



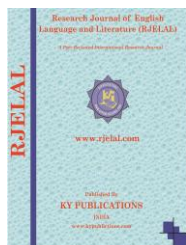
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

TENNYSON'S QUEEN MARY: THE VICTORY OF GOOD OVER EVIL

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ABSTRACT

Queen Mary, the first play of Tennyson's 'Historical Trilogy' was published in 1875. "It describes the final downfall of Roman Catholicism in England and the dawning of a new age"¹. The new age was an era of the freedom of the individual from the priestly domination. The plot of Queen Mary is based upon the conflict relating to Queen's marriage with the Spanish King Phillip, a Roman Catholic; and the conflict is more conspicuous from the political point of view than from the matrimonial point of view. In Queen Mary, Tennyson has presented the dramatic theme from a political rather than a religious point of view and his proclivity to Protestantism which was firmly planted on the English soil, during the 19th century, reflected in religious ethos of the nation, is explicitly evinced.:

Keywords: the political struggle, Love, Christianity rebellion etc.

The conflict starts from the Queen's decision to marry King Phillip. On account of some of the prominent people of England apprehended the domination of Spain and the Roman Catholic Church. So they rebelled, though the rebellion was crushed by the queen. The Protestants were considered to be the enemies of the throne by the queen, and the Papal Legate. In the end, nemesis followed when King Phillip eventually deserted Queen because he could not get his two desires fulfilled, e.g. the capturing of the English throne and the heir apparent from Queen Mary.

In this play, it seems that Tennyson pitied the poor Queen because of her pathetic background. She is sad due to the wrong done by her father to her mother and herself.

Hallam writes: "She had, my father thought, been harshly judged by the popular verdict of tradition; therefore he had a desire to let her be seen as he pictured her in his imagination"².

Tennyson's sympathy imaginatively flowed for the queen not only because she was cast down by her father from her high estate but also because the familiar friends of her childhood too treated her in an insulting manner. No wonder that her bright nature has been clouded by these calamities.

Throughout her short reign, Queen Mary suppressed this Protestantism with the help of her associates. She is unsuccessful because she violates the fundamental rules of Christianity. In some places, patriotic spirit is also infused. Even the villainous character, Queen Mary, although surrendering all the interest of her country to her husband, does not lack the feeling of patriotism:

Mary: There is no King, but were he ten times king,

Ten times our husband, but must lower his flag

To that of England in the Seas of England⁴
(Act V, Sc, i)

The love between Queen Mary and Phillip as well as their decision to marry gives birth to and the division of the country into two groups of people—the first allowing the wedlock and the second opposing it. This in fact constitutes the main conflict of the dramatic action of the play.

In Queen Mary, the political implications of love between Mary and Phillip are more remarkable than the erotic or sensual aspect of the whole affair. Mary offers everything to Phillip but unluckily she does not receive any affectionate and loving response in return. The result of these episodes leads to desperation and loving woman becomes the victims of the forces of the external events. The prevailing political situations urge the selfish Phillip back to Spain and he gives up England and Queen Mary for good.

Mary: He never loved me — nay he couldn't love me

It was his father's policy against France

I am eleven years older than he,

Poor boy!⁵ (Act V, Sc. v)

The only interesting and important element from the human point of view is the love theme concerned with Mary, the neurotic middle-aged queen and her strong infatuation for her cynical Spanish husband. However, this should not lead us to believe that the religious and political strands of the plot are merely decoration paraphernalia for the love theme.

Protestantism as shown in Queen Mary is presented as an unavoidable moral reaction of the English people against the corruptions of Rome. There is a tussle between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants which causes religious restlessness. This restlessness increases because of the merciless and wicked designs of the queen in association with the Papal authority from Rome and her own people owing allegiance to her. The Protestant struggle leads to the democratic conflict, like the rebellious outburst of the English people against the tyrannical queen who tries to crush Protestantism which was the expression of the free religious sentiments of the people. They rebel against her because she weds Phillip of Spain without caring for the political outcome of this marriage.

