

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

FEMALE MASCULINITIES IN SHAKESPEARE

1. *Dr. R.S. BASKKARAN*

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
OMAR AL MUKHTAR UNIVERSITY,
AL-GUBBA, LIBYA. rsbaskkaran@gmail.com
OMAR AL MUKHTAR UNIVERSITY

2. *Dr. P.Tamilarasan*

Asst. Professor (Selection Grade)
Department of English and Foreign Languages
SRM Institute of Science and Technology
Kattankulathur -603202
Tamilnadu
E mail: tamilarp@srmist.edu.in

3. *Dr. poonam,*

Asst. Professor
Department of English and Foreign Languages
SRM Institute of Science and Technology
Kattankulathur -603202
Tamilnadu
Email: Poonamu@srmist.edu.in

Dr. R.S. BASKKARAN, Dr. P.Tamilarasan, Dr. poonam,-- FEMALE MASCULINITIES IN SHAKESPEARE-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(6). ISSN 1567-214x

Key words: *Female masculinities, behavioural, feminine, masculine,gender, feminist,patriarchal*

Abstract

Shakespeare's characters are universal. Female masculinities are expressions of male-gender traits in females, such attributes include being autocratic, powerful, courageous, assertive, highly manipulative, sometimes persuasive, and very often dominant and coercive in decision-making. The concepts of female masculinities have been presented with different meanings and definitions by numerous scholars. Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's play 'Macbeth' displays instances of masculine traits to intimidate her husband Macbeth in order to kill King Duncan. The paper is an attempt to explore Lady Macbeth's behaviour in terms of gender conformity in society regards to masculine and feminine qualities. As Shakespeare's characters are not one-dimensional, and his opinions not entirely feminist. He tries to depict women as equally powerful as men. His perception of women has been fascinating subjects of literature or literary creativity from time immemorial. Shakespeare never fathoms much difference in both genders even though his society was patriarchal.

Introduction

Shakespeare says, "All the world's a stage,/ And all the men and women merely players"(2.7.139-140). Shakespeare's characters are universal. They are flesh and blood. He is the true painter of life. Herold Bloom writes, "The dominant Shakespearean characters- Falstaff, Hamlet, Rosalind, Iago, Lear, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and Cleopatra among them- are extraordinary instances not only of how meaning gets started, rather than repeated, but also of how new modes of consciousness coming in to being"(Bloom, 1998, p.xx). Shakespeare has created hundreds of characters for his 37 plays. Most of the plays of Shakespeare have penetrating force on the soul and nature of a man in its totality. Some of the female characters have female masculinities among them Lady Macbeth is predominant character who controls, dominates and persuades her husband Macbeth to kill king Duncan.

Female Masculinities in Lady Macbeth

Female masculinities are expressions of male- gender traits in females, such attributes include being autocratic, powerful, courageous, assertive, highly manipulative, sometimes persuasive, and very often dominant and coercive in decision- making. The concepts of female masculinities have been presented with different meanings and definitions by numerous scholars.

In other words, the paper is primarily focused with behavioural dispositions of female character, especially Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's play 'Macbeth' exhibits instances of masculine traits to intimidate her husband Macbeth in order to kill king Duncan. This paper is mainly taken up Lady Macbeth for discussion and an attempt to examine her behaviour in terms of gender conformity in the society, respect to masculine and feminine qualities. The feminine world of Shakespearean drama is full of uniqueness, charm, deep influence and furtive existence. Lady Macbeth reflects an interesting blend of

masculine and feminine qualities. She is fully capable of taking up a male role and behaviour. Shakespeare's ideas about masculinity are the social view of what was traditionally seen as masculine at the time. Lady Macbeth's ideas of masculinity are, when she wants to become more powerful. She does not ask the supernatural spirits to give her greater power, it is quite odd, and instead what she has asked for is to have her femininity taken away and even her female gender is to be taken away, to be replaced by male. Germaine Greer comments, "Lady Macbeth sneers her husband's tenderness of conscience" (Greer, 2002, p.69)

