



Relevance of Shakespeare's Macbeth in Society

Jagriti yadav

Research Scholar

Department of English

Banasthali Vidyapith, bansthali (Raj.)

Abstract - William Shakespeare, the strong pillar of English literature and the shining planet of the literary Universe, contributed invaluable treasure to the history of English Literature. As a dramatist he earned a remarkable place because all his plays have universal appeal. Shakespeare's freshness is perennial. In this concern Ben Jonson rightly comments-"that he was not of an age but of all ages, not of one country but of all countries. Nature herself was proud of his design." His all plays, whether they are comedy, tragedy or historical plays, are still relevant for modern society, because Shakespeare is powerful enough to peep psychologically into the character of a person, into his feelings, his nature, his behavior along with the features of the society. He wrote dramas for the contemporary society and audience but they are enjoyed even today with same enthusiasm. Shakespeare managed to depict many truths about the human race accurately; many in modern society fit the profile of Macbeth in one sense or another, partly because human nature hasn't changed a great deal since the Elizabethan era. Themes such as ambition, guilt, shame, anxiety, paranoia, trauma, mental illness, psychological vulnerability, envy, inferiority, manipulation, greed and murder are still relevant in the 21st century. Shakespeare holds a mirror to human nature and to the society. So, Macbeth is not only a story of an ambitious man but it narrates the psychology of every person who wants to be powerful by any means. Even the modern man acts with the psychology of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and persons like Banquo are murdered today. The appetite of over ambition and power leads a man to the path of degeneration is purely applicable for present society.

Introduction - As a literary artist Shakespeare carved his name with golden letters on the plate of history of English Literature. He is the strong pillar of English literature and the shining planet of the literary Universe as well as contributed the invaluable literary treasure to the history of English Literature. As a dramatist he earned a remarkable place because all his plays have universal appeal. Shakespeare's freshness is perennial. In this concern Ben Jonson rightly comments that "he was not of an age but of all ages, not of one country but of all countries He is not a man of an age but of all time. Nature herself was proud of his design." In Shakespeare's tragedies, all his powershis dramatic power, his intellectual power, and power of expression-are at his best. His supreme artistic power supports him to peep into life of a character and observe him psychologically. This unique divine power provides him an opportunity to present characters as social persons whether they belong to any class of the society. Shakespeare has raised them above their particular circumstances endowed them with universal human traits by which they appeal to people in all lands and in all ages. His man and woman are not merely superficial studies of contemporary society but they are true to the eternal facts of human nature. Shakespeare's study of human nature is so deep and true that his characters may be of higher class or of royal family but they are presented with the nature, feelings, ambitions, psychology of common man. The American author Marchette Chute in the introduction of her book Stories from Shakespeare write: "William Shakespeare was the most remarkable storyteller that the world has ever known. Homer told of adventure and men at war, Sophocles and Tolstoy told of tragedies and of people in trouble. Terence and Mark Twain told comic stories, Dickens told melodramatic ones, Plutarch told histories and Hans Christian Anderson told

fairy tales. But Shakespeare told every kind of story—comedy, tragedy history, melodrama, adventure, love stories and fairy tales— and each of them so well that they have become immortal. In all the worlds of story telling his is the greatest name.”

This universal appeal of Shakespearean dramas has made all the Shakespearean dramas relevant for the modern society. If we compare the character of Macbeth with the man of present day, we will find a queue of many Macbeths with the traits of Shakespearean Macbeth. Macbeth is a tragedy about a power hungry man who got pulled into the world of power and crime, eventually leads to insanity, madness, and later death. Although this play is written in 1700s still it is relevant to today’s society. Macbeth is relevant for modern society. Shakespeare managed to depict many truths about the human race accurately; many in modern society fit the profile of Macbeth in one sense or another, partly because human nature hasn’t changed a great deal since the Elizabethan era. Themes such as corruption, power, ambition, guilt, shame, anxiety, paranoia, trauma, mental illness, psychological vulnerability, envy, inferiority, manipulation, greed and murder are still relevant in the 21st century. Shakespeare holds a mirror to human nature and to society. So, Macbeth is not only a story of an ambitious man but it narrates the psychology of every person who wants to be powerful by any means. Even the modern man acts with the psychology of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and persons like Banquo are murdered. The appetite of over ambition and power leads a man to the path of degeneration is purely applicable for present society.

The relevance of Macbeth exists even today. Its quality, universality, victory of good over evil, psychology of characters, over domination of ill will, everything tell the story of today’s life. Macbeth remains relevant in the modern society because its themes are timeless. Ambition, political corruption, and human folly are elements of the human condition. The justification at the end makes ‘Macbeth’ a drama of all ages.

If we talk about Macbeth, he is the General of the king Duncan’s army. In spite of being posted on a higher post he is dissatisfied with his present success. He is over ambitious person which is the effect of Renaissance shown by Shakespeare in the character of Macbeth. The feeling of over ambitiousness is not a part of 16th century but this feeling still exists in this present 21st century. In this materialistic world and present society every person is over ambitious and some persons are overwhelmed by it to such extent that they may go down to any limit at any cost. The appetite of over ambition and power leads a man to the path of degeneration is purely applicable for present society. Too much ambition has many negative impacts, which we can learn from Macbeth very easily. People today would not be determined to kill a king, but they want to remain the best achievers in every concerned field. They become so mad for the fulfillment of the ambition that they shut their eyes and become blind to the consequences and the reality. The ambition of succeeding the goal causes them pain in the end, just like Macbeth. Ambition is good, it is motivation for people to do what they want, but too much ambition has many negative impacts as we learn from Macbeth.

