Head of the Department, Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore

Abstract

The trilogy *TheOresteia* is written by the great Greek tragedian Aeschylus. He is often referred as the 'Father of Greek Tragedy' due the innovation of his staging of Drama. It is the only surviving ancient Greek trilogy. The main theme of this trilogy is the shift from the practice of personal vengeance to a system of law suit. The name 'Orestes' derives from the character orestes, who takes revenge on his mother on his father's death. In this trilogy the first play is *Agamemnon*, where the central action takes place between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. She avengers her husband Agamemnon who committed adultery and sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia. Clytemnestra is warned by the chorus that Orestes will come to take revenge on her. The next play *TheLibationBearers* deals with the reunion of Agamemnon's children Electra and Orestes and their revenge on their mother and her lover Aegisthus. The Furies, the goddess of revenge and remorse, begin to haunt him. Orestes finds refuge in Apollo's temple. Athena the goddess of reason and protection intervenes brings them before the jury.

The Furies act as advocates to Clytemnestra. Orestes is not killed in turn, as it was the retributive law of the time. Though they do not agree at first, Athena calms them, making it clear that a society cannot possibly work and grow under such circumstances. Thus Athena established a legal system for away from blood for blood. The justice is evolved by employing reason, also holding the power to punish violently if it is needed.

Keywords: Furies, Justice, Revenge, Remorse, Refugee, Culture, Civilisation

Aeschylus was forty five in 480 B.C. when the Persians sacked Athens and destroyed the shrines of the gods on the Acropolis. Soon afterward he fought in the forces which defeated the Persians at Salamis and Plataea, as he had fought in the Greek victory at Marathon ten years before/ The Greeks in general, and the Athenians in particular, because they had played the major part in the triumph of the Hellas, saw these victories as a triumph over servitude, moderation over arrogance. After their struggle the people of Athens entered upon spectacular era of prosperity and energy, one of the greatest flowering periods of western civilisation. Physically the two monuments of that age were the Parthenon of Ictinos and Pheidias, and the *Oresteian* trilogy of Aeschylus. Out of the savagery of the past wars and finds a new harmony in religious, political and personal might be created. Perhaps Athens would achieve what public spirited men and women have always longed for, a peaceful, lawful community, a city benevolent gods and beneficent men.

His trilogy sweeps from the *Illiad* to the *Odyssey*, from war to peace. Yet it was the darker events of the *Odyssey*, the murder of Agamemnon by his wife and the vengeance of his son, Orestes that inspired Aeschylus to produce a great tale of the tribe. He deepened Homer with even older, darker legends and lifted him to a later, more enlightened stage of culture. A principal theme of the

trilogy is the shift from the practise of personal vengeance to a system of civilized system of court and trials. The name derives from the character Orestes. The trilogy consists of *Agamemnon*, *TheLibationBearers* and *TheEumenides*. Together, these plays tell the bloody story of the family of Agamemnon. The final play of the *Eumenides* addresses the question of orestes guilt of killing his mother after learning her affair with Aegisthus. He kills his mother Clytemnestra who killed his father Agamemnon. Clytemnestra awakes the Furies to revenge her death on her son Orestes. The Furies drives Orestes from Argos to the wilderness. He makes his way to the temple of Apollo and begs him to drive the Furies away. Apollo encourages Orestes to kill Clytemnestra, and so bears some of the murder. The Furies are more recent race of the gods, and Apollo sends Orestes to the temple of Athena, with Hermes as a guide. The Furies track him down and the goddess of Athena, steps in and declares that a trial is necessary. Apollo argues Orestes case and, after the judges, including Athena delivers a tie vote, Athena announces that Orestes is free. Athena, the goddess of reason and protection intervenes and brings them before the jury. The Furies act as advocates to dead Clytemnestra. Orestes is not killed in turn, as it was the retributive law of time. Though they do not agree at first, Athena calms them, making it clear that a society cannot possibly work and grow under such circumstances. Thus

Athena established a legal system far away from blood for blood. The justice is evolved by employing reason, also holding the power to punish violently if it is needed.

The *Oresteia* is our rite of passage from savagery to civilization. What strengthens this impression are the specific rituals that may stir within the trilogy. In debates on the origin of tragedy, they are among the main contenders, the rituals of the dying god, the hero cult and the legal trial. The Athenians who gathered in the theatre of Dionysus may have assembled at Easter, to worship the god whose death releases vital energies. And the Athenians may have come as patriots to honour his incarnation in a more historical hero, in his achievements and their heavy moral price. And when they watched his acquittal before his judges, they may have renewed their Athenian justice as they witnessed its creation by Athena. Or they may have seen one rite emerging from another in one continuous drama, from the trial at the oracle and the hearth, to the trial at the high tribunal. Dionysus struggling into higher

forms of life, the trilogy bodies forth each form of trial in turn. More than a rite of passage unrefined, *The Oresteia* dramatizes the growth from primitive ritual life to civilized institution. Aeschylus transforms ritual into art, a symbolic action at once individual and universal. Aeschylus presents but as an initiation into stronger states of consciousness. Tragedy, in Aeschylus hands, might empower the young democracy. *The Oresteia* revolutionizes the archaic world. *The Oresteia* is a theodicy, the gods justify human life by living it themselves, the only satisfactory theodicy. The gods become our powers, our energies and our ideals, and they are wedded by Athena, our compassion that alone can breed our culture. The play consists of a great clarity rising from great complexity, terror giving rise to reverence of life.

Reference

1. Fagles, Robert. *Aeschylus The Oresteia*. New York: The Viking Press. 1982. Print.