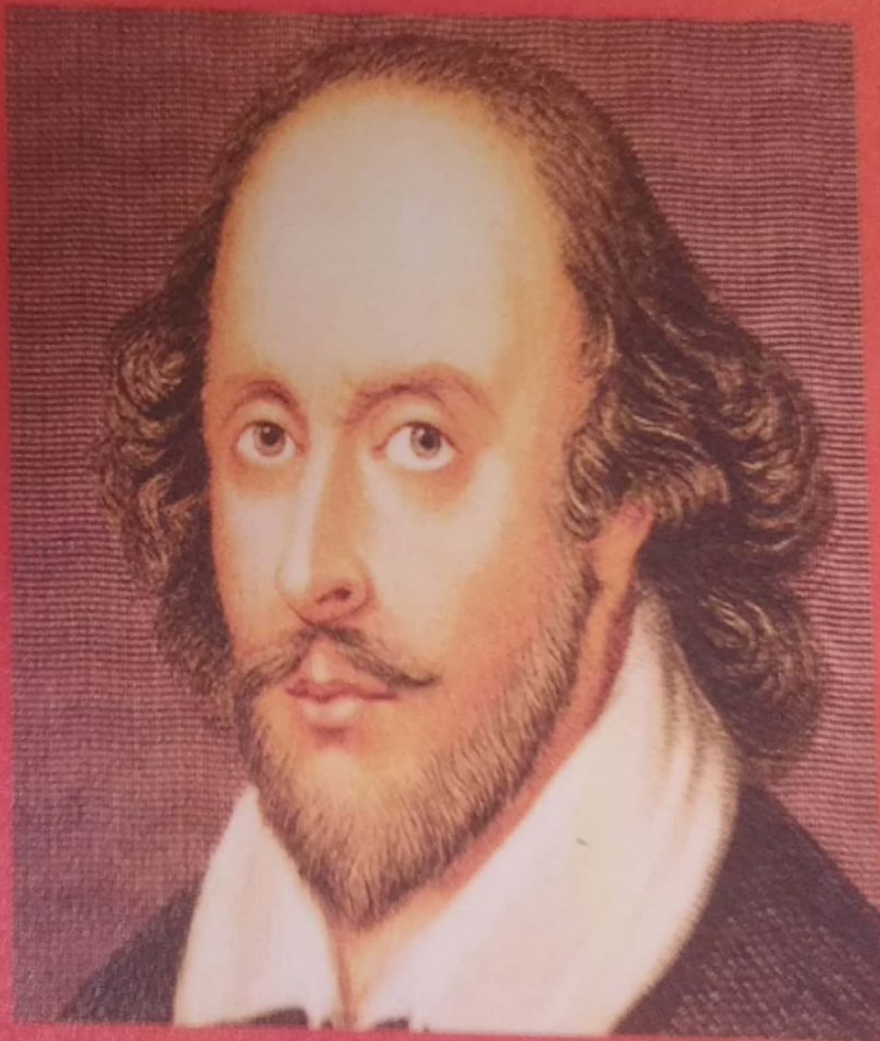


# SHAKESPEARE FOREVER

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# SHAKESPEARE'S HERMIONE AND LADY MACBETH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

B. GAYATHRI

Dame Ellen Terry says, "Wonderful Women! Have you ever thought how much we all, and women especially, owe to Shakespeare for his vindication of women in these fearless, high-spirited, resolute and intelligent heroines?" The portrayal, representation and the characterization of women and the ways in which the female roles are interpreted and enacted have become topics of scholarly interest. It is further more a gift to the entire reading community. Shakespeare's heroines encompass a wide range of characterizations and types, from the uncompromising frankness of Cordelia, the innocence of Desdemona, the quick wit of Beatrice and of Kate, and the intelligence of Portia, to the ruthlessness of Lady Macbeth, the opportunistic unkindness of Regan and Goneril, the manipulative power of Volumnia and the internal power of Hermione. They stand apart from that of the stereotyped characters of the Elizabethan period. They represent both negative and positive qualities which are intertwined with humanity. Some of the major characters are the epitome of dignity and chastity and some characters occupy positions of power that is frequently portrayed as capricious and highly corruptible.

