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10. Topic:
Is "Macbeth" a typical
Shakespearean tragedy?

From: Dr. Sanjiv Kumar
Guest Faculty
Dept of English
U.R. College, Rose

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Discuss "Macbeth" as a typical Shakespearean tragedy.

In writing his tragedies Shakespeare didn't invent any theory of his own. He followed basically what the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle had laid down for the composition of a tragedy. All his famous tragedies such as Othello, Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth are written on the same pattern.

Shakespearean tragedy is the tale of a person of eminence and high social position. The tragic hero is a man of high honour. Hamlet is the prince of Denmark, Othello is the military general of Venice and Lear is the King of Britain. Likewise Macbeth is the military general of Scotland. Macbeth is certainly a great soldier, a loyal and devoted subject of Duncan. In his position he is renowned

for his heroic exploits and personal valour.

The more important is what is known as the tragic flaw in the character of the hero. Shakespeare's tragic heroes suffer from some weakness of character which ultimately becomes the cause of tragedy. Ambition in itself is not bad but in Macbeth it is 'vaulting ambition'. His ambition to become the king of Scotland is fanned and fired by Lady Macbeth who herself is ambitious and by the witches who goad him on the path of murder and sin.

Next important feature of a Shakespearean tragedy is conflict. Conflict is the essence of it. It manifests itself both in physical and spiritual forms. In other words it is both external and internal. The final defeat and death of Macbeth is a

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forgone conclusion. But what is more moving is the state in which his soul is torn in internal conflict. So acute is his suffering that we know not whether to hate Macbeth or pity him. In fact Macbeth is a spiritual tragedy in its true sense.

Then supernatural element plays an important role in a Shakespearean tragedy. The catastrophe is brought about partly through the operation of supernatural powers working upon the fate and actions of the hero. In Shakespeare, these supernatural powers take the form of fate, malignant ghosts, witches, apparition, hallucination or omni-
superstition. In Macbeth the supernatural element appears in the form of the three witches, the ghosts of Banquo as some critics

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believe of Duncan and also in the form of hallucinations. The three witches drive Macbeth on the bloody path of murder and the bloodshed. In fact, their action represents man's helplessness at the hands of unseen powers.

Thus Macbeth is a typical Shakespearean tragedy. It possesses all the traits of a significant Shakespearean tragedy. Its subject is the struggle between good and evil. Evil dominating for the time being but ultimately defeated by the good.

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