

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**INDIGENIZING MACBETH: QALANDAR MOMAND'S PUKHTO
TRANSLATION AS POSTCOLONIAL ADAPTATION**



Sana Zahoor

M.Phil Scholar of Abdul Wali Khan University Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

Dr. Mohammad Muazzam Sharif

Assistant Professor at Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

sanaveezahoor110@gmail.com sharifmuazzam@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper offers a close comparative reading of William Shakespeare's Macbeth and Qalandar Momand's Pukhto translation of the play, completed in the 1960s and still largely unexamined in Shakespeare scholarship. Rather than treating Momand's text as a linguistic transposition of Shakespeare's original, the paper argues that it is best understood as an act of indigenization in Linda Hutcheon's sense: a creative transformation that relocates Macbeth's central concerns, ambition, guilt, fate, gender, and betrayal, within the ethical and cosmological framework of Pukhtonwali, the Pashtun code of honour. Using Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism as a combined analytical framework, the paper traces how Momand recasts Shakespeare's witches as ambiguous mystical figures, reframes guilt as spiritual impurity (napaki) rather than private psychological torment, and rewrites Duncan's murder as a violation of melmastia, the sacred obligation of hospitality, rather than simply a crime against the state. The analysis suggests that Momand's Macbeth constitutes a distinct and understudied instance of Shakespearean indigenization in a South Asian minority language, and that it deserves a place in broader conversations about the postcolonial afterlives of Shakespeare's tragedies.

Keywords: Macbeth, Qalandar Momand, Pukhto translation, indigenization, Pukhtonwali, postcolonial adaptation

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the many translations and adaptations of Shakespeare produced across the postcolonial world, Qalandar Momand's rendering of Macbeth into Pukhto occupies an unusual position: it is frequently mentioned in passing as evidence of Shakespeare's reach into Pakistan's regional literatures, yet it has received almost no sustained critical analysis in its own right (Shinwari, 2024). Momand, one of the most significant figures in twentieth-century Pukhto letters, did not simply render Shakespeare's dialogue into Pukhto; he relocated the play's moral and cosmological assumptions into the ethical world of Pukhtonwali, the unwritten code of honour, hospitality, and revenge that governs much of Pashtun social life. This paper argues that Momand's Macbeth is best read not as a translation in the narrow sense but as an indigenization: a deliberate reworking of Shakespeare's tragedy so that its central preoccupations, ambition, guilt, fate, gender, and betrayal, are re-grounded in Pukhto ethical and religious categories rather than in the Jacobean Christian and courtly framework of the original.

The paper proceeds in three parts. It first situates Momand's translation within the broader critical literature on his contribution to Pukhto letters and within existing theoretical accounts of adaptation, intertextuality, and dialogism. It then applies that framework to a close comparative reading of several key moments in the play, drawing on Momand's Pukhto text and its English back-translation. It concludes by considering what Momand's Macbeth suggests about the broader relationship between Shakespearean tragedy and Pukhto literary and oral traditions.

2. Momand and the Project of Indigenization

Khan (2021) argues that Momand's Macbeth should not be read as an exact rendering of Shakespeare's dialogue but as an interpretive engagement shaped by what Momand took to be the values and sensibilities of a Pukhto-speaking audience. On this account, Momand retained

the poetic and oratorical qualities of Shakespeare's verse while substituting Pukhto idiom, proverb, and imagery for Shakespearean figures of speech, producing a text whose rhythm and cadence draw as much on Pukhto oral storytelling as on Shakespeare's blank verse. Ahmad (2022) makes a related point in his account of how Momand reworks the psychological motivations of Shakespeare's characters: where Shakespeare's Macbeth is driven primarily by personal ambition restrained, and then unleashed, by his wife, Momand's Macbeth is represented as caught between personal ambition and an inherited obligation to defend the honour (ghairat) of his family and clan, a reworking of motive that is consistent with the wider argument of this paper that Momand's translation relocates the psychological register of the play within a collective ethical framework.

Momand's translation also had a documented afterlife on the Pukhto stage. Shinwari (2024) describes performances of the Pukhto Macbeth, including a staging associated with Edwardes College, Peshawar, that drew audiences who had previously had little engagement with Shakespeare and who reported finding the play's treatment of power, betrayal, and fate directly relevant to contemporary Pakistani politics. Shinwari further situates Momand's work within a broader effort to sustain Pukhto as a literary language capable of standing alongside other national and international literatures, rather than being confined to oral and colloquial use.

