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Exploration of good-spirited nature of Nagaland Tribes in Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*

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Abstract

Easterine Kire is an Indian author, known for her work as a novelist, poet, and storyteller. Her novel, *Son of the Thundercloud* has been awarded Bal Sahitya Puraskar by Sahitya Academy in the year 2018. This novel is mostly set among the Naga people in India. The protagonist, Pelevotso lost his entire family and is now traveling in search of meaning in his life. When he gets to the "abandoned village," everyone there has been patiently awaiting the child who will surely bring rain and life again. Pelevotso experiences difficulties that expand his perspective on the world. Usually themes like love, envy, bravery, and betrayal are all explored through myths that provide understanding of the human characters. The purpose of this article is to analyse the writings of Easterine Kire in order to examine the good-spirited nature of the Nagas concealed within myth through the novel, *Son of the Thundercloud*.

Keywords: Compassion – hospitality – charity – life – nature and myth

Introduction

Easterine Kire is an Indian poet and author. In an interview, Easterine Kire explained that her motive for writing was rooted in the need to create written Naga literature. She noted that, although there were many oral narratives, they risked being lost as the oral tradition was fading. Easterine Kire's debut poetry collection, "Kelhoukevira," was published in 1982. This was also the first collection of Naga poetry in English. Her first novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* was published in the year 2003. It was the first novel written by a Naga author in English.

Easterine Kire has written extensively about the Nagas in her writings. In 2018, Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* received the Bal Sahitya Puraskar from the Sahitya Academy. Until the late nineteenth century, the Nagas were "primitive people". Easterine Kire's literature on Naga myths and tales reveals that the Nagas were not a "primitive" people, but rather a people guided by a strong belief system. The wisdom of ancestors and storytellers is highlighted because they have lived longer than others and continue to live on through their stories. Easterine Kire depicts the tenacity and spiritual depth of tribal societies in *Son of the Thundercloud*, especially their hope in the midst of grief and devastation, through a mythic retelling based on Naga oral traditions. According to Biswas, Kire's novel deftly combines myth with actual tribal experiences to produce a story that is both culturally remembered and relevant today. This combination demonstrates how the Naga people's traditional stories continue to influence their identity and values. The novel *Son of the Thundercloud* begins with a prologue. In the prologue, the protagonist Pelevotso's grandmother tells him the story of the son of the thundercloud. The story follows the tiger widow, an elderly woman who lost her husband and seven sons to a tiger. With a broken heart, she waited to join her loved ones in death. One day, while out in the fields, dark clouds gathered and a raindrop dropped on her, impregnating her. She gave birth to a son who grew up to be a warrior and avenged his father's and brothers' deaths. This is the plot of the novel *Son of the Thundercloud*.

Objectives of the Research

1. To promote greater awareness and respect for the distinctive lifestyles of the tribes and their contributions to the values of society portrayed in Easterine Kire's writings.

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2. To strengthen tribal communities by preserving their uniqueness in the face of modernization by capturing and honoring their kindness.
3. To emphasize the positive traits of the Nagaland tribes in order to spread awareness among the next generation.
4. To create a repository of knowledge for future researchers and educators.

Literature Review

Dr. Debajyoti Biswas examines how Easterine Kire's book deftly combines myth and reality in his research article, "Confluence of Myth and Reality in *Son of the Thundercloud* (2018)," with an emphasis on the interaction between traditional Naga mythology and modern concerns. In addition to addressing contemporary socio-political realities, Biswas emphasizes how the novel's narrative structure and thematic concerns demonstrate a dynamic relationship with indigenous cultural history. His interpretation highlights how the book contributes to the preservation of oral traditions and their recontextualization in contemporary settings, enhancing the conversation on indigenous literature and identity.

According to Dr. M. Angkayarkan and Ms. Abinaya Vinayakaselvi's research paper, "A Reading of Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* as an Anthropocene Discourse (2020)," the novel analyses environmental deterioration brought on by human activity. The authors contend that Kire's story is a literary meditation on ecological crises and the repercussions of upsetting the delicate balance between humans and nature, focusing on issues like deforestation, overuse of natural resources, and unsustainable consumption practices. According to their analysis, the book makes a substantial contribution to ecocritical discourse and environmental humanities.

