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### Bertolt Brecht's *The Life of Galileo*: A Play of Conflict between Dogmatic Religious Belief and Scientific Temperament

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#### ABSTRACT

The conflict between scientific temperament and theology as theology always dominated other disciplines in the earlier days has been debated from time immemorial. Many times, theology, though it was said that it had patronised all genera of disciplines never paved ways to nourish and flourish the freedom of thought, research and expression. Ultimately, it is the scientific temperament of the scientists as well as the rationalists that ignited the minds of the common to churn over the dogmas and triumphs at the end. Brecht using his craftsmanship has delineated it vividly in the play, *The Life of Galileo* to enact it through the technique of 'Absurd Theatre'. The present paper tries to through much light on this conflict in nutshell with reference to the play, *The Life of Galileo*.

**Keywords:** Bertolt Brecht's, *The Life of Galileo*, Scientific Temperament, First World War, Astronomer and Mathematician.

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Brecht tells these words through the character of Galileo, "Unhappy the land that has no heroes" to show the world that how the church authority had smothered up the scientific temperament then. As a Medical Orderly in the First World War that defeated and badly disorganized Germany makes him realise to sympathise with the communists and opposes the rising Nazi movement. Like Shakespeare, Brecht as a man of the theatre tries to set the minds of the spectators to churn over the slavery and oppression of the authoritarian church particularly towards the freedom of expression, thought and research for the scientists. As a revolutionary dramatist, he had to meet with angry criticism because of his political pessimism in his plays. To begin with *The Three Penny Opera* composed in 1928, Brecht set the play into a skit on Capitalist Society. His works talk of the theme of revolutionary struggle. These creations are filled with human experience and sympathy.

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As per as The Life of Galileo, a masterpiece of Bertolt Brecht is concerned, it also falls in the same line with other works of his creation. The play chronicles the tragic career of the great Philosopher, Astronomer and Mathematician, Galileo Galilei. It throws light on torture, trial, intimidation and threats by the Catholic Church due to sharing the scientific findings to the world. The core of the play is the conflict between rigid religious belief and scientific reality. Brecht expresses his highly considerate attitude towards then scientists in general and Galileo in particular, the perseverance in a combat against the Church. In fact, The Life of Galileo is an accolade to one of the most historical, impactful, scientific temperament that quests for scientific fact which might have been thought to free people from religious dogmas.

At the outset of scene one in the play, Brecht introduces Galileo as talking with his pupil, Andrea, who is the son of his housekeeper, Andrea Sarti. Andrea curiously pays attention to what Galileo says while probing into the Ptolemaic supposition that claims the Earth as the centre of the universe. Galileo affirms that it is time to 'dispose of obsolete scientific truths'. He would like to clarify the then belief in the phenomenon of the universe with novel ones that precisely model genuineness. He also contests persistently Ptolemaic Physics that holds forth an argument that the earth is a static object hemmed in by movable ones.

In the beginning, Andrea, like any layman, is unmoved. But, it is Andrew who talks about the theories of Galileo Galilei at school. In fact, he serves as a mouthpiece of Galileo's rationality. The information soon reaches to the attention of Mrs. Sarti. Like any mother at that point of time, Mrs. Sarti fears that Galileo is misleading Andrea's concepts of truth, while ignoring his intricate responsibilities and reality, such as remaining out of debt, a chronic social problem faced by many scientists then. In the next scene, Galileo makes the telescope public. The device is seen as merely newness by the public. This new device ignites the minds of the science community. They conceive it as an instrument that can expand current replicas of the universe and ultimately edify the public. As the action of the drama proceeds, Galileo along with his teammate Sagredo uses his new device, telescope to observe the moon. They are convinced that the moon never create any kind of its own light. It only mirrors light from the sun. Thus, this perception provides strong indication for Galileo's theory that the sun is the centre of the universe. Then, Galileo decides to publish his findings immediately for the advantage of science. Whereas, Sagredo warns him that he would be professed insane. Meanwhile, Galileo writes to the Grand Duke of Florence, Cosimo de'

Medici who is the wealthiest man in Europe. He also clarifies him that he would like to name recently discovered moons after the family of Medici. Thus, with his perseverance, Galileo would like to ignite rationality in the minds of the people curtaining to the religious dogmas that had been pestering the minds of then people. Then, the plot of the play shifts to Florence because the duke has invited them. Both Galileo and Andrea move to the palace of Medici in Florence. Meanwhile, Galileo explains and demonstrates Cosimo about the theory of Copernicus's concepts of the universe. Then, Cosimo out rightly rejects it. Even the scholars of Medici also timidly reject the model of Copernicus. They turn their interest towards the side of the Ptolemaic system of the universe. To find out the truth in Galileo's invention, they invite the Vatican astronomer, Christopher Clavius to examine Galileo's experiments on the universe.

Galileo's scientific sojourn continues reaching the Collegium, a research centre in Romanum in 1616. With a long discourse on his findings, they ultimately give assent to the findings of Galileo and the accurateness of the model of Copernicus. By the by, the monks express their reservation that the Church would lose reliability if the research is made public. Further, Clavius keeps on denying the conclusions of the researcher. The Inquisition bans the Copernican science in the same year thinking it as heresy. The Two Cardinals of the Church, Barberini and Bellarmine, question Galileo to cease dogging his theory. Their disagreement is that it is more imperative for people to justify the universe according to holy ideas than to comprehend scientific authenticity. Thus, the Vatican sets a condition to Galileo that he would be allowed to study further if he comes to the conclusion not publish his research articles on the universe.

