Chapter IV

SOCIAL REALISM IN THE SELECTED PLAYS OF JOHN GALSWORTHY

Galsworthy and the Realistic Drama in England.

Galsworthy is a modern dramatist. He writes well-made plays dealing with social problems. Like Ibsen he is a rebel against the old drama which bore no relation to life. He follows the trends set by the Realist and Naturalist theatre. This chapter deals with the contemporary social problems depicted by John Galsworthy in his selected plays.

English theatre before Galsworthy was chiefly traditional. It sacrificed the truth of characterisation and probability of incident to situation and the need for providing everybody with a good part. Eugene Scribe, the most competent French playwright who created the well-made play said in his address to the French Academy in 1836:

You go to the theatre, not for instruction or correction, but for relaxation and amusement. Now what amuses you most is not truth, but fiction. To represent what is before your eyes everyday is not the way to please you; but what does not come to you in your usual life, the extraordinary the romantic, that is what charms you that is what one is eager to offer you.

This conception of the function of the theatre prevailed both in France and England. In England the Victorian stage was governed by commercial motives. It was satisfied with the money that its labour brought it. Invention was dreaded. The actor-managers judged a play by the opportunities it gave them for emotionalism. They had no mind to place before the audience heroes fashioned out of actual, dull, everyday men and heroines that looked like simple maids in gingham gowns. This fear of realism on the part of the professional actor was justified, he believed that if the resemblance between the hero and the audience appeared too great, the scope for the development of passion, and big ‘dramatic’ opportunities like murder and suicide would seem false and ineffective. Nevertheless, realism was in the offering. In France Eugene Scribe wrote half a thousand well-made plays with the assistance of several hacks. When he died in 1861, his tradition was carried on by Victorien Sardou. He wrote topical plays and made naturalness in drama a convention. He developed stage logic. In fact the carried the play a little towards journalistic realism.

In England, the pioneer of the well-made play was Thomas William Robertson. He began as an adapter of the Scribe-Sardou sort of trifle, but either though an independent urge to observation or though the influence of Augier Emile and Dumas the Younger (French
dramatists), he took a step forward in the direction of the “social” drama. His plays Society (1865), Caste (1867), Home (1869), School (1869), War (1871) and others are considered as landmarks on the way to Realism. They established a new kind of domestic drama which some contemporaries dubbed as the “tea cup and-saucer” theatre. It has been observed by some critics that Robertson’s aim was to urge the public to bring their “fireside concerns” to the playhouse. This he sought to do by making his plots and characters and setting as realistic as he possibly could.

Besides Robertson and the adapters of the French plays, the story of the well-made-play in England is told by two great men: Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Pinero. Both found their inspiration in Sardou rather than in Scribe. Each added his individual variations and touches. Each raised the English drama from the triviality and falsity of the French adaptations to realism. Pinero was an expert craftsman. He introduced several advances in technique.

Allardyce Nicoll says that playwriting should not be “the art of sensational and spectacular illusion”. It should be rather “the art of representation of English life”. He insisted that the man of letters must become the stage craftsman. Drama must be more than mere popular amusement, and there must be close connection between any living drama and the larger drama and society in which the theatre exists.

When Pinero and Jones were vivifying the stage of the nineties by their ‘problem’ plays, there was a lack of psychological climate. Sex, politics, and religion were still taboo as subjects of conversation at decent dinner-tables. The dramatist’s right to choose any subject he pleased was not granted by populace. Freedom of the stage was not a practical reality. These things came with Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw. Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright, was the greatest figure of the Realistic theatre of the nineteenth century. He made the drama social, revolutionary, topical. He diagnosed the ills of mankind, destroyed illusions, satirized conceit, provincialism and hypocrisy. Economic pinch and social injustice which he had personally suffered shaped his keen edged social drama. His plays are un-Romantic thesis plays. They are observed dramas.

Ibsen was the first modern dramatist to handle serious problems with material drawn from everyday life. His characters were ordinary people. His plays depicted domestic tragedies. He portrayed the struggles of individuals in conflict with the forces of convention. All his plays were pregnant with progressive social ideas about the rights of man as well as woman. The
pillars of society (1877); A Doll’s House (1879), Ghosts (1881) and An Enemy of the people (1882) present natural characters in conflict with social customs and environment, they in fact bring a fresh breath into the theatre.

The setting of Isben’s stage is uncompromisingly realistic. The object of his drama is to show in the narrowest and most familiar surroundings the working out of a problem which is world-wide in its application.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was the disciple of Ibsen. His prominent characteristic is a fearless intellectual criticism. He possesses to the highest degree wit, Humour and inventiveness. He has the knack of making ideas live. He carries the Realistic drama to its highest drama potentiality. He makes it primarily and enjoyably intellectual drama. Sheldon Cheney says that Shaw is more “natural” than the average Realist. Where others have to force mature at times, sentimentally or emotionally, to gain “effects”, Shaw sails by on the wings of intellectual brilliancy. He more or less swallowed the well-made-play formula in its structural aspect. But he balked at the romantic and sentimental conventions that still clung to it... very obviously in Pinero and Jones, more covertly in Ibsen. In his own words, he looked on “romance as the great heresy to be swept off from art and life”

True to his theory of drama, Shaw raises the curtain on characters that act naturally and with scientific-intellectual honesty. They come into conflict with romantically conventional characters and the contrast between them becomes vividly dramatic and vastly entertaining.

After Shaw, it was Galsworthy who enjoyed the greatest vogue. Like other practitioners of the Realist theatre, he believed in using the stage to set out human follies, inconsistencies, injustice. He tells us in some Platitudes Concerning Drama: “The dramatist of today may pursue one of the three aims. He may give the public those views and codes of life in which it already believes or desires to believe. There is third course: To set before the public no cut-and-dried rules, but the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, but not distorted, by the dramatist’s outlook set down without fear, favour or prejudice, leaving the public to draw such poor moral as nature may afford. The third method requires a certain detachment, it requires a sympathy with a love of, and a curiosity as to things for their own sake; it requires a far view, together with patient industry, for no immediate practical result”. Judged from this angle, Galsworthy may be called more of a naturalist than a realist.
A realist interprets an experience from the standpoint of the ideal. He judges the old values and standards in relation to the new progressive values and standards. A naturalist regards experience as the only order of reality. He believes in strict objectivity and detachment and literal transcription of an experience. His motto is observation, not evaluation, reportage not representation. It may be stated here that by his very approach a naturalist compromises with the status quo. Since he does not judge things with reference to a new set of values, he simply readjusts them within the existing frame-work. A spirit of compromise differentiates the naturalist from the realist who acts like an iconoclast.

Thus, Galsworthy does not advocate complete freedom for a dramatist. He says: “The dramatist’s licence… ends with his design. In conception alone he is free. He may take whatever character or group of characters he chooses, see them with whatever eyes, knit them with whatever ideas, within the limits of his temperament; but once, taken, seen, and knitted he is bound to treat them like a gentleman, within the tenderest consideration of their main springs.” Galsworthy continues: “The aim of the dramatist employing naturalistic technique is evidently 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, talking and moving in front of him.” Galsworthy does not want to identify himself with any individual or group. He aims at impartiality or a sort of negative capability. He observes: “Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral; and the business of the dramatist is to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day.” He says that he is no reformer but only a painter of pictures, and observes: “The sociological character or my plays arises from the fact that I do not divorce from life”.

Objectivity is the principal characteristic of Galsworthy’s technique both in the novel and the drama. In his book The Inn of Tranquility (1912), he says:

“Let me try to eliminate any bias and see the whole thing as should be seen by an umpire—one of those pure being in white coats, purged of all prejudices, passions, and predilections of mankind. Only from an impersonal point of view, if there be such a thing, am I going to get even approximately to the truth.”

Galsworthy speaks here the language of Zola. Naturalism, said Zola, follows the methods of science and studies life with complete dispassionateness. Exaggeration or understatement are absent from this technique. A naturalist tears a page out of life and dramatizes it. His aim, as
Galsworthy says, is to communicate emotions, not to solve problem. He only poses a problem as it occurs in ordinary, real life. He brings into his dramatic vision the conflicts and the motives which lead to conflict. He expresses them and the social waste and violence associated with them realistically. The realism of the naturalist is thus “disinterested, objective, and impersonal as science itself. Its main objective is the representation of the real world. That is why it subordinates plot to character. Every element of drama – situation, dialogue, setting, gesture and acting- contributes to the total unified effect. In dialogue, the naturalist practices an exact fidelity to everyday speech”.

In his essays, Galsworthy speaks of ‘naturalistic technique’ not as the ideal technique, but highly advantageous. Naturalistic art, he believes, is like a steady lamp, held up from time to time in whose light things will be seen for a space clearly and in due proportion, freed from the mists of prejudice and partisanship. This makes clear that Galsworthy desired to reproduce the natural spectacle on the English stage with detachment. He wanted to criticise society with cold objectivity. Hence, in his plays which are mostly concerned with the clash of two opposing principles, he presents the case with equal fairness.

Galsworthy is pre-eminently a realist. He is that artist whose temperamental preoccupation is with the revelation of the actual inter-relating spirit of life, character and thought, with a view to enlightening himself and others. He is distinguished from that artist whom, he calls romantic-whose temperamental purpose is the invention of a tale or design with a view to delighting himself and others. Lynton Hudson rightly observes that the drama to Galsworthy was, as poetry was to Wordsworth, a means of preaching. Wordsworth saw sermons in stones and Shaw wanted the audience to go to the theatre as they went to the Church. However, Galsworthy was a social reformer with a difference. Thus Galsworthy became one of the major exponents of the Realist drama, the problem play, the play of ideas, the social and domestic drama, the drama that cared more for probabilities than for romantic make believe. The fact that Galsworthy deviates from this ideal needs some comment. In his plays, there is a considerable degree of sympathy for the oppressed and downtrodden and this usually takes the form of sentimentality.

Realistic drama is a useful term applied to the kind of a play which treats particular social or moral problems so as to make people think intelligently about it. It is generally tragic in tone and deals with painful human dilemmas. It is the kind of a play that by implication asks a
definite question and either supplies an answer or leaves it to the reader or the audience to find out the answer. It was a popular mode of drama in the late 19th century.

Most of the plays of Ibsen and Shaw are realistic or the problem plays. It is a type of play that appeals to vigorous and thoughtful minds. It can make some contribution to human progress. Drama at its best is an experience of the imagination not only for the writer, the producer and the actors but also for the audience. The writer of the play creates characters and places them in situations that are interesting and in some way relevant to general human experience. The actor tries to live for a short time as another person and enters into the feelings and thoughts of character that is imagined.

One of the essentially pathetic facts about human life is that we have only one short life and the possibilities of experience in one life are very limited. The variations possible for one person are limited even when they become possible at all. None of us have much of an idea what it is like to be some one else. In acting or going to see plays we can live many lives by proxy and so have at least the illusion of widening our experience. The satisfaction of every kind of creation is deep and lasting. The drama offers the most intense satisfaction.

About the nature and the function of the realistic play, well-known critic Cleanth Brook says, “Realistic or the problem plays are plays that focus attention on some particular realistic problem which especially concerns the society of the time but the term realistic play is used in a more special sense to denote a topical interest with further implication that the dramatist is using his play as a social and political instrument to direct the attention of the society to its problems and to stir it to adopt a solution.” A social problems are created due to social atmosphere, political situation, economic reasons, impact of an individual or impact of various incidents. The term realism is further used and developed in drama by Pinero, Jones Galsworthy and the other dramatists in the 20th century.

