

**A COMPARATIVE APPROACH ON THE THEME OF OVER-
AMBITION CONCERNING SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGIC HERO
MACBETH AND PHARAOH WITH REFERENCE TO THE HOLY
QURAN**

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Abstract

Ambition is good, but being over-ambitious can be quite tasking. It is an issue that has been greatly portrayed by Shakespeare in his writing the tragedy of Macbeth. The play depicts damaging physical and psychological effects of political ambition on those who seek power for its own sake. The same is also witnessed in the history and life of the pharaoh, as depicted in the Holy Quran as he enslaves the children of Israel against the will of Allah. The study will tackle the tragedy of Macbeth and how over-ambition lead to his failure and how the same was witnessed of the pharaoh. This paper highlights the deed that compares both Macbeth and Pharaoh. The two characters are over-ambitious about the kingship and power, which makes them commit murders to secure and retain power. It is very important to be ambitious as a leader as it helps in attaining many things, however, in the case of Macbeth and Pharaoh, their ambitions result in deaths which no religion or society accepts as it is sinful. The comparisons of the two characters are highlighted in how they are similar, as well as how they are different. Their deeds are based on the teachings of the Holy Quran to depict how sinful their actions are, and how they did not please Allah.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Macbeth, Murder, Killing, Tragedy, over-ambition, Pharaoh

1. Introduction

Ambition is mostly the driving force in one's life. It can have a tremendously dominant effect on not only yourself but various individuals in your surroundings as well. You can regulate if the results either have a lasting adverse or positive impact. When a goal requires determination and hard work to complete, personal morals mostly take a back seat to the ambition of attaining the objective; In Shakespeare's Macbeth, it is evident that, like many other great leaders such as Pharaohs, Macbeth demonstrates the indispensable leadership virtue of over-ambition. Macbeth's over-ambition does not only drive him to do great things. It pushes him to seize power by doing anything at his disposal, including killing.

2. Comparison

Being the thane of Cawdor was not sufficient, so Macbeth desired to become king, and he decided to act upon it. Helped and assisted by the witches' prophecies and lady Macbeth, his ambitions made him kill the king (Lee Jamieson, 2010). Ross communicates that Macbeth will take over and become the king. "Thriftless ambition that wilt ravin up\Thine own life's means! Then 'is most like/The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth" (Bloom, 2010, 37-39). Macbeth's ambition makes him commit treason and murder as he kills Duncan, the god's chosen king. Afterward, Macbeth murders Banquo, his best friend, because Banquo knew how he became king, and he fears that the truth might be exposed. After the return of the murders, Macbeth discusses, "There's blood upon thy face. / Tis Banquo's then. /Tis better thee without than he within" (Bloom, 2010, 14-16). He feels no anguish towards the death of his best colleague, which demonstrates how much his ambition has taken over his feelings. Furthermore, Macbeth is a man who believes that he is the best to lead and go against even the orders of the king. From the onset of the story, Macbeth is seen as a very loyal servant and who serves the king with all his zeal and night. However, the same changes after he received some prophecy from his watches that he had kept that he had the audacity and the power to become the king one day. It is an issue that becomes eating up slowly as he cannot contemplate and think about the best way to continue serving the king and others; he is a king in waiting himself. Macbeth's mistake is letting his ambition blind him to the immorality of murdering Duncan.

Ambition is required to be a motivating factor that pushes one towards success. However, Macbeth exhibits this quality of ambition in the wrong manner as he kills to seize power. He is the resilient, brave warrior who has conquered in battle and brought victory to Scotland (Lee Jamieson, 2010). Nonetheless, Macbeth's pursuit of attaining more power, his ambition finally results in his tragic death. Before the murder of Duncan, Macbeth questions and second-guesses his ambitions, propensities and actions. Regardless of his anxiety, he capitulates to these propensities and finds himself in an increasingly dangerous situation, with his back against the wall and growing even nearer to his almost inescapable end. Macbeth has ambition, as most individuals in power do. Ambition is an essential quality of individuals in such positions as Macbeth is. However, the ambition for Macbeth does not only drive him to do great stuff. It controls him. By his ambition, Macbeth kills Duncan to acquire the throne. By his ambition, he as well kills Banquo and Fleance.

