Vol 7 Issue 1 Feb 2017

ISSN No : 2230-7850

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Indian Streams Research Journal

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595 **ISSN No.2230-7850**

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INDIAN STREAMS RESEARCH JOURNAL

ISSN: 2230-7850
IMPACT FACTOR : 5.1651(UIF)
VOLUME - 7 | ISSUE - 1 | FEBRUARY - 2017

"THE REFUTATION AND THE RELIGIOUS BATTLE OF THE OSBORNIAN LUTHER AGAINST THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTENDOM."

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ABSTRACT

Right in keeping with his blasphemous diatribes in his works, Osbourne in the characteristic style chose for his protagonist a religious reformer Martin Luther. Osborne's "Luther" is based on the historical reformer, yet the play remains characteristically Osborne's. Martin Luther's refutation of the inherited tradition of life and the fact that he is not certain of the ways in which to reform the world when he rejects the existing Christendom, are two features which should enable us to differentiate Osborne's Luther from the historical Luther. The dramatist himself says that "Luther" is intended to have more than a purely historical function:

I wanted to write a play about religious experience and various other things, and this happened to be the vehicle for it. (1)

KEYWORDS:*Religious Battle , Antichrist , Christians today and attend Communion.*

INTRODUCTION

Osborne is not an Antichrist but still he goes against the existing Christianity, the Church. What he denounces is not sincere Christianity but insincere Christianity, and those who are unchristian in their practice but nevertheless profess Christianity, as well as those who superficially seem Christian in their practice but whose motivations and state of mind are essentially unchristian. If Osborne's Luther is blasphemous, he is angry at the queer and sick world into which the Gospels introduce us. Osborne's Luther is blasphemous, he is angry at the queer and sick world into which the Gospels introduce us. Osborne's prophetic indignation through Martin is against those who limp on both legs: Osborne seems to question directly the decency of those respected statesmen in our society, who are anti-Christian out and out in their deeds, and still call themselves Christians today and attend Communion. In such case, who then does Christianity negate? Osborne also opposed 'faith' as that which modern man glibly professes just because he goes to communion.

In this manner, Martin becomes an essentially Osbornian hero who cries against false religion and false beliefs which have taken the place of the original. He raises his voice against the authoritative forces that brought this condition and strives for a genuine 'religious experience'.

Except the First Act in which we see some spiritual development in the character of Martin, the rest of the play seems more caricature than portraiture. Consequently, unlike the historical Luther, Martin's allegations that are charged against the authority come from 'Indulgences rather than from a genuine reformation of the world. The characters in the play that are meant to of the world. The characters in the play that are meant to stand for the various authorities against which Luther rebels are again caricatured. Still, Hans, the working-class father is the only character, well developed in the play who appears in the First Act. The play itself

consists of twelve self-contained scenes. The First Act deals with Martin's Monastery life and leaves some traces for understanding Luther's later action. The whole of the Second Act and the first scene in the Third Act are taken up with the battle over Indulgences. Finally, we see Martin again returning to the Monastery.Luther's repudiation of the establishment gave Osborne personal interest. Here was a man who divided the world into two camps. But Osborne's Luther is a man whose motivations have very little to do with exterior reality. The play presents the conflict between Martin who is a man of uncompromising society and the authority, demanding an absolute conformity personified in Cajetan, in the drama..

Cajetan stresses every sinew to make Martin bow to the Pope's authority. We meet the Pope himself at a hunting-lodge, where he dictates an order for Luther to be excommunicated unless he can either be made to submit or brought into custody in Rome.

But this external conflict is necessarily preceded by the inner conflict or Martin himself. Almost the whole of the First Act is intended as an investigation of the internal and unconscious conflict of Martin which is only brought to the conscious level in the Second Act. In the First Act, Osborne sheds some light on the causes that lead Martin to his 'monkery' and a new beginning which is mostly revealed through the filial relationship, between Martin and Hans, his father:

Hans : And why? I see a young man, learned and
full of life, my son, abusing his youth
with fear and humiliation. You think
you're facing upto it in here, but you're
not; you're running away, you are running
away and you can't help it.