Queen Mary has 44 characters. As usual in Tennyson's trilogy the characters fall into groups of good and bad characters. Queen Mary comes under the category of the unscrupulous monarchs who are distinguished by some common features. Mary is highly ambitious. In quest of unlimited powers she becomes a virtual tyrant and goes to the lowest degree of degradation against her oppressors. In response to her actions, there is an unsuccessful revolt of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Sir Thomas Strafford. The repercussion of these protests and revolts is that many harmless persons, especially the Protestants, are ordered by the queen to be burnt alive. She appears as the cruellest barbarian at the burning of Archbishop Cranmer:

Howard: He has recanted Madam

Marry: The better for him,

He burns in purgatory not in hell. (Act IV, Sc.i)⁶

Her dishonest and unscrupulous deeds bring her to an unhappy end! She loses Phillip, Calais as well as the sympathy of the English People. Reginald pole, the papal legate and the other degenerate priests also lend their support to the queen in fulfilling her wicked designs. These are the cruel and corrupt ecclesiastics who always encourage her lust for power and gold. These people were spiritually bankrupt having no respect for the noble protest of the common people and have no sense of appreciation for their moral revolt.

Princess Elizabeth, Queen Mary's step sister, a noble woman, unlike Mary, has sympathy for the English people and, she, for sympathizing with the Protestants suffers throughout. Tennyson incorporates the ideals of humanity, love and religion in the Princess. She is tolerant, patient and loving and because of these qualities, she gets the best of her life in the end of the play. She is the only noble character, who gets victory in the end although she becomes a stoic in her life. In queen Mary the Queen wrongfully suspects Elizabeth and as both of them are politically against each other, there is a political conflict too, between them. Princess Elizabeth is kind, polite and loving. That is why she is appreciated for these prominent qualities, in contrast with Mary, who is proud, fanatic and unscrupulous. In the end, the disastrous

condition of Queen Mary makes Elizabeth highly emotional. Although she accepts the throne of England, she decides never to marry.

Mary's political career is commanded and influenced by two traits—one is her boldness and the other is her barbarous treatment of the rebels and the Protestants. In her personal life, she is passionate and emotional only to her Spanish Husband. She is blindly attached to Phillip and this statement leads her to yield to his will, whether fair or foul, and the end is frustrating when he does not respond positively. The character was difficult for the theatre because the protagonist of the piece, neither heroic nor miserably pathetic, is a bitterly disheartened lady who is defamed for massacres. Yet Tennyson thought that Queen Mary was the most remarkable of his plays from the point of view of character delineation. Tennyson wanted to depict Mary as he had imagined her to be. Tennyson sympathizes with the queen for the courage when she blurts out rejoicing after accession and the triumph over revolt:

Mary: My foes are at my feet and Phillip King. (Act II, Sc. iv)⁸

On the whole, Tennyson did more than justice to Queen Mary by making her a dignified character, by adding a fierce glow to her gloomy fanaticism and by making her speeches and action more vigorous and powerful than she had historically possessed. The chief problem was to furnish sufficient relief to the intense sadness in situations when Mary's devotion is repelled by Philip's coldness and mainly in the last scene when Mary falls on the ground rocking herself to and fro in a state of severe mental agony. In the beginning Mary has the capacity to rise above the wrongs she has suffered to forget her enemies, even to practice a measure of tolerance so long as she may retain her religious faith. In the end, she is ruined by her unreasoning passion, her obsessive love for loveless Philip. "At first, her desire is simply a yearning that troubles her private dreams. But ultimately her frustrations determine the violence she inflicts upon her own realm. Abandoned by the Spaniard, she loses all purpose in living and with it all true time to sovereignty."⁹

Lord Howard explains it thus:

Her life since Philip left her and she lost,
Her fierce desire of bearing him a child,
Hatch like a brief and bitter winter's day,
Gone narrowing down and darkening to a
close¹⁰.

"Throughout all history," Tennyson said, "there was nothing mournful than the final tragedy of this woman, who, with her deep longing for love, found herself hated by her people, abandoned by her husband and harassed in the hour of death by the restlessness of despair."¹¹ Elizabeth, Mary's half-sister, is another prominent character whose fortune declines as Catholic Queen's heightens and rises to the zenith against as Mary's falls. Elizabeth, like Queen Mary, personifies a political party and she is Princess of the Tudor blood with the innate courage to rise us to emergencies to deal with sudden happenings which demand prompt action. Elizabeth was inclined towards the English spirit and she had a harmonious acquaintance with her people while the Queen was under the strain of the foreigners and was guilty of bigotry. Although Elizabeth's character is noble and dramatic but Mary overpowers her when both are compared.

