

## (B) SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SHOW OF SEVEN DEADLY SINS

### Introduction

The grand show of the Seven Deadly Sins takes place in scene II of the Act II of *Doctor Faustus*. We find Faustus very much upset as Mephistophilis, his abject slave, flatly refuses to answer Faustus's question about the creator of the universe. In the beginning of this scene we have already seen how the soul of Faustus waver between vice and virtue felt that God might still pity him if he could pray and repent. And now disgusted with the impudence of Mephistophilis and after listening to the Good Angel or the voice of his own conscience he makes frantic appeal to Christ:

"Ah Christ, my Saviour,  
Seek to save distressed Faustus' Soul".

And then very dramatically appear Lucifer, Belzebub and Mephistophilis on the scene. All of them have come to exert their very great influence on Faustus to lead his vacillating soul away from the path of virtue. And they do succeed in their vicious endeavour, as we find Faustus telling them:

"And Faustus vows never to look to heaven,  
Never to name God, or to pray to him."

After winning back his soul Lucifer is mightily pleased to put up the grand show of the Seven Deadly Sins. The main purpose is to tone up the dejected mood of Faustus and to divert his mind away from God and Christ. And the devils do succeed in this also as we find Faustus telling Lucifer:

"O, this feeds my soul" !

### Marlowe's originality

Marlowe is quite original and unique in his treatment of this spectacle of Seven Deadly Sins. Both in the *Fasutbuch* and the *English Faust Book* it is absolutely different. There we just find a masque of the seven chief devils in the form of ugly animals. The sins of pride, covetousness, wrath, envy, gluttony, sloth and lechery have been mentioned in scriptures as the most deadly vices to corrupt and contaminate human soul. And in the medieval Miracle and Morality plays personified representation of these sins was very common and popular. Undoubtedly, this show of Deadly Sins reveal the influence of those Mystery and Morality plays of the past on Marlowe's genius. Then we also find a show of these Seven Deadly Sins in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. It is very likely that Marlowe might have been influenced by Spenser in this matter.

### Symbolic significance

It may be noted that the importance of this pageant of Deadly Sins does not lie simply in its dramatic significance of diverting

Faustus's mind away from God and Christ. It has also considerable symbolic significance. All these vices are ingrained in human nature and man's duty is to fight and conquer them with the grace of God. And Faustus is no exception to this. To give way to these deadly vices means debasing and degrading human soul and thereby paving the way to hell and eternal damnation. And Faustus, puffed up with his pride in his learning and scholarship, has already submitted to some of these vices. His inordinate ambition to gain super-human power and craving for sensual pleasures of life have all really led him to sell his soul to the Devil. Hence this pageant of Deadly Sins is in fact symbolising the vices in the soul of Faustus himself. And pride has been given the pride of place to lead the grand procession, as it is pride that plays the most important role to bring about man's downfall. The sins reveal themselves in all their vicious colours before Faustus, and this may be a timely warning for the tragic hero. Alas! Faustus has waded too deep into the mire to find his way back to save his soul from the impending doom and damnation.