Macbeth killed and murdered various people in the same context, and this paints him as a tragic hero who now wants to conquer and deal with all people who are against him and his ideas with total animosity. The height of the actions that portray him as a really bad person is the plot to kill the king as he had been advised by his wife and the entire repercussions of the same (Bradley, 2015). The greed to be the king is the major issue that makes Macbeth kill the king who had trusted him and had treated him just like his son. The death of the king, nevertheless, to make Macbeth the end fails, and he, in the long run, is killed, and his greed for power and to be the king is never achieved. The same is against Allah's will as stipulated in the Holy Quran "the Quran 5:32 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) Because of that, We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone killed a person, not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind" As a result of their ambitious nature, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were deeply affected by the murders they committed. Both of them suffered from enormous guilt because of their ambition, and Lady Macbeth finally committed suicide over it. The latter committed suicide since she could not overcome her feeling of guilt because of her evil manipulations and the outcome of those manipulations on her husband. "Lady Macbeth's guilt for Duncan's death leaks out when she is heard speaking of the murder in her Sleep". (Wells & Anjna Chouhan, 2015) Macbeth feels extreme guilt

after murdering King Duncan. This murder ruins his life leading him to the darkness of guilt. On the other hand, Pharaoh, at no point, is consumed by the guilt of his actions. Till his demise, he feels okay with all actions that he has ordered; he was the most tyrant character in that era. Pharaoh does not get consumed by guilt is shown clearly when Allah has sent the prophet Moses and his brother Aaron peace be upon them to guide and advise him to worship Allah, Allah says to both Moses and Aron "The Quran 20:43,44 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) Go both of you to pharaoh verily, he has transgressed (all bounds in disbelief and disobedience and behaved as an arrogant and as a tyrant)", "and speak to him mildly, perhaps he may accept admonition or fear,(Allah)" additionally, prophet Moses peace be upon him was showing him signs, proofs, evidence, lessons, revelations, etc. but he refused, and he was insisting on his committing sins " The Quran 20:56 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) And indeed We showed him [Fir'aun (Pharaoh)] all Our Ayat (Signs and Evidences), but he denied and refused".

Macbeth is not able to cover his wicked activities, and his nobles go against him. To hide what he has been doing, Macbeth's ambition makes him commit more murders, and he murders Macduff's son and his wife. Macduff, upon hearing this news, claims, "Let us rather/ Hold fast the mortal sword, and like good men/ Bestride our downfall's birthdom" (Bloom, 2010, 3-5). He is prepared to pick up his sword and revenge the death of his family. Macbeth's over-ambition drives him to this tragedy, his last battle he will ever fight. Macbeth is still valiant enough to go to war beside his all men being against him. His ambition makes him feel indomitable. Macbeth is courageous in the encounter; with nearly no one on his side, he battled until his demise.

In the land of Egypt, Pharaoh was the dominant figure of power. This portrayed by the holy Quran in his quest to create dominance over the children of Israel against the will of Allah. He was so extremely powerful that he regarded himself as a god, and no one was capable or inclined to disagree with this. Out of his ambition, he claimed, "The Quran 79:24 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) I am your lord, most high"

Pharaoh's ambition made him effortlessly exert his authority and influence over all the Egyptians. He employed the strategy of divide and rule. He established class distinctions, divided the Egyptians into groups and tribes, and set them against each other. In Egyptian society, the Jews, who were the children of Israel, were placed at

the lower level (Aisha Stacey (© 2010 IslamReligion.com), 2013) 1. They were turned into servants and slaves.

At that time, Egypt was known as the world's superpower. The ultimate power was in the hands of very few. Pharaoh and his right-hand ministers conducted matters as if the lives of the people were of little or no importance. The political condition was, in some ways, comparable to the political realm of the 21st century. According to Ibn Kathir, an Islamic scholar, the children of Israel vaguely talked about one of their nation's son planning to gain the power of Egypt from Pharaoh. The witches had prophesied on Macbeth that he was going to be the king, and this is one of the key issues that alerted and chanted how Macbeth was working, and even his loyalty to the king dropped significantly.

Witchcraft is also one of the key issues that are associated with the word and the life of Macbeth. Macbeth believes in the power of the witches who have known his weakness and who have used the same to ensure that Macbeth is fully convinced about their fate (Hays, 2003). The same situation is what creates a rather negative view on Macbeth, and it turns him from the normal and person who had full trust in the king and who was working diligently towards meeting the demands of the overrun that were required of him. It is the same concepts that are largely responsible for brainwashing him and led to the development of the rather new and irregular behavior on the leader.

The witches had prophesied on Macbeth that he was going to be the king, and this is one of the key issues that alerted and chanted how Macbeth was working, and even his loyalty to the king dropped significantly. Macbeth believes that his bid and his will to be a leader had been sealed long before he was born, and it is an issue that put him in a bad light with the people that he is leading (Schoenbaum,2014). It is imperative to note that after the witches had declared to him that he was going to be the king, he now ventures on plans and methods that could see him witness and achieve this move. It is here that the true identities of Macbeth are seen. He now plots to kill all the people who are against him and who are against his ideas that he could be the king hence showing the effects of being over-ambitious.