3. Theoretical Framework

Three complementary theoretical resources inform the analysis that follows. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) treats adaptation not as a derivative or lesser form of the source text but as a distinct creative act, shaped by the adapter's own cultural and ideological commitments and by the expectations of a new audience. Read through Hutcheon, Momand's changes to Macbeth, his substitution of Pukhtonwali for the honour codes of Jacobean Scotland, his recasting of the witches as ambiguous mystical figures, are not deviations from a fixed original meaning but part of the ordinary work of adaptation, which necessarily reconstitutes a text's meaning for a new cultural setting.

Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality (1980) provides a second lens. On Kristeva's account, no text is self-contained; every text is in dialogue with prior texts, oral traditions, and cultural narratives. Momand's Macbeth can accordingly be read as a site where Shakespeare's tragedy is placed into conversation with Pukhto oral storytelling, proverb, and elegiac poetry (tappa, marsiya), producing a hybrid text that is neither purely Shakespearean nor purely indigenous but a product of their intersection.

Finally, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism (2010) describes literary works in which multiple voices, registers, and worldviews coexist without being resolved into a single authoritative perspective. Momand's translation, which layers Islamic vocabulary, Pukhtonwali's ethical categories, and Shakespeare's own dramatic structure within a single text, exemplifies this kind of polyphony, and Bakhtin's framework helps to explain why the translation resists being read simply as either a faithful rendering of Shakespeare or a wholly independent Pukhto composition.

4. Ambition and the Moral Order

Shakespeare's Macbeth famously diagnoses his own motive as "vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself and falls on th' other" (1.7), a formulation that locates the play's tragic flaw within the individual psyche. Momand's translation of the corresponding passage reframes ambition as tama, an excessive desire that threatens not the self alone but the social and moral balance of the wider community, and explicitly ties Macbeth's downfall to the honour of his family rather than to a private failure of self-restraint. Shakespeare's Macbeth similarly muses that "if chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir" (1.3), a line that Momand renders through the Islamic vocabulary of taqdeer (destiny) and khudaai marzi (divine

will), replacing Shakespeare's comparatively secular notion of chance with an explicitly theological account of fate. The effect, consistent across these passages, is to shift the moral weight of ambition from an individual failing to a violation of an order that is simultaneously social and sacred.

5. Guilt as Spiritual Desecration

A comparable transformation governs Momand's treatment of guilt. Where Shakespeare's Macbeth wonders whether "all great Neptune's ocean" (2.2) can wash the blood from his hands, invoking a classical, mythological register, Momand's translation retains the image of the sea but removes the classical allusion, aligning the passage instead with the Islamic concept of *taharat* (ritual purity): Macbeth's guilt becomes a matter of *napaki*, spiritual impurity, rather than a private, psychologically inflected torment. Lady Macbeth's line "Out, damned spot!" (5.1) undergoes a similar shift: Momand's version drops the specifically Christian charge of damnation and instead frames her breakdown as a loss of *namoos*, the honour attached to a woman and, through her, to her household. In both cases, guilt in Momand's Macbeth is less a matter of individual conscience than of a rupture between the self and a moral order that is at once religious and communal.

6. Fate, Prophecy, and the Supernatural

Shakespeare's witches are deliberately left ambiguous: neither wholly malevolent nor clearly benevolent, they tempt Macbeth without compelling him. Momand's translation reworks these figures through the vocabulary of Pukhto and broader Islamic mysticism, rendering their greeting ("All hail, Macbeth") with the Pukhto salutation associated with *pirs* and *faqirs*, holy or ascetic figures credited with prophetic insight. This shift recasts the witches not as sinister conjurers but as ambiguous vessels of a truth whose interpretation is left to Macbeth himself, consistent with Rehman's (2022) argument that Pukhto oral tradition treats prophecy and omen as tests of a person's judgment and self-control rather than as external forces that simply cause events to happen. On this reading, the tragedy in Momand's version lies not in the prophecy itself but in Macbeth's arrogant misreading of it, a shift of emphasis that brings the play closer to a Pukhto and Islamic understanding of fate as something to be met with humility (*sabr*) rather than presumption.