Dr. Thokchom Sunanda Devi, in her research paper titled, "Ecofolklore and Indigenous Wisdom in Easterine Kire's Novel: A Study of *Son of the Thundercloud* and *When the River Sleeps* (2022)," explores how Kire's writings combine traditional wisdom, nature, and sustainable living. Devi demonstrates how Kire upholds environmental principles while conserving Naga cultural legacy by examining the mythological and indigenous components in the stories. The study places Kire's literature as an essential contribution to Indian literary discourses on sustainability, ecofolklore, and indigenous ecological wisdom by highlighting the books' engagement with issues like habitat loss and climate change. According to C. Keren Vinita and Sushil Mary Mathews' 2022 essay, "Redefining the Cultural Hero: A Study of Monomyth in Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*," Kire uses the monomyth archetype to symbolize Nagaland's distinct cultural identity. In order to show how the interaction between myth and reality reveals ingrained cultural truths, communal values, and identity within the Naga context, the writers examine the novel's narrative structure and mythological aspects. According to their analysis, Kire's writings reinterpret the hero's journey in a way that is rooted in indigenous tradition and represents the sociocultural makeup of her society.

Recent research on myth theory has broadened its focus beyond traditional interpretations by relating mythic patterns to current cultural, social, and political issues. In his work "Conspiracy Narratives as a Type of Social Myth" (2024), Radek Chlup makes the case that contemporary conspiracy theories serve as social myths that influence political

identities and collective belief systems, highlighting the persistent influence of myth in the digital age. In a similar vein, Nikolaj Plotnikov highlights the epistemological significance of myth in human knowledge by revisiting Ernst Cassirer's symbolic theory of myth via the perspective of Soviet academic Nikolai Zhinkin (Studies in East European Thought). In "Myth of Objectivity and the Origin of Symbols" (2023), Md. Shahinur Rahman examines the symbolic aspects of myth, challenging the sociological discourse's presumption of objectivity and highlighting myth as a fundamental component of symbolic cognition.

In the subject of religious studies, Robert A. Segal (2015) ^[6] highlights how contemporary interpretations of myth try to balance narrative meaning with empirical knowledge by contrasting mythic and scientific ways of thought. Furthermore, Giorgio Touburg (2024) ^[29] investigates the use of myth in management theory, pointing out how mythic archetypes are frequently used in organizational identities and leadership. When taken as a whole, these works show that myth theory is still an active, multidisciplinary topic that can be used to analyze both classic stories and modern cultural productions. Myth theories differ greatly based on the theorist's discipline and point of view. Each theory presents myth as a cultural, psychological, and symbolic phenomenon through a different lens, highlighting its depth and complexity.

Mircea Eliade, the well-known Romanian author, philosopher, and religious historian made important advances in our knowledge of myth and its key role in human society. Eliade explores in great detail how myth shapes the human experience in his seminal 1963 book *Myth and Reality*. The tone for Eliade's investigation is established by the book's opening evocative statement, "Through skepticism and inquiry, we can approach a deeper understanding of reality." It conveys his desire to study myth as a profound tool by which civilizations construct meaning and wrestle with life's riddles, rather than as merely fiction or superstition. Myths, according to Eliade, are more than just archaic tales or antiquated worldviews. Instead, they are vital, dynamic stories that offer structures for comprehending the world and human life.

According to Eliade, myths disclose what he refers to as sacred history—tales that describe the earliest moments that gave rise to the current state of the universe, society, or human conduct. These stories, which are frequently set in a primordial period, or "time of origins," are reenacted through customs and rituals, giving participants a chance to re-experience the dawn of time and re-establish a connection with the divine. Eliade's fundamental realization is that myth functions as a template for all significant human endeavours. Archetypes—ideal examples of how to act, conduct, or think—are established by myths. People and communities link themselves with the sacred order of the cosmos by recounting and repeating these tales. In this way, myths are active forces that shape cultural identity, social norms, and awareness rather than only being inert stories. Eliade also emphasizes how myths enable humanity to understand the otherwise unfathomable nature of the cosmos. They offer a symbolic vocabulary for understanding death, transition, chaos, and suffering.

