

GODDESS FORTUNA: SMILE OF A WHORE

SUWANEE GOSWAMI* AND ERIC SORENG**, PH. D.

*Research Scholar
Department of Psychology
University of Delhi
Delhi

**Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Delhi
Delhi

ABSTRACT

The Roman Goddess Fortuna is the personification of fate, luck, chance and bounty. Her smile is described as whorish due to its fickleness upon which the luck of humankind depends. As the ruler of chance she is in control of the universe but is whimsical by temperament and quite arbitrary in the exertion of her powers. The *Meretrix* aspect of Fortuna is explored in this paper with reflections about the nature of fate and chance in the light of Jung's concept of synchronicity as a counterpart. Further, Fortuna as presiding deity over gambling, divination, oracular powers is explored with special reference to the Wheel of Fortune card in the tarot.

GODDESS FORTUNA

Our everyday language is a fecund archive of the unconscious giving expression to the archetypal experiences of humankind in the form of allegories, metaphors and symbols. "Good Luck", "Best of Luck", "May luck be with you"—are some phrases used in common parlance, but unconsciously hint towards an invocation of the Goddess of Fortune: Fortuna. We often encounter her in our daily lives when finding something meaningful in unlikely places, getting a promotion against all odds, winning a lottery, narrowly escaping something untoward, *etc.* The unpredictable nature of human life, death, and the unknown led to its personification in the form of a powerful feminine force governing over human affairs, fate, chance and coincidence. The proverb, "fortune favours the brave/bold" is yet another expression exemplifying the precedence of virtues such as courage, fortitude and perseverance associated with good fortune and success. Goddess Fortuna's destination is never final; she has to be continually appeased through a persistent spirit of boldness and action.

Mathematical laws consider much of the universe as quantifiable and measurable, but still regard probability as an important concept, which refers to the outcome of and laws presiding over random events exemplified by drawing of lottery, rolling of a dice, tossing a coin, *etc.* Random sampling in statistics highlight the role of chance factors in which each member of the sample has an equal likelihood to be picked up for the study. Einstein (1945) is famously quoted for saying, "God does not play dice with the universe", but developments in quantum mechanics have initiated indeterminism and randomness into physics, although a debated area. Jung's concept of synchronicity provides a counter argument to absolute randomness in support of a meaningful coincidence of certain unrelated but impressive events that may contain a deeper value for the *psyche*.

Fortuna was considered to be an extremely powerful and dynamic Roman Goddess with multiple functions presiding over determination of what fortune would be allotted to the mortals. Her domain of 'allotting' finds manifestation in words like lot and lottery that refers to the nature of fate experienced by humankind. Aligning to Jungian thought, mythology of a race are not merely invented narratives but are reflections of the nature of psychic processes; while the characters in them—the gods, goddesses, demons, angels, *etc.* are archetypal figures that symbolically express the inner unconscious phenomena. They facilitate a symbolic dialogue between the conscious and unconscious *psyche*. From such a perspective, the experiences of human life regarding the precariousness of fate represent the existence of a psychological state as such which finds embodiment in the Goddess Fortuna. Her role as a tremendous force governing the workings of the universe in which she is totally arbitrary, reflects the attitude towards fatalism versus free-will. The enormity of external and unconquerable forces that impress upon the human mind in spite of one's trust in free-will or capacity for active agency and self-determination, leaves one at the hands of something superior beyond one's wit that humans attribute to chance.

Fortuna's Greek counterpart, the Goddess Tyche goes hand-in-hand with Nemesis, the Goddess of vengeance and retribution. Together they undertake the roles of distributing and balancing out the fortune of humans. Since

Tyche/Fortuna is quite irresponsible in her allocation of rewards, Nemesis steps in to even out and make sure that the mortals receive their due share. If a person goes about blowing his own trumpet, bragging about his luxuries, has ego-inflation due to one's social standing, not sacrificing a portion of one's riches to the deities, or looks down upon the needy, and then Nemesis enters the scene to subdue and seek revenge on the individual, thus maintaining the natural order of cause-and-effect.

