

The Role of Psychological dilemma in The Play Macbeth

Dr. Richa Dewani

Associate Professor, Department of English Literature, Government Arts College, Sikar Rajasthan India

Abstract-Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' has been considered as Psychological tragedy. Shakespeare introduces many soliloquies to expose the conflict of mind. It is conflict between reality and hope good and evil as well as duty and ambition. In a Psychological tragedy, the hero fights against himself. He has no struggle with his destiny. No man ever creates any obstacle in his way. In fact his own mind is divided between his reality and golden hopes. The conflict is between the two aspects of his own personality. bad decisions. Overall the moral dilemma faced by Macbeth is effectively conveyed through the creative use of dramatic irony and the effective portrayal of the central concerns of the play. Shakespeare successfully engages the readers sympathy for Macbeth through the exposition and the means through which he faces the dilemma are very clear.

Key Word's : Backdrop and Psychological Role

THE BACKDROP

Macbeth's character study reveals how the hunger for infinite power can lead one to the total disregard of human values. Obsessed with the idea of gaining absolute power, Macbeth strikes out the difference between what is wrong and what is right and removes every obstacle in his way through power. The more he aspires for the power limitless, the more he degenerates into corruption. The craze for remaining in power makes him act ruthlessly, The conflict is between the two aspects of his own personality. 'Macbeth's is a great Psychological tragedy for the hero's mind is full of conflict between his reality and golden hopes; his duty and ambition Indirectly it is conflict between good and evil. Macbeth suffers from a divided personality. Macbeth has not even considered becoming king and he is introduced as a brave and valiant soldier who is trusted by the king. Macbeth is initially a very noble and good character but later on in the play we realise that his obsession with power turns him into an evil character. Macbeth is told by the witches that he will gain three titles: ?All hail Macbeth? Thane of Glamis All hail Macbeth?

Thane of Cawdor All hail Macbeth, that shalt be kind hereafter? The witches? three prophecies are central to the downfall of Macbeth. William Shakespeare's Macbeth, an array of unsuccessful attempts to overcome psychological issues is presented. As the three witches cast their first spell, good and bad switch roles, leading to many tragedies that were influenced by not only Macbeth's psychological issues, but also other main characters, like Lady Macbeth,

ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DILEMMA

Macbeth, most probably written in 1606, and first published in the first folio in 1623 is considered to be one of Shakespeare's four major tragedies while at the same time being the shortest one of these. The fall of Macbeth is not the fall of a king, a politician, but a fall of a human being, whose distinguished position is used to depict a great and powerful man, therefore making his demise look even more tragic. Macbeth is a king among the men for his superb qualities both as a human and a soldier before he slays Duncan and seizes the throne; following that, he diminishes in both aspects, until he is reduced to a base murderer with no emotions whatsoever, shallow and unmoved to the extent of his great fall.

Psychology is the study of behaviour and mind, embracing all aspects of conscious and unconscious experience as well as thought. In psychology of a particular person we study his mental functions and his social behaviour, perception, emotion, motivation, and personality. This extends to interaction between people, such as interpersonal relationships including psychological resilience, and other areas.

The aim of this paper is to examine Macbeth's ruin in the psychological terms: his ambition and the influences from both within and without, together with the underlying stress on Shakespeare's psychological method of writing. Macbeth's vaulting ambition plays an important role for his tragic fall. His innermost

struggle, excessive imagination and dilemma arouse pity in audience.

The play *Macbeth* is basically the character of Macbeth, the warrior. In this play Shakespeare is so obsessed with the personality of Macbeth—his psychology, his conscience and mental conflicts, the good and the bad selves in Macbeth and above all his demonic ambition—that overwhelms the plot developments, the dramatic conflicts and the major actions of the play *Macbeth*. Therefore, to know the play *Macbeth* we must know the character of Macbeth. The major conflicts, dramatic developments and action plans take place within Macbeth's mind. The play reaches its climax when the mental conflicts within Macbeth are at their heights. Before fighting with Macduff Macbeth's downfall has reached its end point. Macbeth is defeated psychologically and the beginning of climax is marked with the death of Lady Macbeth and the moving of the Great Birnam wood to the Dunsinane hill.

