

# Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: A Renaissance Tragedy

Ankush Mahajan

R.R.M.K Arya Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Pathankot

---

**Abstract**—*The tragical History of Doctor Faustus: A Morality Play is an eternal composition by Christopher Marlowe in the monarchy of the Renaissance English literature of the 16th century. In the play, Good Angel stands for a conscience that is the voice of soul, and Evil Angel stands for the human desire that is in favour of the devils—Lucifer, Belzebug and Mephistophilis. Seven Deadly Sins have some certain purpose. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus fulfills the purpose of an old morality play. Appearance of the seven deadly sins is one of the major features of the morality play. English drama has its long history. The Miracle Play was based on saints' lives and divine miracle and The Mystery Play was based on the Bible. The origin of the morality play is there in the mystery and miracle plays of the middle age. The Morality Play is an allegory in dramatic form. It is a dramatization of the battle between the forces of good and evil in the human soul. The play is an exteriorization of the hidden sacred struggle. In it, virtues and vices appear as characters. Marlowe is well-known for his blank verse as he used in The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus and made it different. The poetic quality of drama is so powerful that the piece is considered more a poem and less a tragedy. The playwright has revolutionized the whole concept of the language of the drama and made poetry as an impressive medium of expression. After giving the life and force to the poetic drama, Marlowe became a glorious figure and later made the way for Shakespeare and Milton. There is no doubt that Marlowe was a writer of serious tragedy but we may not deny to the fact that The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus has little scope of comedy, or comic-scene for the purpose of comic-relief. It is hard to believe that a serious dramatist like Marlowe has scope for comedy. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is a tragic-comedy: as it has blend of the tragedy and comedy. Generally, the mixing of tragic and comic is called tragi-comedy. The play is a fusion of the elements of tragedy and comedy. There are scenes of humour and pity. Marlowe's contribution to the English tragedy is of great importance and what is the most striking is in the field of art of the characterization, blank verse, and in the morality play. Marlowe portrays life-like characters: neither absolutely perfect nor a complete sort of evil, he is a combination of good and bad. Plot in a tragedy is important, but the most important is the role of the central character. Marlowe's The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is not only the tragic-story of Faustus but it is the tragedy of every man. There two Angels are the representative of man's two tendencies— one of the good and the rest is bad; one is constructive and another is destructive, the first is in favour of God and the second is in favour of devil.*

**Keywords:** Doctor Faustus, Good Angel, Evil Angel, Morality Play, Tragedy, Tragicomedy, Renaissance, Character.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Man is always thankless by nature. Although he has been entitled as the crown of creations. Yet he is not satisfied with it. He often cries and complains why he is not God? Why he cannot change the direction of the sun and the Moon? Why he cannot move the heaven and the earth? And why he cannot raise the spirit of the dead?. It is man and man only who, perpetually, challenges the monarchy of God and like Renaissance man says;

“There is no God on the earth and if there is any in the sky, we shall bring him down very soon.”

## 2. INTRODUCTION OF RENAISSANCE

Renaissance, literally, means rebirth .It represents Europe-wide movement which marks the modern world. In Renaissance period, it was for the first time that man began to have new discoveries, new inventions and new interests. Printing press was invented for the first time in the history of mankind which caused widespread of knowledge, enlightenment and civilization. But these achievements of man in Renaissance period are much less than the values he had lost under the garb of pride and arrogance. That is why; Renaissance period is a paradoxical tale of man's outer glory and inner deterioration. Apparently, man was trying to break into the heights of clusters but inwardly, he was unable to enlighten his inner moral and spiritual bankruptcy. Renaissance stands for the inordinate ambitions, individualism, supreme lust for power and pelf, quest for knowledge, passionate love for beauty and hankering after sensuous pleasures.

## 3. LIFE OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE (1564-1593)

Marlowe, who was the son of a shoemaker, was born in Canterbury less than three months before the birth of Shakespeare. He was educated at Kings' School, Canterbury, and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he acquired heterodox views on religion. After going down from Cambridge, he became a secret-service agent of some kind, and travelled abroad in this capacity.

He settled in London in 1586, and soon joined the Lord Admiral's Company of Players. His career as a dramatist must have begun soon after his career as an actor. On the 30th May, 1593, he was stabbed in an inn at Deptford by a shady secret-service agent by the name of Frizer and died at the age of twenty-nine years and three months.