Wealth and good-fortune also attracts envy, greed, conflicts, grief, sloth, arrogance, *etc.* Amulets in the form of evil's eye have been used for thousands of years to ward off any malevolent forces resulting from envy for another's prosperity; likewise lucky charms are used to attract good fortune. Goddesses Lakshmi and Alakshmi are sisters in Indian mythology ruling over fortune and strife respectively that walk side-by-side. Both do not reside at the same place at once; when one sister arrives the other departs. As the elder one of the two sisters, Alakshmi was born from the poison that emerged during the churning of the milky ocean, whereas Lakshmi was born from the *amrita*. Just as darkness is followed by light, the harsh ways of Alakshmi also signal towards the disciplining of the people to mend their ways so as to ready the household to welcome Lakshmi. Hence, Alakshmi also represents the law of *karma* and order; she delivers punishments, misfortune and adversity to the people to keep them grounded and prevent them from losing sight of their aims while caught up in the ever rotating merry-go-round of earthly pleasures. Alakshmi is thus, the regulating force behind Lakshmi. Both fortune and misfortune as psychic functions of inner abundance and poverty complement each other as a self-regulating unit of the *psyche* for equilibrium and wholeness.

As a general force, Fortuna has as many as twenty-eight different names (Patch,1922) and domains in accordance to her powers over places, events, natural phenomena, one's stage in life, *etc.*—Fortuna *Victrix* for victory in war, Fortuna *Redux* as controller and guide in the sea, Fortuna *Annonaria* for bountiful harvest, Fortuna *Romana* as guardian of Rome, Fortuna *Publica* for the people, Fortuna *Equestris* for luck of the knights, Fortuna *Faitrix* for a fortunate life in general, Fortuna *Virgo* for the virgin, Fortuna *Barbata* for adolescents, Fortuna *Virilis* for love and marriage, *etc.* As the last of the deities during the phase of transition from paganism to Christianity in Rome, she incorporated within her embrace the tasks of several other deities.

As an external influence, the Goddess ruled over mundane human affairs and worldly concerns such as wealth, fame, success, glory, triumph, possessions, luxury, good luck and other materialistic pursuits. She was rarely associated to one's spiritual quest and knowledge of the soul. Hence, the only way to rise above her influence was to utilize one's mind on which she had no control. Humans strive to acquire virtues ("Fortune favours the brave") and qualities to escape from her clutches through spiritual advancements and appeasing of different deities representing soul, mind, intellect, order and reason.

A point of distinction between her and Fate lies in the fact that while Fate follows a pre-determined course, Fortuna takes pleasure in jumbling up the aligned order of destiny.

PORTRAYAL IN MYTHOLOGY

The depiction of Goddess Fortuna reflects the significant themes of her characteristics, deeds and the nature of her cult. Patch (1922) illustrates her in the following manner:

- She is blind
- She does use her eyes at times
- Unsteadily stands on top of a globe
- Strolls along unsteadily
- Does not stay in one place for long
- She may either have a joyous or bitter face
- She is envious
- She can turn into a foe
- She has a stubborn nature
- She chooses the course of her own path depending upon her whims
- She likes to play games with the mortals for the sake of her own fun
- Her shafts are used to wound men
- She interacts with men
- She is a *Meretrix*
- Her smile determines the luck of mortals
- She is unreliable and frail.

Her depiction with a blindfold is symbolic of blind luck that is impartial and unbiased in her distribution of fortune to all the mortals alike. In this regard, she is similar to justice that does not discriminate between the strong-weak, rich-poor, young-old and maintains fairness at all times. However, we live in a world where the honest person may be weak and poor, and the fraud may be rich and powerful. Yet one likes to believe that truth and fairness shall prevail at the end.

Blind to the world outside, Fortuna sees with the inward eye of intuition and clairvoyance as she is also the Goddess of oracular powers. Her inner sight is visionary with a keen awareness to behold not only the future of the people, but she can also aid in penetrating into the unconscious elements and hidden depths of the soul in the practice of divination.

The pursuit of material goals has an effect of blinding people in the eye as manifested in the world at large. Excessive consumerism, hedonism, hoarding without restraint, makes one a puppet dancing to the tunes of Fortuna while losing sight of the deeper realities of existence. Very often than not, one who is financially blessed chooses to turn a blind eye to the misfortunes of another fellow individual. Fortuna is a collective archetype that does not deal with individual attitude alone but reflects humankind's equation to wealth, fame, success, status and so on that may create a sense of power and ego-inflation; none of which can be permanently secured. Power in turn results in corruption in most cases eventually leading to manufacture of deadly weapons, wars, need for total domination, subjugation of the other, racism, poverty, global terrorism, subduing of nature, ecological imbalance, *etc.* All of this is ultimately symbolic of partaking in the blindness of Fortuna. Her attributes provide a glimpse into human's unconscious projections and perception on the nature of mundane reality.

