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**STUDY ON KING LEAR WITH REFERENCE TO
COMMON PEOPLE'S WIT: SOURCE OF
COLLECTIVE WISDOM**

Study on King Lear With Reference To Common People's Wit: Source of Collective Wisdom

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Abstract – *This paper deals with Shakespeare's portrayal of the common people as witty and intelligent human beings. Quite often, they outwit even kings and lords and expose their follies and blunders in a subtle manner. Essentially, their wit is symbolic of the notion and concept of age-old wisdom that goes with the common people and combines tradition, pragmatism and culture. The common people are keen observers of life in Shakespeare's plays. They have not been to universities for good education but they have practical wisdom about the worldly affairs. Their down-to-earth understanding of life and its complexity is based upon their good and bad experiences. They seem to be completely immersed in the local culture in the play The Merry Wives of Windsor (1599).*

Key Words; Outwit, Tradition, Pragmatism, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

This folk culture has come down to them through their age-old beliefs and customs. They have pungent humour and sharp wit and they take on legendary Falstaff without much problem, nay, they outsmart and humble him. In every comedy except this one, Shakespeare has shown nobles and lords as chief protagonists. Falstaff is not sincere in his love towards Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. He just wants to befool them and grab their attention by hook or crook. His letters do not contain his genuine feelings. They reflect only his riotous nature. Mrs. Page feels a deep contempt towards Falstaff for he is an aged knight and a love-letter on his part is quite unexpected and uncalled for. She thinks about avenging herself on him. Mrs. Ford undergoes the same experience. She also received a letter with the same contents which plague the mind of Mrs. Page. Having been seriously offended by the undesirable overture of Mr. Falstaff, they decide to teach him a lesson. They perceive at once that he is a philanderer and they plan to bring him to his senses. He is caught into the trap of Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page. He had wished to befool them but his plan for a practical joke boomeranged on himself. He is taught a very bitter lesson as he is thrown into the cold waters of Thames. Falstaff is misled to believe these two ladies thrice and a lot of humiliation is heaped upon him. He is forced to wear the gown of a fat woman of Beeford, a maid-servant of Mr. Ford for saving his own skin. In the Windsor Park again, he is pinched from all sides by the ladies disguised as imaginary fairies. The Windsor wives, who are ordinary middle-class ladies, have forced the notorious knight to admit "I am made an ass." It is not a confession

simply at the individual level. Shakespeare has clearly shown Sir John Falstaff at the receiving end in his pitched battle of wit and humour with the Windsor wives.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In *Much Ado About Nothing* (1599), there is another commoner who attracts our attention. This is a Friar. Claudio is expected to marry Hero but he levels a false charge against her that she has a loose character. The Friar objects to it. He defends the unfortunate lady. Friars such persons in the medieval society who frequently came in close contact with the common people and would live in poverty for religious work.

In *Timon of Athens* (1608), Flavius represents the positive qualities of the common people. Timon is a very helpful and over-generous Lord. When he has wealth, many friends and acquaintances take advantage of his liberal help and become prosperous. By a sheer stroke of ill-fate, Timon himself becomes weak and resourceless. In the changed circumstances, all his friends betray him by refusing to help him. However his steward, Flavius, stands by him through all thick and thin along with other faithful servants. He is a very sensible servant and friend. His only interest is to bring back the lost wealth and fortune of his master. In fact, Flavius's loyalty to Timon is loyalty to England and the Christian beliefs both. The moral and ethical beliefs imbibed in the masses by different monks and saints stand protected in the saner acts of Flavians.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Fool in *King Lear* represents the age-old beliefs of the common people. King Lear has given away his entire kingdom in dowry to two of his daughters, Goneril and Regan. These daughters turn out to be extremely selfish and ungrateful. The comments of the Fool reflect upon the blunder of Lear and increasing ingratitude of the children towards their parents. He reminds Lear that even birds and animals have a shelter of their own. They are careful about their basic needs. It is nothing but foolishness to forget one's genuine needs. Lear is suffering because he did not use his commonsense properly. the prophecy on behalf of Merlin from the mouth of the Fool alludes to alarming developments in the English society. The old society with medieval ethos was giving way to the emergence of a new capitalist one in which men and women of ill-reputation will be building up churches. In other words, the Fool wants Lear to realize that the old society which is based upon true loyalty, trust and positive life values is dying away. So he should not take it to his heart if his daughters have betrayed him.

CONCLUSION

When bad time comes, people's set behaviour also undergoes a sea-change whatever the individual characters like Fool and the Windsor wives speak in Shakespeare's plays, it is only a reflection of their collective understanding and wisdom about different aspects of human life. This remarkable trait is an offshoot of their traditional social life shaped by concrete experiences of many generations.

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