In Shakespeare’s ‘Macbeth’ the words of witches ‘fair is foul, foul is fair’ visualize the indulgence of people in the quag of this materialistic world. How a person of valour and virtue astray from his path only due to his inner force of evil like greed, ill-will, ambitions, holding of supremacy. Once a person treks the path of evil against his conscience he loses humanity and all his human feelings. He gets cut off from good and God and gradually sinks into utter despair and suffers from spiritual agony. The predictions of the supernatural powers germinate in Macbeth the seeds of crime. Present society also confirms Shakespeare’s universality. Like Macbeth many persons commit heinous crime under any outer or inner enforcement of over ambition. Even many politicians, higher class people do the crime directly or indirectly for their supremacy. Many times loyal persons like Banquo are punished and criminals are awarded.

“Macbeth has been termed the Tragedy of Ambition.....Ambition alone calls into operation the forces that bring about the central deed and its train of fearful results. In Macbeth himself it is selfish ambition, the unqualified passion to possess what is not his, the conscious self-seeking that confesses itself to itself and dispenses with the hypocrisy of self-exculpation.”{1}. therefore, the over-ambitious nature of Macbeth leads him to his downfall. The witches stimulate the dormant ambitions in Macbeth’s heart. This vaulting ambition makes him bold and bloody and leads him to commit King Duncan’s murder. Here in the present age, man’s witches are represented by the ill will of a person which provokes and leads him to immortal path. And thus, a total reverse of fortune comes to a man of high degree and strikes him down in his

pride. His fate not only affects the welfare of himself but of family, society or even of the whole nation, when he falls suddenly from the height of earthly greatness to the dust.

Besides it, Shakespeare's power of understanding of human nature, capacity to delve deep into the psyche of an individual, mastery over human psychology, understanding of human emotions, sentiment, instincts have made him the greatest philosopher of human heart. The characters of his dramas react not only for the social circumstances of the Elizabethan era but of all ages. They reflect the mental reaction of person of present society. This is not a mental conflict of only Lady Macbeth, but the person of every age. Every person suffers from a conflict between conscience and ambition after committing a crime. He can't come out from the web of hideousness of the crime. Every time the crime haunts him as in Macbeth, after the murder of King Duncan. Lady Macbeth's natural abhorrence of blood is pathetically revealed. She was obsessed with the horror and smell of blood and cannot be getting rid of the nauseous odors from her hands.

"Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia

will not sweeten this little hand. Oh!, Oh!, Oh!"

The realization of the hideousness of their crime dawns on her soon after the murder. The glory of her dream fades away. A person also feels exhausted, sleepless and finds himself as a victim of inner and outer conflict. The psychological analysis of Shakespeare makes his Macbeth to realize a person about his guilt and the result to be gripped by the fear of consequence of the murder. These words reflect the mental fear and commitment not to do the wrong to anybody at any time.

I'll go no more:

I am afraid to think what I have done. Look on't again I dare not"

This Shakespeare's universal humanity and psychological analysis provide a firm platform to all his dramas. Another aspect of woman psychology of every era is presented by Shakespeare through the character of Lady Macbeth. He paints the character of Lady Macbeth with the selfless ambition also which is due to born of love and misguided self-sacrifice. It is her love for Macbeth that makes her more potent, a deadlier, incentive in fulfilling her vicious task. In modern society there are also women like Lady Macbeth who want to see their husbands on the peak of the progress even by hook and crook without caring for the results.

Shakespeare also paints the feeling of betray and man in disguise. The principle of appearance and reality on the level of man's life is reflected in the whole play. For example when Macbeth arrives, Lady Macbeth asks him to deceive others by putting on a false appearance—

"---Look like the innocent flower, But he serpent the under't"

At a later moment Macbeth echoes her sentiments—

"False face must hide what the false heart doth know"

Again, a question arises in the mind that Macbeth who is basically a kind and a charitable man and his heart is 'too full of milk of human kindness' may be a traitor! Shakespeare tries to express that one cannot judge the character of a man outwardly. So, he presents Macbeth as 'worthy gentleman, noble Macbeth and valiant cousin but in reality he is a potential traitor. The king Duncan himself accept that—

"There is no art To find the mind's construction on the face"

The king himself does not identify the Black and deep desires are hidden in Macbeth's mind. The modern man also has a honey tongue and a heart of gall. Many politicians behave like this. Many sincere and devoted leaders are assassinated only for sovereign. No mark of repentance is shown on the faces of criminals. But few persons like Macbeth burned

themselves in the fire of guilt and their inner conscience make them sleepless. As Macbeth suffers from the doom of sleeplessness—

“Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cowder Shall sleep no more.

Macbeth shall sleep no more.”

Now to sum up, whatever Shakespeare presented in his literary work is universal, moral, remarkable as well as applicable for all ages. He insists through ‘Macbeth’ that crime affects the individuals as well as the environment. Its evil operates on the level of man, family, state and the physical universe. But ultimately evil destroys itself to give place to good. Indian Mythology also conveys the same message. The greed, ambition, etc. all encourage the good to act against the evil and consequently, the evil is destroyed at the end. There are lots of morals to be learnt from the play. Firstly, the main moral of the play is not to be tempted to do bad things in order to gain power. In addition, another moral of the play would be that even if a person thinks that he goes deep in the immoral deeds there is always also a way to come out to rescue himself from the degradation This moral justice of Shakespeare crowned him as a supreme in the history of English Literature. Paying the tribute to William Shakespeare Carlyle said, “Shakespeare was the grandest thing we have yet done... Indian empire will go, at any rate someday, but this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts forever with us.’ {2}

References:-

1. A.W. Verity, Macbeth, Surjeet Prakashan, Delhi.
2. Jain, B.B., Shakespeare’s Macbeth, Ratan Prakashan Mandir, Indore.

