

## B. A. English (Honours) Part-II

### Paper-III

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#### Topic—Macbeth: A Brief Introduction

*Macbeth* is one of the four 'dark' tragedies (the other three being *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*) written by William Shakespeare. It is the shortest of all of his tragedies. Some evidences in the play indicate clearly that the play was written to please the King James I, who had become the king of England after the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. Shakespeare borrowed the story of Macbeth from *Chronicles of Scotland* of Raphael Holinshed.

Macbeth, the Scottish General, and his wife, Lady Macbeth, instigated by the strange prophecy of the three witches, murder the king of Scotland, Duncan, and become the king and queen of Scotland. Macbeth fears that Banquo, his fellow-general, knows of his crime so he decides that he (Banquo) along with his son, Fleance also must be killed. On the way to Macbeth's palace Banquo is struck down by the murderers employed by Macbeth while his son, Fleance manages to escape. His crime increases one by one. Later knowing the fact that Macduff also knows about the brutal murder of the king, Macbeth sends murderers to attack Macduff's castle and kill him, but having been already warned, Macduff has escaped to England. His wife and children are murdered by Macbeth's men.

By now both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are fully aware that their crime is known to everyone. Macbeth once again visits the witches who assure him that he would never be harmed by 'man of woman born, and that he would rule Scotland 'till Birnam wood shall come to Dunsinane'. This obviously gives confidence to Macbeth who now accumulates his energy to

defend the castle of Dunsinane against the English who have joined with Macduff and other Scottish leaders against the tyranny of Macbeth.

Now the pressure of guilt and anxiety begins to overshadow the mind of Lady Macbeth who in the famous 'Sleep-walking scene' relives the terrible night when the heinous murder of the King Duncan took place. A little later when Macbeth is preparing to meet Macduff and the English, she kills herself. Then a soldier tells Macbeth that Birnam wood is moving towards Dunsinane and he has seen it. In fact the English soldiers had been told to break the branches from the tree in order to hide themselves while attacking the castle of Macbeth and this fact is known to the audience, not to Macbeth.

Macbeth resolves to fight till the end with a little hope of the witches' promise that he would not be harmed by any man born of woman. But while fighting with Macbeth savagely, Macduff declares that he 'was from his mother's womb/Untimely ript', that is, he was not born of a woman in a natural way but through a Caesarian operation. It is then only Macbeth fully realises that he has been tricked by the witches and now no more hope for his survival is left. Still he fights desperately in the battle and in the last he is killed by Macduff.

In this way a crude wild play ends. In fact, Macbeth, the most poetic play of Shakespeare, is a deep psychological study of a brave man who meets his doom by his own 'vaulting ambition'.

**Source:-**

R. J. Rees' English *Literature: An Introduction for Foreign Readers*