



A Thematic Study of John Galsworthy's Play

Sapna Sahu

Guest Faculty

Govt. College, Jawahar Nagar Sehore (M.P)

Dr Richa Pathak

Assistant Professor

Sam Global University, Raisen Road Bhopal (M.P)

Abstract :John Galsworthy was an English novelist, playwright and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932. Galsworthy was also a successful dramatist, his plays, written in a naturalistic style, usually examining some controversial ethical or social problem. . Galsworthy believed that drama should be written with a definite purpose in mind. He said, "A Drama must be shaped so as to have a spire of meaning. In grouping of life and character, has its inherent moral; and the business of the dramatist is so to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of the day. Galsworthy loved to deal with situations, a factor which is one of the first essentials of a good drama. His central situation is the moral or social problem at the bottom of the play. He practically never relied on dialogue for introducing his theories. Galsworthy's plays can in most cases be understood as social criticism dealing with the ethos of British society, class system, working class problems and other social concerns. Mr. Galsworthy wrote a drama of social distinctions. His plays sometimes take on almost the symmetry of an argument, but they remain remarkably unheated. The author had a passionate love of justice, but he was content to lead the social thought by presenting pictures of life without exaggeration. He leaves his audience to solve the problems he has presented. He looks at both sides of the question, with impartiality, and then pleads for a better understanding. Yet he never resorts to melodrama. He discards coincidence and mechanical contrivance and reduces his dialogue to simple austerity. He employs the realistic method, but does not lose, in the process, his artistry nor his spiritual discernment. He was "Realism, transcended with spiritual understanding.

Key words : Naturalistic, ethical, social problem, impartiality, coincidence and spiritual discernment.

Introduction : Galsworthy dramas have five distinguishing characteristics. First among these is his evident sincerity. He wanted to show life steadily and as a whole, avoiding all artifice, sentimentality, and straining after effect. He was faithful and conscientious in representing reality. Whether what he wrote pleased his audience or not. This was a full reaction against Victorianism. A second marked characteristic in his plays is sympathy He had the capacity to identify himself with the experiences of others, He is a typical representative of modern humanitarianism. His emotional nature lead him to charity, sympathy and toleration. Third is his great impartiality. He always showed both sides of the question. Hamilton believes that his "Olympian neutrality" hurt his plays, because the audience wants to be partisan. Another characteristic is his prevailing irony. He constantly reminded us that, even after the spirit of fairness and impartiality has been exercised to the utmost,

there is a disconcerting twist in things which cannot be wholly accounted for or eliminated. Lastly in all of his plays is a feeling of pity and indignation. The spirit of compassion combined with hot anger may be termed the most important of Galsworthy's characteristics, although it is the least obtrusive.

John Galsworthy began his career as a playwright with *The Silver Box* (1906) where the theft of a prostitute's purse by a "young man of good family" is juxtaposed against the theft of a silver cigarette case by "a poor devil", with very different repercussions. Galsworthy said that his aim was "to create such an illusion of actual life passing on the stage as to compel the spectator to pass through an experience of his own, to think and talk and move with the people he sees thinking and talking and moving in front of him. "*The Silver Box*" is Galsworthy's most discussed and controversial problem play which unveils disparity, discrimination, snobbery and hypocrisy in the society. It also comment on the various social and moral issues like poverty, inequality and unemployment just like other social plays as 'Justice'. *The Silver Box* also contains a social satire on unjust social partiality. The play is an appeal for compassion and sympathy for the poor who invariably suffer. It indicts the society for its contrasting treatment of two men, Jack and Jones, the one belonging to the affluent section and the other to the vertically opposite. Law which is equal for all is ruthless and unjust towards the weak and helpless.

"Give us a job sir," - "Take a man on" - "Got a wife and three children". Sick of it I am!"

In "*The Silver Box*", there is the mechanical, almost unconscious favouring of the rich at the expense of the poor in the law courts. In this, Jack Bartmwick and Jim Jones are both found guilty of theft on the same evening, when they got intoxicated together. Jack took a girl's purse, and Jim a silver Cigarette box from the Barthwick home. Their cases were the same in many respects, but with one important difference; Jack's father is a wealthy Liberal Member of Parliament while Jones is a loafer out of work. Mrs. Jones, the char woman at the Barthwick home, is the only person known to have been in the room when the box was found to be missing. She is suspected, and later the police inspector finds the box in her house. Jones admits the theft, and attacks the officer for trying to arrest his wife. A police court case follows. The elder Barthwick wants to keep Jack's connection in the case quiet, so he hires a lawyer. In the end, the theft of Jack is passed over, and Jones is condemned to a month's hard labour. On reviewing the two thefts, it can be seen that they were very similar. Both were drunk when the thefts took place; both lost interest in the articles after -they had been stolen; both were without; any moral compunctions for what they did. The difference lies in the fact that Jones gives a truthful account of it all, while Jack resorts to forgetfulness and lying. Galsworthy was attacking the man who loves fine phrases and professes liberal principles, yet the moment his interests are threatened, turns cad. Class is pitted against class here, and the wealthy do not hesitate to destroy the poor who get in their way.

