

Shailesh Ranjan
Assistant Professor,
Dept. of English,
Maharaja College, Ara.

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B.A Part- II (English Hons.)
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Character Sketch of Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth, who is also remembered as the fourth witch of the play by some critics, occupies one of the most favourite place among the Shakespearean tragic heroines. The eminence which Macbeth enjoys among the tragic heroes of Shakespeare, lady Macbeth enjoys among the heroines. She far excels other heroines in the Shakespearean world by her grandeur, strength, and awe. She is fitting counter part to her husband and possesses just those very qualities which her husband lacks. She is therefore complementary to her husband and helps in making the tragedy full and complete. She is the guiding force and deciding factor at least in the first half of the play. Without her it is impossible to imagine about the tragedy of the play ‘Macbeth’.

Ambitious : William Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of whole English literature, sketches the character of Lady Macbeth as an ambitious woman. She is as ambitious as her husband. The only difference between her ambition and that of her husband is that she is not ambitious for herself but for the sake of her husband. She wants him to wear the crown of Scotland . One of the critics named Mrs. Jameson says, “It is particularly observable that in Lady Macbeth’s concentrated, strong nerved ambition, the ruling passion of her mind, there is yet a touch of woman, she is ambitious less for herself than for husband.” In order to enable her husband to achieve ambition she actually goes through a process of unsexing herself. In the first instance, she plans with her husband the murder of Duncan; in fact she takes the initiative in it. Thus, Lady Macbeth is an ambitious woman.

Strength of Will : Lady Macbeth excels even her husband in her strength of will, determination and resourcefulness. Once the decision to murder king Duncan is taken, she knows no wavering or retreating back. No sense of morality, gratitude or compassion can deter her from striving to achieve her goal. She would never bid the earth not to hear her steps or the stars to hide their light. This force of will makes her bold, courageous irresistible passionless cruel . She invokes the spiritual powers :

“Spirits

*That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
And fill me from the crown to the toe – top full
Of direst cruelty.”*

She invokes the spirits to make her blood thick and stop up all access and passage to pity and remorse, so that no powers may

“Shake my fell purpose, nor keep pace between
The effect and it.”

It is rightly to say, that without her the murder of the king would have been impossible.

Tactful : Lady Macbeth is highly resourceful at the same time. She is tactful and does not lose her mental equilibrium even in the most critical situation. She advises her husband to “look like the innocent flower and be the serpent under it.” She is a woman of very practical wisdom :-

“ To beguile the time, look like the time.”

When Macbeth dreads his “filthy hands,” she says :-

“ A little water clears up of this deed.
How easy is it then !”

Some critics even believe that her fainting at the time of discovery of King’s murder was merely an affection . She feigned in order to draw the attention of the lords and ladies from her husband to herself. She was afraid that her husband might divulge the guilt out of his excessive fear, weakness and pricking conscience.

Her feminine Nature : Yet she is essentially a woman possessing the essential feminine nature. She can not wholly discard her feminine weakness in spite of her devilish will and unwavering determination. Her feminine nature fully possesses her in the sleep walking scene. Every scene of murder has gone deep into her mind and heart. She recalls the event and shudders at its very thought –

“Yet who have thought the old man
To have had so much blood in him?”

Not a Human Monster : Lady Macbeth is not quite inhuman. It is a mistake to call her the “fourth witch” in Macbeth. She is not inhuman by nature. At one place she says :

“Here is the smell of blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.”

She deliberately tries to counteract all feeling of pity and remorse in a state of abnormal excitability. In spite of all her vicious deeds, we pity her and mourn her untimely death.

Thus, Lady Macbeth is one of the most favourite characters in the portrait gallery of William Shakespeare.

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