Eliade sees myth as a living reality—a truth that unveils the holy aspect of existence and the structures of human consciousness—as opposed to reducing it to psychological symbolism or simple metaphor. Crucially, Eliade's

utilization of antiquated materials, such as quotations from thinkers like Xenophanes, demonstrates his wide-ranging perspective. Although Xenophanes was well-known for his criticism of conventional anthropomorphic representations of the gods, Eliade takes advantage of this skepticism to examine how people's perceptions of myth and the sacred change over time. His viewpoint does not discount skepticism; rather, it integrates it into a more thorough investigation of how myths persist, especially in contemporary or secular society.

Myth as Sacred History of Eliade argues that myth is an essential part of the human experience. Myths are far from extinct; they still influence how people view the world, comprehend their role in it, and derive significance from the most significant events in life. People can reach a more profound level of reality through myth, one that rises above the ordinary and makes the sacred possible in day-to-day existence. Myths frequently describe the birth of the world, the origins of humanity, and the construction of social values. These narratives provide humans with insights into existential concerns and the nature of reality. Myths provide people with a sense of purpose and belonging by telling them foundational stories.

Eliade highlights that important moral lessons are hidden in myths. Myths provide significant ethical lessons by depicting the consequences of human acts and the values that civilizations respect, such as bravery, honesty, and compassion. For example, stories about heroes and their tribulations serve both as entertainment and as a means of imparting moral insight. Individuals who engage with these stories understand the values of the culture and apply them in their own lives. Myths thus serve as moral teachings, directing behaviour and encouraging ethical development.

Eliade claimed that myths resonate with core human experiences and emotions, providing psychological insight that helps people navigate life's difficulties. People who engage with myths confront archetypal themes like courage, sacrifice, and transformation, which reflect their own challenges and goals. This myth-based investigation of the human psyche allows for a more in-depth knowledge of personal and community issues, as well as counsel and solace in uncertain times. Mircea Eliade's thoughts on the instructional function of myth highlight its diverse importance in human life. Myths provide important frameworks for comprehending existence, teaching moral lessons, shaping cultural identity, informing rituals, and providing psychological insights. Engaging with these narratives allows people to connect with their past while also developing a better understanding of themselves and their place in the world. In an increasingly complicated culture, the teachings and wisdom contained in myths are acting as critical tools for education and personal progress.

According to William Harmon and Hugh Harmon, the purpose of mythology is to explain creation, divinity, religion, existence and death, natural events, and the stories of cultural heroes. Narratives often revolve around a mythical figure who represents the community's cultural values. As a result, the hero becomes the archetypal entity, with humanistic principles specific to his society recurring in reality. As per the views of Joseph Campbell, Bill D. Moyers, and Betty S. Flower, myths "offer life models" in the form of archetypal heroes whose experiences and attitudes under the conditions of their adventures leave a trail to their community in leading a morally decent life. The

views of Mircea Eliade regarding myth in literature are fundamental to comprehending the cultural and metaphysical functions of myths in storytelling and human awareness. According to him, myths are deeply ingrained stories that transmit important truths about the world, life, and human nature rather than being purely imaginative fiction.

In short, Mircea Eliade's thoughts on myth provide a deep comprehension of the role that myth plays in literature. According to him, myths offer means of connecting with the eternal and sacred in addition to telling stories about the world's beginnings and the human condition. They serve as a link between the past and the present, between the divine and human life, in literature. Literary criticism is still influenced by Eliade's theories, especially in works that examine the relationship between culture, identity, and the universal themes found in mythical narrative.

In this present paper, the researcher investigates the good-spirited nature of tribes in Nagaland in Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*. With this, a reader can understand how good the Naga tribes are by heart.

Methodology

The research employs a qualitative approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the good-spirited nature of tribes in Nagaland. A close reading of Easterine Kire's novel *Son of the Thundercloud* with the lens 'Myth as Sacred History' will be conducted to identify the real nature of tribes in Nagaland. In addition to that, the study will consider critical reviews, interviews and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Compassionate Tribes

Easterine Kire's writing highlights her people's myths and traditions. In her novel, *Son of the Thundercloud*, Pelevotso was raised in a household that followed the community's taboos. His grandmother encouraged him to open his heart to the unknown. Only when calamity strikes that one remembers the ancient storyteller who told tales of taboos, traditions, and the supernatural world. Kire's narrative underscores the value of conserving cultural stories and how they echo throughout generations. The incorporation of myth with contemporary situations prompts readers to consider their own origins and the power of storytelling.