The Pharaoh also had magicians whom he relied on to perform miracles for him. However, they later converted, making him threaten them. They did not bow to his threats, and at last, he was left high and dry. " The Quran 20:73 (Translated by Al-

Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) Verily! We have believed in our Lord, that He may forgive us our faults, and the magic to which you did compel us. And Allâh is better as regards reward in comparison to your [Fir'aun's (Pharaoh)] reward and more lasting (as regards punishment in comparison to your punishment)."

As being ambitious to retain power, Pharaoh arrogantly reacts and gives the order that all male children born to the Children of Israel be killed." The Quran 2:49 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) And (remember) when We delivered you from Fir'aun's (Pharaoh) people, who were afflicting you with a horrible torment, killing your sons and sparing your women, and therein was a mighty trial from your Lord." His ministers, however, perceive that this would result in the destruction of the Children of Israel as well as an economic ruin for Egypt. This results in the change of order; the male children are murdered in one year and spared the following year. Pharaoh becomes so obsessive he sends detectives to find out pregnant women. If any woman gives birth to a male child, he is murdered immediately.

Pharaoh punished then killed his wife because she believed in Allah. She was amongst the Israelites and was a faithful woman who kept her faith a secret to avoid the Pharaoh. When Pharaoh learned about her faith, he got extremely upset and forbade her; however, she did not stop; therefore, he began to torture her. Pharaoh took his wife Asiya, and due to his ambitious nature, he tried to stop her from believing in Allah by torturing her in various ways. While being tortured, she said, "The Quran 66:11 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) My Lord! Build for me a home with You in Paradise, and save me from Fir'aun (Pharaoh) and his work, and save me from the people who are Zâlimûn (polytheists, wrong-doers, and disbelievers in Allâh)". Allah showed her home in paradise, and she started laughing while being tortured. Pharaoh was very ambitious, and he was determined to make her denounce her faith; however, she did not, and that way, she ended up dying. In trying to make magicians denounce their faith after being converted, Pharaoh initially became angry before he gave his permission. Secondly, he accused the being in the same league with Moses, and thirdly he threatened them to cut off their hands and feet on opposite sides and to murder them by crucifixion " The Quran 7:124,125 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) Surely, I will cut off your hands and your feet from opposite sides, then I will crucify you all. They said: Verily, we are returning to our Lord". At this juncture, the newly-converted magicians

retorted that his threats are of no matter for them as they are now believers; Pharaoh can murder then, but they will go back to the Lord as believers (Andrew C. Smith, 2018). Nonetheless, the specific wording and rhetorical point made are, in every case, distinct. The wording of the repentant magicians comprises of condemnation for Pharaoh taking revenge on them for believing and a prayer for patience and constancy as they are to die. The main aim of the threats was for them to denounce the faith that they had acquired. Pharaoh was ambitious that by threatening them, they would heed him and retreat; however, this did not happen.

Pharaoh's over-ambitions make him order the murder of all male children being born to make sure he retains power and killing his wife, trying to make her denounce her faith. This is similar to what Macbeth did by killing the King, to seizure power. Both the character feels that they are the ones that should be reigning, and they do anything to obtain and retain power. They are not afraid of killing innocent individuals to make sure their power is not taken away.

Every dictator or tyrant is surrounded by people, servants, advisors who support him, and they push him to be brutal, and they are one of the causes that they led him to be a tyrant. Lady Macbeth suffers none of her husband's uncertainty. She quenches for the kingship for him and wants him to kill Duncan to seize it. The moment Macbeth arrives at Inverness, she supersedes all of her husband's objections and encourages him to kill the king that very night. "you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty" (Shakespeare & Albert Richard Braunmuller, 1997, 1.5.15-20). Macbeth and his wife plan to get Duncan's two chamberlains drunk so they will be blamed for Duncan's death. Additionally, Macbeth hires a group of murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. On the other side of the pharaoh, Haman pushed Pharaoh to behave against the will of Allah and his prophet Moses peace be upon him. He was very close to the Pharaoh who, boastful and mocking, said: "The Quran 40:36,37 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) And Fir'aun (Pharaoh) said: "O Hâmân! Build me a tower that I may arrive at the ways... The ways of the heavens, and I may look upon the Ilâh (God) of Mûsa (Moses) But verily, I think him to be a liar.". Unquestionably, Haman was a master of constructions. The Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform miracles to match the signs of Moses before they were converted to

Islam. They were one of the factors that pushed the pharaoh to be against the prophet Moses.