The most significant development in the history of British drama towards the end of 19th century was the powerful rise of the realistic social drama. The movement towards realism on the stage was in full swing for over forty years since its inception in the 1890s. It pumped new life in to drama when it had fallen in to the effective monotony and cheap commercialization over the long century. It came as an expression of the mood of the moment in the age of realism and science. Fantacy and fiction were of no avail when rationalism prevailed in every sphere of life and literature. The craving for actuality on the stage came as right reaction to the incredible
situations, incidents and actions running rampant through most of the plays handed down to the 19th century and at the turn of it. It indicated the sheer need of a revolutionary change in the form, content and style of drama. Realistic presentation of the scenes of everyday life, treatment of the social problems of the day and attempts at reproduction of the actual language of the people on the stage were some of the chief marks of the dramatic art under the influence of realism. The themes and the language accepted from the factual world made drama prosaic in spirit and form. It lacked the thrill of poetry and romance and tended to be a vehicle of ideas. The impact of this movement was felt everywhere in all branches of the dramatic literature of the time. That is how the realistic trend in drama was moving vigorously onward and giving birth to the different types of realistic prose drama. The two ways of presenting social themes on the stage are called by the historians of literature as the realistic play and the play of ideas.

Galsworthy is fundamentally a modern realist. His plays mirror contemporary society. He had a profound humanitarian outlook of life and he tried to the best of his ability to adopt a realistic attitude. He was slow to condemn individuals. He was not sentimental in his approach and only rarely did he rely upon pathos for the effect of his scenes. He had an excellent sense of dramatic architecture and although his emphasis was not on individuals, he had a power to give the realistic quality to the persons with whom he dealt.

Galsworthy is a great realistic writer. His realism should not be confused with the photographic representation of life. His realistic plays are poignantly shaped and inspired by high intention and imagination. He dealt with social reality like a social reformer. The social problem was the raw stuff of realism, it means through which he made his communication, evaluation and expression, to a large extent his imagination is enlivened by constructive imagination. He gave impressive close ups of life at its most damnable, but he had the artist’s love of design, his eye for detail, his plays deal with contrasts. His role as a reformer and philanthropist did not let him stray in the magic world of fancy or idealism. He was a great lover of truth and presented life around him as he truly saw it. Coats say, “Galsworthy is as relentlessly realistic in almost all his plays as in his novels and short stories. He shows us things visualized through his temperament, not as many people would prefer to see them. An incorruptible lover of truth, he attempts to shape all his plots and problems with the greatest impartiality, allowing both sides to air their opinions and throwing light on their ideas in all possible ways. For him the task lies in the unrolling of the problem, not in the solution. The unrolling of the problem should serve to make
us think and reflect to awaken our interest in what is hitherto unknown to us or wived in a wrong light. Galsworthy himself discusses his theory of realism. Analyzing the term realism he says, “To me the words realism, realistic have no longer reference to technique for which the words naturalism, naturalistic serve far better. Nor have they to do with the question of imaginative power- as much demanded by realism as by romanticism. For me a realist is by no means tied to the naturalistic technique- he may be poetic, idealistic, fantastic, and impressionistic anything but romantic that is so far as he is a realist he can not be”.

The word, in fact, characterizes that artist whose temperamental pre-occupation is with the revelation of the actual interrelating spirit of life, character and thought, with a view to enlightening himself and others, as distinguished from the artist whom he calls romantic- whose temperamental purpose is the invention of tale or design with a view to delight himself and others. It is a question of temperamental antecedent motive in the artist and nothing more. Galsworthy’s realism emerges primarily in two ways- in his theme and in characterization. All the plays of Galsworthy’s are sociological plays. He depicts real society in all its aspects. He wrote his plays with a definite purpose. His purpose was to expose the shortcomings and evils of the existing social institutions. This could not have been achieved unless he presented a realistic picture of social life and institutions. He possessed a remarkable power of objective detachment in his portrayal of society. He came under the influence of the French naturalism. He strived to present the truth without favor of prejudice. Each of his plays deals with a realistic social problem. *The Silver Box* exposes the great social evil that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. *Strife* presents the endless conflict between workers and the employers. *The Pigeon* brings out the question of the vagabonds and the poor. In *The Eldest Son* it is the problem of morality applied to the rich and poor. *The Fugitive* treats of women’s position in social life. The spirit of the crowd and idealism dominate *The Mob*. ‘Loyalties’ is a study in social pride and social conventions. *Justice* exposes the evils and shortcomings of prison system and judiciary. Not only are his themes realistic, but his treatment of those themes is equally realistic he presents both the sides with objective detachment. In *The Strife*, he presents the cause of both the workers and the employers with detached fidelity and truth. While writing *Justice*, he interviewed convicts, who had experienced months of solitary confinement, but he got the views also of prison governors and wardens, and these too were stated with complete disinterestedness. His legal knowledge came in good stead in exposing the shortcomings of the system of law and
judiciary. Galsworthy’s plays realistically describe modern society and its problems. He totally eschewed the romantic element in his presentation of problems. Ideas, institutions, morality, class interests and social forces form its main theme. Many of Galsworthy’s plays are based on an inexorable incompatibility between the justice of society and what is actually just. He also handled definite problems of marriage, of sex relationship, of labour disputes, of the administration, of the law, of solitary confinement, but for him the individual problem leads always to the general relations between individuals within the social organism. He suggested no practical reform, though reform appeared in his constant indication of existing wrongs. His solution was not practical but ethical. The source of evil for him laid in failure of imagination and sympathy.

His character-portrayal is equally realistic. He draws his characters from his real experience of persons or situations around him. His characters are therefore living human beings, whom we can meet any day in life. All his characters even the heroes are ordinary men possessed of common human weaknesses and frailties. Most of his characters are typically Englishmen. They have English traits. They are more types than individuals. Dancy is a typical whimsical military man, Hillchrist represents the landed nobility, Hornblower is a modern capitalist, Falder is a common clerk who represents the modern ordinary middle-class persons, romantic in nature and suffering from want of money. Galsworthy is thus a realistic artist. He has the naturalism of Zola and realism of Turgenev. To these he adds his own sympathetic view with a humanitarian zeal. To read his plays is therefore to study all the prominent English social institutions of his day.

Of all the various trends in drama at the time of Galsworthy, perhaps the most epochmaking one is naturalism which stemmed from France and soon became a powerful medium of the realistic social drama all over Europe. The work of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), the foremost naturalist dramatist of Europe, was introduced to the English audience in 1889 with the production of ‘A Doll’s House’ in London. This naturalistic trend was closely akin to realism, but the presentation of realism in the naturalistic plays was quite different from that in the problem plays of Robertson, Pinero and Jones, the plays of ideas of Shaw and the plays of poetic realism of Synge. To awaken a sense of injustice against the social evils, these dramatists used their tricks as regards the manipulation of their characters and the weaving of their plots around the central social themes.

Galsworthy’s Contribution as a Dramatist
John Galsworthy’s conception of drama is mainly based on realism and a general sense of morality. He believed that drama is a meaningful art form, capable of stirring the mind and bringing awareness of noble principles in life. It is a medium through which a dramatist can project a life as he sees it. He held firmly that the realistic depiction of contemporary life through drama would serve a useful purpose. It would make people realize their shortcomings, awaken in them a sense of guilt and prepare them to change the defective structure of society. With such a noble purpose in mind, Galsworthy took to playwriting. He never, for a moment, thought that drama was merely an instrument of cheap entertainment. Every play of Galsworthy is shaped so as to have a spire of meaning. A problem—social, economic, domestic or personal—forms the canvas of the Galsworthy plays. On this canvas painted the figures of flesh and blood characters and they are so posed as to bring the inherent moral poignantly to the light of day. Galsworthy intended to disturb the complacent people of his time and shake them from their slumber. He wanted to bring to light the evils in the society so as to bring about a reasonable change in the outdated social structure of the day. The social thinker in Galsworthy employes drama to serve this purpose and the humanitarian in him appeals for benevolence, tolerance and understanding. His plays are intentionally wrought out pieces—significant scenes from everyday life—from which the inherent moral of which the dramatist speaks, emerges.

The fabric of every Galsworthy play is woven around some definite idea, quite often an ethical idea. In order to fulfil the craving of his spirit he rounded up his characters and facts within the ring fence of the dominant ideas which cause social, economic, domestic or personal problems such as the disparity between the rich and the poor, the clash between labour and the capital, social and legal injustice, domestic tyranny, the class conflict and unhappy marriages. These ideas form the very backbone of his plays.

While Galsworthy was careful that each play should incarnate an idea, he took care that his plays should not be sermons deliberately written. His method of presenting an idea is quite different from that of Barnard Shaw. Both Galsworthy and Shaw regarded drama as a meaningful form and emphasized its serious purpose in life. But Shaw uses drama to propagate his ideas and expound his theories. He creates the world of his own ideas which rarely corresponds to reality. Galsworthy, on the contrary, aims at creating the illusion of actual life upon the stage. Galsworthy stirs the heart, Shaw agitates the mind.
Galsworthy was disgusted with the then current unreal, romantic type of drama. The real life was worth depicting in the plays because such depiction, he thought, would in the right direction. The organic human being was the centre of attraction for Galsworthy. The uneven social condition of his time and the tyrannies inflicted on the individuals under them were very disturbing. The poor had to suffer greatly in consequence of the economic disparity that prevailed the aristocrats ruthlessly exploited their inferiors and the members of the weaker sections of the society had to bow before the law that was conviently interpreted for the benefit of the titled and money class, a constant fight raged between the common man and the worn out values of the gentry and the materialistic views of the newly rich class of the manufacturers, the women had to live their life according to the will of their husbands and could not get protection from society or law when singled out from the herd, the relations between labour and capital were not cordial, life in the prisons was hell for the prisoners. Galsworthy thought it necessary to arouse public opinion against this unhappy state of affairs through his plays. Thus he resorted strictly to the presentation of real life upon the stage because he wished to rise in revolt against the artificial, bastered form of drama. He wanted to bring a sense of awareness among people of the evils of their systems through drama by presenting the burning social problems of the day.

As realism is an important trait of naturalism, so is the objectivity of the dramatist. The conscientiousness of a judge and the impartial attitude of an umpire are necessities for the realist dramatist. Galsworthy was a judge of facts and he could look towards things dispassionately and as objectively as he could. Of course, he could not maintain ruthless objectivity as he was obviously sympathetic towards the afflicted and the poor. In The Silver Box, Justice and The Fugitive his sympathy for the helpless persons is clearly seen, while in plays like Strife, The Skin Game, Loyalties and A Family Man his dispassionateness becomes easily discernible. But his sympathy for the sufferers does not mar his art. He is not a prejudiced or partial while presenting life’s problems in his plays because he knows that the realistic art is like a steady lamp.

Eventhough Galsworthy has established his reputation in the literary history of our times as a no negligible figure both in fiction and in drama, it has to be admitted somewhat regretfully for the matter of research activity, that full length studies of his work to date have been few and far between. In the awareness of that not even muchspade work has been done in this line on the chosen author, the present research study aims at close and systematic study of social realism to be found in the considerable body of Galsworthy’s drama.
John Galsworthy wrote ‘Justice’ in 1910. It is a social tragedy and is one of the greatest works of Galsworthy. In this play he makes an attack on the evils and shortcomings in the English law and judicial system. There is a strong attack on English prison system, especially solitary confinement. It is a plea for greater sympathy for the derelicts and waifs of the society. In this play Galsworthy shows that a man who commits some theft under very straitened circumstances like Falder should not be subjected to the course of law, because it is our society that is responsible for turning innocent people into sinners. The speech of Mr. Frome in the court of law represents Galsworthy’s attitude towards the subject of justice and law courts. In short, it is a play that deals with the problems of the criminal and the treatment of the society towards such criminals.