Usually, storytellers transmit their people's knowledge system verbally from generation to generation. They are memory keepers who preserve their ancestors' traditions, customs, and knowledge. With the rise of print culture, these memories and knowledge systems are recorded in books for future generations to read and study. It has long been argued that when oral histories are printed, some parts are lost. Claude Levi-Strauss discusses myths and claims:

...there are some things we have lost, and we should try perhaps to regain them, because I am not sure that we can regain these things exactly as if they had never been lost (Levi-Strauss 3).

Easterine Kire's works faithfully preserve her people's oral heritage and the wisdom of her forefathers. According to her people, every mountain, river, waterfall, and beast has a magical story associated with it. Kire describes her people's "myths" in *Son of the Thundercloud*, including their taboos that must be followed to avoid misfortune. The story's initial introduction to the compassionate nature of the Naga tribal people comes from Pelevotso's grandmother. Pelevotso is

the protagonist of the novel. Pelevotso's grandmother is the most depressed person in the tiny Angamis town. Since her husband's passing, she has devoted her time to gathering herbs that can treat sick people and animals. This indicates that Naga tribes are ready to dedicate their time to aid those who are ill.

Ever since her husband died in a hunt, she had lived alone, collecting herbs to heal sick and wounded animals and men. People called her 'the solitary one' (Kire, 2016, p. 11) ^[11].

Even though they do not have food for themselves, the Naga tribes showed empathy by feeding the starved. This is made very clear by Pelevotso's trip to the Village of Weavers. It is a belief that in the Village of Weavers, there was enough food and water to be found. During the famine Pelevotso lost both his parents and family. So, he felt there was no reason for him to stay in his native village. Thus, Pelevotso, with no more than the clothes upon his back and a hunting knife, left the village. He passed through the Black Mountain, the path of which consisted of narrow mountains rather than well maintained roadways. In this particular scene we can witness Pelevotso's partaking in the hospitality of the starving inhabitants.

There had been no big roads, just narrow mountain paths that he followed up and down until they brought him to some human settlement or a solitary dwelling. He would partake of the hospitality of the starving inhabitants and continue on his journey (Kire, 2016, p.16) ^[11].

In addition to this incident, Pelevotso's meeting with the sisters Kethonuo and Siedze upon arriving at the Village of Weavers serves as another illustration of the hospitality extended by the native people. The sisters assured Pelevotso that they would provide him with shelter even though they were hunger.

You have come far, traveller. We have no food, but you may shelter in our house. That is our way. We never turn a traveller away and it will soon be night, so you may be our guest (Kire, 2016, p. 18) ^[11].

Naga tribes are known for their generosity when it comes to offering gifts on important occasions. Mesanuo is the youngest sister of Kethonuo and Siedze. When Pelevotso told the Headman that Mesanuo gave birth to a baby, the Headman of the village offered Mesanuo seed grain as a gift to eat with her son in the future when he chose to take part in the miraculous birth.

Seed grain, he said, pushing the small bag toward her, food for the future. It is for you and your son (Kire, 2016, p. 46) ^[11].

According to Mircea Eliade, myths can provide comfort and wisdom in times of difficulty. They provide a sense of order and continuity by assisting individuals and society in managing problems while maintaining their social bearings. Pelevotso heard thunder while he was staying with the sisters Kethonuo and Siedze. He told the sisters to go inside, as it looked like it is going to rain shortly. Pelevotso let them inside the home and then raced back to find broken bricks, wood, jute bags, and old sheets of perforated tarpaulin so they could fix the roof before the rain hit. Once he had gathered everything, he laid the jute across the enormous gaps in the roof, pulled the tarpaulin over the jute, and fastened it with bricks and wood. He can do that extend only, because there was no other material he could use. When all of this was finished, he gave the sisters instructions to sit in a certain area that he had made as safe as he could. This helps us to grasp their benevolent nature.

Better stay under this portion of the roof, he said, indicating the part that he had covered as best as he could (Kire, 2016, p. 30) ^[11].

