

## STUDY MANUAL FOR SEM 2 ENGLISH HONOURS

### Soliloquies of **Lady Macbeth**[Act1,Sc.5]

---

- Lady Macbeth's first appearance in the play as a lady reading a letter from her husband establishes her uniqueness as a woman who is literate and therefore empowered and who is a close confidante of her powerful husband .
- Unlike Macbeth, she has no doubts regarding the propriety of their intentions – she is determined to incite Macbeth by the “valour of her tongue”, because she suspects that he is wavering due to the “milk of human kindness” in his disposition.
- She has a Machiavellian unscrupulousness about her and condemns Macbeth for lacking the “illness” that should accompany ambition.
- In her 2<sup>nd</sup> soliloquy, Lady Macbeth reveals her inclination towards the evil as she invokes the evil spirits , begging them to “unsex” her so that she is not weakened by “compunctious visitings of nature” .
- Lady Macbeth thus violates the normative feminine ideal and structures her monologue to build a self-image of a ruthless monster, so much so that she has been acclaimed as the “Fourth witch” of the drama.
- Both the soliloquies however contain subtle undercurrents which subvert this image of DEMONIC AGGRESSION.
- The “milk” image which appears in both the soliloquies is a part of the broad food imagery which is recurrently used throughout the play. By comparing milk to human kindness in terms of the nourishment value inherent in both [milk is the precious nourishment bequeathed by Nature to the body while kindness is the food for the soul], Lady Macbeth unconsciously reveals the strong MATERNAL INSTINCT behind her aggressive façade. It is this instinct which makes her cherish the sacredness of milk as the purest of all food bequeathed to man by Nature.
- Her repeated invocation to the dark powers indicates her inner fragility which she is desperately trying to suppress.
- Her plea to be unsexed paradoxically suggests intense awareness of her feminine frailty and the desperate urge she feels to replace it with MASCULINE AGGRESSION, befitting the task of murder.
- The urge to “make thick” her blood also indicates her frantic attempt to annul the natural INSTINCTS of COMPASSION and TENDERNESS that are deeply embedded in her.
- Lady Macbeth refers to the “golden round” which is her chief motivation, but she wants to secure it for her husband and not for herself. Thus whereas Macbeth is propelled by his personal ambitions, Lady Macbeth is influenced by her all- consuming love for her husband.
- Unlike Macbeth's soliloquies which expose his hidden inner mind, Lady Macbeth's monologues register the APPEARANCE of MONSTROUS RUTHLESSNESS which she is deliberately trying to cultivate. The wife in her tries to ignore the MATERNAL and FEMININE instincts which are her REALITY. This unnatural REPRESSION of natural instincts ultimately results in her PSYCHOLOGICAL BREAKDOWN.

- Lady Macbeth's soliloquies indicate that her imaginative power is SHALLOW and LIMITED in comparison with her husband's superlatively sensitive imagination. She wants the darkness to hide her knife which stabs the victim- but she fails to realize that the inanimate knife cannot operate without the hands of a human being. A civilized human is bound by SACRED LAWS of Nature, Morality and Society and their violation will leave irrevocable marks on the soul.

Prepared by

SANGITA RAY

**DEPT. of ENGLISH,GHC**