#### 4. WORKS OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

##### Dramatic Activity of Six Brief Years

The period of Marlowe's dramatic activity comprises six brief years, from 1587 to 1593. Yet during those six years he wrote six splendid plays—all reflecting his essential spirit and nature, all full of passion, poetry. Each drama centers round some overmastering passion—wild, intemperate passion that grows and develops till it destroys itself. The lust for empire, the lust for lucre, the lust for knowledge and the lust for beauty—these form the background as well as the mainspring of each play. In all these, Marlowe reveals himself as 'the greatest discoverer, the most daring and inspired pioneer, in all our poetic literature', as the writer of genuine tragedy and genuine blank verse, as one who prepared the path and made the way for the advent of Shakespeare. In all these are evident qualities of terror and splendor, intensity of purpose and sublimity of note, imaginative daring and lyrical magnificence. In all these is illustrated his individualistic conception of tragedy, the classical Greek conception modified by the Renaissance spirit, the conception which portrays "the struggle between the overweening soul, typically Renaissance in its insatiable ambition, and the limitations which it seeks to overcome." The following are the important works of Marlowe:

##### 1. "Tamburlaine"

It was Marlowe's first powerful trumpet-blast. The general chorus of warm welcome which greeted the play on its first presentation on the stage in 1587 encouraged Marlowe to 'pen his Second Part.' The very subject-matter and style of Tamburlaine sounded a new and striking note compelling public attention and admiration. The very opening lines of the play contain what may be described as Marlowe's dramatic manifesto:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,  
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,  
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,

Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine,  
Threatening the world with high astounding terms,

And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

Tamburlaine is the story of a Scythian shepherd who dreams of world conquest and achieves his aspiration magnificently. As a drama it has many drawbacks—the plot is weak and loosely knit; the scheme seems to be inartistic, nay,

absurd; the effects are grim and bloody. Yet who can refrain from appraising the play as a first-rate one, taking into account its attractive exaggeration of thought and expression, its burning passages of eloquent poetry, its glare and horror, its vehemence and intoxication, its titanic truculence and luminous colouring? In the forefront of all these, and towering high above them all stands the high-tempered hero, full of indomitable strength and passionate speech. Tamburlaine is the symbol of invincible human will, the embodiment of a fearless vision, filled with fretting and fuming aspirations and with the rapturous glory of which 'youthful poets dream on summer eves by haunted stream.' In Tamburlaine is enshrined and illustrated—

Man's desire and valiance that range,

All circumstance and come to port unspent.

'Still climbing after knowledge' infinite—Tamburlaine bestrides the world like a medieval Napoleon. In tune with the Titanic strides and triumphs of this superman are the Indian hunter who thunders—'I throw my mind across the chasm and my house follows', and also the Scythian horses which sweep wide spaces of uncivilized splendour with their swift and sparkling movement. On the whole, Tamburlaine is 'the most resplendent' of Marlowe's plays in which the morning stars of his poetry sing together.

##### 2. "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus"

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus which followed in the wake of Tamburlaine is acclaimed by all as Marlowe's best play in which the leaven of fertile poetry and fearless imagination works wonders. The story is that of Faustus, a scholar who sells his soul to the devil in his eagerness for the acquisition of universal knowledge. Faustus is as insatiable and mighty as Tamburlaine. If Tamburlaine thunders—

I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains,

And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about,

And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere

That Tamburlaine be slain or overcome;

Faustus declares with vibrant passion—

All things that move between the quiet poles,

Shall be at my command: emperors and kings,

Are but obeyed in their several provinces,

Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds:

A sound magician is a mighty God.

Out of the dry bones of the old German legend Marlowe has fashioned a work of art, a noble drama of a scholar's soul in the grip of intense agony. It is a play of vast conflict, fearful failure, intense feeling, stirring emotion; it is a play whose central idea is that of loss; a play in which sin is presented

with its inescapable reward; a matchless spiritual tragedy in which the mighty protagonist is man and the mysterious powers that surround him; a play whose symbolism has an irresistible appeal.

### 3. "The Jew of Malta"

This proved to be, in its own day, the most popular of Marlowe's plays. Barabas, the Mediterranean money-lender, with his avaricious dreams of wealth, fore-shadows Shakespeare's Shylock. Dedicated to the spirit of Machiavelli, the play opens a new phase in Marlowe's work. It is a picture of "the Elizabethan world of 'policy' in which men were unscrupulous, bold, implacable, cruel in power and sometimes heroic in defeat." Less passionate and less lyrical than Tamburlaine and Faustus, *The Jew of Malta* is, however, stronger and more bitter than its two illustrious predecessors.

### 4. "The Massacre of Paris"

It is generally regarded as Marlowe's crudest work. As in other plays so in this, there are brave and beautiful phrases, emotional and impassioned lines, memorable and magnificent speeches, and grand and glorious tragic touches. But the material is weakly managed and the characters are poorly drawn. Indeed, the impression left by this play is that there is not much of Marlowe's hand in it.