Due to the nonsupport from the authority, Galileo stops researching for eight years. With the appointment of a scientist by the name of Cardinal Barberini as the next Pope, he resumes his research in Astronomy assuming that he would be protected. In due course, Galileo publishes his findings widely. There is rejuvenation in scientific thinking. The Church feels that it is losing its supremacy. The then Church names Galileo an unorthodox and his followers declare that his findings have put an end to Christianity. Many have realised that Galileo has demonstrated a heroic act by sacrificing his life to quest for truth in science. They begin amenably to reject the unscientific dogma. Duke who was a head promulgates an order to arrest Galileo and put him to Inquisition. Church threatens and warns Galileo. He is shown

weapons and instruments. Due to the pressures from the authority, Galileo openly renounces his findings to save himself from the subsequent consequences. He has to remain as a prisoner for nine years, until 1642. Meanwhile, when he is in the prison, Andrea meets him. Galileo wants his research findings, 'Discorsi' to be made public. He decides to send it through Andrew. After collecting 'Discorsi', Andrea goes to Holland. At the end of the play, Andrea hears about a possible witch that was spoken by children. It makes Andrew to realise then in the importance of scepticism. Andrea interposes that it is unscientifically possible for a person to fly on a broom. Thus, Brecht portrays the plight of a scientist then and the vested interests through the character of Galileo vividly and rationally.

To begin with what Andrea says in one of the scenes in the play, "Science has only one commandment: contribution. And you have contributed more than any man for a hundred years" (Andrea, Scene 13), it is quite clear that in the journey of research often a scientist may intentionally or unintentionally forgets or realises of the impact of his inventions on society. On hearing about Galileo's perseverance in research, Andrew feels sorry and begs forgiveness for speaking nonsense about him. He praises the spirit of Galileo by saying the contribution of Galileo to science matters much than his shortcomings in the event of the Inquisition. Through the character of Galileo, Brecht demonstrates the sacrifices of personal life of a scientist in order to ignite the minds of the people to bring out a progress in the society. At the end of the play, the spectators realise and know that Galileo succeeds in finishing his vision and mission, though he has been imprisoned in his home and confined to do things against his willingness.

Further that play can be read as Brecht's penetration into the well of acceptance. He sets the spectators to go beyond what the world has accepted of the phenomenon. He makes Galileo say, "The aim of science is not to open the door to infinite wisdom, but to set a limit to infinite error" (Galileo in Scene 9). Galileo imparts this lesson to his pupils after explaining why ice floats on water. He is continuously fighting to bring change to a country that is so ingrained in tradition that it regards progress as an adversary. Even certain Church officials, including Cardinal Barberini and the scholar Clavius, recognize that Galileo's discoveries are accurate and significant. But they never try to make them known to the rest of the world for fear of upsetting traditional beliefs, because tradition gives the church authority to keep the people ignorant. The church's leaders believe that scientific development will cause people to

doubt the established structure. That is why the Church forbade Galileo from doing study and publishing. However, Brecht attempts to demonstrate that the strength of human growth is unpredictable and unstoppable. It will gradually tear through the walls of tradition sooner or later. At the same time, Brecht attempts to demonstrate that reason is the ultimate weapon against tyranny, whether it be the Inquisition, capitalist society, or totalitarian regime. He sparks people's brains to think rationally about the prospect of advancement. He also directs their rage against the existing ideas, which he believes are compelling and unstoppable challenging the existing system.

The play further throws light on freedom of thought and speech. Galileo says, "Someone who doesn't know the truth is just thick-headed. But someone who does know it and calls it a lie is a crook" (Galileo in Scene 9). Galileo argues to the scholar Mucius, who wants to explain why he doesn't agree with Copernicus' views regarding the rotation of the Earth, that describing why the truth isn't true is meaningless. In the play, it is revealed that Galileo's speech is restricted by the Church. Furthermore, he has been forbidden from disclosing his findings. He has been constantly advised that the job he is doing is illegal and that he should not be doing it.

Hence, this play may be studied as a conflict between the inventions in science and theology and also as a conflict between an established belief and scientific temperament.

Close study of Galileo's discussions reveals that as a Mathematics teacher seeks to prove astronomical models correct; as a strong guy full of energy and blessed with a contrarian nature, with a knack for making difficult issues simple to understand. He loved to ask questions, which irritated the Catholic Church. The Church was enraged by his questioning of the Aristotelian model, a century-old theory that said that the Earth resided at the center of the cosmos. He instead adheres to Copernicus' concept, which places the Sun at the center of the solar system and revolves the Earth around it. As the tale progresses, Galileo is able to demonstrate conclusively that Copernicus was correct, but he faces the difficult task of convincing the Church that centuries of religious teachings were wrong.

Galileo knew that if he went against the church, his research would also be smothered. He even feels that there would not be research at all. He also realised that if he is alive, he can prove his findings at a later stage. Moreover, Galileo was a man of tastes. He loved food,

beauty and life itself. He had a daughter by name Virginia who was supposed to be married to Ludovico. But, he fails to arrange marriage of his daughter. He does research persistently and publishes many papers in the incarceration. He dictates his research findings to his daughter as he has lost his eye sight partially. When he was warned and shown instruments, he recanted what he had researched openly. Because of his recantation, Galileo was openly condemned by the scientific community across the world. Finally, Brecht makes Andrew to reappear and revisit Galileo in the end of the play to take away Galileo's persistent findings in the form of 'Discorsi' to show the world his contribution that had been carried out in the course of his imprisonment proving long live the scientific temperament.

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