Lady Macbeth says in her famous soliloquy:

Come you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here

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

Of direst cruelty!. (1.5.37-43)

She is not sure there is enough manhood to go around between herself and her husband. She calls upon scheming spirits to "unsex me here". This is her vivid way of asking to be stripped of feminine weakness and invested with masculine resolve. She immediately assumes that power will be used negatively. It will be used in a cruel way and not just cruelty, but direst cruelty the very worst kind. This is how she characterises men and that is not just because her husband is cruel. Before Macbeth comes to visit her with the news about the witches prophesy. She says, "Yet I do fear thy nature/ It is too full of the milk of human kindness" (I.7.15-16). She does not really talk about her husband Macbeth here. She talks about the ideal of manhood, man as a warrior but also man exercises his power and uses it cruelly. She also says, "make thick my blood./ Stop up the access and passage to remorse"(1.5.33-34). The other characteristic of being a male as far as she is concerned that men do not feel guilt. She emphasises, "come to my woman's breasts. / And take my milk for gall" (1.5.36-37). In this image men are the opposite of women.

Women have breast milk because they nurture, but men instead have poison, gall is a kind of poison here. According to Chambers 21st Dictionary "gall" means "poison". She asks the spirits to take out the milk because she and Macbeth have just lost a child and she is still lactating, but she wants it turned into poison.

This is an incredible attack on masculinity, the accepted view of what a successful man should be powerful, cruel and lacking in conscience, showing no remorse. Macbeth also comments on masculinity, when Lady Macbeth wants Macbeth to kill King Duncan. He is in confusion and says "I dare do all that may become a man / Who dares do more is none." (1.7.45-46) Macbeth's defense makes it clear that he realises the assault is levelled at his manliness.

Although men can be cruel and powerful they cannot go against the laws of God, laws of society, particularly in any attack on their king. Lady Macbeth does not accept that she asks, “wouldst thou have that which thou esteem’st the ornament of life,/ And live a coward in thine own esteem”(1.7.43-45). In other words will you have the thing? that you prize most the crown kingship, the ornament of life. Would you have that or live a coward in your own esteem?. It is an extraordinary idea of manhood is constantly up for review. Lady Macbeth knows that belittling him will incur the wrath of his pride and spur him to act and kill King Duncan.

Lady Macbeth further jabs at Macbeth's masculinity. Macbeth just enters into battle, he has defeated the Norwegian; army in the description that we have had at the beginning of the play but even this is not enough to convince Lady Macbeth that he is not coward. He also needs to convince himself that he is not a coward and if we go back to that word “dare” of his and that is what is uppermost in his mind, a real man shows absolutely no fear in this society at least in terms of the way; Macbeth and Lady Macbeth view it. Richard G.Moultan (1990) comments on:

Lady Macbeth distinctly speaks of
the enterprise of treacherous ambition. He quotes:
What beast was’t, then
Which made you break this enterprise to me.(1.7.46)
The anti-thesis the key to the characters of Macbeth
and Lady Macbeth (Moultan,1990,p.157).

She does not pretend to cover up the fact that she has been the active dictator, controller and ruling her husband all along. She is not only worries that Macbeth may be “too full of the milk of human kindness”(1.5.15) to kill Duncan but also confesses to the fact that her husband is only being a weakling who could not hurt a fly and that his nature is too soft to murder or nurse any high ambition. A.C.Bradley (2010) is of the opinion:

She knows her husband’s weakness, how he scruples‘to catch the
nearest way’ to the object he desires; and she sets herself without
a of doubt or conflict to counteract this weakness. To her there
is no separation between will and deed; and, as the deed falls
in part to her, she is sure it will be done. (Bradley,2010,p.307).

