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POLITICAL ASPIRATION WITH DEMONIC DOMINATION IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S  
*MACBETH*

Prof. SANJAY KUMAR SWARNKAR<sup>1</sup>, Dr. DHARUV SHANKAR<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Head of English Department, C.S.J.M. University, Kanpur, U. P.

<sup>2</sup>English Lecturer, Mahamaya Polytechnic of Information Technology, Akbarpur, Kanpur Dehat, U. P.



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ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare – the miraculous swan of Avon – grew up as a golden rose of Elizabethan pose in the literary expanses of English Language. As a matter of fact, he is one of the most glistening gems in the sphere of dramatic composition that has been hoisted and theaterized by the world-famous playwrights of all eras. His endowment lies not only in dramatic attainment but also in poetic complement. Broadly speaking, he was a cosmopolite writer who struck all the facets of human life. So far as the matter is concerned, political concepts often play a curious and queer role in many of his dramatic compositions in which he tried to raise political issues such as war vs. peace, religion vs. politics and legitimate vs. illegitimate means of gaining the status of monarchy. However he was not a political philosopher, he was proficient in the theories of political practice. In Elizabethan age, superstitious views as well as political issues were the major sources of discussion and literary delineation as the people believed in ghosts, spirits, witches and miraculous capacities of the stately personalities. This paper, basically, aims at exploring Macbeth's imagination of political aspiration which is governed by demonic cogitation. In fact, *Macbeth* is the platform of clashing engagement that is proffering the seeds of political aspiration sprouted with devilish dedication. On a more profound level, it analyses the tyrannical tale of Macbeth, a Scottish general, who desires for monarchical power that leads him and his family ultimately to disaster. To fulfil his craving for the crown, he turns into a liar firstly, a murderer secondly and a tyrant finally. In addition, the prophetic role of the witches strengthens and sharpens his longing for political power. Primarily, *Macbeth* is nothing but a play of vaulting ambition which has its origin in political navigation; secondarily, it also traces out devilish doings which are executed by both Macbeth and the professing witches. Consequently, it is right to argue that Shakespeare had sowed the kernels of political aspiration multiplied with demonic domination in the ruts of his dramatic composition – *Macbeth* – as he wanted to highlight the drawbacks and shortcomings of the monarchical system which was prevailing in the European states of the sixteenth century.

**Keywords:** Aspiration, political, demonic, domination, ambition, evil spirit and witches etc.

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## Introduction

William Shakespeare is a world-renowned literary genius of marvellous power. All the prodigious and prestigious milestones of literary meditation chant melodiously the canzonets of Shakespearean grandeur which was initiated in the glamorous sovereignty of Queen Elizabeth I, one of the most renowned empresses in the history of Europe. As a matter of fact, he is one of the most fulgurous jewels in the dramatic universe that has been raised and staged by the world-renowned playwrights of all epochs. His talent discovered not only the great monument of dramatic attainment but also the pillars of poetic movement. His dramatic miracle is not only confined to the Elizabethan age but also amplified to the all succeeding eras which played an outstanding role in the upliftment of literary expansions as Ben Johnson appropriately uttered: "Shakespeare was not of an age, but of all ages."

Contemplating Shakespeare's place in English literature, W. J. Long rightly comments: "Shakespeare holds, by general acclamation, the foremost place in the world's literature, and his overwhelming greatness renders it difficult to criticise or even to praise him." (153-154) Long, further, states: "He leads all that brilliant group of poets and dramatists who have given undying glory to the Age of Elizabeth". (137)

In addition to a great dramatist, Shakespeare is an outstanding and spectacular political thinker as many of his plays revolve around the theme of politics and deal with political matters – war vs. peace, religion vs. politics and legitimate vs. illegitimate monarchical system etc. More or less, in many of his plays, political aspect is at the centre of his dramatic rays. In Elizabethan age, political views along with superstitious issues were the major means of meditation.

*Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines the term 'political' as 'exercising or seeking power in the governmental or public affairs of a state, municipality, etc.' (1497); and *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* delineates the term 'aspiration' as 'the action of deserving and striving for something or an earnest desire'.(132) Besides, the meaning of the term 'demoniac' is 'a person seemingly possessed by a demon or evil spirit' (WEUD 530); and the meaning of 'domination' is 'an act or instance of dominating, ruling or swaying'. (WEUD 582) Throwing light on the delineation of these terms, it is obvious that the political aspiration with demoniac domination is the procedure of aspiring and acquiring political or monarchical power through the means of evil domination or deeds. Similarly, in the play, *Macbeth* is having a strong desire to get the throne of Scotland and carries out many evil deeds such as the murder of Duncan and many others to achieve his desired goal.

## Stream of Political Aspiration

William Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* as a political aspiration that is rooted in demoniac dominion. The nature of the play – *Macbeth* – is political as it displays the divine power of Duncan and political aspiration of Macbeth, a Scottish general, who falls into the pond of demoniac domination after hearing the prophecies of the three witches.