The readers can understand that Macbeth has already turned into a tragic figure and his physical defeat is imminent. Therefore the consequent war with Siward and Macduff are a part of the climax that started with Macbeth's mental downfall, as far as the plot development is concerned. This is because, the play *Macbeth* is psychological play concludes when Macbeth's mind is saturated with the thought of death, defeat and repentance. His suffering have already turned him into tragic figure. His assassination in the hands of Macduff restores his heroic stature and turns him into a tragic figure. Therefore, the mental conflict and the bite of conscience in Macbeth together form the main sequence of the tragedy of Macbeth. The action and the plot develop in the psychological domain.

In other tragedies of Shakespeare the evil is concentrated in the antagonists who are able to bring about the ruin of better people than themselves by making use of their weakness: pride, credulity and lust. But in *Macbeth* the evil is transferred from the villains to the hero and the heroine. For instance, Macbeth, the hero of the play stands as a perfect embodiment of the disintegration of the individual under the influence of evil. At the start of the play he is a very successful and highly esteemed member of a social group, loaded with honours and enjoying every prospect of further commendation. He has a loving wife and a secure home in his castle at Inverness.

He is a man "full of the milk of human kindness" (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* I.V.17). As the play opens, we learn of his heroic actions in defense of the kingdom. We see him interact with other nobles, and their friendship and esteem are evident, as is Duncan's high regard, which expresses itself in terms of fertile growth, the beauty of natural processes, and spontaneous generosity with promises of more to come. But as he is overpowered by evil and the crime is committed, his human feelings are gradually destroyed until at the end of the play he becomes the unnatural man, cut off from humanity and from God. As his link with humanity weakens, so also does his desire to live, until at last he sinks into total despair which is the surest evidence of his damnation.

"Stars, hide your fires, let not light see my black and deep desires"

(*Macbeth*, P. 35)

In the works of writers such as Shakespeare, transitions in characters flow smoothly that in the end we feel that it ought to have been so. The final misery of Macbeth at the end of the play will be shown as a logical outcome, even though these two 'Macbeths', the one in the first, and the other in the last act of the play, are, in many aspects, two different men. In order to explain this psychological progression from the thane of Glamis to the beheaded king of Scotland, we have to focus our attention on his state of mind in the very beginning. At first, Macbeth is mentioned by an unnamed captain as a brave general and soldier, who distinguished himself in battles against the invading army. His loyalty to king Duncan is indisputable, and as a sign of a great trust, he is chosen to be the host to the king himself and his two sons.

All these facts exist merely to emphasize his value and valour and serve as a contrastive device to Macbeth's later doings. The sordid appearance of the witches reflects the darkness of Macbeth's intentions; their chanting that "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (*Macbeth*, P. 25) indicates his loss of the moral compass; finally, their predictions of him becoming the king reveal his hidden ambitions. 'Hidden' is the key word. Of course, Macbeth cannot reveal that he desires to be the king instead of Duncan. He knows that Duncan has two heirs, and that in no near future will he be in a position to lawfully ascend to the throne. Having these considerations in mind, it can only be concluded that Macbeth had a violent manner of bringing down Duncan on his mind from the very beginning, and that

he tried to conceal it as best as he could. The letter to Lady Macbeth is a solid proof that this overthrow was not only thought of, but actively planned as well. On this topic Bradley asserts a similar opinion:

"Precisely how far his mind was guilty may be a question; but no innocent man would have started, as he did, with a start of fear at the mere prophecy of a crown or have conceived thereupon immediately the thought of murder. (...) In any case the idea of fulfilling it by murder was entirely his own." (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, P. 288) The aspect of secrecy plays a significant role. We cannot deny that in the beginning Macbeth is a good man with bad intentions. The bloodthirsty plans make the internal struggle even more horrifying – should he give in to his "black and deep desires", that he is obsessed with repressing? This inner struggle tortures him a lot. Macbeth's will was broken at the beginning of the play. Because of this subconscious pressure, Macbeth who informs his wife that "We will proceed no further in this business", (*Macbeth*, P. 41) and adds that he would feel an immense guilt for betraying all the honours and gifts he had received from the king.