To Lady Macbeth, her husband is known to many as a brave man full of ambitious and vigorous actions but unfortunately is a stark weakling. She says

to justify her persuasive typical female masculine traits. She does not hide the fact that Macbeth can only act on her impulse as evidenced in the instant letter, Macbeth has sent to his wife. Here, she represents Macbeth's doubts and fears or the "feminine" order within him. It is when he returns from his victory over this alliance that he meets with the three witches whose prophesy a great future for him. Immediately, the masculine nature of the weird sisters bewitches Macbeth to the extent that he is mesmerised into planning for the inevitable acts. Lady Macbeth too follows the pattern of such prophecies against the Thane of Cawdor. She casts her female masculine spell on her husband, who decides instantly to covet his master's post. She persuades Macbeth that the only way to become recognised and crowned as the prophesied king is to murder Duncan. She succeeds in persuading Macbeth to perpetuate the murderous action against the feminine nature of her husband. Also, it is notable that despite she has installed a strategy; she begins to doubt her husband's firmness and promptness to successfully execute the plan of killing King Duncan. Even when Macbeth begins to consider backing out of the act:

We will proceed no further in this business:

He hath honoured me of late, and I have bought

Golden opinions from all sorts of people,

Which would be worn now in their

newest gloss, soon. (1.7. 32-35)

She instantly persuades him into action, teasing and scolding that he is too decent and squeamish to murder Duncan for the crown. She further controls and encourages Macbeth saying, "Glamis thou art and Cawdor and shalt be what thou art promised" (1.7.45). Lady Macbeth thus exercises her female masculine order and control over her husband as she directs "Thus thou must do, Hie thee hither, that I may pour my spirits in thine ear and chastise with the valour of my tongue" (2.1.41-44). From this, it is glaring that the iron lady asserts her will on her husband, especially with harsh and authoritative words that pierce through his heart. Further still, in her assertive behaviour, Lady Macbeth coerces her husband into killing the king. She eventually dismisses any form of fear or failure in Macbeth thus:

Macbeth: If we should fail?

Lady Mac: We fail? But screw your courage to the sticking- place,

And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep, (1. 7.46-50)

From the above discussion, Lady Macbeth knows immediately that her husband's determination to perpetuate this criminal act has slackened. Even

when Macbeth expresses his desire to bow out of the wicked act, Lady Macbeth gives him a tongue-lashing and urges him on:

That made you break this enterprise to me?
 When you durst do it, then you were a man;
 I have given suck and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
 And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn

As you have done to this. (1. 7.48-60)

Lady Macbeth's courage at carrying out her plan is further amplified when she states how easy it would have been even for her to suffer and deprive her most loved son of maternal love and would have plucked her nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out, had she so sworn. Stopford A.Brooke(2003) speaks:

Lady Macbeth in the whirl of her impulse, saw no objections
 to the murder
 of Duncan. No sense of honour. No scruples of
 conscience, no womanly
 feelings, her intervened to stay her willMoreover, the
 momentary
 loss of her womanhood of all tenderness, the unsexing herself
 in
 the intensity of her impulse.(A.Brooke,2003,p.213)

Lady Macbeth accuses Macbeth of cowardice and lack of manliness when she discovers that he has already made up his mind against Duncan's murder. She boldly asserts that she would not mind killing her own son rather than breaking any vital promises made in time like this. Stopford A.Brooke is of the opinion, "She denies her motherhood's tenderness, though she knows she is false to herself. She mocks him with bitter sarcasm"(A.Brooke,207).Lady Macbeth

ultimately embodies the relationship between gender and power by repeatedly seeking to emasculate Macbeth as a strategy to convince him to murder Duncan. Thus, hesitantly and rather reluctantly, Macbeth succumbs to his wife's urgings and assertive will. He stabs the King in his bedchamber. She goes on to convince him. Thus, in a case where the wife usurps the position which the patriarchal society has stereotypically assigned to husbands, there is reversal of roles which points to the existence of female masculinity in the Renaissance which was essentially a patriarchal society. She has been able to successfully manipulate and brow-beat her husband by reversing a kind of gender role; a pointer to equality of gender. This research paper, therefore, scrutinised related masculine features in the character of Lady Macbeth who uses coercion to assert wills on her husband Macbeth to kill King Duncan.

