



CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE - The Morning Star of English Drama

Christopher Marlowe is one of the most suggestive features of English Renaissance and the greatest of Shakespeare predecessors. He was well known as the father of English tragedy, he was the pioneer and path founder to whom the master of drama Shakespeare had followed. Induction of Tragedy marked the end of Miracle and Morality plays, which were already disliked by the English audience. Marlowe is the one who gave perfect shape to English drama and considered it as a piece of art writing. Tragedies in English drama started in 15th century with the advent of Renaissance and the translation of Italian tragedies. The first English tragedy was Gorboduc 1565 by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville but this was mainly based on Senecan tragedy and had all its properties, so it was quite a great task for Marlowe to give a new shape and charm to English literature.

Early Life and Marlowe's Journey as a Dramatist

Christopher Marlow was born in Canterbury in 1564 and can be considered as the first major dramatist of the Elizabethan period; he was of a humble birth and was from a Shoemaker family. Later he was educated at King's school in Canterbury and finally made it to Cambridge University. All his education was made possible through scholarships and his University education had helped him to acquire a reputed position in the world. Further, he manages to get into the circles of educated people and eventually become a royal spy and a great scholar. Moreover, University education helped him to acquaint with Greek and Latin Language and through its literature, he learnt about the civilizations and culture, which were not of English and about the ways of governance such as Roman Republic. Therefore, this knowledge gave him a new outlook of the world that was totally different from that of the ordinary people of England were possessed with. Marlow was celebrated for the innovations that he brought to the field of drama writing. His greatest contribution to English drama is the introduction of blank verse and he had perfected this style of writing in his dramas.

In 1593, Marlow went to Traven and there he was stabbed to death at the very tender age of 29. Many controversies revolve around him viz., he was

a royal spy, an atheist and a homosexual, but his writing overshadowed all such controversies and he was remembered as one of the gem of English Drama.

Major works of Marlow and its features

Marlow's reputation today as a play writer rests on his four major works:

Tamburlaine the Great (1587-88), Doctor Faustus (1588-92), The Jew of Malta (1589-90) & Edward II (1592). Other minor works are Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris, but these two works has smeared with the dispute that they were written in collaboration with other writers, but the first four works are attributed to Christopher Marlow only. These four works brought a great reputation to Marlow and can be considered as the Morning star of Renaissance and he became a path founder for Shakespeare to follow.

The major features that can be found in his works are as follows:

Use and abuse of power

In the beginning, Marlow analyse the meaning of power and its various version. In Tamburlaine, Marlow portrays an arrogant, ambitious and powerful character of Tamburlaine marked by his many dramatic speeches. Being a lame from a low birth, he reaches to a great height and afterwards he starts abusing the ***power of position***. In Jew of Malta, we can see ***commercial power or money power***, where we have a Jew who delights in the power which his wealth fetches him. He was a sadist and draw immense pleasure out of the sufferings of people. In Doctor Faustus, we can see the ***power of knowledge***. A ***desire to control all power even through the help of demonic or satanic power***. It also deals with the transaction of the human with demons to gain power on the earth. Edward II gives us a sad and tragic picture of a king who is in the pursuit of his personal desires and had a problem with the ***kingly power*** that he exercises. At the end, he meets a tragic end due to his failure in giving up his personal desire in the pursuit of his kingly duties. So in this way Marlow's characters show that how the subject of power is attached with the individual ambitions and social restrictions.

Social mobility

The concept of social mobility is also an integral part of Marlow's characters. We can see this very clearly, because Marlow himself is an instance of social mobility, who was raised from a family of shoemaker and later became a great scholar and a royal spy. He also gives an idea that how personally a character is ruined due to the social mobility. It means social structure is at par with social mobility, one may achieve the high-ups of the society but at last, the social structure of the society will decide his standings and all other achievements will be put aside and

suppressed. The above-cited scenario is not only important in Marlowe's context but also tells us about Renaissance society and how it used to treat the social mobility. Even though a person may acquire higher position in life due to his hard work and education but the institution in society like religion or government will put an end to this upper social mobility.

In short we can say that his plays deals with the conflict between individual interest and the social restrictions, even though the free will helps us to acquire good position in the society but at last it is the religion or the government who are going to put an end to it. It also suggest that good work what we are doing right now may lead us towards salvation but on the other hand it suggests that it is determined before our birth.