"I dare do all that may become a man, who dares more, is none"

(*Macbeth*, P. 42)

We observed that Macbeth gave up on his plans in one moment yet he went back to them in the very next. What could produce this sudden turn? Again we postulate that the cause lies in the psychological element. Macbeth had already faced the pressure from within and had not been able to cope with it – hence his decision to stop. However, in this crucial moment, when he found himself in a situation somewhere between a firm resolution and a mild reluctance, came yet another influence. This time it was from the outside, epitomized in the persona of Lady Macbeth. Of course, it is by no means our intention to cast the shadow of guilt utterly upon Lady Macbeth – her doings would have no particular effect if there was not present in Macbeth himself the original intention for his dark doings. She merely tipped the balance to the other side of the scales, but even that proved to be of tremendous importance in Macbeth's criminal development.

Lady Macbeth is a unique character in Shakespeare's plays. With a presence in the drama that amounts to no more than some three hundred lines, she manages to be both a major and a memorable character. Their

relationship throughout the play is certainly peculiar. They are very supportive of each other, exchanging affectionate letters, discussing everything to the smallest details, giving each other advice, and sharing mutual ambitions and fears. Moreover, they seem to behave in the opposite ways in the different parts of the play – in the beginning Lady Macbeth is more determined and courageous than her husband, a balance which is completely reversed in the last act. Still, the influence that Lady Macbeth can exert upon her husband in the first two acts, which was crucial for Macbeth's fall, proves to be vast.

Lady Macbeth very well understands psychology of her husband so she doubts on his decision taking. She uses this great sway over him to further their plans of becoming royalty. A keen psychologist as she proves to be, she chooses not to simply persuade him, but to question that which is most precious for him: his manhood. Lady Macbeth was aware of his unstable nature from the very beginning. Did she not, having read the letter from Macbeth, utter these words:

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdar, and shalt be
What thou art promis'd: yet do I fear thy nature
It is too full o' th' milk of humane kindness..."

(*Macbeth*, P.36)

During the conversation with him, she repeats the same basic idea, using a somewhat different phrasing:

"...Art thou a feare'd
To be the same in thine own act, and valour,
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem?

Letting I dare not, wait upon I would,

Like the poor cat I' th' adage."

Lady Macbeth essentially challenges his ego. She calls him a coward, a man without resolve, who can only wish, but does not dare to actualize his wishes, a man who gives false promises, and most importantly, a man who is, having all these traits, not truly a man. One must understand Macbeth in order to understand why this blow dealt by his wife was so successful. His soul was that of a warrior, and for him competition was something normal, a part of the ordinary life, a discipline in which he had already proved himself, earning the title of a general, and a thane of two regions. His skills, strengths and qualities were widely recognized by the king and his companions. It was henceforth natural for him, having achieved such success, to want the recognition from the one person

he holds dearest in his heart: his wife. It was Macbeth's monomania, his intellectual obsession that caused him to set the standards that cannot be truly set, or not at least in such a simplistic Manichean black-and-white duality, where a person or a thing is either good or bad, either earthly or divine. Macbeth falls from his lofty position he only seems to see things in black and white (seeing them, indeed, more in black, and even blood-red tones, as is presented with the imagery of the play). His logic is as follows: if he does not dare to murder the king, but in the same time his wife vows to kill a child of her own if that was her promise in the first place, then he is not brave – or at least not as brave as Lady Macbeth.

Thus, he is psychologically put into an inferior position in which he, an accomplished warrior who has faced and slain numerous enemies on the battlefield is now not an equal to his wife, not as good as her. It is for these reasons that Macbeth felt attacked and in a need to defend himself against the accusations which denied all that he was supposed to be. The only solution was to take some practical steps, and through the material evidence prove to Lady Macbeth that he was as strong as her. His chief hubris, ambition, was now fueled by yet another tragic flaw – pride. And to extinguish hubris, as Heraclitus said, takes more than to extinguish fire. The tragic flames that were burning inside of Macbeth's soul were by no means extinguished – there was never such an attempt – but were additionally stimulated by the character of equally ambitious and, in that moment, far more daring Lady Macbeth. He became a furnace, in which sins were boiling, ready to explode and deliver its deadly contents.

“ O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife...”
(*Macbeth*, P. 63)

In a night filled with howls and shrieks, with the sky flashing with lightning, and the whole Scotland descending into an overall nightmarish atmosphere of darkness and horror, Macbeth walks on the path of a murder, and one thing he sees is a phantomlike knife in front of him. Nothing could describe better the terrifying magnitude of the deed he is going to commit. In one sense, the murder of Duncan and the "supernatural" occurrences across the country show us the disturbance of the Elizabethan natural order, in which king was, primarily for his honours and responsibilities, a person whose violent death was

supposed to have such consequences. On the other hand, it describes Macbeth's psyche in that moment.