Social Background

The late Victorian period and the following Edwardian era saw Britain at the height of her power. Industrialization and colonization led to the accumulation of immense wealth in the hands of a few. Ownership of land accounted for much of the wealth, and it is significant to note that in 1911 one percent of the population owned sixty-six percent of the land in Britain. The population itself was divided into broad classes- the well-heeled upper class, the well-to-do middle class and the poverty-striken working class.

The advent of the industrial era saw the emergence of the new aristocracy of industrialists, who formed a distinct class of their own- the new rich. These people thrived on human profit-making machinery and wielded enormous power in every sphere of life. They lived pampered lives, cared for by a retinue of servants. The middle class of salaried professionals- the so-called white collar workers- were also adequately cushioned against hardships. This class earned the contempt of contemporary writer’s for their smugness, hypocrisy and dogged opposition to any form of change. There was also the lower-middle class; the clerks in offices, the petty
shopkeepers, people who looked after other people’s money and property. Both the powerful rich and the educated middle-class were indifferent to the desperate plight of the working class, who lived a sordid, often brutal existence in the slums that had mushroomed around factories in industrial towns. The miserable life and poverty of the slum-dwellers was deplored in general but the task of social uplift was neglected by gove officials and philanthropists alike.

The years in between 1890 to 1940 witnessed sweeping, often cataclysmic shifts on power, causing great deal of physical suffering and spiritual disillusionment. Revolutionary ideas such as those of Darwin earlier in 1850, and now of Freud plunged people in doubt and uncertainty. The very foundations on which human beings had based their assumptions about stability and rationality were crumbling. The time was ripe for change. Thus, an undercurrent of thoughtful criticism began surfacing slowly. The new demand was for liberalism in politics and reforms on socialistic lines in England. The victory of the Liberal Party in the General Elections of 1906 in England left none in doubt about which way the tide was turning. For the first time there were thirty representatives of the Labour Party amongst the newly elected members of English Parliament. They were supported by the trade unions and their votes enabled the Liberals to pass many bills implementing reforms, for example in 1907, income tax for lower wage earners was reduced, and in 1908, pensions and Labour exchanges were introduced. The Liberals were in favour of freedom in politics, religion and in trade; their reforms were based on humaniterion principles- an attitude that Galsworthy shared.

The fifty years bridging the turn of the century were, therefore, witness to changes in technology, patterns of work, power and class relationships. A novelist writing during this period would have had much to write about, but the age failed to produce any truly representative political fiction. It is only in the sparkling social satire of Wilde and Shaw or in the brooding novels of Hardy and in Galsworthy’s realism, that we find a partial reflection of this eventful period.

Galsworthy was a social reformer. He was a philanthropist and a political philosopher. He rose to be the poor and downtrodden classes of society. He was deeply pained to discover how the poor class of society suffered, pined and languished away under a number of tyrannies inflicted upon them by the rich and ruling class of the people. He had seen the naked reality of society and felt aghast at the innumerable social, economic and political evils that prevailed in
his day. He sought to reform those evils through his literary works. Each of his plays, therefore, deals with one or the other social, economic and political problem.

**Justice** throws light on some glaring shortcomings in the contemporary English law and judicial system. He says that law is blind, feelingless and lifeless process. It crushes into powder anybody who is entangled in its network. It shows no sympathy to man on the score of basic human temptations and infirmities. It does not recognize the sentiment behind an action. It judges a man on the score of his tangible actions and completely ignores the sentiments behind the action, however, noble they might be. The judicial system, likewise, is a mechanical process. It is heartless, unscrupulous and unfair. It is a malignant process in which innumerable innocent and noble hearted men are victimized. The wheels of the chariot of law keep on revolving and men are caught every day and crushed under them. Galsworthy expresses his views through the words of Mr. Frome: - “Justice is a machine that, when someone has once given in the starting push, rolls on of it.”(Act-II, P.-24)

It is this idea that has been developed in this play. Falder, the hero of this play, is a noble-hearted young man of 23 years old. He is not a criminal by nature. He has no marks of a professional criminal upon his face. But circumstances compel him to commit a crime in a maddening fit of mental excitement. He loves a woman whose life is in danger. He wants to help her but he has no money. It is the question of now or never before him. In this state of mind a cheque of nine pounds is given to him by his employer for encashment. He is so excited and emotionally agitated that he forgets the sense of good and bad and right and wrong. In a maddening fit of excitement, he adds zero after the figure 9 and ‘ty’ after the word nine and thus gets ninety pounds from the bank. All this was done in the course of just four fatal minutes. As soon as he gets the money, good sense prevails upon him. He feels ashamed of his deed and heartily wishes tat it could be undone. But it is too late. He thinks of throwing away the money and flinging himself before a bus but his attachment with his beloved fails him to do so.

Both John Galsworthy’s strengths and weaknesses as a dramatist derive from his commitment to the ideas and methods of realistic drama. He was neither a religious man nor a political activist, and his plays spoke for no specific ideology or orthodoxy, but he believed that every 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. This meant, as he said in, ‘Something Platitudes Concerning Drama’ that a drama must be shaped so as to have a spire
of meaning. Such a theory of drama attempts two mutually contradictory tasks; first, the objective, balanced, impartial depiction of reality, and second, the embodiment of the playwright’s subjective, ethical, emotional response in the posing or shaping of a moral spire of meaning. Galsworthy’s plays are secular morality plays. His gentlemanly didacticism issues in dramatic sermons that attempt to evoke sympathy and understanding for the human condition and that teach the humanistic creeds of civility, compromise and fair play. In Galsworthy’s plays, the sentimental or melodramatic pointing of a moral frequently undercuts the attempt to depict faithfully the problems of individual characters or social groups. Throughout Galsworthy’s dramatic works, there is a tension between oppressive moralism and melodramatic theatricality. As critic Allardyce Nicoll has observed, “Galsworthyan realism and the Socialist realism tend to suffer from the same kind of the pathetic complaint that the deplorable and even tawdry sentimentalism.”

Galsworthy has some definite views about the art of plot construction. “A good plot”, he writes, “is that sure edifice which slowly rises out of the interplay of circumstances on temperament within the enclosing atmosphere of an idea. A human being is the best plot”. This shows that he made the plot subordinate to character. His plots are based on the study of the characters. He reverses the Aristotelian conception of the relationship between plot and character. With Aristotle plot is first and character is second. With Galsworthy character is first and plot is second.

Galsworthy’s primary aim in writing plays was to make known to the complacent Victorian public, certain deep-rooted evils in society. As he took up a basic social problem—for instance, penal servitude in Justice, in which he advocated amelioration of prison laws- Galsworthy made a thorough investigation of the existing system which caused the problem. He then adopted the naturalistic technique to project the situation dramatically, without much embellishment. The portrayal of stark reality had the effect of arousing public conscience and Justice illustrates this point. The plot reveals the careful economy exercised, by the author, in its construction. Each character and every scene is strictly functional, offering a specific aspect of the subject, and thus building up a complete picture of the situation. The plot itself is simple and straightforward. The action takes place over a period of two and a half years. It is a four act play, moving from the lawyer’s office- the scene of crime- to the courtroom, thence to the prison, and back again to the office. The circular motion of events serves to emphasize the relentless motion (chariot-wheel) of
Justice, which crushes those very victims of society whom it should protect. Irony plays an important role in the progress of events in Justice. Falder, an essentially honest man at the beginning of the play, has become a vagrant by the end of the play, rejected by the society. Ruth, for whose sake he committed a crime, has become her employer’s mistress in return for the material support he gives her, and Mr. Cokeson and the Hows, who want to help Falder, can not do so. Falder observes; ‘nobody wishes you harm, but they down you all the same.’ His death, it appears in retrospect, was inevitable. Galsworthy adheres to the traditional concept of the interdependence of plot and character. Unity of action is maintained in the gradual unravelling of the theme- that of the unjust and inhuman treatment inflicted on prisoners in the name of justice.... Justice is a powerful social tragedy. It is a strong satire on the contemporary English system of law and judiciary. Galsworthy brings into light the glaring shortcomings and defects in the legal system of England. He says that law is a blind and inhuman process. Law does not take into consideration human psychology and innate human infirmities. The British judicial system is unfair and unscrupulous. It is a malignant process in which innumerable innocent and noble intentioned men are victimized. The chariot-wheels of the system of law continue to revolve furiously and innumerable innocent men are caught into them and crushed to powder. The prisons are like an ill-fated ship in which thousands of prisoners perish. Once a man is caught and convicted to imprisonment, there is no escape for him. Once a man puts his step into the cage, there is no withdrawal possible for him. It is a process of completing the crime. This is the idea behind this social tragedy Justice. This idea is brought home through the conviction and death of an innocent and noble hearted young man, Falder.

This act introduces the characters and the critical situation from which the dramatic conflict arises. Falder is a junior clerk in the prestigious solicitor’s firm of James and Walter How. Cokeson, the Managing Clerk, is annoyed by Ruth Honeywill, who is desperate to meet Falder. He relents when Falder arrives for work and allows them to speak to each other privately. Ruth tells Falder that her husband has again been violent with her, this time almost killing her, and she has left home along with her children. Falder sympathises and asks her to meet him at 11.45 near the booking office. The desperation of both is apparent, though their destination is unknown. Their plan is obviously a secret one.

A little later, Walter How discovers that the firm’s bank balance is much lower than he had estimated? The cheque-book counter-foils reveal the fact that an unauthorized sum of ninety
pounds has been withdrawn during the past week. Walter remembers having signed a cheque for nine pounds only. James, his father, reminds him of his bad habit of leaving space after his figures on a cheque and they realize that someone has taken advantage of this fact. Suspicion first falls on Davis, an erstwhile employee who has recently left for Australia. However, the bank cashier, Cowley, is able to identify Falder as the person who encashed the cheque in question.

When Falder is confronted with the evidence, he denies having anything to do with the matter. However, his alibi falls to pieces when Walter remembers that the counterfoil could only have been altered after Davis left for Australia, the cheque-book having been in his possession until after Davis’ departure. Cornered, Falder confesses his guilt and although Walter and Cokeson plead for leniency, James as the head of the firm, decides to prosecute. Detective-Sergeant Wister then arrives and takes the unhappy young man, Falder, away.

This act comprises the trial of Falder. The scene is a realistic dramatic presentation of the proceedings of a law court. Witnesses are called and cross-examined. The evidence of Falder and Ruth reveals their secret love affair. She, as the victim of an unhappy marriage, longs to leave her husband and marry Falder. Falder, it is revealed, was driven to desperation on seeing the marks of violence on Ruth—evidence of her husband’s ill-treatment of her. In need of money, he was tempted on seeing the cheque, but can not recall altering it or any of the events, during the time he took it to the bank to encash. Only after the deed was done and the money in his hands, did the realization of the enormity of his offence dawn on him. He could have chosen to return money and confess but instead used it to buy their passage.