The women characters possess both feminine and masculine attitudes and behavior that are predominant all over

the plays. They represent not only the power but also their intelligence and a strong sense of personal independence by which they defend themselves. Each and every woman character of Shakespeare has its unique part in its own ideology. This paper highlights two women in the plays of Shakespeare – Hermione in “The Winter’s Tale” and Lady Macbeth in “Macbeth” – and attempts to contrast between their characterizations by which Shakespeare endeavors to bring out the women identity crisis of his era.

Hermione is a queen, mother and matron. She is good and beautiful with royal ancestry. The character of Hermione exhibits what is never found in the other sex, her dignity without pride, love without passion, and tenderness without weakness. She receives the first intimation of her husband’s jealous suspicions with incredulous astonishment. When he accuses her more plainly, she replies with a calm dignity,

“Should a villain say so, The most replenish’d villain  
in the world, He were as much more villain; you, my  
lord. Do but mistake.”

“To tell, he longs to see his son, were strong:  
But let him say so then, and let him go”..... Act

**I, Scene 2, Line 92**

Hermione inspires admiration as well as pity when her husband, filled with jealousy and doubt accuses her in front of her own attendants when she remains calm with dignity. At the same time she represents the theme of “Ahimsa” which has the power of strong protestation with saint-like patience. She has been waiting for several years for the truth has been realized by

her husband. When she is in prison, she reminds of Sæthra, the heroine of the Indian epic "Ramayana" for her will power. What the latter followed to preserve her virtue is also followed by the former. Filled with these peculiar qualities, her character proves that Shakespeare is a champion of women kind and an innovator who creates virtuous women characters.

Lady Macbeth is another great example of Shakespeare's craftsmanship. The play 'Macbeth' revolves around the main characters Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. It is because of her by whom the play moves to an unexpected plot. She is dominant to her husband and makes him do all the crimes against Duncan. Finally she dies of confusions and guilty that lead to the total destruction of Macbeth.

The character of Lady Macbeth is ruthless, burning with unquenchable desire to have the name of a queen. She is determined and cunning and she does everything which cannot be accomplished by other women. She is quick-thinking which has the power to manage critical situations. After the murder of the King Duncan, Macbeth loses all control over himself and it is Lady Macbeth who tries to help him.

"..... Why worthy Thane,

You do unbend your noble strength to think  
So brain-sickly of things. Go get some water,  
And wash this filthy witness from your hand."

Macbeth has brought the daggers by which he murdered the king, with himself after murdering Duncan. Lady Macbeth carries away them and when he shudders to go back to the death chamber again to deposit the daggers, she says:

"Give me the daggers; the sleeping and the dead  
Are as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood  
The fears as painted devil. If he do bleed,  
I'll glid the faces of the grooms withal".....  
Act II, Scene II.

Through her character Shakespeare wants to prove that women also have the power over the kingship as well as the kings. She has the ambition of her husband and has the desire to fulfill that by means of cruelty and plot. She resolves to persuade Macbeth to remove every obstacle to its fulfillment. She is totally different from that of the character of Hermione. Shakespeare represents the female dominant quality of his time through the character of Lady Macbeth. More relentless and more ambitious than her husband, she plans to execute the idea of murdering the king in order to make her husband the next king.

In the final scene, Lady Macbeth evokes our pity completely. This is a great contrast to the pity evoked by Hermione. The love she has for her husband is not a real one but it is because of her desire for the throne, while Hermione's love for her husband is real and pure even though he suspects her. The former doesn't care for her womanhood to become a mother; all she wants is just the power but not mankind. But the latter is very much attached with her son and she is always cares for the welfare of her husband and maintaining her dignity.

S.T.Coleridge calls Shakespeare, "Our myriad-minded Shakespeare." The characters which this paper focuses are just a few of his myriad characters and each of the characters has its

own unique character and philosophy of the world. It totally expresses his mastery in making characters and his experience of reading the mindset of the people of his time. Shakespeare cannot be confined to his age alone but for all the ages in which still the playwrights have been following his style. These kinds of differentiations of characters make Shakespeare, an immortal one.

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