He chooses to become the king, and to entangle himself even more in the crime. The other reason for the continuation of his fall is the lack of a positive person who would bring about the repentance. Lady Macbeth is ever-supportive in evil deeds. First, he kills the king's guards so as to blame them for the murder. Then Malcolm and Donalbain, king's sons, are implicated in their father's death, and are forced to flee from the country. Macbeth is crowned, but is still not satisfied, still insecure and doubtful whether he will be discovered. He was not alone when the prophecies of the witches were exclaimed. And now that they have all come true, Macbeth is afraid of Banquo's suspicions. The chaos in his mind is at its peak: there is nobody he could trust, nobody to lean on, except for his wife. And to her he confesses the following words:

“ O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife
Thou know'st that Banquo and his Fleance lives.” (*Macbeth*, P.10)

To this Lady Macbeth answers

“ But in them, Nature's copy's not eterne” (P.11)
Again, Macbeth has to commit a murder, and once more, he is prompted by his wife to do so. And while the murder of Duncan was done with the numerous changes of moods and the efforts to acquire the resolve for the endeavour, the assassination of Banquo was executed rather quickly and easily. Lady Macbeth does not need to persuade him more. No murder is perfect, and now the murderer in Macbeth could never find peace. In his eyes, everyone is a potential traitor; what he did could happen to him as well. For, who knows if there is another Macbeth with his Lady, dreaming of becoming a royal pair? In a precise and remorseless manner Lady Macduff and her son are eliminated, while Macduff, the primary target, manages to escape the execution. Though no other crimes of Macbeth are specified from there on, we can guess that numerous more people are killed, imprisoned or expelled from the country. The following quotation, taken from the conversation between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth following the murder of the king, presents us with the evidence that tyrannical Macbeth has indeed killed sleep:

"Methought I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more:
Macbeth does murder Sleep, the innocent Sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,

The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in Life's feast." (*Macbeth*, P. 47)

The last phase Macbeth becomes more philosophical and imaginative. His psychological development is in the total opposition to the beginning of the play.

"Out, out, brief candle life's but walking shadow..." (*Macbeth*, P. 101)

The sympathy we feel for Macbeth in many ways stems from his suffering, his diverse emotions, his high achievements and the great honours he received. Now he is stripped of all that. His soul has become barren, incapable of emotionally relating itself to any other human being, even Lady Macbeth, who, completely consumed by guilt, is wandering across the palace in an endless sleepwalk. Ironically, while Lady Macbeth lives in a perpetual nightmare, Macbeth does not sleep at all. As G. Wilson puts it, "He is plunging deeper and deeper into unreality, the severance from mankind and all normal forms of life is now abysmal, deep." (*The Wheel of Fire*, P. 155) He cannot even feel anything else any more, fear in particular. At one point he says:

"I have almost forgot the taste of fears;
The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
As life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors,
Direness familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
Cannot once start me..." (*Macbeth*, P. 100-1)

All this fearlessness is supported by Macbeth's great self-deception, having its source in the second meeting with the witches. Again, they basically tell him what his deep suspicions are, but this time he does not listen to them. Instead of pausing for a moment and trying to decode their sayings, he takes them at face value, discarding the deeper allegorical meaning they are supposed to convey. Once more, Macbeth entertains the aforementioned quality of judging things only by their appearance, the trait in which he is fairly persistent throughout the entire play. Things either are by "widely accepted" standards, or they are not at all. There can be no metaphor, no hidden meaning, because Macbeth's mind is focused only on retaining power. He does not have time to ponder upon a possible deeper sense of the second prophecy, with all of his enemies plotting ceaselessly and waiting for him to make a wrong step. Therefore, since trees cannot

uproot and walk, and there is no human being that was not born out of a mother's womb, he is safe from any dangers whatsoever, or, in other words invincible.

The causes of such a state of mind have been stated in the previous sections – the starting doubts and insecurity, the psychological pressures, the covering up of the criminal tracks, the cruel removal of all potential enemies – all these made Macbeth become so brutal and plain, a shadow of his former self, having kingship and power just for the sake of them. But, what are the results of it?