The interest in this act arises out of the arguments of the two counsels –Frome and Cleaver. Frome bases his arguments on humanitarian principles and pleads for a pardon on the grounds of temporary insanity. The prosecution counsel—Cleaver—however, demolishes Frome’s arguments with calculated effectiveness. The jury and the judge are disposed to believe his argument and the jury declares Falder to be guilty. The judge sums up the case, referring to the responsibilities of the administrator of justice. Falder is sentenced to three years penal servitude. In this scene, Galsworthy indirectly points out the lapses in the legal system, particularly the lack of sympathetic understanding and of any humane attitude of the judge towards human failings.

There are three scenes in this act, all in a prison where the life of the prisoners and the attitudes of prison officials are clearly delineated.
In the first scene, the playwright introduces the Governor of the prison, Captain Danson. He has a military bearing and his mutilated hand and Victoria Cross proclaim him to be a war hero. He is speaking to the chief warden of the prison, Wooder. They discuss a weapon which has been found in a convict’s room. A little later the prison chaplain enters. While the governor is compassionate man, both the warden and chaplain are apathetic towards the prisoner’s. The governor then receives a visitor—Cokeson—who has come to see Falder. In his rambling fashion, Cokeson explains the reason for the visit—Falder’s funny look and Ruth’s worry. The prison official’s are amused to discover that Cokeson thinks of a prison term as a course of treatment prescribed for a patient. The doctor is called and he assures the visitor that Falder is as well as can be expected. Cokeson insists that it is Falder’s state of mind that must be cared for, and only leaves on the assurance that the Governor will look into the matter.

In scene II, the governor visits the cells of those convicts who are going through the period of solitary confinement. The playwright has taken this opportunity of revealing the state of mind and thoughts of these unfortunate men. The common complaint is of monotony, where the prisoners find the silence overpowering. Falder admits to being nervous but tells the sympathetic governor that he is quite well, mentally. The doctor too finds nothing wrong with his health but admits that Falder would be better off working in the shops (or the workrooms where prisoners were obliged to do hard labour). The governor reflects that it is, after all, Christmas Day. The irony of people celebrating the birth of a savior, within the bleak walls of a convict prison is emphasized by the playwright.

Scene-III is the climax of the plot. Here, the entire effort of the playwright has gone into depicting the agony of the convict who undergoes solitary confinement. There are no words spoken, but the mute distress of Falder is used to convince the audience of the unfairness of this form of punishment. The scene culminates with Falder banging his fists against the iron door of the cell the symbol of the agonized human soul, yearning for freedom.

In this final act, Galsworthy has presented the resolution of the plot. The scene is once more the office of James and Walter How, two years later. Ruth, as in the first act, arrives early in the morning and begs Mr. Cokeson to find a job for Falder in the firm. She has met him after his release from prison and she describes his desperation for a job. Cokeson agrees to help, but is dismayed and annoyed when Falder arrives in the office, immediately after Ruth’s departure.
Cokeson has already heard about Ruth’s misfortunes—how she has had to become her employer’s mistress in order to support her children, having left her husband. Falder’s condition worries him further, for the young man seems to have lost his interest in life a strange thing in one so young. Rejected even by his own family, the only joy in his life is the love and support of Ruth.

The two partners come in while Cokeson is speaking to Falder. Sending the young man out of the room, Cokeson appeals to James How to re-employ him. James is reluctant to have an ex-convict working in the firm, but unbends after Cokeson continues to plead with him. However, his agreement is conditional because he is adamant that Falder should dissociate himself from Ruth. Falder is then tackled by James but surprisingly he remains firm in his resolve to be with Ruth. James then prevails upon Ruth to give up Falder for his own good. Miserable and helpless she agrees. Cokeson sends Falder inside to give him time to cope with his unhappiness. It seems as if history is repeating itself, when Detective-Sergeant Wister appears, once more looking for Falder. This time it is because Falder, as an ex-convict, has failed to report himself to the police and they have also had reports that he has been trying to secure employment on the basis of forged references. James refuses to reveal Falder’s whereabouts, but Wister, seeing his cap lying on the table, realizes Falder is on the premises.

It is a pathetic sight as he leads the doomed young man away. A few minutes later, Falder commits suicide by jumping from the staircase. There is an overwhelming sense of sadness at the waste of a young man’s life, and Cokeson’s consoling words; ‘He is safe with gentle Jesus’ (Act-IV, P.-63), hang in the air as the curtain falls.

Interpretation of the Word ‘Justice’:— The word ‘Justice’ can be interpreted in various ways. At the fundamental level it stands for the principle of justness, fairness and impartiality and implies moral rightness. The word also refers to the functioning of the legal system- the dispensation of the impartial judgement by the process of the law. Justice is, further, the title conferred on a judge. Justice, in retrospect, has ironic undertones for whereas we are led to expect conduct in accordance with the principle of justness, what Galsworthy actually exposes is the injustice and iniquity of man-made systems of law.

The whole play is a caustic comment on the discrepancy between the intrinsic nature of the term justice and the administration of it in the law courts. Falder’s act of forgery is a crime in the eyes of the society but the punishment meted out to him is out of proportion with the
seriousness of the offence. Galsworthy uses as his mouthpiece the young attorney, Hector Frome, who indicts the legal system as being least concerned with human character, situation and suffering. His rhetorical question—‘Is a man to be lost because he is bred and born with a weak character?’ underlines this ruthless aspect of so-called justice and his warning—‘Imprison him as a criminal, and I affirm to you that he will be lost’ goes unheeded by judge and jury. Falder is imprisoned in the cage of the Law, never to escape.

The playwright raises serious questions about the fundamental purpose of justice—is it meant only for punishing the wrongdoer or is it intended for correcting the erring individual and rehabilitating him as a responsible and trustworthy member of society? Justice is an illusive term and Galsworthy’s intention is to make the audience pause and ponder over the meaning of such an abstract word. In the play, Falder and Ruth appear as puny creatures, lost in the complicated labyrinth of the law, from which they can never emerge to freedom. Their only option is to make an unsavoury compromise with the situation. In Ruth’s case, she leaves her husband and becomes the mistress of her employer, in Falder’s case; he forges references to get a job after leaving prison. Death is, of course, the last resort and Falder, caught in the vortex of social forces, commits suicide. The tragic irony is that the symbolic blindness of impartiality of Justice has unfortunately become the blindness of complete indifference. The wrongdoer is punished—well and truly—but has Justice been done?

This tragedy made a powerful impact on the social life and judiciary of England. The legislatures became aware of the heartless process of law. Galsworthy made further personal appeals in the press and to the Prime Minister of England. In the end this tragedy led to the revision of the rules relating to solitary confinement. Galsworthy makes an important note about it in his diary, “Justice made a great sensation, especially in Parliamentary and official circles, Winston Churchill, the new Home Secretary, and Ruggles-Brise, head of the Prison Commission both witnessed it, the first with sympathy, the second with a sinking sensation. Reinforcing previous efforts the net result was that solitary confinement was reduced to three months for recidivists, and to one month for intermediates and star class.” Justice is thus one of the most important sociological plays of the twentieth century.

The great dramatists of the past ages like Sophocles, Shakespeare and others were concerned with the fundamental feelings of the human heart like love, hate, jealousy, ambition, madness etc. but the modern dramatist looks at the life around him and wants to present it in his
plays. He finds that man to-day is confronted with numerous problems. So the modern dramatist wants to tackle these problems and to present modern life truthfully. His plays, therefore, get involved in the presentation of social, political, moral, personal and domestic problems. These plays which deal realistically with the manifold problems of the modern man were given the name realistic social play or the problem play by Sydney Grundy. The pioneer of this new type of drama was Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian dramatist. He started discussing in his plays the various problems of society-home, sex, hereditary diseases etc. in England this trend was followed by many dramatists such as St. John Hankin, Stanley Houghton, Granville-Barker etc. but the real disciple of Ibsen was the great playwright- George Barnard Shaw. John Galsworthy’s all plays are also realistic social plays or the problem plays.

Galsworthy was a social reformer by temperament. He had a warm heart and he had a great sympathy with individuals who come into conflict with society and its inhuman and pitiless laws and institutions and are crushed down in the process. All his social tragedies deal with various social, domestic, moral and legal problems.

The play ‘Justice’ is a social tragedy. It deals with the life of a common man, a junior clerk, William Falder. He commits a forgery under the pressing need of money for helping the wretched woman, Ruth Honeywill. She is tortured by her husband and Falder wants to drag her out of that drudgery. Falder is sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment for the act of forgery. But when he is released, he is not treated as a citizen of the civilized society. He tries his best to get some re-employment but he could not get job at all. When at last he goes to James, he is again arrested by Wister on another charge of forgery. But being afraid of the horrible prison life, Falder throws himself down and finishes his life. Thus the whole play is a tragedy, but it is not Shakespearean or Greek or the Classical type of tragedy. Galsworthy has followed none of the preceding tragedy writers. In Aristocracy or Monarchy, the aristocrat or the monarch must be made to suffer to give effect to tragedy. Shakespeare’s heroes were aristocrats or monarchs. Galsworthy, on the other hand, was writing in an age of democracy and in a democracy it is the common man that suffers. That is why Galsworthy’s all the suffering heroes are from the common stock.

In the age of democracy nobody is a monarch but every common man has got an importance of his own. In democracy man is important. His merits and conditions are important. Galsworthy’s tragedies, therefore, revolve round the miserable and society-tortured life of the
common man. Here the common man is crushed not by any super-natural power or by gods but he is crushed by the force of an impersonal blind faith of social conventions and customs.

The same case is in ‘Justice’. Ruth can not get divorce from her husband easily. Falder and Ruth can not lead their life happily together though they love each other intensely. Their relationship was against the existing Victorian morality. The conventions, customs, laws, code of conduct and the morals are all the creations of society. In the Victorian England people were very particular about morality. That is why Falder, once declared as a criminal can never get an employment in the civilized society and he has to die of hunger. In the words of A. Nicoll, ‘the heroes of Galsworthy’s dramas are the unseen fates of modern existence’. Falder and Ruth are the victims of the rigidity of modern existence. Even the educated people and the men of social status like James can not stand against the blind social conventions. Therefore, we can say that the play Justice is a social tragedy which does not invoke in us awe but it certainly invokes pity and pathos for the hero.

Social Realism

The social injustice involved in the treatment meted out to outcasts like prisoners, vagabonds and certain type of immoral persons who embrace immoral in the plays like Justice, Windows, Escape, The Pigeon, Exiled, The Silver Box, The Fugitive, Old English and The Exiled. The social evils of imprisonment, unemployment and immorality are outcasts in these plays in order to bring to the playgoing people, a realization of the seriousness and intensity of these problems. The dramatist believes in the inner goodness of the man and shows that criminality is the common law of humanity. The detestable life of the prisoners and the outrazing of prisoners when they come out of the prison, back to society are depicted in Justice. The dramatist brings home through his plays that understanding and sympathy, rather than ostracization and cruelty, would do much better to rehabilitate the prisoners back into society.

Justice mainly dwells on the circumstance under which the crime is committed and the injustice of sentence of solitary confinement demonstrates through imaginative literature. The dramatist shows the problem of crime and penal servitude from the humanitarian point of view. He also shows how inevitable circumstances force the young man to commit a crime. His love for Ruth is earnest and his sympathy for her is genuine, for trying to release her from the brutality of her husband, he pays very heavy price. The play Justice impresses on the audience how solitary confinement crushes the spirit of Falder, the tragic hero of this play. His mental
agony, sorrow and despair are powerfully presented in act III scene III in which not a single word is uttered by Falder. It shows that he is tortured from within. When Falder comes out of the prison, he is completely broken in spirit and in body. He is just a skin and bones. When Mr. Cokeson enquires about his health, he answers in a hopeless tone that he is alive.