According to Eliade myths serve as models for correcting human behaviour. They provide models for living a meaningful life. In his view, myths are more than just stories because they shape and guide human actions.

The Naga tribes are known for their kindness in helping those in need. This is evident by the dialogue between Pelevotso and Mesanuo. Mesanuo shut the door and pulled a sack of grain over the threshold before leaving for the Abandoned Village to visit her sisters Kethonuo and Siedze. Pelevotso looked at the grain sack and questioned why she is doing so with a confused gesture. In response, Mesanuo said, "It means a stranger in need of food can help himself to the grain." Even if I'm not present to greet them, it is still a show of hospitality.

It means any stranger who needs food may help himself to the grain. I don't know how long we'll be away, and it is a sign of hospitality to guests even if I'm not around to host them. Now that we have food, we should not hoard it for ourselves, lest we lose it all again (Kire, 2016, p. 77) ^[11].

Naga Tribes as Lovers of Nature

People who have a strong love, respect, and admiration for the Earth and its natural surroundings are known as "earth lovers." Naga tribes usually have strong beliefs about sustainable living and environmental preservation. In the sixth chapter of Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*, When Pelevotso came down to the Village of Weavers there had been no trees. The valley where the Village of Weavers stood was treeless. But when Mesanuo gave birth to her baby young saplings, rocks and stones were sprouted up from the earth. Mesanuo's response to the Headman's query, "Where have those trees and rocks come from?" will uncover their love towards the earth. Mesanuo compared earth with mother. Because earth is seen as the origin of everything. Like mother gives birth to a baby, earth gives birth to trees, rocks and grains.

The earth has birthed trees, rocks, stones, and grain, just as a mother births her offspring. The trees and rocks are the sons of the earth. Take care of them and they will take care of you and your children (Kire, 2016, p. 46) ^[11].

Despite losing his spouse and child due to starvation, Pelevotso continues to show his love to Mesanuo's newborn. Mesanuo felt joy as she gave her son to Pelevotso. He stared at the newborn's pink skin and the blue veins running over his cheek, resembling the rivulets formed by rainwater running off cracked, parched land. He enjoyed singing the song quietly while carrying the infant and rocking him back and forth to the beat of the tune. The baby slept peacefully in Pelevotso's arms. This demonstrates how, despite their dissatisfaction, Naga tribes show their love to others.

Pele sang the song softly as he carried the baby, rocking him back and forth to the rhythm of the song. The baby smiled in its sleep and the traveller continued to sing the only song he knew (Kire, 2016, p. 47) ^[11].

Tribal people are very fond of activities like involving water, especially rivers. The river was sometimes referred to as their mother. They will believe that their mother has passed away if the river is supposed to be sandy and dry. However, if it came back to life, they would rejoice by claiming that their mother had returned to feed them. Because it is the village's source of life. So, the river was

revered as Mother. Fathers provided food and fish from the river for their family. The women would frequently catch frogs by the riverbanks for a medicinal broth in case someone in the family became ill. Nobody leaves the river without anything. The people referred to the river as "our mother" because it contained food.

It is the name of the river. We call her our mother because she gives us food: fish, frogs, herbs and water. You must also call her by that name (Kire, 2016, p. 55) ^[11].

Mircea Eliade in his work "Myth and Reality" claims that myths provide a shared framework for understanding the world, fostering a sense of belonging and unity among members of a group.

Nialhuo was the name of Pelevotso's village, which was located on the western hills. Below the hills, there were many forests where the young men learned to hunt and two small rivers where they fished and bathed. The local elders would frequently warn that if the younger generation did not learn to appreciate the village, it would soon be abandoned. This helps the reader comprehend Naga tribals' affection for their own village.

It's the best place to live in. We are blessed. Our young should not think there are lands better than this to build a home. They belong here, they must take the place of their ancestors. They feared that if the young were not taught to love the village, it would soon be abandoned (Kire, 2016, p. 12) ^[11].

Perspectives of Tribes on Life

Eliade claims that myths provide answers to fundamental concerns about suffering and existence. It assists individuals in making sense of their existence and finding a purpose in life. Naga tribes' views on life differ from that of non-tribal people. During the conversation between Pelevotso and Mesanuo, Pelevotso asserted that life is unpredictable and difficult. But Mesanuo clarified Pelevotso by saying that although life is difficult and uncertain, we have the power to shape it in the ways that we desire.