Firstly, it is a sense of a great disillusionment with life. Everything has become pointless and futile for Macbeth; no goal is true enough to be striven towards; there is no greater meaning, but that life is a transient feeling of the world, concluded by death. When informed about the demise of Lady Macbeth, Macbeth enters into the famous soliloquy about the event itself being vastly unimportant, and could have happened any day after, without major effect upon the scheme of things. So it goes with Macbeth who now, at the end of his life, has nothing to hide, though he still calls for darkness. Now it is a different kind of darkness, not the one intended to cover his black desires, but darkness that ends life, which, to him is:

"...A tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing." (*Macbeth*, P. 101)

With such bold convictions he charges into battle, and we see in practice that he indeed fears nothing, not even death. For, when it is revealed to him that Macduff was not ordinarily born (and indeed, what is truly revealed is that Macbeth misinterpreted the prophecies) - he still chooses to fight the inevitable:

"...And damn'd be him, that first cries hold, enough." (*Macbeth*, P. 105)

With these words ends the life of Macbeth, the king of Scotland, who has in the end proven, at least to himself, not to be a coward, and that no other man could really do more than he could, but who has, in the process of doing it, completely lost himself and his soul.

The first and foremost objective of this analysis was to show and prove the fluency of Shakespeare's psychological craftsmanship and role of psychological elements in Macbeth's dilemma. The attempt of this paper is to focus on Macbeth's psychology in the play through descriptive analysis.

Macbeth tells us plenty things, yet we must concentrate on the themes in the context of this text. We saw the dark side of the ambition and how, unless controlled by the use of the moral code and humane means, it can come to control the ambitious one: for Macbeth barely questions the morality of his actions, often justifying them with what he sees fit at the moment, whether it is a prophecy, or a sense of an imminent danger coming from some of his false allies; its final consequences in the figures of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, both devastated in their own ways. And lastly, *Macbeth* could serve as a political fable, investigating the lure of power and the dangers of attaining it simply for its own sake, largely useful for modern politicians and rulers, who could find so much to learn from this drama – even though we are somehow not very convinced that they would learn anything at all, even if they happened to read it, or see it at the theatre.

CONCLUSION

Macbeth's immoderate desire for power and the consequent fear of losing authority drove him to immeasurable corruption, and he obliterated whoever was an obstacle in the way of his absolute sway over Scotland, but finally, his tragic death at the hands of Macduff makes him an example for all who are overridden by the passion of power deeply rooted in their psyche. Her husband on what to do and what not to. Once the Macbeth is possessed by an overwhelming desire not only to remain in power by whatever means it is possible and whatever price he has to pay for it but also to be the father of the dynasty of kings is an exploration of the nature of evil in Macbeth, Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' is psychological tragedy. It is rich in the element of Psychology. Shakespeare has exposed the inward thoughts of his characters. In this matter soliloquies make a great contribution. These Psychological speeches express the real personality of the speaker.

REFERENCE

- [1] Bradley, A. C. (1985), *Shakespearean Tragedy*, The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy, 'Macbeth', Macmillan, London.
- [2] Knox, J. (2004). The First Blast of the Trumpet. John Knox, On Rebellion, op. Cit, 43.
- [3] Mehl, D. (1986), *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [4] Raghukul Tilak, Shakespeare: Macbeth, (New Delhi: Rajhans Prakashan Mandir, 1997), p.25.
- [5] Shakespeare, W. (1968) *Macbeth*, Penguin Group, London.
- [6] Series: Facta Universitatis, Linguistics and Literature Vol. 8, No 2, 2010.
- [7] Wilson Knight, G. (1968), *The Wheel of Fire*, 'Macbeth and the Metaphysic of Evil', Methuen and Co. Ltd., London.
- [8] Wright and La Mar (1973), (Macbeth) 'A Study in Evil', in *The Tragedy of Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, New York.
- [9] <https://targetnotes.com/describe-macbeth-as-a-psychological-tragedy/>
- [10] <https://www.markedbyteachers.com/as-and-a-level/english/macbeth-the-dilemma-of-whether-to-kill-the-king-or-not.html>
- [11] Wells, R. H. (2004). Shakespeare on masculinity. Cambridge University Press.
- [12] www.the-criterion.com The Criterion: An International Journal in English ISSN 0976-8165, September, 2012, Vol., III, Issue, III