Allardyce Nicoll says, “In ‘Justice’ we feel the waste implied by Falder’s suicide, and the same spirit is trenchantly expressed in The Mob, The Pigeon, The Eldest Son, The Fugitives and Loyalties- all alike in producing this atmosphere and in making the faiths of man his masters.”

A. C. Ward remarks, “Justice’ is a commentary upon the prison administration of that period.”

In the words of W. L. Phelps, “Justice has less equality in the scales than its title would seem to demand.”

George Samson says, “Justice is a legal diagram used to harrow the feelings of the audience with the horrors of the prison life.”

R. H. Coats says, “On the whole Galsworthy’s climaxes are good, they are not included in his every play, but where they do occur, they are reached naturally and inevitably by a kind of sure pointing forward and acceleration from the beginning.”

John Galsworthy himself remarks, “Justice made a great sensation, especially in Parliamentary and official circles.”

STRIFE

John Galsworthy finished this play ‘Strife’ about the end of April 1907. It was the third play of Galsworthy. It was produced by Charles Frohmann at the Duke of York’s Theatre in 1909 and was received with universal acclaim. Even those critics, who did not like the dramatist’s excessive impartiality in the conflicts of the play, loudly praised it for its superb construction and technical perfection. In fact, Galsworthy’s dramatic art in Strife was immediately absorbed into the general development of the English realist theatre. Some harsh critics of today who become oblivious of Galsworthy’s age speak of superfluous characters, lack of dramatic tension and sentimentalization of the situation arising out of the death of Mrs. Roberts, the wife of the strike-leader Mr. Roberts. Despite its negligible flaws, Strife was a great success in London and in New York and later on in Vienna in 1913. Its popularity is of lasting
nature because it portrays the eternal battle between Capital and Labour, the employers and the employes.

The rise to real power of the English labor movement early in the 20th century provided a subject suited to Galsworthy’s realistic method: *Strife* comes closest, among his plays, to a work of lasting value. Through the careful dramatic opposition of ideas, characters, metaphors and structural elements, the play presents the tragedy of two fanatically iron-willed leaders who battle against each other at great cost to themselves and their followers. The play takes place during six hours on a February afternoon and evening at the Trenartha Tin Plate Works on the English-Welsh border, where the strike has lasted for five months, crippling the company and bringing suffering, hunger and a winter without heat to the labourers. The deadlock results from the conflict between the leaders of the opposing sides, David Roberts of the strikers and John Anthony of the company directors.

Galsworthy’s *Strife* is a beautiful indictment of the present structure of industrial society. It presents the strife between the capital and the labour, and advocates better understanding between these two great forces of our industrial life. The leader of the capitalists is Anthony and the leader of the labourers is Roberts. Galsworthy points out that the interest of industrial harmony both capitalists and the labourers should work in union and should not unnecessarily fight for their rights. There should be reconciliation between the two parties since unnecessary strikes and lock-outs hamper the progress of industrial life and retard production.

Galsworthy constructed the play so that its spire of meaning would arise from the dialectic of the opposing concepts represented by Anthony and Roberts. In a letter to a director who wanted to revive the play in 1931, Galsworthy insisted that “the plays real theme” was not the battle between capital and labour but rather “hubris or violence; Strife is, indeed, a play on extremism or fanaticism.” Both Anthony and Roberts refuse to compromise their principles by giving in to the other side; their rigidity of purpose shows a kind of heroic intellectual vainglory, producing bitterness, suffering, waste and death. Galsworthy once more created “type” characters, but Anthony and Roberts are types as extremists, not as members of any social class—such men may be found in any class.

Galsworthy imposes structural balance on the action to achieve the resonant effect of contrast and parallelism of idea, character and situation. The confrontations of labour and the management in the first and the third acts balance each other, as do the separate meetings of
directors and strikers in the second and the third acts, in which each side rejects its leader’s plan for action and decides to accept instead the terms for compromise proposed by the union representative. Galsworthy handles his large caste of characters with an almost schematic balancing of psychological and social types. He also uses settings, properties and dramatic language appropriate to the theme of Strife; in several scenes, he contrasts the excesses of cold and heat, hunger and plenty, luxury and deprivation. Metaphoric language carries the idea that is Anthony and Roberts are like gods in their power over men, they are also like devils in the way they use power to cause sufferings for the sake of their principles. The play has its melodramatic moments, such as the fight among the workers at the end of the second act, but over all, it is much less encumbered by the sentimentality and overly theatrical scenes that spoil many of Galsworthy’s plays.

Strife, in an understated and better conclusion, neither celebrates nor condemns the opposing sides in the struggle of labour versus capital; instead it portrays the need for civility and compromise in human affairs. The plan opposed by the union representative at the beginning of the play finally is adopted; Anthony and Roberts have a moment of mutual recognition after their followers have rejected the inhumanity of blind, proud adherence to principle. The theme of hubris is, if anything, too carefully and obviously portrayed in Galsworthy’s systematic balancing of scenes, characters and metaphors and in the working out of a metaphoric dialectic of opposed ideas. Strife, nevertheless, remains Galsworthy’s best problem and a realistic play and the best realization of his theory of drama.

For Galsworthy the subject of the play, namely, the strife between capital and labour, was topical. After the publication of the Communist Manifesto of the introduction of economic themes by Ibsen, Shaw, Wells and Granville-Barker, and the mounting struggle between the ‘haves’ and ‘havens’ in England and other European countries, the tug-of-war between the workers and their masters was bound to be an attractive theme for the theatre going audience. Social historians tell us that open class antagonism had become the order of the day in the first decade of the 20th century. There was a rapid rise in prices. Profits had registered an increase by 29.5 per cent but nominally wages had gone up only by 12 per cent. The disproportionate increase in industrial profits and industrial wages resulted in the enhanced poverty of the workers. This led to the strike movement for higher wages. There were also demands for reduced hours of work and other national programmes for the improvement of labour conditions. In 1905,
the miners of South Wales in the coal field struck work for better service rules. Strikes among railway men, engineers, cotton spinners and mine workers of Northumberland Durham followed with much intensity. Galsworthy had all these social upheavels in his mind when he wrote this play. With such a background his attempt was bound to arouse interest in the world of drama.

‘Strife’ is a drama of irreconcilable extremism. Written on the theme of Capital and Labour, it points out the stupidity of fighting to a finish. As Wanklin, a character in the play, says, ‘The essence of things is to know when to stop.’(Act-I,P.-21). In the uncompromising state of affairs lies a tragic disaster. Galsworthy was the prophet of toleration. He believed that the sword perishes by the sword. The fatal thing in human personality is strong will minus self control and balance. Such a will resembles Hubris which the Greeks regarded as the principal cause of tragedy. In a letter to a correspondent, Galsworthy wrote, “The strike, which forms the staple material of the play, was only chosen by me as a convenient vehicle to carry the play’s real theme, which is that of violence. It is only fashionable to suppose it is on the subject of capital and labour.” Violence is undoubtedly the prominent thematic strand of the play but it is the result of diehardness. The two major characters of the play—John Anthony, the Chairman of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, and David Roberts, the strike leader of the workers, have been responsible for immeasurable violence due to their rigid attitudes, because of them alone, the workers have been on the strike for six months. While the Company has reached the verge of disintegration, the workers have come to the brink of starvation death. On both sides the obstinacy of the leaders presents a big contrast to the relanting spirit of the followers. Among the employers, it is the iron will and unyielding nature of John Anthony, and among the workers, it is the unbending will of Roberts that creats a seri ous deadlock. Ultimately, Anthony is voted down by his men, and Roberts is ignored by the strikers whom he was leading because they arrive at a settlement behind the scene. The crest-fallen, now widowed, Roberts is shocked at this unexpected turn of the events. What is the ultimate upshot of the struggle? The Directors of the company have made terms without the Chairman and the workers have called off the strike without obtaining the consent of their leader. Roberts aptly remarks: “So...they have done us both down, Mr. Anthony?”(Act-III,P.73). Henry Tench, the Secretary of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works and Simon Harness, a Trade Union Official, complete the thematic design of Galsworthy when they say:

Tench; It’s all been so violent! What did he mean by: “Done us both Down?”
If he has lost his wife, poor fellow, he oughtn’t to have
spoken to the Chairman like that!

Harness; A woman dead; and the two best men both broken!

Tench; (staring at Harness...Suddenly excited) D’you know, sir..These
Terms, they’re the very same we drew up together, you and
I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this... All
This... and... And what for?

Harness; (in a slow grim voice) That’s where the fun comes in!

(Act-III, Page-73 & 74)

One may ask the question whether Anthony and Roberts were the only ones affected by
their actions. The answer is.. No. the play would not assume the proportions that it does if the
continued fight had not resulted in the starvation for the women and children of the labourers and
big losses for those connected with the Company. It is the colossal universal suffering that puts
“Strife” on a grand scale.

Galsworthy is certainly impressed by the waste and the misery which the strike brings
about. He wants to prove that men should be ruled by reason and his proof lies in depicting
clearly the utter futility of quarrelling over differences of the opinions which could better have
been settled by arbitration or compromise. After all, the contending parties settled the dispute
exactly on the terms and conditions which had been drawn up before the five-month-old strike
began.

Galsworthy tells that the action of ‘Strife’ takes place on February-7, between the hours
of noon and six in the afternoon, close to the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, on the borders of
England and Wales, where a strike has been in progress throughout the winter. It is a bitter cold
winter. The five month old strike has also made bitter the mood of the Company Directors and
the lives of the workers’ who have started starving. Hunger has afflicted the workers wives and
children. They are without coals, without cigars, without food and without funds. They are
feeling the pinch of striking work and going without wages. The Company Directors are also in
an unhappy state of affairs. They have lost nearly fifty thousand pounds. Their customers are
looking towards other companies and are signing contracts with them, and all this is only due to
the adamant attitude of the Company’s Chairman, John Anthony, who believes in, “No
Surrender” Two months earlier when Roberts the strike-leader met the Board of Directors at London, Anthony told him that he was a foolish uneducated man unable to comprehend the wants of the men he was representing. But in the meanwhile the Directors of the Company have started relenting. That is why on February 7 they aer meeting at the house of the Manager, Francis Underwood for the purpose of discussing the situation with Mr. Simon Harness, a Trade Union Official, and the Men’s Committee on the spot. Henry Tench, Secretary of the Company, hopes that the meeting will end in a compromise and a settlement will be found for the dispute among the Union, the workers and the Company Directors. However, when the meeting takes place, the Chairman infuriates the Board of Directors by his firm statement: “No Surrender” The Directors ventilate their protests:

Wilder: who wants to surrender? (Anthony looks at him). I want to act reasonably. When the men sent Roberts up to the Board in December—then were the time. We ought to have humoured him; instead of that, the Chairman—(Dropping his eyes before Anthony’s)—er—we snapped his head off. We could have got them in then by a little tact. (Act-I, P. - 8).

At Anthony’s reply: “No Compromise!”, Wilder recounts the ill effects of the continuous strike, prices are going up daily, dividend is not paid, the old contracts will have to be worked off at the current price level, the shares are below par, they will drop to a half by the time of the next dividend, the prosperity of the Company will wither away. The Directors tell the Chairman to give up his bedrock principles. Wanklin remarks: “We’re with you in theory, but we’re not all made of cast-iron.” Anthony retorts: “Better go to the devil than give in!”