### 5. "Edward II"

It is an undisputed masterpiece of Marlowe—in which he touches "his highest point of excellence." It is a great historical and political play anticipating Shakespeare's *Richard II*. There is here none of the beauty and pathos of the earlier plays, none of their splendor and poetry. The whole is subdued, the style is restrained and temperate, and the characters are boldly and clearly drawn. The plot is controlled and well adapted, and the treatment of the characters and the details of description exhibit a growing maturity in the art of Marlowe. Splendid instances of deepening gloom and swelling pathos are there as in the dungeon scene at Berkeley Castle and in the abdication scene. And the play touches our imagination and thrills our emotion in the same way as do the great tragedies of Shakespeare. With something Greek about it as far as the stern presentment of human misery and anguish is concerned; *Edward II* is an artistic play that moves us by its very simplicity and humanity. It is Marlowe's ripest play and lasting legacy.

### 6. "Dido Queen of Carthage"

*Dido Queen of Carthage*—for which Marlowe borrowed material from Virgil's "Aeneid"—was left unfinished. It was Nashe who completed and arranged it for the stage. What part was done by Marlowe and how much of the play belongs to Nashe is a point not satisfactorily explained. But it is evident that Marlovian touches are there surely. The play differs from all its predecessors in that it does not paint or portray any lust. The hapless love-tale of the great Carthaginian Queen is

treated poetically and dramatically. This is the only play of Marlowe which has love as its theme and woman as its central figure. Marlowe's fondness for rich imagery and colourful description is present in plenty. His ships have golden cordage, crystal anchors and ivory oars. Dido has silver arms and tears of pearl. Even the common soldiers wear rich embroidered coats and have silver whistles to control the winds. It is thus that Marlowe reveals his passion for describing the beautiful, his delight in luxuriant outward and visible loveliness. Who can miss the ravishing beauty of the lines where Dido expresses her thirsty love for Aeneas—

I'll make me bracelets of his golden hair,  
His glistening eyes shall be my looking-glass;  
His lips an altar, where I'll offer up  
As many kisses as the sea hath sand;  
Instead of music I will hear him speak;  
His looks shall be my only library.

## 5. CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE; TRUE CHILD OF RENAISSANCE

Christopher Marlow is the true child of Renaissance. He is saturated with the spirit of Renaissance. He holds the desire of supreme power and pelf. He is also, influenced by the beauty and glamour of the world. So, he displays the same spirit in his plays.

Not only *Dr. Faustus* but also all the titanic heroes of Marlow's tragedy like "*Tamburlaine*", "*The Jew of Malta*" and "*Edward 2*" exhibit the Renaissance traits.

We see in *Dr. Faustus* a wonderful expression of renaissance elements and the character *Dr. Faustus* as a renaissance man. The most important thing in the Renaissance is craving for 'knowledge infinite'. This characteristic has been injected in *Faustus* properly. He has achieved knowledge of all branches. Yet he feels unfulfilled. So he wants to practice black art and with this he would be able to know all things –

"I will have them read me strange philosophy."

After selling his soul, he, at the very first, questions Mephistopheles to know the mystery of the universe, about the position of hell.

"First, will I question with thee about hell,  
Tell me where is the place that men call hell?"

## 6. REVOLT AGAINST HEAVEN

*Dr. Faustus* being the product of Renaissance and the mouth piece of Marlow is dissatisfied with his present position. He wants to be the commander of the whole universe. The only way to become a mighty god is to revolt against Heaven and

step into the field of magic. Being a Renaissance man, Faustus happily abjures Heaven and gets associated with black art, He declares;

” All things that move between the quite poles, Shall be at my command”

### **Love of power and pelf**

Although Dr. Faustus is a learned man and knows what good and bad is, yet, the intoxication of power and pelf dominates his mind. He willingly, entrusts his soul to devil and declares;

“Had i as many souls as there be stars, I’d give these all for Mephistopheles”.

### **Lust for Wealth**

Renaissance man, always, hankers after wealth. He wants to extend the realm of his resources. He desires to enhance his money, his asserts and other precious things of the world. Dr. Faustus, being a product as well as a reflection of Renaissance age, wants to have all worldly resources under his belt. This desire is vividly manifested when he (Faustus) aspires to get the costly gold of India and orient pearl. He declares;

” I’ll have them fly to India for gold, ransack the ocean for orient pearl”

### **Love for knowledge**

Renaissance man is ever inquisitive to trace out the mysteries of life, earth, skies, heaven, and hell. He seeks the ways of knowledge through different means. Same Renaissance spirit is infused in Dr. Faustus who is the mouth-piece and spokesman of Marlowe. He becomes curious to know something about heaven and hell. He even, wants to know the exact location of hell. Therefore, after embracing magic Faustus orders Mephistopheles to tell him about hell as he declares;

“Faustus; First will i question with thee about hell”

### **Love for Beauty**

Renaissance man is much influenced by apparent beauty and bodily charm. He happens to be aesthetic and therefore, wants to see each and everything beautiful and attractive. Faustus, being a Renaissance man is no exception in this regard. He is also, influenced by beauty. He hates ugly and shabby things. When Mephistopheles attends him along with an ugly shaped devil. Faustus abhors it and orders him to change its shape. He declares;

