

(iii) Role of Venus - 2015

(a) Outline the role of Venus in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

In the *Aeneid*, Venus fulfils the role of Aeneas' overprotective mother. As a goddess, she is constantly looking out for her son on his travels as well as intervening with Jupiter and protecting him from Juno. While she always means well, she can sometimes be too focused on Aeneas' destiny and can end up hurting him personally. Nevertheless, because of her guidance and protection, Aeneas successfully reaches Italy and wins the war with the Latins.

One aspect of her role is acting as a guide for Aeneas. In Book I, while he is in the woods near Carthage, Venus appears to him in disguise and advises Aeneas to go into the city and talk to the queen, who will welcome him. In Book II, during the fall of Troy she convinces Aeneas to spare Helen, revealing that it is the will of the Gods that the city should fall. She then urges him to find his family, leave the city and fulfil his destiny. In Book VI, she guides her son to the golden bough so that he may descend into the Underworld by sending two doves in its direction. Later in Book XII, Venus provides her son with tactical advice in the fight against the Latins. She advises that he attack the city of the Latins.

Another aspect of her role is her constant protection of her son. While the goddess Juno continues to work against Aeneas, Venus tries to counter that by shielding him from danger as much as she can. There are many ways in which she protects him. For example, when Aeneas and his friend Achates approach Carthage, they are shrouded in a cloud that Venus conjures to prevent them from being seen. However, she protects him in another way when she, in fear that Juno will incite the Phoenicians against her son, sends down another of her sons, Cupid, the god of love, who takes the form of Aeneas's son, Ascanius. In this disguise, Cupid inflames the queen's heart with passion for Aeneas. While this will later backfire and end up hurting her son and Queen Dido, she ultimately protected him from Juno's wrath.

In the battles in the later books of the epic, Venus intervenes to preserve her son from harm. Most notably in Book VIII, she manipulates her husband Vulcan, the god of fire and forging, to provide Aeneas with new weapons and armour that will give him an added advantage. One of these weapons includes a golden shield with depictions of future famous Roman events such as Romulus being suckled and Julius Caesar's defeat of the Gauls. She herself delivers them to

Aeneas. Later during the final battle in Book XII when Aeneas is wounded in the leg by an arrow, Venus heals her son so that he is prepared to fight Turnus in their next encounter. Turnus is being supported by Juno the entire war and Venus aiding Aeneas balances it out. Both times Venus is fulfilling her role as guardian or primary protector of Aeneas.

I think Venus' biggest role in the Aeneid is her divine influence on Aeneas' behalf. Aeneas' destiny angers the goddess Juno. She does not want Aeneas to reach Rome because of her grudge against the Trojans and her knowledge that their descendants will destroy her favourite city Carthage. However, Venus only needs Jupiter's favour. After Juno sends a storm to harm Aeneas' ship, Venus rushes to Mount Olympus to beg Jupiter to end their suffering. Jupiter assures her of Aeneas' destiny and sends a god down to Carthage to make sure they are hospitable to the Trojans. In Book IV, she aligns herself with Juno to arrange a "marriage" between Aeneas and Dido. While Juno wants Aeneas to remain in Carthage, Venus knows that he will not. Pretending she wants the marriage will assure that Juno won't use Dido against Aeneas. In Book V, Venus fears more tricks from Juno, worries about the group's safety at sea when they leave for Latium. She pleads with Neptune, and he grants Aeneas safe passage but takes the life of a crew member Palinurus. The two goddesses' bicker in Book X which results in Jupiter deciding that the gods should no longer be involved in the Trojan/Latin War. In truth, Venus is very influential in aiding his destiny by intervening on his behalf to the Gods.

(b) In your opinion, were Venus' interventions always helpful to Aeneas? Explain your answer by reference to the *Aeneid*.

Overall, Venus loves her son and tries to help him in any way that she can. She probably his greatest ally throughout the Aeneid and saves his life countless times. She saves him from the storm in Book I and guides him out of the city of Troy in the tragic Book II. She heals him in Book XII amid battle. She covers him in a mist while he approaches Carthage and meets him as a huntress to tell him about the Queen. She constantly pleads to Jupiter about Juno stopping Aeneas from fulfilling his destiny.

Venus is also vital to Aeneas' descent into the Underworld to meet his father by directing him towards the golden bough. Aeneas is able to learn about his and his son's future and is filled with a new courage upon leaving. He could not have done that without his mother's help. Also, providing him with the armour and weapons from Vulcan is extremely helpful for him to fight a war he was not prepared for but rather forced into by Juno.

Unfortunately, Venus can sometimes be unfeeling as a mother. She remains distant throughout the Aeneid and only rarely interacts with her son which angers him. Her distance also means she can unintentionally hurt him. Venus is divine and knows the greatness of Aeneas' future by Book IV, but Aeneas does not know it. She cruelly schemes with Juno, lets Aeneas fall for Dido and start planning a future with her. This causes him as well as her great pain when it is time for him to leave. In truth her filling Dido with infatuation for Aeneas is the cause of her death. This is where the goddess can be unhelpful in the Aeneid.