The appearance of Harness at the meeting shifts the discussion from amongst themselves to between the Directors and the Workers’ supporters. Harness tells Anthony and other members of the Board:

'I am quite frank with you. We were forced to withhold our support from your men because some of their demands are in excess of current rates. I expect to make them withdraw those demands today if they do, take it straight from me, gentlemen, we shall back them again at once. Now I want to see something fixed up before I go back to night. Can’t we have done with this old fashioned tug-of-war business? What good’s it doing you? Why don’t you recognize once
for all that these people are men like yourselves, and want what’s good for them just as you want what’s good for you—(bitterly). Your motor-cars and eight-course dinners’. (Act-I, P.-12).

Anthony replies: “If the men will come in, we will do something for them. This is no spirit of compromise.” (A.-I, P.-13) Harness asks the members of the Board of Directors individually: “Is that your opinion too, sir—and yours—and yours?” (A.-I, P.-13). The Directors do not answer. Harness resumes: “Well, all I can say is; it’s a kind of high and mighty aristocratic tone I thought we’d grown out of—seems I was mistaken.” (A.-I, P.-13) Galsworthy makes it one of his points in the plays that society must give up its old stupidity to improve matters. Harness tells the Board that the workers do not want pity, they seek justice. A little later the tense situation relaxes a bit and Roberts tells the Board: “Every man of us is going short. We can’t be so worse off than we have been these weeks past,” (A.-I, P.-15). He advises Anthony to prepare himself for the worst that can happen to his company. Incidentally he remarks; ‘we know the way the cat is jumping.’

Anthony loves a fight with the men. He has fought them down four times. But this time Roberts warns him that he is fighting the last fight he will ever fight. The deadlock becomes too intense for other members of the Board. Anthony is compelled to adjourn the meeting to 5 o’clock. In the interval that follows Anthony hears a persuasive word from his daughter Enid. She calls upon him to relent. She recounts the distress the people are in. she talks of her own maid, Annie, who married Roberts. She is in wretched condition. Since the strike began, she hasn’t even been getting proper food. Anthony does not want to yield even at Enid’s suggestion. He tells her if no one stood between the Capitalist and the continual demands of Labour, the latter would squeeze the former’s throat. Enid hears her father’s say: ‘First would go your sentiments, my dear; then your culture, and your comforts would be going all the time!’ On Enid’s saying; “I don’t believe in barriers between classes”, Anthony shouts, “You... don’t...believe...In...Barriers... Between the classes?” Finally, it is for the sake of his health that Enid advises her father not to press his principles any further. Wnid fails in her mission. And before the drama moves towards the next stage, Tench speaks to Anthony; “I know you hold very strong views, sir, and it’s always your habit to look things in the face; but I don’t think the Directors like it, sir, now they they see it.” The directors see the crux of the matter but not
Anthony. Frost, Anthony’s servant, makes one of the best comments on behalf of Galsworthy, when he says, “This strike, sir, puttin’ all this strain on you. Excuse me sir, is it.is it, sir?”.

In the second act of the play the scene shifts to the kitchen of Roberts’ cottage where a meager little fire is burning. The ladies present here belong to the families of workers. Mrs. Roberts is ill. She is a thin and weak and dark haired woman about thirty-five. The condition of other women is no better. Strike has also bitterly told upon their health. Mrs. Bulgin, for example, is a little pale, pinched up woman. An exception is Madge Thomas, a good looking girl of twenty-two. This young girl is in love with George Rous, hence a little unmindful of the effects of worker’s strike.

As the act opens, Mrs. Yeo talks of scarcity of money and material. Mrs. Rous talks nostalgically of the year 1879 when most of the women around her were not even born or were in their early childhood. She tells them how the company started and her father working on the acid got a poisoned leg. Representing the fatalistic nature of the workers, Mrs. Rous calls the misfortune of her father an act of Providence. She regrets that there were no Compensation Acts then.

The conversation of the women in Roberts’ kitchen reveals the sufferings of the workers on account of the long strike. They are penniless and in the grip of starvation. It is in this grim situation that Enid comes. She requests Mrs. Roberts to persuade her husband to bring an end to the strike. Enid is in fact one of the mouthpieces of Galsworthy. She speaks a bit realistically about the capital. She also blames the workers for their poverty because they spend such a lot in drink and betting. Mrs. Roberts listens all this and she makes a startling statement that, ‘Roberts never touches a drop; and he is never had a bet in his life.’ It is also through Mrs. Roberts that we learn more about the cause of the labour. She represents her husband, “Roberts says a working man’s life is all a gamble, from the time he is born to the time he dies.” Roberts is a man of character, says his wife. He does not want to have a farthing from anybody, when the others are suffering.

When Roberts returns to his cottage Enid pleads with him for a compromise. She tells him to end the strike for everybody’s sake, for his wife’s sake. Roberts says that she is pleading for her father’s sake and then we learn the old truth about Anthony and Roberts from Enid.
Acting on one’s principles without the spirit of give and take is the cause of the whole problem. Anthony does not want to surrender, Roberts does not want to finish his game. One worker, Chapel says that the strike has gone beyond its proper limits.

In the next scene of this act the workers gather at an open muddy space. Roberts is to address them. Harness the Trade Union Official meets them first. He pleads for modification in their demands. The suffering workers are already in the mood of compromise, he has made an impression on them. He pleads for the suspension of the strike because its continuation is against the law of nature.

The act ends on a tragic note. The wife of Roberts dies. She has a weak heart, no doubt, but the strike too inflicted its blow on her frail health. The workers’ reaction towards the strike is anti-Roberts. They believe that they had enough of it. There is a fight among them.

In Act-III, Anthony and Roberts continue to maintain their uncompromising attitude about the strike. Anthony is further let down by his own son, Edgar. It also reveals the generation gap. The new generation is more considerate to the working class. He sympathises on the death of Mrs. Roberts and decides to resign his directorship. Anthony does not change even at the suggestion of his son. Apart from his kith and kin, Anthony has to face opposition from the members of the Board.

Anthony and Roberts are the masters of the show even in this act. Anthony makes a long speech when Wilder proposes that the dispute be placed at once in the hands of Mr. Simon Harness for settlement. Pride is perhaps the tragic fault in Anthony’s character. He is stubborn. He is unchangeable in any circumstances. He does not understand that relations between capital and labour have changed with the rise of the trade unionism. He is certainly an old fashioned man. He is unable to feel the pulse of the time. He lacks re-orientation of his ideas. He does not know that society is always discovering new truths and it is the sign of the wisdom to adjust to these new truths for the sake of peace and harmony, even progress and prosperity. Anthony’s attitude towards the underdog is the one which is not suitable to him. Roberts, the unbending leader of the strikers, also does not harmonise himself with the feeling of his fellow men. He continues to maintain an uncompromising attitude. He does not know that Harness has already brought about an end to the strike. Harness completes the gist of the outcome of the long strike due to the intransigence of Roberts and Anthony with the remarks: “A woman dead; and the two best men both broken!” Finally there is a sting in the tail. Tench asks Harness: “D’you knows
sir, these terms, they are the very same we drew up together, you and me, and put to both sides before the fight began” Harness closes the play with the ironical observation: That’s where the fun comes in.!”

Social Realism

A large number of problems arising from the various facets of people live in society find an artistic presentation in many of Galsworthy’s plays. Being a noble-hearted man of liberal sympathies, he had a keen perception of man’s inhumanity to man in different ways and walk of social life. He seems to be particularly sensitive to the injustice establishment and those unfortunate fellows who are cast out of society for misdeeds, punished out of proportion and thus ground to pieces in the mill of convention. The weaker section is represented quite proportionately from this angle. The miseries emerging from castecism in the British society of this time and the sensationalism espoused by the popular press have also found notable shape in the thematic pattern of his plays.

Injustice to the labour community employed in the factories and the domestic servants is a major theme in Galsworthy’s plays of social life. The first one finds expression in Strife, Exiled and the Foundations. The factory workers are presented in his plays as completely dependent on their employers, who turn them out the moment they do not need them. They have to remain satisfied with what little crust of bread the employers offer them. So their life is insecure and humiliating. If they demand fair wages and expect respectable treatment, their masters squeeze them all more.

_Strife_ depicts the conflict between the workmen of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works and the Directors of the Company. The workers go on strike, pressing their demands for better wages and fair service conditions. The strike goes on throughout the winter. The factory workers and their wives and children suffer immeasurably and are shown well-nigh starving when the play opens. The situation becomes worse and Annie Roberts, the wife of strike-leader dies of cold and hunger. The worker’s faith in Roberts shakes. They finally discard his idealism and leadership and come to the compromise with the Directors. The terms of the compromise are the same that were offered before the strike began. Thus the whole action of the strike appears to be meaningless and wasted.
The bitter clash cause heavy loss to the company and a great deal of suffering to working community. The dramatist presents both the sides dispassionately, but he sees to it that the scans of the misery of the working class more powerful impression than the discomfitures of the rich. The Directors of the company are concerned only with the profits and the dividends but the workers fight for justice and their bread. They can not bear their wives and children starving. The stark reality of their hopeless situation breaks their spirit. Slaves of uneven circumstances they can afford no longer to live on the bread of Roberts’ idealism with which he urges them to fight to the finish. They find themselves compelled to surrender in order to escape from starvation and the directors impose a settlement on them which saves the company and ensures the owners future profits but does little for the workers’ welfare. The artistic purpose of the play is to arouse pity for the workmen by and large. The directors, who are the villains of the peace, don’t bother about the sorrows of the workers and promote their selfish gains and power in all circumstances. It is noticeable how they wash their hands of the responsibility for Annie Roberts’ death. It is not the masters but the poor workers that suffer, starve and die. Strife strongly stresses this type of injustice. One fully realizes how utterly hopeless the life of workers is. They simply can not raise their hands and walk like free and equal species of mankind.

Galsworthy draws attention to the wrongs done to the workers community by depicting its sorrows and sufferings and taking the strife the limits of the workers’ capacity to endure. In the severe cold of winter they neither get coal to warm them nor enough food to live on. They are reduced to make skeletons. George Rous does not smoke or drink for three weeks. His mother looks like a ghost. The wives and children of the workers are in a great misery. They somehow manage to get whatever they can for sheer survival and pull on. Mrs. Bulgin lives on bread for four days. She keeps her children in bed because they do not get food as they are so hungry. Mrs. Rous is as white as snow. Annie Roberts suffers for a long time from cold and hunger and dies in it.

The workers moral collapsing has been shown in the second act. The workers one after another differ from Roberts. Henry Thomas appeals the workers for compromise and they are agree, they need to get relief from the misery at any cost. This note of rebellion against Roberts is impossible for the workers to continue the fight. The capacity to endure and their desire to stand for the ideal cause are broken completely by the pangs of hunger.
The dramatist deepens the impression of injustice further on our mind through two characters- Enid, the daughter of John Anthony, the chairman of the board of directors and Edgar, his son. Both have a notable sense of injustice and humanity. Enid’s earnest desire is to help Annie Roberts and her sympathetic attitude towards the problems, are made explicit through her attempts for bringing about peace and compromise. She appeals to her father to end the conflict and tells him that she does not believe in barriers between the classes. Edgar, on the other hand, boldly opposes the ruthless behavior of his old and strict father in the board meeting and appeals to his consciences, taking the stand that war on women and children can not be fair. He tells the directors that all of them are responsible for Annie’s death. Thus, Enid’s sympathy for the workers and Edgar’s sense of justice has been shown by the dramatist very beautifully. The conscience of the stony hearted directors and their callousness towards the workers and their own self-centered natures stand out in contrast to the patient endurance of the workers, a contrast that appeals the poignancy of the struggle, the seriousness of the problem and the blackness of the wrongs done to the labour community.