Human wants are insatiable, never to be filled and constantly in a state of flux. Hence, Fortuna as the personification of material gains is depicted as shaky, unsteady and transient. Her emotions are volatile turning from sweet to bitter and from friend to foe; representing the stark realities of the modern world wherein one makes another a friend or enemy depending upon ones hidden agendas of gain-loss. She keeps mortal individuals forever in a perpetual loop represented by her wheel that one requires sharp discretion and insight on when to disembark from Fortuna's wheel. Standing on top of the globe she is the force behind its motion just like currency/money in the world that keeps it virtually rotating. As a stream of water flows with currents, similarly currency in the form of money is in constant motion across the globe, thus, representing Fortuna's nature of unsteadiness and continuous movement. Just as the incessant monetary currents can make an individual lose his footing to be swept in its flow, similarly the currents of psychic energy can get out of control at times inundating the individual in its chaotic depths. The shafts of Fortuna are unlike Cupid's shaft that wound humans with love, but with unending desires, possessions, status, success, greed, envy, lust, dissatisfaction, and so on.

FORTUNE AS A MERETRIX

The unpredictable and enigmatic attributes stereotypically associated with women led to the personification of luck as feminine. 'Lady Luck', infamous for her fickleness, is solicited by Frank Sinatra (1965) in his song, "Luck be a lady tonight" to behave in a lady-like manner and stand by his side without leaving him for another man as they enter the casino. Gambling is a game of luck in which the singer hopes to be lucky if only his lover—Lady Luck—does not betray him: "...At times you have a very un-lady-like way of running out..You're on this date with me...And yet before the evening is over...You might refuse to stay..." Personification of luck as the lover of a gambler expresses his concerns or insecurities regarding her unfaithful nature to abandon and pull him down as she takes pleasures in fornicating with other men: "...A lady never leaves her escort, A lady does not wander all over the room, And blow on some other guy's dice...Stick with me baby, I'm the guy that you came in with, Luck be a lady tonight". With Lady Luck by his side, the singer hopes to be at the right place at the right time for things to unfold in his favour and probably hit the jackpot through an incredible stroke of luck.

Goddess Lakshmi as the ruler of fortune is known as "*chanchala*" meaning whimsical/ restless and "cock-eyed" (Pattanaik, 2014) as she may appear or vanish without any prior warning or reason.

The random, indiscriminate and free-choice of a prostitute to engage in sexual liaisons liken her to the nature of fortune as equally arbitrary and unreliable. Various meanings of 'whore' allude to its moral, political, economic and social connotations, but in this context it refers to her promiscuous nature as someone who does not commit to one man and enjoys involving with multiple men. Her manifold interactions manifest in the form of lack of allegiance to anyone while pursuing her own whims, fancies and constant mobility from place to place.

The Latin word *Meretrix* refers to 'mereo' (merit) or 'one who earns money'. Just as prostitution is a commercial activity involving the exchange of money, similarly a prominent domain of Fortuna is her control over wealth and money. Both money and erotic urges can be extremely seductive and addictive, sometimes leading to dangerous yearnings of the soul that can never be fulfilled signalling its predatory nature as a shadow manifestation. The prostitute as an inner-figure within the *psyche* can manifest destructively much like one's intoxication with wealth, often at the cost of disregarding one's deeper self and negotiating integrity in favour of momentary pleasure, power, gain or money. On the other hand, when fortune is employed to enable others who are less privileged and cultivate a healthy relationship with wealth, then one can strive to be free from Fortuna's wheel or to attain liberation through the Goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. Likewise, the image of the prostitute as sacred can lead to redeeming consciousness as exemplified by Mary Magdalene, the soul in Nag Hammadi, or Goddess Venus-Aphrodite.

THE SMILE OF FORTUNA

Da Vinci's portrayal of Monalisa's intriguing smile has captivated generations of masses for hundreds of years. Although a smile serves the primary purpose of expressing inner-states and emotions, but its spectrum may be varied depending upon its social function ranging from: rewarding smile of approval, to conceal a lie or deceit, to greet another, sarcastic smile, wistful smile, etc.

