

B.A - Part - II

English - Honors

Paper - III :- Marlowe - Edward - II

Marlowe as a representative dramatist of the Renaissance Period

Marlowe was the greatest dramatist of the University wits. His career as a playwright was short - stretching over some half a dozen years yet he made no small contribution to the development of the British drama. He was gifted with a dramatic genius which was inferior only to that of Shakespeare. He was really a representative dramatist of Renaissance period. It was the period which tolled the death knell of the Middle Ages and ushered in a new era of bright hopes and rosy aspirations. It was the age of adventure and material wealth. It was an age when the minds of the people were lured by the new visions of distant lands rich in gold and jewels. Music dance and mirth played a significant part in the general life of the men and women of this age. The men of the Renaissance felt in their blood the flush of the new spirit, and exhibited in their literary works the emotions and feelings that the new upsurge had created in their hearts.

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Marlowe, more than Shakespeare was the representative dramatist of Renaissance period. In his four plays, 'Tamburlaine', 'Doctor Faustus', 'The Jew of Malta' and Edward II there is a full blooded expression of the entire age with all its new aspirations, hopes and dashing adventure. Marlowe is the dramatist of the Renaissance period par excellence and his plays are an epitome of what the Renaissance people felt and lived. Marlowe touches almost all aspects of the Renaissance in his works.

Marlowe's ideal of a man of the Renaissance is pictured by him in the figure of Tamburlaine, the Scythian conqueror. In Marlowe's vision the man of Renaissance were expected to be -

"of stature tall, and a sprightly fashioned
His lofty brows in folds."

The pleasure of the earth and material values of life, which the men of the Renaissance held dear are given full scope in Tamburlaine where the dramatist says -

"A god is no so glorious as a King
I think the pleasure they enjoy in Heaven
can not compare with kingly joys on earth -
To wear a crown enchased with pearl and gold,"

In 'The Jew of Malta' we have another expression of the love of wealth and precious stones which fired the

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imagination and vision of the Renaissance men and women. Barabas the Jew is a typical Renaissance figure in his love for wealth. He employs all his energy to accumulate "infinite riches in a little room". His vision of -

"Bags of fiery opels, sapphires amethysts,
Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds
Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,"

is, in fact, the vision of the average-wealth fired men of the Renaissance.

In 'Doctor Faustus' Marlowe presents a man of learning who is the master of varied knowledge ranging from philosophy to economics, but is dissatisfied with all his knowledge and practises necromancy to acquire worldly power. So great is Doctor Faustus's love for power and pleasure that he sells his soul to the Devil for enjoyment of worldly pelf and power.

In 'Edward II' the spirit of the Renaissance is evidently seen. The play largely concerns with the spectacle of human life, the rise and fall of personalities, the supremacy of sensuous pleasures over royal duties - all these bear the influence of the Renaissance. Edward II is a lover of sensual pleasures. Being a king, he does not care to seek power, nor is he able to wield it. Power is thrust upon him. Being a

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hedonist, he wants to enjoy life to the full. Gravelson, who himself is 'a nightgown mushroom' speaks of Edward's pleasure-seeking life:

" Music and poetry is his delight,
Therefore I'll have Italian masks by night
Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows
And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad,
My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay."

The defiant tone of the Renaissance adventurer is heard in the speeches of Young Mortimer when he is commuted to the Tower.

" What Mortimer, can ragged stony walls
Immure thy virtue that aspires to heaven?
No, Edward, England's courage, it may not be;
Mortimer's hope surmounts his fortune far."

Young Mortimer is a Machiavellian character. 'Feared am I more than lov'd' and one of the maxims attributed to Machiavelli was that "it is better for a prince to be feared than loved". The contempt for worldly limitations is a typical feature of the Renaissance and Mortimer's speech, a few

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minutes before his end brings out this spirit in the fullest measure. He is not bound by earthly limitations and defiantly challenges base fortune that brings him down.

"Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel
There is a point, to which when men aspire
They tumble headlong down; that point I touch'd
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?"

Thus, Marlowe, was the mouthpiece of the new age of the Renaissance. He was himself a lover of all those values which were held dear by the people of the Renaissance
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