*Strife* appeals on many levels of meaning. It is a play about the clash between capital and labour, the waste of force involved in the caste-feeling of capital pitted against the caste-feeling of labour, the nemesis of extremism, the conflict between opposing wills, the generation gap represented by Anthony and his children- Enid and Edgar, the lack of cohesion between leaders and the followers, the conflict of intransigent personalities, the inability to change with the times and lead a life of peace and prosperity, and the logic that fanaticism and inflexibility alike over reach themselves in a society which ought to thrive on mutual understanding; especially in trade disputes. In a bigger way the play illustrates the idea that class is destiny. Anthony does not fight for himself but his class. He owes a duty to capital not only national but also international. His belief is that masters and servants are two different classes. They have different fates and different destinies. Their sensibilities, their ideologies, their attitudes are different. Masters and men can not be equal. Where two men meet the better man will rule. The interests of the two classes- the labour and the capital- are poles apart. They can never be the same. The whole truth is that the men will never become masters.

Galsworthy points out the way of peace and prosperity in the midst of the class struggles. Philosophically, too, the play has a universal idea. It is Galsworthy’s own words, the perishing of the sword by the sword. The fatal things, says the dramatist, is strong will minus self-control and
balance. Galsworthy claims that he is an impartial observer in the clashes between his major characters. This is true but not absolutely. In Strife Roberts and Anthony are allowed to present their cases with utter objectivity, yet we find that Galsworthy’s sympathy is with Roberts. As A. C. Wards comments, “the scales are held dispassionately by the dramatist, and the audience feels only the desperate futility of the tragic pride and prejudice on both sides. But then by his choice of incident at the climax of the play, Galsworthy destroys in a moment the illusion of impartiality. The death of Mrs. Roberts is not an appeal to human instincts of harmony and justice; it is an appeal to humanitarian sentiment which, fundamentally, has no bearing upon the real problem of Strife.”

The play has no heroes in the traditional sense of the word. Neither Roberts nor Anthony is a heroic figure. They are the two best men, both broken. A. Nicoll rightly says, “Galsworthy makes neither Anthony nor Roberts a man who governs events. Both have iron will and are determined to fight to the bitter end, but they are not drawn in individualistic heroic terms. The one takes his strength from what may be called the capitalist faith, the other from the faith of the rebels. Fundamentally, each is incapable of acting otherwise than he does. Capital makes Anthony what he is. He can change even if the times have changed. Labour has made Roberts the person he is. He believes that the god of capital and the god of labour are two different powers.”

In Strife as well as in other plays of similar themes, Galsworthy makes the invisible social structure the hero and the characters act mere puppets. They have very little independent existence. Even when they are individualized they are intensely typical. They represent common human lapses and weaknesses. All of them show their weakest spots in a time of struggle. All of them are selfish human beings. They suffer from internal schisms and rivalries. Anthony and Roberts are left alone. Their followers drift away from them and end the strife on their own terms. Hence, it is not the personal hero that governs the events of the play. It is the social structure and that is where the fun comes in Galsworthy’s plays.

THE SILVER BOX

The year 1906 was a landmark in the career of John Galsworthy as a writer. On 23 March, ‘The Man of Property’ was published, the first of the series which became the famous Forsyte Saga, and possibly his best novel. And then on 25 September 1906, a few weeks after his
thirty-nineth birthday, his first play, The Silver Box, was produced at the Court Theatre, London, to become at once the most discussed and controversial play of the year. The climate of opinion was beginning to change in his favour; the national conscience was stirring, and the Liberal Government, which had been elected in 1905, was beginning its great programme of social and political reforms. Galsworthy’s friend Edward Garnett had suggested to him in 1905 that he should write a play; he began it that winter at Bolt Head in Devonshire and he finished it in Kensington, London, in March 1906.

From the first it was intended for the Court Theatre, London, which was then making theatrical history—just as, fifty years later, it made history again, with John Osborn’s Look Back in Anger. The series of new plays produced at the Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907, and brilliantly directed by J. E. Vedrenne and Harley Granville Barker, was a landmark; it included plays by Shaw, Yeats, Granville Barker, Gilbert Murray, Masefield and Galsworthy, and it began the modern era of English drama. So many problem plays or the plays of ideas or the social realistic plays have been written since that, but in 1906 they were revolutionary, and often resented for audiences of those days had long been accustomed to artificial plays written solely for light entertainment with little truth to life and little artistic quality. This theatrical revolution was not limited to Britain, it was European and the two great leaders were the Norwegian, Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), whose plays were translated into many languages, including English, and the Irishman, George Barnard Shaw (1856-1950), whose plays were also widely translated, but John Galsworthy followed with a distinctively English, although less substantial contribution. His plays too were widely translated.

‘The Silver Box’ showed that a new dramatist had appeared, with a style and attitude of his own. His aim, as he said later himself, 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. Moreover Galsworthy gave the audience something important to think and talk about a social problem or a question of conscience. Many well-known people approved of this first play of his, from the famous actor-manager, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, H. G. Wells, H. W. Hudson and other leading writers. Really good was H. G. Wells’s verdict, although he disliked Galsworthy’s novels. The response of the press was enthusiastic. Notices appeared in nearly sixty newspapers and magazines and only a few were unfavourable. The dramatic critic of The Times concluded,
“our stage realists are so rare and so valuable that we would not say a word to discourage a recruit to their little band so promising as Mr. John Galsworthy.” It was through his plays rather than his novels that he exercised his strongest influence for social reforms. He was always more artist than reformer, however, and was rather aggrieved if his plays were valued more highly as propaganda than as drama. Years later he wrote in the collected edition of his works, ‘a dramatist strongly and pitifully impressed by the encircling pressure of modern environments will not write plays detached from the movements and problems of his times. He is not conscious however of any desire to solve those problems in his plays or to effect great reforms. His only ambition I drama, as in his other work, is to present truth as he sees it and gripping with it his readers or his audience, to produce in them a sort of mental and moral ferment whereby vision may be enlarged, imagination livened and understanding promoted.

_The Silver Box_ presents a criticism of the law prevailing in England during his times. It deals with the old criticism of British law so pointedly reffered to by Oliver Goldsmith in his ‘Traveller’ that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. Galsworhty tries to show in _The Silver Box_ that law can be purchased by the power of wealth and he seems to re-echo the lines of Goldsmith in the ‘Traveller’:

Laws grind the poor,

The rich men rule the law.

Jack barthwick, the son of a rich M. P. commits the same crime of stealing as Jones, the poor man, but Jones is punished whereas Jack is allowed to go scot free. A. Nicoll rightly says, “Both father and the son realize perfectly that Jones is being badly treated, that he and Jack should, in a just society, have received the same punishment, but circumstances will it otherwise. The one is a rich man’s son; the other is nobody. Society, that invisible presence, determines that the rich shall be preferred to the poor.”

In a letter, Galsworthy remarked that the main idea of _The Silver Box_ was that one law for the rich another for the poor is true, but not because society wills it so, rather, in spite of society’s good intentions, through the mere mechanical wide-branching power of money. Galsworthy’s play contrasts the unprincipled, propertiedand pragmatic upper-middle-class characters with their lower class victims in the manipulation of the judicial system. The audience knows from the beginning that the culprits are in two related cases of petty thievery, but
Galsworthy creates suspense through gradual revelation of their guilt to their families. The first thief is young Jack Barthwick, down from Oxford on vacation, who, while out drinking with a female companion, steals her purse containing seven pounds. The play opens as Jack returns to the Barthwick home with Jones, a drunken, unemployed groom. When Jack passes out, Jones steals the purse and a silver cigarette box. Jack’s theft is revealed to his family but is concealed in the court at Jones’s trial until after Jones’s sentencing, when he can only cry out in helpless frustration, thus giving the audience the main idea of the play.

In Barthwick’s cowardly hypocrisy is illustrated throughout the play, especially in one scene at the end of act-II. Jack’s father, John Barthwick, a Liberal Member of Parliament, is so concerned that the scandal of a trial will damage his political and social reputation that he betrays his Liberal sympathy for the poor. One of the Jones’s children is heard sobbing outside the Barthwick’s window because the child can not find Mrs. Jones, his mother and the Barthwick’s housekeeper (she has been wrongly accused, arrested and imprisoned with her husband, even though he has admitted his guilt). The sound of the child’s suffering moves Mrs. Barthwick to suggest that the case be dropped, but Mr. Barthwick says the matter is out of their hands and refuses to help. The curtain drops on the melodramatic tableau, as Mrs. Barthwick turns her back on the crying. Mr. Barthwick covers his ears, and a servant closes the window to shut out the noise of suffering. Galsworthy also teaches a dramatic lesson through contrasts and parallels. To illustrate the further disparity between the lives of the rich and poor, he sets one scene in Jones’s lodging during their meager meal of potatoes and onions and contrasts it with the following scene of the Barthwick’s elaborate dinner. In act-III, the trial for theft is preceded by hearing to remand the children of an out-of-work father to court custody. The court ordered break-up of a family arouses Barthwick’s liberal sentiments, but Galsworthy shows that liberal zeal for social reform is quickly sacrificed to self interest as Barthwick seeks to suppress all evidence of Jack’s involvement in Jones’s case.

In The Silver Box, Galsworthy attempts to portray realistically a serious issue of injustice without resorting to the heroics of the melodrama. He imagines the characters as social types and describes their keynotes in a letter to Granville Barker; the play has no hero, and if there is a villain it is a social class rather than an individual. The drawback of this method was once its virtue, but the sense of recognition to be gained from its topical documentery, realism has been
lost and one is left with a double overdose of obvious didacticism and melodramatic attempts to arouse pathos as in the crying child scene.

**Sufferings of the Underdogs**

Galsworthy was a thorough social idealist and a thorough artist. He possesses a remarkable faculty to discover dramatic elements in natural and unforced situations. He never introduces false themes. He always maintains a classic balance which can be seen in his work. His work reveals that he is essentially English in his humour, he wrote plays first to instruct and then to delight. He was completely dissatisfied with the French pattern plays of his days and wished to present real life. He says, “My dramatic invasion, and the form of it, was dictated rather by revolt at the artificial nature of the English play of the period and by a resolute intention to present real life on the stage.” Galsworthy believes the writer should make its audience think.

His temperamental preoccupation was with social reform. His didactic tendency is a great menace sometimes but his skill enables him to copy with the demon of the didacticism using the device of creating occasion for speech making and propounds on the dramatist’s behalf. Sheila Kays Smith remarks, “Undoubtedly his most striking quality as a dramatist is his sense of formal and craft but he is far removed from that school of playwright of which Pinero and Jones are leaders, whose technique amounts to little more that a working knowledge of the stage.”

When we study the themes of his plays, we will notice that he chooses the graver aspects of contemporary life and he lays strong emphasis on incidents as the outcome of the forces stronger than the individuals. Ibsen too adopted the same method but he concentrated on the individual only while Galsworthy gave more emphasis on the forces of nature as Skemp remarks, “For Galsworthy the individual problem leads always to the fundamental problem of the general relations between individuals within the social organism.”