Martin: If it is so easy in here, why do you
think the rest of the world isn't knocking
the gates down to get in?(2)

If this discussion gives us some insight into the condition of Martin. the cause of his monkery is even more explicitly expressed a few moments later:

Hans : I thought you were blaming your mother
and me for your damned monkery!
Martin : Perhaps I should. (3)

From this context we can infer how an unsatisfactory filial relationship could foreshadow Martin's ambivalent attitude to God - a sense of desperate need and a sense of being singled out for special victimization. And whether the punishment comes from God or Satan is unimportant:

Martin : Somewhere, in the body of a child.
Satan foresaw in me what I'm suffering
now. That's why he prepares open pits
for me, and all kinds of tricks to
bring me down, so that I keep wondering
if I'm the only man living who's baited,
and surrounded by dreams, and afraid to
move (4)

This is but the growing isolation of Martin in which the religious and personal struggles are inevitably intertwined. In his discussion with his working-class father, Hans, we witness the personal as well as the

theological theme going together. In his spiritual struggle Martin progresses through a continuous conflict between his desire to humiliate his own pride and his troubled sense of the validity of his hubristically independent thinking. Hence the doubt:

Martin : What is the use of this talk of this
penitence if I can't feel it?(5)

The solution for all Martin's growing isolation and his internal pressure that lead to an exorbitant guilt is offered in the form of confession. But this does not serve as a ventilation for Martin's troubles. In such a state, the consolation of his brother monks, the communal religious practices or the submission to authority does not work. Because the question of salvation is a question for the individual himself. It is a question 'for the single one'. Thus Martin becomes despaired and achieves one of the fundamental stages in the process of religious experience: At this stage Martin participates in the vision of kierkegaard, whose spirit is the symbol of despair. It is this despair which kierkegaard considers as the most wretched and the most hopeful stage of man's subchristian existence. But the religious vision can be obtained when the individual passes through a crisis by being forged into 'doubt'. This is possible only for the self-conscious moralist who long for order in an apparent disorder. We have already seen that Martin's self-awareness alone brought him to this condition to doubt the existing religious practices. He craves for religious certainty in direct proportion to his profound tormenting doubts. Martin not only himself experiences this but also says:

Martin : And you tell me this! What have I
gained from coming into this sacred
Order? Aren't I still the same? I'm
still envious, I'm still impatient, I'm
still passionate!...
All you teach me in this sacred place
Is how to doubt.(6)

Like the Kierkegaardian tragic visionary, Martin cannot resist the temptation to left his doubts go and so wishes to 'leap' into faith. Dissatisfied with the offered alternatives, he wants to have an unmediated contact with God; and so he prays:

Martin : Receive, Oh Holy Father, almighty and
eternal God, this spotless host, which
I thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee
for my own innumerable sins of commission
and omission, and for all here present
and all faithful Christians, living and
dead, so that it may avail for their
salvation and everlasting life. When
I entered the monastery, I wanted to
speak to God directly you see. Without
any embarrassment, I wanted to speak to
him myself, but when it came to it, I
dried up- as I always have(7).

His superiors tell him to remember that the Creed expresses belief in the forgiveness of sins, but to Martin reliance on that in no way leads to kingdom of heaven. Osborne prepared the way leads to kingdom of Heaven. Osborne prepared the way here to Luther's divergences from the official line of the Church when some years later at wittenberg, he was to develop his concept that, as everything man does is sinful, it is faith in God

that will save him, not forgiveness of sins or penance.

Luther is described in the First Act as a man divided from his fellows not only by his superior intelligence, but by his inability to accept compromise or pretence, and equally troubled by his inability to come to terms with his own father as with his Heavenly Father.