Galsworthy has rightly quoted:

"Justice is a machine that, when someone has once given it the starting push, rolls on of itself."

: John Galsworthy, *Justice* [1910], act II

Every part of human civilization has to depend on earthly justice. The judgment may sometimes appear appreciable or not appreciable. But, there is no way humans can deny it. John Galsworthy's famous play *Justice* also deals with that judgment, legal as well as social. The play unravels the horrific impacts of the strict enforcement of legal justice. In addition, it also highlights the destitution of social justice crippling in a modern community. The social tragedy boldly carries a significant irony to manifest how an unintentional offender gets severely punished for a minor crime. In reality, it satires earthly justice.

John Galsworthy in his play *Justice* adopts a satirical tone to criticise the unfair practices of the judicial system which gives free hand to the upper class on their crimes and puts the wretched people behind the bars for their trivial illegal acts. A third sphere of interest is the social degeneration which arises almost inevitably out of social injustice. The failures and the outcasts of the social system are well known, but the reasons for their conditions should be traced. Along with this is the case of social failures after the process of deterioration is complete. The effects and the possibilities of these people make an interesting study for the dramatist. Three plays of

Galsworthy deal with the subject of social deterioration. They try to show us the forces that go into the making of -the outcast of society.

In Justice, Falder, the twenty-three year old junior clerk in the office of John and Walter How, a firm of solicitors, is a pale, nervous young man of weak will. But a chivalrous disposition. He is interested in the patient, long suffering Ruth Honeywill, whose husband has tried to kill her and who has escaped with her three children while he was asleep. Falder decides they should escape to South America as man and wife. He forges a cheque in order to get enough money to do this, fully intending to pay the money back. The theft is easily detected, however, Walter How, the son of the head of the firm, pleads that his father give Falder another chance. But John refuses, especially when he learns that a woman is involved. He is prosecuted for forgery, convicted, and committed to penal servitude for three years. Falder almost goes mad because of treatment he receives, and at the end of two and one-half years he is paroled. Both his health and reputation were ruined, and he cannot; find a job.

Ruth talks him into applying at his old firm, where Walter How talks his father into offering him a job—but John How stipulates that he give up Ruth. Each refuses to give up the other, however, since their love is the one saving element in both their lives. Ironically the judge and the jury find Falder guilty of two offences – forgery and immoral relation with a married woman, and sentence him to a solitary imprisonment. The society and the legal system have little interest in human passion and sympathy for suffering; the wheel of justice has no eyes to see the wounds it inflicts on the trapped. Nobody is interested in knowing what led Falder to forge and why Ruth found her life with her husband unbearable. In fact, Justice puts the judge and the jury in the dock because they never cared to stem the rot in the system.

The title of the play actually sneers at the law that only too often nurtures the forces of injustice and hurls Falders down the precipice to their death. Falder wants to save Ruth from hell, but he finds himself in hell when he is thrown into prison. The frustrating experiences leave Falder demoralized and desperate, and failing to clutch at the straw he loses faith in life itself.

FALDER is sitting exactly opposite to the JUDGE, who, raised above the clamour of the court, also seems unconscious of and indifferent to everything.

Even in the prison cell the fate of Ruth haunts him, for he knows that there is none to help his Ruth. But then Falder is a human. James How and the judge do not see thing in his light. They, in their anxiety to save the majestic edifice of law and society forget to temper their judgment with mercy, though they are very much keen in praising the Christian piety. The consequences of all these are extremely horrifying.

With Falder, we all are prisoners in our cells and we all suffer and share the shame of the victims, for we are all equally helpless before the majestic institutions that hold our world to ransom. As Falder is bewildered in his defeat, he despairs of a future, for his alienation of the society and his nightmarish experiences make him stray even from Ruth. And it is in that angle of this the significance of the title should be read. When he comes out of the cell and finds himself free, he still clings to life and tries once again to share it with Ruth. But ‘Justice’ doesn’t give him respite. So he jumps to his death and gives law the slip, saving himself from further onslaught of ‘justice’. Thus the circle of irony is complete.

In the ironical title of the play, the playwright highlights a thought-provoking social issue of injustice in front of his audience and readers to persuade them to read and watch his play through a humanitarian lens to decide whether the judiciary proclaiming justice and equality for all or the poor men leading a miserable life is to be blamed for the crimes committed in the world.

With a solid and courageous view, Cokeson doesn’t hesitate to say,

“No one’ll touch him now! Never again! He’s safe with gentle Jesus!”

Robert Cokeson’s words make it clear that he feels extreme pain to see the suffering that the offender, Falder, had to go through. His remarks define the bitter truth that death has finally brought the ultimate relief for the ill-

fated youth. With his demise, Falder has now crossed all clutches and boundaries of the law. No legal justice can chase and hunt him now. Moreover, no threats of law and so-called ethics or morality can frighten him any more. Even no prison administration catches and confines him. In a word, he is now above all earthly justice. No more earthly prosecution is waiting for him.

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