Marlowe's Tragedies were totally different from Senecan tragedy henceforth he was mentioned as morning star of English drama. The feature of his tragedies became a kind of guidelines for Shakespeare to follow and to rule the world of theatre in the coming years.

Tragic heroes

Marlowe was the first writer who broke down the medieval conception of tragedy, which revolve around great Kings and Queens and their extraordinary achievements. Marlowe created real tragic heroes in his dramas who were from humble birth and later achieve the greatest positions through constant efforts and firm determinations. But the only exception was Edward II who was born with silver spoon. Whereas other portrayed characters of Marlowe had their upbringing deeply rooted in the humble or poor society, for example Tamburlaine who was a shepherd by birth and later became a soldier king, Doctor Faustus who was born to a humble parents but later became a great scholar through his desire for knowledge and so on.

Tragic flaw

Marlowe's heroes rose to great height due to their hard work, but they met their failure due to some tragic flaw in their character. Tamburlaine who was over ambitious and his mad pursuit of military and political power lead to his downfall, Doctor Faustus sold his soul to devil in order to acquire ultimate knowledge, in Jew of Malta Barabas met his failure due to his greediness discarding the human values, in Edward the II the king met his downfall due to his love for a man. But his tragic heroes never blame their destiny for their failure on the other hand they met their failure due to some weaknesses or a flaw in their character. This

special feature made Marlowe's drama quite different from Senecan tragedies.

Passion and zeal

Almost all Marlowe's tragic heroes were driven with one or the other passion and this very passion made them quite different from others and lead them to a great height. Tamburlaine was driven with a passion to acquire power and authority and this very passion for authority made him to meet his downfall, Doctor Faustus had a passion to acquire ultimate knowledge for which he was ready to sell his soul and this led him to his tragic end, In Jew of Malta Barabas had a passion to accumulate wealth to become rich and in order to gain this he was ready to leave all human values and he even doesn't hesitate to kill his own daughter, Edward II for his love for a man was such that he was totally unaware of the morality and sacrifice welfare of the nation. The irony is that the same passion that lead these heroes to reach great heights had become the main reason for their downfall too.

The inner conflict

One of the greatest contribution of Marlowe to tragedies is the introduction of the element of inner conflict. This can be noticed in Doctor Faustus and Edward II. Inner conflict can be witnessed both at physical level as well as at spiritual level. Marlowe's heroes unlike the Greek heroes were not the one who were governed by their destiny or by the divine power, but they were the masters of their own will and destiny. They all met the tragic end due to some flaw in their personalities and through their own actions. This is the greatest contribution of Marlowe to English drama and these tragedies awoke pity among the audiences towards the hero and awe against the extremity which is always danger.

Blank verse

Marlowe was the first to use blank verse in his dramas, he produced some drama which was entirely new to English theatre, in one sense he freed English drama from rhymed lines of morality and miracle place and gave new shape to English drama in the form of blank verse which helped the future dramatists to follow the anecdotes of these type of writing. Not only this, Marlowe was the founder of dialogues which are filled with fashion and liveliness and they made his tragedies to appear more realistic to the audience.

Three unities of drama

According to Aristotle - A good drama is the one that follows three unities i.e. ***Unity of time, Unity of action and Unity of place***, but Marlowe was totally opposite to this ideology and he produced the tragedies which are free from these three unities of drama and he proved that a tragedy can be successful even without following the three unities which were considered essential by Aristotle for a perfect tragedy.

Seriousness and complete lack of humour

Another important feature of Marlowe's tragedy is seriousness and complete lack of humour. However, we can say that this seriousness alone gave a definite shape to his tragedies. Another important feature of Marlowe's tragedy is less scope to female characters. Whatever the role Marlowe gave to female characters in his tragedies were all minor in nature such as Zenocrate in Tamburlaine, Helen of Troy in Doctor Faustus, daughter of Barbosa- Abigail in Jew of Malta and King Edward's wife- queen Isabella in the play Edward II are some of the example of minor roles given by Marlowe to his female characters.

To conclude we can say that Marlowe's unique style of writing tragedies and innovativeness that he showed in his writings made him quite different from other playwrights. Thus, he became the Columbus of a new literary world in England who paved the path for future dramatist, and among the one was Shakespeare who followed him and became the master of English theatre.