7. Masculinity and Gender within Pukhtonwali

Lady Macbeth's provocation, "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7), is rendered by Momand in terms that invoke not an abstract standard of masculine courage but the specific demands of Pukhtonwali, in which a man's worth is measured by his defence of *ghairat*, *namoos*, and the reputation of his kin. Her later invocation, "unsex me here... fill me... with direst cruelty" (1.5), is notably softened in Momand's version, where "cruelty" becomes *z̤ōratia*, a term closer to courage than to malevolence, a change that reflects the difficulty of reconciling Shakespeare's image of a woman actively willing herself toward cruelty with Pukhtun cultural expectations of femininity organized around nurturance and honour. As in the treatment of guilt discussed above, Momand's revisions do not simply soften Shakespeare's text; they relocate its account of gender and transgression within a specifically Pukhtun moral vocabulary, in which a woman's departure from expected conduct is read as a matter of communal and spiritual consequence rather than individual psychology alone.

8. Betrayal, Justice, and the Violation of Melmastia

Perhaps the most significant transformation in Momand's translation concerns the murder of Duncan. In Shakespeare's version, Macbeth's hesitation is framed primarily in terms of Duncan's "double trust" as kinsman, subject, and host (1.7). Momand's rendering makes the

violation of hospitality, melmastia, the central crime, translating Macbeth's self-reproach in terms that explicitly invoke both tribal and divine law: to kill a guest under one's own roof is presented as an offence against zamanat, the guest's inviolable right to protection, and against the collective ghairat of the host's community. This reframing is consistent with the broader argument of this paper: where Shakespeare situates Duncan's murder within a framework of divinely sanctioned kingship, Momand situates it within the specifically Pukhtun institution of hospitality, for which there is, in Pukhto oral tradition, no possibility of full moral rehabilitation. The consequence is that Macbeth's crime in Momand's version is rendered even less redeemable than in Shakespeare's original, since it violates not one but two sacred obligations at once.

9. The Tragic Hero and Pukhto Cultural Memory

Shakespeare's tragic hero is typically undone by a single flaw, or hamartia, that isolates him from his community even as it destroys him. Momand's Macbeth is undone in a manner that Pukhto oral tradition would recognize as a double death: the death of the body, and the deeper death of being excluded from communal memory and elegy (marsiya). Macbeth's final defiance, "Lay on, Macduff, and damned be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'" (5.8), is rendered by Momand in terms that preserve its surface bravado while framing it, in context, as empty of the honour that would normally accompany a warrior's death in Pukhto epic tradition. This closing transformation crystallizes the paper's central claim: Momand's Macbeth is not a heroic failure in the Western tragic sense but a man who, having violated ghairat, melmastia, and communal trust, forfeits not only his life but his place within the collective memory that Pukhto oral culture reserves for its honoured dead.

10. Conclusion

Read across these episodes, Qalandar Momand's Pukhto Macbeth emerges as considerably more than a linguistic transposition of Shakespeare's play. Ambition becomes a threat to communal as well as individual integrity; guilt becomes spiritual impurity rather than private torment; prophecy becomes a test of humility rather than an external determinant of fate; gender transgression becomes a matter of collective honour; and the murder of a king becomes, first and foremost, the violation of a sacred duty of hospitality. Taken together, these transformations support Hutcheon's contention that adaptation is a creative and culturally situated act rather than a diminished copy of an original, and they illustrate Kristeva's and Bakhtin's accounts of texts as sites where multiple traditions, here Shakespearean tragedy, Islamic ethics, and Pukhtonwali, are brought into sustained dialogue. Momand's translation deserves recognition alongside other well-studied instances of Shakespearean indigenization in the postcolonial world, and it points toward a wider and still largely unwritten history of Shakespeare's reception in Pakistan's regional languages.

References

- Ahmad, N. (2022). Cultural adaptation of Shakespeare: A study of Qalandar Momand's Macbeth in Pukhto literary traditions. *Journal of South Asian Literature*.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2010). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. University of Texas Press.
- Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A theory of adaptation*. Routledge.
- Khan, T. (2021). Qalandar Momand's contributions to Pashto literature and linguistic standardization. *Journal of Pukhto Literary Studies*.
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*. Columbia University Press.
- Momand, Q. (2021). *Macbeth* (P. Smith, Ed.). Pukhto Press.
- Rehman, F. u. (2022). *Supernatural elements in Pukhto folklore and Shakespearean tragedy: A*

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

comparative analysis of Macbeth and tribal myths. Journal of World Literature.
Shakespeare, W. (2006). Macbeth. Penguin Classics.
Shinwari, S. A. (2024). Edwardians bring to life Shakespeare's Macbeth in Pashto. DAWN.