

Q: Describe the circumstances under which King Duncan was done to death. Who do you think is responsible for the murder of King Duncan?

Ans. Macbeth and Banquo met three witches on their victorious journey back home from the battlefield. The witches hailed Macbeth as 'Thane of Glamis', 'Thane of Cawdor' and the next 'King of Scotland'. Macbeth was already the Thane of Glamis. Just after a while, he was informed by Ross that he had been blessed with the title of Cawdor by King Duncan. The prophecies of the witches had already flamed the fire of Macbeth's ambition. Now that the prediction that he would become Thane of Cawdor came true, he was doubly encouraged to become King of Scotland.

King Duncan highly praised Macbeth's valour, and declared that he would be happy to honour Macbeth by becoming his guest in his castle. Macbeth sent a message ahead to his wife, Lady Macbeth, telling her all about the witches' prophecies.

Macbeth was undoubtedly a man of guilty ambition. But, he had the touch of natural kindness which made him shrink from seeking the crown by foul means. He brooded ceaselessly upon the third prophecy of the witches that he would become the next King of Scotland. Yet, he could not make sure as to how he should reach his goal. Duncan was his guest, his kinsman and his King. By every consideration, he was bound to protect the King, and not kill him. Besides, he knew that Duncan was so meek and honest a man that his death would surely arouse a universal pity and hatred against his murderer.

Thus dogged by the pangs of his guilty conscience, Macbeth, at one point, decided not to go any further in his heinous business. However, the persuasion of his wife proved too much for him to resist. In fact, she had already schemed the murder on her own. She planned that she would drug the drink of the King's servants. Thus when the King would be fast asleep after the days hard journey, they would carry out the murder and pin the blame on the servants.

At length, Macbeth made his way towards the King's chamber. He opened the door and found the King sleeping soundly. The grooms of the chamber were lolling back on their stool in drunken stupor, and on the bed, there lay the daggers as Lady Macbeth had placed them. Lady Macbeth herself would have killed Duncan. But, the sight of his face with his white hair reminded her of her own father, and she stopped. Finally, Macbeth took hold of the daggers, and lest the sight of the King should unnerve him, the straightway stabbed the King to death.

Macbeth himself is responsible for the murder of King Duncan. Macbeth was a 'peerless kinsman' and 'too full of the milk of human kindness'. But, he also harboured 'black and deep desires' that led him to his tragic end. Shakespeare's mighty hero is an exceptional personality in his merits as well as in his defects. He fails where failures are very costly, and where even a common man may succeed. It is from such a 'fatal flaw' that his tragedy ensues. With Shakespeare, character is always destiny. The element of 'hamartia' is always prominent in the Shakespearean tragedies. The fatal flaw in Macbeth's character was his vaulting ambition. It is true that the witches made tempting prophecies about Macbeth's future. But, they would never have tempted an innocent man. Macbeth's temptation lay within, and the witches only served to bring that to the surface. Lady Macbeth's persuasion, again, only accelerated the evil force in Macbeth. But, Macbeth himself was responsible for the murder of Duncan, as also for his own tragedy.