

Study on Author's View as Common People Are the Vehicles of Social Change

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Abstract – According to author the common people are shown in open revolt against all types of exploitation and deprivation. This sort of uprising on their part naturally turns out to be revolt against kings and lords. In the process, their active participation becomes a positive change in the social and the political composition of the times. They even endeavor to capture power. In any case, their active efforts in this direction shake the very foundation of the feudal society and pose a serious threat to the political supremacy of elite and in consequence herald the dawn of new age.

Key Words; Participation, Social, Political, Composition, Foundation, Feudal Society.

INTRODUCTION

Joan of Arc, a shepherd-girl, emerges as a powerful symbol of the rising expectations of the common people in the historical play *Henry VI-Part I* (1591). She challenges the nobles, lords and princes and defeats them in face-to-face duels and battles. After the death of Henry V, the English nobles feel highly demoralised in the face of her fierce attacks on behalf of their arch enemy, France. Charles Dauphin, who later on becomes the king of France, feels really impressed by the physical strength of this shepherd girl. He falls in love with her at once. She ascribes her power to the blessings of Mary which is not absolutely convincing. The age was such that nobody could believe that a shepherd-girl could outsmart even lords and nobles in the battlefield. In fact, it is only a theatrical device on behalf of the great playwright to invest Joan La Pucelle with supernatural powers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Jack Cade is the leading character representing the common people in *Henry VI-Part II* (1593). He is the son of a brick layer. He rises in revolt against nobles, lords and gentlemen of England. He organises the workers and peasants and challenges very seriously the citadel of political power. Dick, the butcher, Smith, the weaver, a sawyer and a large number of common people support him whole-heartedly. Jack Cade promises them a new world in which the prices of consumer goods will be less

than what they are at present. Lord Humphrey reminds Cade of his low social status. But Cade forcefully encounters his argument by saying that even Adam, the first man to move on earth, was not a gentleman. He was just a gardener. In the beginning of human civilization, nobody was a gentleman. Everybody had to work with his hands. Unfortunately, Cade is slain by a lord, Iden, in a duel. His sudden death seals the fate of the common people. But his end seems to be quite hasty and against the law of poetic justice. Perhaps Shakespeare could not afford to displease the rulers of his time beyond a point.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The dialectics of class struggle in Shakespeare's plays was gathered by him from British and European history. Because of a rapid growth of trade and industry, the gap between the rich and poor grew wider and it led to social conflicts also. Gifted with a rich intuitive power and an intense passion for fathoming the ultimate truth in human affairs, Shakespeare always kept in his mind the bitter experiences of the English people like the *Black Death* (1347-1350), a bubonic plague in which one-third of the total population perished and 35 insurrections, food riots and unlawful assemblies which took place between 1581 and 1602 and some disturbing experiences of European countries as well. These historical events helped Shakespeare in creating the dialectical interaction between the commoners and the rulers of his time in his plays. He penetrates through experience to the meaning

of experience. He hints unmistakably at the arrivals of a new age in which the common people will have complete control over the affairs of the state. But in the contemporary society, despite his deep sympathy with the commoners, he is still reluctant to welcome them in royal robes.

It will not be proper to remember Shakespeare as a revolutionary poet and playwright. He is certainly the most sensible and one of the greatest playwrights of the world yet lacks intellectual boldness and a revolutionary attitude towards the crumbling feudal hierarchy of his age. His great weakness lies in his eagerness to defend the citadel of kings, nobles and lords in his plays when they are engaged in crucial battles for political supremacy with the commoners. Shakespeare appears as a playwright whose class loyalties are equally divided between the kings and commoners with a slight tilt towards the former.

CONCLUSION

Despite visible constraints of his age, Shakespeare is able to project the common people as vehicles of social change. The society is in transition, passing from feudalism to capitalism. The common people are the archetypes of this multifaceted change. Personal and societal changes are tied to each other and influence each other in spiral. On the personal level, the acquisition of knowledge leads to internal change. On the societal level, the emergence of social action changes social realities, leading to formal, informal, planned and unplanned acts of change. Every human being is both social and individual entity. He has basically two roles to play, one for himself and the other for the society. The common people in Shakespeare's plays fulfil these two types of roles very successfully. Individually, they assert themselves and seek recognition of their hopes and aspirations in the feudal society undergoing a slow transformation. Through their virtuous and chivalric actions, they amply prove that they are as brave and respectable as the kings and nobles. Their individual and collective activities hint at the emergence of new social forces of liberty, equality and fraternity.

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