Life is hard and unexpected, but we can direct it to go the way we want it to. It is up to us (Kire, 2016, p. 92) ^[11].

Kethonuo continued that people become old and pass away so that fresh people might take their place. They are also supposed to do certain tasks before passing away. That's the reason we're present.

People grow up and grow old and die so that new people can take their place. And before they die, they are meant to do some things. That is the reason why we are here in the first place" (Kire, 2016, p. 109) ^[11].

Results & Discussion

The study examined at how the Naga tribes' naturally compassionate nature was portrayed in Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*. The story emphasized qualities like kindness, love, hospitality, generosity, and charity that were essential to the Naga people's moral and cultural identity. These principles were ingrained in the characters' daily interactions and worldview; they were not just idealistic concepts. Pelevotso's trip to the Village of Weavers, where he came across kindness and spiritual insight that finally guided him to his life-changing destiny, served as a striking example of this. This journey, which was characterized by patience, humility, and human connection, provided a counter-narrative based on indigenous ideals in contrast to

the prevalent narratives of conflict or marginalization that are frequently connected to tribal societies.

The oral storytelling tradition, which transmits knowledge, myths, and moral teachings from one generation to the next, is essential to the cultural transfer of these values. These oral histories are now being preserved and transformed into literary forms as a result of the growth of print culture, which enables them to endure in new cultural contexts and reach a larger audience. In his exploration of myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss observes that "there are some things we have lost, and we should try perhaps to regain them, because I am not sure that we can regain these things exactly as if they had never been lost." This statement strikes a deep chord with Kire's creative endeavors, which aim to use fiction to both archive and renew indigenous memory and wisdom. *Son of the Thundercloud*, then, acts as a literary and cultural record—one that engages in a wider discussion about the value of myth in contemporary society while preserving the Naga people's culture. Kire underlines the timeless significance of indigenous storytelling in forming moral frameworks and maintaining cultural identity by fusing myth with experienced reality.

Conclusion

According to Eliade, myths are not merely stories but symbolic narratives that reveal truths. They reflect a type of historical reality and represent old communities. It is very clear that individuals and groups can obtain a deeper understanding of themselves and their surroundings by interpreting myths' symbolic language. It helps to retain and transmit ideals from one generation to the next. Also, it can help community members feel more connected to one another. Myths can enhance social relationships. Elements in myth can act as vehicles for presenting the most important aspects of reality. In short, myths guide each and everyone in this world. At the end of this complex examination, it is clear that myths continue to provide greater insights into human nature, life, and reality. Myths offer moral and ethical principles that guide humans.

Myths are often effective means of delivering moral and ethical principles that influence both personal conduct and more general social norms. Myths contain teachings that are not explicitly imposed but are instead assimilated through storytelling because of their rich narratives and symbolic frameworks. Mythological characters frequently serve as examples of virtues like bravery, honesty, loyalty, and compassion while also highlighting the bad effects of traits like greed, betrayal, or hubris. These narrative decisions are not coincidental; rather, they are didactic in that they provide viewers with examples of appropriate or inappropriate behaviour.

Myths allow people to think about difficult moral concerns in a more approachable and emotionally impactful way by presenting moral quandaries within the framework of captivating and frequently fanciful stories. In oral cultures, where formal systems of moral instruction may be scarce, this storytelling technique enables communities to transmit fundamental principles from one generation to the next. Mythic stories offer a common vocabulary for talking about duty and transgression, justice and injustice, and right and wrong. Myths support social cohesiveness in this way by providing shared points of reference that direct interpersonal interactions and behaviour in the community.

Furthermore, by offering complex scenarios in which characters must make tough decisions, myths assist communities in navigating moral ambiguity and promote ethical and consequential critical thinking. These tales serve as simple yet effective teaching tools that teach people how to live morally and peacefully in their societies, not just to entertain listeners or explain origins. Consequently, myth's ability to represent and convey a culture's fundamental ideals, influencing both individual identity and societal norms, is what gives it its lasting significance.

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