” I charge thee to return, and change thy shape, thou art too ugly to attend on me”

Faustus’ love for beauty can be judged on another occasion when he describes his planning after being associated with magic. He narrates the way of changing the uniform of public school in a very attractive manner. He describes;

” I’ll have them fill the public school with silk, Wherewith the student shall be bravely clad”

### **Love for voluptuousness**

Renaissance man is very much fond of voluptuousness. He looks to be a relaxed person after satisfying his sensual desires. Faustus, too is at first attracted by the most beautiful lady of the world (Helen) and then satisfies his carnal desires with her. Faustus declares;

” Sweet Helen make me immortal with a kiss, Her lips suck forth my soul”

### **Mental Conflict**

Renaissance man suffers inner as well as outer conflict of mind. Faustus, in capacity of a Renaissance man, undergoes the same experience. He is confronted with an inner mental conflict when good and evil angels appear;

“Good Angel; Sweet Faustus, think of heaven and heavenly things”

“Evil Angel; No, Faustus, think of honor and wealth”

The outer confrontation is aroused when an old man appears and tries to convince him in these words;

” .....As no commiseration may expel, but mercy. Faustus, of thy Savior sweet,

Whose blood alone must wash away thy guilt”.

## **7. THE RENAISSANCE SPIRIT IN THE DOCTOR FAUSTUS: DOCTOR FAUSTUS IS A CHILD OF RENAISSANCE**

Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is undoubtedly a child of Renaissance and almost all the elements of the spirit of the movement are reflected in the play. The difference between Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus and its counterpart, in the “Faustbuch” underlines the influence of the Renaissance on the play. In Marlowe’s hero, we find reflected most of the chief characteristics of the Renaissance, such as “individualism”, “self-confidence”, “impatience with earthly limitations”, “a spirit of revolt”, and “love of beauty” and “learning”. The Doctor Faustus displays both, the best and the worst element of the Renaissance. A typical representative of the Renaissance, he deserves both—our admiration and our pity. On the whole, Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus has the impact of the spirit of the renaissance. Faustus’ sense of individualism, love for power, learning, beauty, and impatience with earthly limitations made him the representative of a renaissance individual. Finally, it would not be wrong to claim that Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus is a child of renaissance. Lust for power is the cause of the tragedy in the Doctor Faustus Marlowe’ The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus deals with the lust for power of the hero, Faustus. Herein, there is a great creed for the power in the hero, so he studies very much of almost all the branches of the

study. He finds that nothing is important; therefore, making himself the most powerful like Omnipotent, he selects the black magic even at the rate of his soul. Faustus considers: "O, what a world of profit and delight, Of power, of honour, of omnipotence".<sup>15</sup> The whole story of the tragedy moves around the lust for "power", "omnipotence", and "honour" of the central tragic-figure of the tragedy, therefore, it is the Tragical History of Doctor Faustus.

## 8. DOCTOR FAUSTUS: A TRAGEDY OF EVERYMAN

Marlowe's The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is not only the tragic-story of Faustus but it is the tragedy of every man: conflict between good and bad ideas, good and evil angels. There two Angels are the representative of man's two tendencies— one of the good and the rest is bad; one is constructive and another is destructive, the first is in favour of God and the second is in favour of devil. The first represents soul, and the second, human desires and worldly pleasures. Whatever is described about Faustus, is common to everybody from many prospects. Faustus is a typical representative of the Renaissance people but he has universal appeal. The subject-matter of the drama is very clear as it deals with the lust for worldly pleasure and it is the reason of the tragedy of everyman in the world, and so with Faustus. Thus Faustus in the Doctor Faustus is a representative of everyman.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Thus, that in to be Marlowe has write into play Dr, Faustus as renaissance play and Faustus is good human being, in this era you can sees that to be more than of writer face and effect to renaissance age and also for spiritual power of Elizabethan age in drama. So than can to see in Dr, Faustus as Renaissance man and also great master piece for this age in Marlowe play as well as Dr, Faustus.

## REFERENCES

1. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.26
2. Cuddon, J.A. A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, [Delhi: Doaba House,1998], p.519
3. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus,[Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.6
4. Cuddon, J.A. A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, [Delhi: Doaba House,1998], p.89
5. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.5
6. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.9
7. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.14
8. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.26
9. Compact Oxford Dictionary Thesaurus & Word power Guide, [N.Y. Oxford University Press, 2003] p.965
10. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.50
11. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.51
12. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.5
13. Compact Oxford Dictionary Thesaurus & Word power Guide, [N.Y. Oxford University Press, 2003] p.965
14. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.50
15. Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, [Madras: Macmillan India Limited, Edited by Menon, C.B., 1993], p.51