These people weave an atmosphere of intrigue and clash. It was an age when balance was hanging between the old faith and the new. There are statesmen like Page, Howard, Wyatt and Bagen Hall, for whom religion was a question of politics while from the point of view of the ecclesiastics like Pole, Bonner and Gardiner, the political power was an institution and religious conformity should be enforced by the politicians.

Tennyson's chief characters acquire symbolic significance. His dramatis personae represent vice, virtue and institution. His historical figures lack individuality and complexity and serve the purpose of the poet's favourite conception of didacticism. Even against a particular character, there is a manifestation of the poet's favour and prejudice, such as Mary representing corrupt monarchy. Tennyson employs these symbols extensively to reveal his characters. His characters act confidently because they are devoid of inner conflict.

. His plays were deep-rooted in didacticism as Tennyson's art was basically meant for communication, with the intention of the intellectual edification of the reader. He, therefore, dealt with the religious and political themes in his plays. The dramatis personae and themes of the plays communicate a definite message. Tennyson's own ideas are revealed in dialogues, and many characters become his mouth pieces and reveal his pre-conceived ideals— as Cranmer denounces papacy and expresses Tennyson's views.

As far as the theme and characterization are concerned, Tennyson dominated his characters with his own personality, pre-occupied with some particular convictions and thoughts prevalent in the Victorian age. That is why, his characters fail to grow independently or steadily in a natural manner, and are in fact, tied down to certain notions.

His main aim was to produce historical figures in their historical perspective but intentionally he picks up such situations from the pages of English history and invents such circumstances as deal with and justify his own thoughts and beliefs directly or indirectly. The situations in these plays are put in a way as to provide sufficient environment for the full illustration of the moral and social position of a particular character.

The entire plot of *Queen Mary* delineates the numerous circumstances of political and religious problems. These situations reflect the unscrupulous and ambitious deeds of the ambitious Queen at every step. While writing this play it seems that Tennyson was under so much stress and strain of political and religious upheavals that even in love-episodes selfish political motives penetrate.

In the religious situations, Tennyson focuses upon only one aspect of the Church – the English Church in conflict with despotism and tyranny, a conflict illustrating medieval struggle confirms Tennyson's belief and conviction that church should dominate the sovereigns. In *Queen Mary*, English people as Protestants vehemently oppose Spain and the Roman Catholic Church.

Tennyson is at his happiest and best while dealing with the situations of love. His love scenes pertain to an intriguing triangular contest. He refines

the various subtle moods of passion and portrays such situations of self-sacrificing women. This bears a testimony to his personal belief in wedded love. characters. Dramatis personae are dominated by some particular traits. But these traits do not develop gradually out of circumstances but are incorporated as extraneous elements. For example, Princess Elizabeth is noble from the very start and on the contrary Queen Mary is ambitious and unscrupulous from the very beginning. The poet is on his extreme when he delineated his characters in clearly defined black and white from the beginning of the dramatic action, instead of allowing them to take on these colours through the impact of circumstances and situations. This did not allow Tennyson to create complexity in his dramatis personae by allowing them to blend the differing colours in the personality. His noble political characters are dominated by one common virtue— love for England and her people, while the vicious ones by ambition.

Tennyson delineated the character of noble and loving women in his best dramatic sense. In these situations, innocence, self-sacrifice and such other good qualities are depicted successfully. He feels pleasure in describing his noble women who confirm his ideal of a true type of feminine love. But while portraying the characters of the wicked women, he fails to bring forth the complexity. That is why it is apt to say that while Tennyson was successful in bringing the vitality and vividness in his gentle women, the portraits of the bad women are devoid of these convincing solidity.

We can conclude our discussion by saying that inspite of being a stage failure *Queen Mary* is a historical study of the struggle dealing with Protestantism and patriotism in relation to the personal lives of the characters. One inference, perhaps, can explain the failure of the play as a theatrical piece as well as drama and that is Tennyson's artistic ambition to stick to historicity of facts and personages and his attempt to make them relevant to the contemporary ethos of England. These, somehow, thwarted his artistic efforts, to give the requisite artistic freedom to the shaping of human elements within the dramatic action of the play.

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