Fear motivates people to numerous things, no matter if they are right or wrong. In the play Macbeth, it was fear that was the main motivating factor that influenced the outcome of the play. When Duncan's death was discovered the following morning, Duncan's son Malcolm and Donalbain fled to England and Ireland respectively due to fear that whoever killed their father might desire to kill them too. Macbeth also killed Banquo beside him, bearing best friend due to the fear that Banquo would tell the truth concerning the murder of Duncan. On the other hand, the Israelites had been in Egypt for many years, and they had become numerous, and Pharaoh feared their presence. He feared that one day, the Israelites would turn against the Egyptians. Slowly and quietly, he forced them to become his slaves. However, Pharaoh still feared that his Israelites slaves would rise against him. Therefore, he ordered a terrible punishment, that all the male babies of the Israelites be killed (Aisha Stacey (© 2010 IslamReligion.com), 2013). Fear was so clear when the mother of the prophet Moses worried about her newborn Moses from Pharaoh because Pharaoh had ordered his servants to kill every male child of Israelites at the year when male children should be killed so, she put him in a basket in the river and Allah will save him " The Quran 28:7 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) And We inspired the mother of Mûsa (Moses), (telling): "Suckle him [Mûsa (Moses)], but when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve. Verily! We shall bring him back to you, and shall make him one of (Our) Messengers.". Another depiction of fear is when the witches of the pharaoh were waiting for Moses to show their ability. They were talking with each other with dissatisfaction as they disputed over their affair among themselves and concealed their private conversation. Therefore, they were obliged to be involved in the show against Moses, but they were afraid of Pharaoh. " The Quran 20:62 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) Then they debated one with another what they must do, and they kept their talk secret".

Macbeth and the pharaoh are also deeply engulfed in power and they have rendered their lives quite useless. The two leaders depict the true life of people who are gluttonous, greedy, and over excitement in leadership. Macbeth is a greedy leader and he wants to have everything for himself. The greed that is depicted of the pharaoh, in

this case, shows a leader who is not concerned with the welfare of the local people. Greed who also makes Macbeth consider killing people and this seen when he even kills the innocent in the society like Banque and Duncan.

Besides the similarities that both Macbeth and Pharaoh share as a result of their over-ambition, there is one major difference that exists between the two characters. As opposed to Pharaoh, Macbeth did not have an advisor who could have guided him on doing the right thing. He had no friends as he already had killed Banquo, the only best friend. The only person who was in his inner circle was his wife, who encouraged him and helped him to plan for the murders. Lady Macbeth devises the plot for her husband to kill King Duncan and is initially less fazed by the action than her husband (Bloom, 2010). Nonetheless, she finally unravels, too, and commits suicide. In the case of Pharaoh, he is surrounded by numerous advisors; however, he ignores all their advice. Unlike Macbeth, who is advised to do wicked things, Pharaoh is advised to do the right things by Prophet Moses, who is sent to him by Allah and his brother Aaron." Quran 20:43,44 (Translated by Al-Hilali, M. T. U. D., & Khan, M. M.) Go both of you to pharaoh verily, he has transgressed (all bounds in disbelief and disobedience and behaved as an arrogant and as a tyrant)", "and speak to him mildly, perhaps he may accept admonition or fear, (Allah)". Pharaoh is adamant and does not want to be guided; he appreciates the likes of Haman, who helps him to continue sinning. To him, he feels powerful; however, all through, he goes against the will of Allah. Therefore, Macbeth does have a chance to decide whether to heed good advice as there is no good advice from his wife. On the other hand, Pharaoh decides to be ignorant of the advice from Moses and Haroon, who are sent to him by Allah.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, through all these events, it is evident that Macbeth and Pharaoh were headed on a path for tragedy, which was initiated and strongly fueled by their ambitions. It provided them the thane of Cawdor as well as a hunger for success. Their ambition impelled them to kill and torture to attain and remain in power. However, Both Macbeth and Pharaoh did every to their capacity to attain and retain power and kingship. However, they both used orthodox means for the sake of power and kingship. They ended up doing against the will of Allah. They exercised their power as if they will never die and face the judgment of Allah, whom they ignored all their whole life. However, Allah's justice let them face their downfall. The latter is the

destiny for every dictator and tyrant among the different ages and eras. There is no living being whose power is beyond that of Allah, and whoever goes against his will does not go unpunished.

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