

B. A. English (Honours) Part-II

Paper-III

-Dr. Anand Bhushan Pandey

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
S. B. College, Ara

Act wise Summary of *Macbeth*

Act- I

Scene- I

The play opens with this first scene in a secluded and desolate place (deserted heath) in Scotland. The weather is full of thunder and lightning. In such a stormy weather three witches meet. They show interest in Macbeth, a general in the Scottish army. They decide to assemble there again to meet Macbeth on his way back from the battle ground. They reveal their motto: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" that is all that is fair is evil for them, and all that is foul is fair for them as they fly through fog and filthy air.

Scene- II

This scene opens in a Camp near Forres. In the backdrop of the scene there is a battle going between the Scottish army and the rebel forces. Duncan, the king of Scotland, with his two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, Lennox, a nobleman of Scotland and some attendants meet a bleeding sergeant who has just returned from the battlefield. The sergeant informs them as to how the fortune of the battle at first seemed to be in the favour of the rebels but the appearance of Macbeth on the scene turned everything to Duncan's favour. Macbeth killed the rebel Macdonwald and the moment Duncan's forces were about to gain victory, the King of Norway joined the attack on Duncan's forces with fresh vigour and new supply of soldiers. The sergeant praises the bravery and valour of Macbeth and Banquo, another general of the King's army. Ross, a nobleman of Scotland, also narrates the fearlessness, heroism and warrior skill. The sergeant has to be attended due to profuse bleeding. The scene ends with the news of the victory of the King's forces under the leadership of Macbeth. The King orders the execution of the Thane of Cawdor and the conferring of the title on Macbeth.

Scene- III

This scene again opens at the same deserted heath where the three witches meet again as decided earlier. They wait for the arrival of Macbeth who was returning from the battlefield after the victory. Macbeth and Banquo arrive at the scene. The First Witch greets Macbeth as the Thane of Glamis, the Second Witch as the Thane of Cawdor and the Third Witch greets him and says he (Macbeth) would be the king hereafter. For Banquo, at first, they do not appear to be inhabitants of the earth but after their prophecy he also asks them to tell something about his own future, though with the frankness that he neither needs their favour nor fear their hatred. The Witches tell Banquo that though he would not be the king, his descendents would be the kings of Scotland.

The prophecy of the Witches gave a boost to Macbeth's dormant desire which he had somewhere already nursed in the form of ambition of becoming the king. Macbeth gets excited beyond measure by this prophecy. Then, Ross and Angus appear on the scene and hail Macbeth with the title of Thane of Cawdor, conferred on him by the King Duncan some moments back. Macbeth is surprised to know the first prophecy coming true. Now he hopes that the second prophecy of the Witches of his becoming the King of Scotland might soon come true. He thinks just as fate has made him the Thane of Cawdor, similarly, fate will make him the king also. Banquo is also surprised to know the correctness of the prophecy. Then they go to the camp to meet the King.

Scene- IV

The scene opens at the royal palace at Forres. Macbeth and Banquo accompanied by Ross and Angus reach Forres where they are warmly welcomed and praised by the King. To this Macbeth affirms his loyalty to the Crown. Then, the King announces that his son, Malcolm would be the successor of the throne and now onwards he would be called the Prince of Cumberland. But Macbeth takes this announcement as the obstacle to his plan of becoming the king. The King decides to pass the night at Inverness, in the palace of Macbeth as his guest. Macbeth, however, hurries home in order to make suitable arrangements for the reception and stay of the King.

Scene- V

The scene opens at Macbeth's castle where Macbeth's wife, Lady Macbeth is shown reading a letter from her husband, in which he has written about the former's meeting with

the Witches and their prophecies and their partial fulfilment. Having read the letter Lady Macbeth starts analyzing the character of her husband. She knows that Macbeth is not without the ambition of becoming the King of Scotland about which he had told her earlier but she also knows that he is hesitant of committing any deed like murdering the King. Now she decides to encourage her husband “to catch the nearest way” to seize the throne. Then a messenger arrives there with the news of Duncan’s visit to Inverness. With the excitement of this news she invokes the aid of the spirits to make her bold enough to help her husband to snatch this opportunity to murder the king while he is in their castle as a guest. When Macbeth arrives she greets him with two titles. She advises him to put up a mask of smiling face before the people around him in order to conceal his intentions.

Scene- VI

This scene too opens at Macbeth’s castle, where the old and gentle King wholly unaware of the deadly intention of the hosts (Macbeth and Lady Macbeth) is going to stay overnight and be murdered. Duncan and Banquo praise the gentle breeze blowing there and pleasant ambience of the castle. The King along with his sons and attendants appears before the castle. When Lady Macbeth appears, the king greets her with great warmth and Lady Macbeth in turn greets him with sweet words and professes sincere loyalty to the King. Duncan expresses his desire to her to lead to her husband’s room.

Scene- VI

Swayed by his thoughts Macbeth slips out of the supper-room where the King dines. In his soliloquy, he thinks about the awfulness of the act of murdering the King. His intuition forbids him for committing an act of treachery. There is a conflict going on in Macbeth’s mind. After a series of reproaches Lady Macbeth succeeds in persuading her husband to commit the act. She discloses the plans and Macbeth is finally persuaded to murder Duncan in such a way that the guards of the king would appear guilty of the murder. In this way Macbeth’s vaulting ambition emerges and it shows how he is under the prowess of his wife’s personality.