

Gladiator



Director: Ridley Scott

Cast: Russell Crowe, Joaquin Phoenix, Connie Nielsen, Oliver Reed

Duration: 155 min.

This is a pure Hollywood movie that nonetheless refers to a very important era of history - the beginning of the fall of the Roman Empire. This movie reminds us of the glory of Rome, long before Christian historians misjudged it; by mostly dwelling on its fall, while forgetting to praise its golden era.

The Roman Empire is one of the cultures that integrated religious tolerance into its society (in Rome there were Mithran, Roman and Egyptian temples), although it is widely known as a persecutor of Christians. The fact is that the new religion sought to impose itself upon all others (contradicting the spirit of religious tolerance adopted by Rome); and to achieve this, it used manipulation and political instability. This was a power struggle.

Whatever has happened, history proves that there is a true cause for the fall of the Roman Empire: notably the corruption that grew inside those who were the pillars of the Empire.

One of the last personalities of the glorious line of Stoic philosophers-emperors was Marcus Aurelius. In the movie we see him in his tent on the field of battle, writing perhaps the most profound journal in the world; the "Meditations" or "To Myself", a book that clearly shows the emperor's ethical qualities. This was not written to be read or to be taught, but for himself. It expressed his thoughts, lessons and observations of himself. It was written, when he knew no one would be able to listen to him but himself. This is why his observations and meditation are so important. The movie presents him as a wise and fair person, caring and worrying about the continuation of the empire, sensing that the fall was near. He puts all his hope on one person, who he knows is fair and capable of continuing his work. This is the Gladiator.

The Gladiator is a classic hero, with a destiny of suffering that will eventually lead to glory; from the moment that he is freed from ambition and he asks only for one thing: to live a simple life. But, his Fate, his "Dharma" as it is known in India, was different. His fate would ask him to show his virtues, to convey them, to develop them constantly; and when things got rough, to offer them to others, by serving higher causes. In this way, he turns himself into a model of morals, having as his motto this: "What we do in life echoes in eternity".

There is a third person to the story, the traitor who is always nearby when a Hero exists. The traitor is Commodus, the adopted son of the Emperor. He has all the properties of evil: incapable, corrupt, a coward, an ambitious sycophant. He is the alter ego of the Hero.

The movie is not strictly based on history; the gladiator himself is pure imagination. Marcus Aurelius was not murdered but died of old age. In fact, Marcus Aurelius proclaimed his son Commodus as the new king.

The most interesting thing about the movie is the symbolism hidden inside each character. The traitor symbolizes the lowest aspects of the Hero that he must confront and conquer, even if they seem to be all-powerful and in control. The gladiator symbolizes the conscience in each human, that will fight against the lowest parts of his personality (symbolized by Commodus); helped by its great ally and master, the Higher Self, the most spiritual part of man (symbolized by Marcus Aurelius).

Even though Hollywood cannot be as profound as the Bhagavad Gītā or Ramayana, it can, if it wishes bring out the most noble elements of Heroic Epics, such as bravery, honor, dignity, obligation, oblation, and inner battles. These qualities are underestimated nowadays, but much needed.

It is suffice to bear in mind that "What we do in life echoes in eternity."