Here we can compare and view an excellent example from Tamil Classic 'Silapathikaram' was written by Elango Adikal. According to Professor Dr.K.Chellappan 'Silapathikaram' is probably is one of the earliest feminist critical literary works because Kannaki is silent from the beginning. But only when she begins to speak, she ends the History and she makes the History. Moreover she uses the body language. She makes her body to speak by wrenching her breast and throwing towards Madurai and burnt the entire city. Elango Adikal makes Kannaki acquire power by acquiring language. Shakespeare describes Lady Macbeth as an evil incarnation. But Elango Adikal on the other hand elevates Kannaki as Goddess; she flies towards the sky, towards heaven. Goddess status is bestowed upon Kannaki.

The letter Macbeth has written to his wife and he calls her my dearest partner in greatness and he repeats the word greatness when he talks about the greatness that is promised thee. Let us focus on the word partner this is extraordinary in Jacobean times in Shakespeare's time women were subservient to men, the society was a patriarchy and therefore a wife was a husband's property but not so in this marriage here Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are equals. "Thee" and "thou" are informal and suggest a lower status that is what he calls Lady Macbeth, he emphasizes her lower status it is also used to convey his love and then he contrasts that with my dearest partner and greatness in other words he is encouraging her to imagine being Queen more quickly. The letter is written in prose the convention in Shakespeare's plays is that characters who are of low social status speak in prose the murderers for example and the porter but characters with high social status speak in Iambic Pentameter. Macbeth does not write his letter in Iambic Pentameter why because it emphasizes to Lady Macbeth that she is of low status. Klein enunciates, "As soon as King Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth begins to lose her power and place in society because there is no room for her in the exclusively in the male world"

Shakespeare tries to depict women as equally powerful as men, thereby questioning the existing traditional stereotype of women designated as weaker vessels and dislodging the established hierarchies of power or powerlessness of

men and women. He thus, renders the relationship between binary oppositions unstable as either of the sexes can exercise masculine traits when necessary. As seen through the above analysis women did not enjoy social equality with men during Shakespeare's time.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's perception of women has been fascinating subjects of literature or literary creativity from time immemorial. Shakespeare never fathoms much difference in both genders even though his society was patriarchal. Shakespeare did not write any of his play with the intention for them to be seen as feminist because that thought had not existed in his time. He creates realistic, as well as meaningful female characters, who act just like their male counterparts. The works of arts of Shakespeare are essentially genderless. Shakespeare's characters are not one-dimensional, and his opinions not entirely feminist.

References

1. Bloom, Harold. (1999). Shakespeare: The Invention of Human, New York: River Head
Books, Penguin Group(USA)Inc. p.xx
2. Bradley. A. C. (2010). Shakespearean Tragedy, New Delhi: Surjeet Publications pp.
330,307.
3. Brook, Stopford. A. (2003). On Ten Plays of Shakespeare, New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers.
pp. 207,213
4. Chambers 21st Century Dictionary. Edit. Robinson Mairi (2000). Allied Chamber Ltd: New Delhi
5. Chellappan, K. (2020) - Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America.
<https://youtube/qwNMrEybo5I> accessed on 10/7/2020
6. Greer, Germaine. (2002) Shakespeare: A Very Short Introduction, New York: Oxford University Press. p.69

7. Klein,Joan Larsen.(1980) Carol Ruth Swift Lenz,Greene, Et al “ Lady Macbeth:Infirmary of Purpose,” in The Woman’s Part:Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare,eds. Urbana:University of Illinois Press. p.248
8. Moulton G.Richard, (1990). Shakespeare As a Dramatic Artist, New Delhi:Surjeet Publications. P.157
9. Shakespeare,W. (1998). As You Like It. The complete works of William Shakespeare.
The Shakespeare Head Press, Oxford, Wordsworth edition. pp.139-140
10. Shakespeare, W. (1998).Macbeth. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare.
The Shakespeare Head Press, Oxford, Wordsworth edition Ltd.