"May Lady Luck smile upon you" is a common phrase used to greet or wish another that signifies the power of Fortuna's smile to influence the luck of the people. Her benign, friendly or gentle smile reflects her affirmation and favouritism towards a person whom she chooses to reward and bestow with abundance.

Deities manifest in social constructions and contexts. Gods and goddesses possess, personify and project various emotional states that actually convey man's own perceptions and feelings towards the archetypal value represented by that particular deity. In Greek mythology, Zeus is depicted as stern, Poseidon is moody and tempestuous, Hades is merciless, Hermes is witty and humorous, Ares is aggressive, Aphrodite is mostly sweet and romantic, Artemis has a short temper, Hera is jealous, etc. Hence, the smile of Fortuna reflects the attitude of the people towards the nature of the powerful and uncontrollable force governing their lives. It is an instinctive human behaviour to respond and reciprocate to a smiling face more positively. A smile radiates exuberance and positivity hence may have a boomerang effect of drawing a rewarding smile from the Goddess of Fortune herself. Constant cribbing, bickering and disarray in a household is believed to attract bad luck or Goddess Alakshmi whereas, if one maintains peace, joy and cleanliness then Goddess Lakshmi makes such a place her abode.

The smile exuding from the feminine mouth is also a symbol of *eros* and its alluring kisses. The smile of Fortuna—the *Meretrix*—is reflective of her seductive and flirtatious nature to solicit a lover. Her whorish smile represents her inclination to take a lover upon whom she showers her favours profusely in the form of plenitude and prosperity, albeit on a temporary basis. The slang "French whore" refers to a single woman who seductively smiles at another woman's husband while ignoring his wife as she is confident about her sexuality and knows that his wife is no sexual rival for her. Similar are the ways of Fortuna who uses men (women) as objects of her amusement.

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNA

Nietzsche writes, "Everything goes, everything returns; eternally rolls the wheel of being... Crooked is the path of eternity" (Nichols, 2019).

Etymologically, 'Fortuna' is derived from the Latin '*vortumna*' meaning "she who turns the year about" (Graves, 2011). The rotation of her wheel which is symbolic of the solar year, determines the cyclical patterns in life, time and duration, seasonal transformations, death and rebirth of the crops, thus, she gets associated to bounty, abundance or fertility. The ceaseless repetition of Fortuna's wheel like the spinning wheel weaving the threads of destiny reiterate the course of *psychic* mobility, progression, stagnation or monotony.

Astrologically, Fortuna represents the wheel of the zodiac, identified in the sky since the time of the ancient Babylonians as the circular wheel of twelve constellations, highlighting her association to time and the stars that hold the destiny of man. Jung (1989) writes about each individual's single star that is his guiding god, representing his inner divinity, goal and destiny.

The worship of Fortuna continued during the middle ages in pagan traditions as the presiding deity of divination. The practice of divination and fortune-telling continues in the modern times that involve consultation with the 'Mistress of the Future': Fortuna. Humankind's curiosity to foresee or learn about their future and to attain some sense of control over it finds embodiment in the image of Fortuna. She was believed to communicate oracular decrees or predictions at her centres of worship which were later interpreted through drawing of lots. The Goddess who enjoys playing games of chance with humans also agrees to "reveal her intentions by allowing the proper lot to be drawn or the proper card to appear, because these methods defy reason and order" (Patch, 1922).

The Wheel of Fortune card in Tarot stands for the twists and turns of fate, "the perpetual motion of a fluidic universe and for the flux of human life" (Waite, 2018) ruled by Fortuna. Her appearance signals the unfolding of a new phase, end of something, orderliness, sudden turn of events, luck and success, trusting in cycles of life, or bringing to conscious awareness the unconscious detrimental patterns operating within the *psyche* that needs re-assessment.

The wheel symbolizes upward and downward motion, likewise it encompasses all the high and low points in life bringing together all the opposing forces of summer-winter, up-down, night-day, birth-death, *etc.* thereby, standing as an archetype of wholeness. On the contrary, the recurring motion of the wheel can also signal the routine affairs of mundane existence in which one might feel trapped, of psychic tedium through ruminating thoughts, obsessions, compulsive acts, *etc.*, leading to the excruciating sense of running in circles and getting nowhere.

Just as Goddess Fortuna makes an individual spin and rise up to the zenith of her wheel, she can also bring one crumbling down at the blink of an eye; hence, it is crucial to be conscious of her influences when to ride fast or slow, to hold on or to de-board and make the most of her favours while it lasts.

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