In the play, the three witches play a major role and turn it into a demoniac tragedy. When they tell Macbeth that he would become Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cowdor, and, afterwards, King of Scotland, Macbeth becomes more ambitious and a potential desire of political aspiration is arisen in his heart, mind and soul. Moreover, Lady Macbeth intensifies his ambition of becoming a king and seizing Duncan's throne when he tells her the predictions of the witches. Consequently, it seems that the seeds of evil nature are going to be sprouted in his conscience. Considering the characteristics of Macbeth, Horace Howard rightly comments: "Here is the first intimation of that spirit of wickedness existing in Macbeth which develops itself in the process of the piece....Macbeth attracts their attention and excites their interest through the sympathy which evil ever has with evil because he already harbours a wicked design." (8)

So far as the matter is concerned, Macbeth is possessing a 'vaulting ambition' that is sprouted with evil combination. The witches were the only means which essayed to awake his slumbering aspiration of majestic throne. If the witches had not prophesied, even then he would have tried to become the king of Scotland sooner or later. In fact, the witches are inciters and instigators who turn Macbeth's mental direction towards the stream

of political aspiration which will be fulfilled with demoniac dedication. In this reference, H. B. Charlton rightly quotes about his nature:

“Macbeth is fully aware, of course, that he is deliberately committing himself to what he knows to be evil. His personal ambition is prompting him for his own selfish ends to act which are contrary to all accepted codes of right conduct. In considering them, he reveals what is his innermost nature. He regards the worthiest and most desirable objective of human life.” (150)

On being a victorious and brave warrior, Macbeth begins to expect for the position of a king. Moreover, he was highly ambitious from his early childhood. His mind is always reflected with the ideas of procuring the throne of Scotland. It is visible in the play as he affirms it:

“If chance will have me king.

Why chance may crown me, without my stir.” (*Macbeth* Act-I Scene-III 37)

Undoubtedly, it is the evil nature of Macbeth that murdered Duncan, the king of Scotland. Ostensibly, it is Macbeth’s aspiration that is responsible for Duncan’s murder and it brought doom and tragedy in his life. Here, G. K. Hunter’s statement is quite quote-worthy: “The power of Macbeth is presented as free floating, with only the weakest of psychological restraints attached, and with powerful enemies of restraints dedicated to its destruction. And in such a miasma of undirected power, free-floating will lessen the battles lost and won; indecision has the only decisive victory.” (20)

In the beginning of his life, Macbeth is a good fellow. He is a person “full of the milk of human kindness”. (*Macbeth* Act-I Scene-V 17) On account of his heroic deeds, he is highly esteemed in Duncan’s court. But, because of his political ambition, his nature is changed and he turns towards the evil deeds. He commits one crime after the other and becomes tired of all these vicious activities. At a later stage, he realises the depressing effect of his gruesome crimes. Then it seems that he longs to get peace while he is much mentally disturbed. But it was impossible now. His speech in despair is note-worthy here:

Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player,

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage.

And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing. (*Macbeth* Act-V Scene-V 21)

### **Stream of Demoniac Domination**

The evil nature of the play can be observed even in its opening scene. The play begins with the discussion of the three witches. It was thundering and lightning and the air was foggy and filthy when the witches were talking to one another and asking when they would meet again:

*First Witch*

When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning or in rain?

*Second Witch*

When the hurlyburly’s done,

When the battle’s lost and won.

*Third Witch*

That will be ere the set of sun.

*First Witch*

---

Where the place?

*Second Witch*

Upon the heath.

*Third Witch*

There to meet with Macbeth. (*Macbeth* Act-I Scene-I 19)

The witches further say, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair: Hover through the fog and filthy air." This figurative statement proves that these evil spirits believe in demoniac existence of the natural world. They do not like good and graceful activities. When these witches appear in the second time, the demoniac or evil nature of the witches is noticeable:

*First Witch*

Where hast thou been, sister?

*Second Witch*

Killing Swine (*Macbeth* Act-I Scene-III 27)

When the third witch asks the first one where she was and what she was doing. The first witch replies to her that she was engaged in seeing a sailor's spouse who was munching nuts. She asked for some nuts, but she refused to give her any nut. She says that the woman was ill-mannered and selfish. Her husband had ventured out on a voyage. The witch further states that the sailor's wife has not given her any nut so she will go to her husband's ship, convert her form into a mouse and then cut the rope of the ship so that it may be drowned into the sea. Here, demoniac as well as evil nature of the witch is worth-revealing:

*Third Witch*

Sister, where thou?

*First Witch*

A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,

And mounch'd, and mounch'd, and mounch'd.

'Give me' quoth I.

'Aroint thee, witch!' the rump-fed ronyon cries.

Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' th' Tiger;

But in a sieve I'll thither sail

And, like a rat without a tail,

I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do. (*Macbeth* Act-I Scene-III 27)

If Macbeth is having a 'vaulting ambition', his wife, who is known as Lady Macbeth, is possessing more vaulting ambition. When Macbeth tells her about the prognostication of the witches, she, suddenly, aspires to become the queen of Scotland. In reality, it is she who incites and persuades her husband to murder the king of Scotland. Her demoniac nature is noticeable in the following lines when she calls the spirits of darkness:

Come, you spirits

That tend in mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full

Of direst cruelty! (*Macbeth* Act-I Scene-V 42)

By hook or by crook, she wants to get the queenly crown of Scotland. She thinks that hideous murder of Duncan is a glorious deed. Broadly speaking, she is over excited and overwhelmed. In this connection A. C. Bradley justly states: "Moral distinctions do not in this exaltation exist for her; or rather they are inverted: 'good' means to her the crown and whatever is required to obtain it, evil whatever stands in the way of its attainment" (335).

Gradually, demonic nature overpowers her mental stature. Indeed, her sleep walking is nothing but the result of her disturbed, perturbed and anguished mental status. The evil atmosphere which is generated by her and her husband spoils the physical, mental, moral and universal standards of Scotland.

With the murder of Duncan starts a cycle of relentless contamination that continues with the cruelty of many murders such as King's two attendants' killing, murder of Banquo and the family members of Macduff etc. With the passage of time, his betrayal, feats of murder and tyranny become perceptible to everyone as it is observed by Macduff:

Each new morn,  
New widows howl, new orphans cry; new sorrows  
Strike heaven on the face. (*Macbeth* Act-IV Scene-III 5)

### **Stream of Political Aspiration with Demonic Domination**

Macbeth, a distant relative of the king of Scotland, is a bold warrior and a competent and skilled general. The sergeant describes him as Bellona's bridegroom. Besides, his heart is full of noble virtues as he is "full of the milk of human kindness." But Macbeth is highly ambitious. He admits it that it was his vaulting ambition which prompted him to murder Duncan as he says:

I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which overleaps itself  
And falls on the other. (*Macbeth* Act-I Scene-VII 57)

This ambition is stirred and strengthened with the villainous efforts of Lady Macbeth. She reminds him that he had decided to kill Duncan once even before his meeting with the witches. Then she suggested him that it was not a favourable time and place to carry out the deed. As soon as he got a chance, he executed the evil deed of Duncan's murder. As a matter of fact, his ambition, gradually, turns into a political aspiration which leads him at the status of a cruel tyrant.

Admittedly, Macbeth becomes more bloody when he hears from the apparitions that he would not be harmed by any person who is born of his mother. Besides, he should not care for anything until Birnam wood moves towards Dunsinane Hill. Broadly speaking, these apparitions were nothing but the visible forms of demonic spirits. The second apparition that is a bloody child says to him:

Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn  
The pow'r of man, for none of woman born  
Shall harm Macbeth. (*Macbeth* Act-IV Scene-I 149)

It is clear that nobody who is born of his mother would be able to harm Macbeth. The third apparition is a child wearing a crown, besides, it bears a tree in its hand, just as Macduff's soldiers will do later. The third apparition tells Macbeth that he would not be defeated until Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane Hill as it is observable through the following lines:

Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care  
Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:

Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until  
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane Hill  
Shall come against him. (*Macbeth* Act-IV Scene-I 151)

Now Macbeth thinks that all human beings are born of their mothers and Birnam wood which is static will never move to Dunsinane Hill. So he becomes more and more tyrannous with the passage of time. Very soon, it is observed that his political aspiration has many aspects of demoniac domination. The reason is that he fulfils his imagination of political aspiration with the tyrannical killings of many innocent persons. Consequently, it is right to argue that his political aspiration is overpowered with the current of demoniac domination.

### Conclusion

In point of fact, Macbeth's political aspiration – his greed for power and unrestrained ambition – leads him to a calamitous doom. Besides, it disturbs and destroys the lives of many other people also. As soon as his political aspiration is awakened, he begins to long the sovereign power of Scotland. As a result, firstly, he becomes a liar, secondly, a murderer and finally a tyrant whose calamitous deeds derange the peaceful life of Scotland. Then he does the murder one after the other. Indeed, there is a sequence of murders such as the murder of King Duncan, the slaying of Banquo, the merciless killing of Lady Macduff, her children and many other soldiers and servants. All these murderous activities lead his wife to do suicide and finally his own killing by Macduff.

Macbeth's political aspiration is steadfast and firm-minded. He is not in the mood of yielding even when he comes to know that Birnam wood has started to move towards Dunsinane and Macduff is not a woman born person. He was taken out of his mother's womb before his birth. He is not disheartened and discouraged even at the later span of his life as he utters lastly:

I will not yield,  
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet  
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.  
Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,  
And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,  
Yet I will try the last. Before my body  
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff;  
And damn'd be him that first cries 'Hold, enough!' (*Macbeth* Act-V Scene-VII 223)

Finally, it is right to conclude that Shakespeare's striking play – *Macbeth* – is a political play whose main theme revolves around an imagination of political aspiration which is fulfilled with the power of demoniac domination.

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