From this despair of Martin stems the anger and rudeness of man. He does not accept either the works or any other outer means which are supposed to be the solution for his salvation. The personal crisis that is presented in Act One is taken at public level form the Second Act onwards. Now Martin begins to condemn the Church openly, a blind rebellion without knowing the alternatives to substitute the existing disorder. When he exposes the pitiful meaninglessness of the sacred relics, he condemns the peasants with the following words:

Martin : Your emptiness will be frothing over at
the sight of strand of Jesus' beard, at
one of the nails driven into His hands,
and at the remains of the loaf at the
Last Supper. Shells for shells, empty
things for empty men. (8)

His earlier humiliation now paradoxically turns into pride, and Martin is bold enough to take the existential consequences of his godlessness and valuelessness. In the first scene of the Second Act there is a savage parody of the selling of indulgences by Church officials. Here Osborne produces one of ht finest pieces of writing for the stage -- the speech of John Tetzel, the glib hypocritical salesman of indulgences - strategically placed by Osborne to underline Luther's doubts, and to dramatise the unscrupulous behaviour, within the Church, that Luther was so vigorously to attack. Tetzel's approach to his audience is direct and attacking. He has not come to ask but to demand, and his argument is straightforward in blackmail, exploiting the fears aroused by the Church's preaching concerning the horrors and damnation that is the consequence of unrepented sins:

Tetzel : For every mortal sin you commit, the
Church says that after confession and
contrition, you've got to do penance ---
either in this life or in purgatory ---
for seven years. Seven years. Right?
Are you with me? Good. (9)

And the scene ends with the crowd throwing their coins into the collecting box to obtain the Pope's insurance policy for their souls. With this, Osborne has thrown down the gauntlet to the Luther he has been exploring in the earlier scenes, and from this moment on the conflict between reformer and Church is in the open, and the play moves forward with a new vigour. Luther, now at the Eremite Cloister at Wittenberg under the Vicar General Johan von Staupitz, and teaching at the University, begins to preach against such abuses of the Church as indulgences, and the exploitation of dubious holy relics. His sermon (II iii) attacks the Church and its influence upon the people in "rough German" and Osborne gives fluency and strength once more in his plays to a rebel against established authority.

However, the conflicting forces are drawn more closely when the Vicar General of the Augustinian Order, Johan Von Staupitz, plants the fact that Martin has been preaching sermons about Indulgences. Martin is gently informed to withdraw his attempts but his ignorance of the warning takes him to Augsburg where he is asked to present himself before Cardinal Cajetan, Dominican General and Rome's highest representative in Germany. In the conversation with the papal legate in Germany, Luther asks, "Where have I erred?" but receives no answer from the Church that he can accept as any reply at all. Osborne develops the growing division between Luther and the Church with considerable skill, showing Luther not as seeking division, but forced to it by the inability of the Church to respond to his pleas for the reform not of itself but of its clergy; a necessary reform underlined by Osborne's vivid scene of Pope Leo at his hunting lodge, only half pretending to listen to Luther's letter of

explanation whilst playing with birds, dogs, and longbow.

Martin's and so Osborne's repudiation of Christ can not be understood any more than Martin's attack on Christendom unless one distinguishes between contemporary Christianity and the original Gospel. Discrimination between these conceptions makes clear a systematic exposition of what Osborne has to say on Religion.

Jesus himself rebelled against the Jewish Church exactly in the same sense in which we use the word today. It was a rebellion against the 'saints of Israel', against the hierarchy of society - not against its corruption but caste, privilege, order, and formula. It was the disbelief in higher men; the 'No' to all that was priest or theologian. Briefly, this is what brought Jesus to the Cross: the proof of this is the inscription on the Cross. He died 'for' his guilt. And all evidence is lacking however often it has been claimed that he died for the guilt of others. Jesus died as he lived, as he had 'taught', not 'to redeem man' but to show how one must live. This practice is his legacy to mankind, his behaviour before the judges, before the catchpoles, before the accusers and all kinds of slander and scorn - his behaviour on the cross.

This is all what we can account for Martin's blasphemy; he is angry but only at the sick world into which, as we said earlier, the Gospels introduce us - the scum of society, and childlike idiocy. They seem to give each other a rendezvous. Jesus died not for the redemption of our sins, but the show us a way, how to prefect ourselves. In a similar way, Osborne oppose 'faith' as that which modern man professes hypocritically without having a thought of doing anything about it, except going to Communion.

It must be noted that in "Luther" opposes Indulgences which ensure immediate entry into heaven avoiding purgatory; which provide for forgiveness for the sins even those not yet committed. But the kingdom of God Martin believes is in the hearts of men when it is sought in another life, the central insight of Jesus seems to him to be betrayed. Thus when the original meaning of ideals by which it is rottened, Martin answers to Cajetan that is is better to smash the hypocritic Christendom even though he doesn't have an alternative:

> A withered arm is best amputated; an infected
> place is best scoured out, and so you pray for
> healthy tissue and something sturdy and clean
> that was crumbling and full of filth(10).

The concept of Indulgences had depreciated the present life. The expectation of perfection in another world has made men condone their imperfection in this world. Instead of striving to become perfect here and now, as Jesus exhorted men to do, they put their trust in the distant future.

Moreover, the depreciation of this world could be carried to the extent of a complete devaluation of anything a man might do in this life- and this aspect of the Christian faith made it possible for Christianity to make the State use its forces. The doctrine of the two worlds thus became almost a symbol of double standards. There is a Christian world where one will be perfect and in which one must have faith; and there is pagan world which one perceives all around oneself, where one cannot be perfect, and where those who have faith and know that their sins are borne by Christ are just.

In this manner, false faith takes the place of action: instead of perfecting oneself, one is expected to have faith in the perfection of Christ, and the Church, instead of insisting that man leave father and mother and break with conformity, insists that man conform to the Church in matters of faith and to the State in matters of action. And Martin Luther's rebellion is against this conformity.

The Church as well as State intimidate man into conformity and thus tempts and coerces him to betray his proper destiny. The State and the Church become arch enemies of self-realization in the individual's remaking of his own nature. The dictatorial attitude of the Church is well presented by the Pope, Leo X. Soon after listening to the news that Martin is going in defiance of the will of the Church and its practices, he realizes that the Teutonic 'peasant' could upset his elegant world and the control of his own sophisticated Latin's over the Christian hegemony. He issues orders to Cajetan either to take Luther into custody or banish and excommunicate him:

> "Pope : There's a wild pig in our vineyard, and

it must be hunted down and shot"(11) .

This is but the decadence of the Church symbolized in Pope. In retaliation, the monks throw books of Canon Law and Papal Decrials into the huge fire outside Ester Gate, Wittenberg. Martin furiously declaims the Papal bull which excommunicates his and casts it into the flames. Martin continues preaching defiant sermons. Finally, in the scene at the Diet of Worms, John Von Eck debates with Martin in the presence of the Emperor Charles V, and Eck, in his argument asks Martin to retract his books and correct their errors. He insists not to doubt on the holy orthodox faith which had been established by the most perfect legislator known to us, a faith defined by sacred councils, and confirmed by Church. But this does not change the will of Martin:

Martin : ... I don't believe in Popes or councils -
unless I am refuted by scriptures and
my conscience is captured by God's own
world, I cannot and will not recant,
since to act against one's conscience
is nether safe nor honest. Here I stand;
God help me; I can do no more. Amen (12).

Having been overpowered by the 'ultimate despair', Martin is not satisfied with anything less than God who is the "really highest Good". Conviction means something to be convinced. It is an objection, question, to be answered. And the Church apparently failed in this regard, hence it rejection by the protagonist. Martin has realized the complete futility of human existence, who cannot find any meaningful relationship beyond it. Thus the essence of the tragic vision becomes "The sickness unto death". Only despair prevails. Martin, in taking the alternative of defiance and seizing upon nothingness, is alone bold enough to take the existential consequences of his godlessness. But he takes them with pride, the very 'hubris', that in its rebellion moved him to nihilism or godlessness, rather than transcendence.

After his defeat at the hands of the Church and authority, Martin, however, has resigned himself to the external world only to turn inwards. After such resignation to the godless universe, Martin is left with nothing; and out of such nothingness he now again hopes because he wants to reconstruct something afresh. But since this hope is necessarily preceded by the better humiliation, we call it paradoxical. Moreover, Martin's return to Monastery, and his marriage with the nun become symbolic, not only in suggesting the hero's withdrawal from his active life but also signifying his spiritual death, on which the final curtain falls.

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