Galsworthy’s plays are well made plays full of thought and substance. He uses where necessary the usual tricks of the melodrama, but he displays a thorough artistic restraint. He wrote his first play ‘The Silver Box’ in 1906, in a naturalistic manner. The play had been praised by all class of audience. In his very first play he showed his craftsmanship. This play is one of the first examples of the naturalistic school of England. Venom Frank says, “A single play ‘The Silver Box’ by till then where caused astonishment, even in the amidst of astonishing court theatre session.” The silver box is Galsworthy’s first play. It arrays class against class in a
manner prophetic of its author’s subsequent work. It opens with a night scene in which we see young Jack Barthwick returning home completely drunk. He enters the room with a purse in his hand which he has stolen for a joke from the girl with whom he has been spending the evening. He is accompanied by a rather less drunk working man, who met him outside the house and helped him find the keyhole for his key. Barthwick falls asleep and Jones, the working man, sizes the opportunity to steal the street girl’s purse and silver cigarette box from the table. The play then goes on and shows how different are the consequences for an upper class and a lower class criminal. Jack Barthwick is visited by the girl, who demands her purse back, but she is satisfied when his father, a rich M. P., instead gives her a generous sum of money. Jones is sentenced to a month’s hard labour no one thinks about him at all. In this play a case is portayed of Jack and Jones. Jack is a pleasure seeking man and the son of a rich M. P. law favors the rich and crushes the poor.

Jones meets Jack at night and helps him to open the door of his house, where upon Jack offers him wine as he has no money to pay and in fit of sudden impulse Jones, an unemployed person, decides to score off Jack. Mr. Barthwick, the liberal M. P. cross questions Mrs. Jones and finds out the previous history of him. It reveals that Mr. Jones had a child before marriage. He decides on this account to discontinue the poor Mrs. Jones, who is honest. The police arrests Jones on a charge of theft. Jones has a small quarrel with the police and on the charge he is still more sternly dealt with by the law. Jack and Jones have committed the same crime. But Jones is punished and because he is poor and Jack, being the son of rich M. P. goes free. Jones says, “Call this justice? What about ‘im? ‘E got drunk! ‘E took the purse—‘e took the purse but it’s ‘is money got ‘im off—Justice!” (Act-III,Se.-II, P. 82). Jack and Jones committed the same crime but treated differently. Though in this play, Galsworthy wants to present the idea of the society which has different rules for the two sections of society. The play is realistic and so there is no melodramatic painting or we do not find a trace of conscious wickedness. Barthwick is not a villain. The judge is not a wicked person yet the actions of Jack and Jones receive different treatment. The silver box that Jones took away from Jack was out of spite. Jones is an honest man who wants to work. He says, “A man wants to sweat his soul and to keep breath in him and ain’t allowed that’s justice that’s freedom and all the rest of it.”(Act-II, Se.-I,P.38) Jones feels very odd when he is not working when he is out of employment. He drinks heavily. He drinks but of another kind of work that sets him to drink. According to Galsworthy; “The keynote of
Barthwick is want of courage. He thinks himself full of principles and invariably compromises in the face of facts. The keynote of Mrs. Barthwick is want of imagination."

*The Silver Box* contains a social satire on unjust social prejudice. In *the silver box* which is architectonic in style and realistic having no freaks or chance to any exterior element. We find sympathy for the underdogs in his plays. Jones loves his children. He is unemployed and feels—“If I’d ha’ known as much as I do now, I’d never ha’ had one o’ them. What’s the use o’ bringin’ ‘em into a state o’ things like this? It’s a crime, that’s what it is; but you find it out too late; that’s what’s the matter with this ‘ere world.”(Act-II, Se.-I, P.-42&43) The unemployed Jones wanders in search of employment and he says, “A lady says to me: ‘D’ you want to earn a few pence, my man?’ and gives me her dog to ‘old outside a shop—fat as a butler ‘e was—tons o’ meat had gone to the makin’ of him.”(Act-II, Se.-I, P.40) It shows the sympathy of the playwright towards Jones. The play deals with contemporary life of the ordinary people and suggests how there is one law for the poor and one for the rich. The play has a tragic tone but it is not tragic.

It is according to the naturalistic style of drama which faithfully presents the reality. It has no soliloquies; the whole drama takes place before, as if we are on the stage. In the play we notice that both are almost but not quite parallel. Jack steals a woman’s sky blue velvet silk purse, the latter steals a silver cigarette box, both are parallel, although the theft was wrong in both the cases. Jones’ side was weakened and Jack’s side was strengthened. This is because Jack enjoyed favourable circumstances of economic and social status whereas unemployed Jones was leading a life of poverty. Thus Jones is condemned to one month’s hard labor for the noblest thing, he ever did the second point which engage our attention, is that the power of wealth diverts the course of justice, as due to wealth the magistrate himself influenced by wealth and power.

Mrs. Jones would have left her husband however, she is faithful and loyal to him, and she stands by him while he is not to her. Galsworthy excellently portrays his best and worst characters together. Barthwick symbolizes hypocrisy. In the silver box Galsworthy deals with the problem of underdogs. Thus his plays are the plays of social themes and are known as drama of ideas or the realistic play. His studies of the contemporary English society and its inherent conflicts and maladjustment are valuable human documents of considerable historical and artistic importance.

**Social Realism**
The life of domestic servants offers Galsworthy another avenue for the presentation of social injustice. ‘The Silver Box’ is perhaps the most important play based on the theme of social realism. It presents a story of wrongs inflicted on a char-woman Mrs. Jones and her husband James Jones who has been out of work for months. Jack Barthwick, a son of John Barthwick, a liberal M. P., comes home quite drunk past midnight and tries to find key-hole. In his drunkenness he looks for it on the wrong side of the door. Jones who happens to be passing, sees this and helps him, Jack offers him a drink and cigarette, which Jones accepts. Jack falls asleep on the sofa and Jones drinks and smokes. Under the influence of the drink, he pockets the silver box of cigarettes and the crimson purse which Jack has stolen from a lady of his acquaintance. The silver box is found missing the next morning and it causes concern in the house of the Barthwick’s, suspicion falls on Mrs. Jones who works there as a char-woman. The detective is employed by Barthwick to find out the crime. He finds the silver box at Mrs. Jones’ lodgings, and gets her arrested on the charge of theft. Jones tells the detective that he has stolen himself the silver box and his wife is not guilty, but the detective does not listen to him. So to save the honour of his wife, he struggles with the detective and deals him a blow but he is over-powered by the detective and is arrested on the charge of assault. Mr. Barthwick with the help of his lawyer keeps the issue of the stolen purse out of the case as the purse was actually stolen by his own son Jack. He later withdraws the charge of theft not on account of any kindness of pity for the poor prisoner but merely in order to avoid further involvement through his son’s crime in the case and loss of good name through publicity in the newspapers. Jones gets one month punishment with hard labour and Jack goes unpunished.

The story presented in ‘The Silver Box’ shows that the helplessness of the poor leads to their victimization, which causes a great trouble and distress to them. The law and its ministers are of little use for them, as the poor can not afford lawyers to plead for justice. So the justice they get in the court is merely a travesty of it. Galsworthy reflects through the presentation on this theme in this play his view that the law should not be blind to the weakness and misfortunes of the lower classes. Their hopeless circumstances lead them to the illegal acts but many of them are not bad by the character. The legal system should see to it that the poor are given just treatment at the hands of the law and not victimized vindictively. Irrespective of the class or creed, it should guard the interests of the all people. That is all should be truly equal before law.
The impression of injustice to the poor servants like Mrs. Jones and unemployed persons like Jones come strongly as the dramatic effect of the dramatist’s treatment of the woeful life of the underdogs in this play. He powerfully depicts the situation in which the poor live as very desperately. Jones wandering in search of job makes him desperate. He comes to realize that he is useless and a mean character in the world of luxury and leisure. A man like him wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in, but is not allowed to do so. He asks a question to which it is hard to find an answer. What is it that has made the aristocrats any better than himself? They are rolling in wealth and luxury even though they have not done a day’s work in their lives. The evils they do and the sins they commit are not brought to the light because they have got money.

This glaring contrast between the just and the unjust makes Jones contemptuous of the gentry. He takes the silver box merely out of spite. He would have thrown it in the gutter but by chance he is arrested. He took the crimson purse only to score off the fat calf Jack it is nobody’s property and he would like it as the wages for all his wanderings after job. But Jones was justifying his action behind an illegal act which is usually not considered and the victim is branded as guilty on circumstantial evidence.

Moreover, the dramatist shows that Jones is not given of air trial in the London police court. He can not afford the fees of a lawyer and whenever he tries to speak out his feelings with an agitated tongue and demand justice, he has silenced; either by the lawyer of Mr. Barthwick or by the constable. This suppression is purposely imposed to save the skin of Barthwick’s. Jack Barthwick’s crime is not less grave than the crime accidentally committed by Jones. Jack has stolen the purse of a lady and has attempted to issue a cheque to Moss & Sons, Tailors which his bank could not meet. Mr. Barthwick is aware of the sins of his son. He tells him that he might have been prosecuted, had he been the son of a poor man or a clerk. He admits to himself that the persons like Jack are nuisance to the society. Ironically the exact words come through the mouth of the magistrate when he passes sentence upon Jones at the end of the play. Thus by introducing the episode of the theft the dramatist brings forth the contrast between the Barthwick’s and the Jones’s, it illumines the fact that through good by the character of Jones. Jones is unable to get justice and though guilty Jack escapes from the hands of the law.

The charge of the theft and the verdict of the court prove too much for Mrs. Jones. She loses her three children. Jones points out this fact and angrily asks the magistrate, “Who is to make up to her for this?”
The strong logic of this question is unanswerable. The magistrate is simply sorry for her. Mr. Barthwick makes a shame faced gesture of refusal and hurries out of the court. When Mrs. Jones turns to him and appeals humbly for assistance and sympathy, the genial meek Mrs. Jones endures the sufferings and serves as a moment to the patience of the poor who are victims of injustice. The dramatist deepens the impression by introducing some incidents which prick the conscience hard. The sobbing of Mrs. Jones’ little boy rends the heart. She says to her husband that they ought to drop the complaint. The Silver Box is the real masterpiece of Galsworthy. It is a triumph of the naturalistic technique in drama. The characters are ordinary men and women. There is no villain among them. The judge is impartial and gives a fair judgement on the basis of the evidence before him and yet a great justice is done and incalculable harm is done to innocent people. The fault is not that of characters, the fault lies with the social and economic system and the legal procedures which is advised for the disposal of disputes. The Silver Box shows that the problem can be solved by the exercise of some imagination and sympathy. Thus The Silver Box is undoubtedly a great social tragedy.

LOYALTIES

Galsworthy wrote in his diary for 1921; “During the summer ‘Loyalties’ was written… this was the only play of mine of which I was able to say when I finished it; ‘no manager will refuse this.’” The plays popular success proved Galsworthy to be correct; he had adapted his realistic techniques to his audience’s preference for entertainment instead of sermons. As in ‘The Silver Box’, he used a crime plot but spent far more effort creating a successful modern melodrama that along with his peek into the lives of the postwar, aristocratic, horse-racing set, includes a critique of upper-class anti-semitism, hypocrisy and misplaced loyalty to its own members. For the first time since The Silver Box, Galsworthy employed neither a pattern of recurrent imagery nor a central emblematic property of setting to underline his theme. The ideas in the play emerge in short speeches closely related to the action; the closest Galsworthy comes to a debate in Loyalties is the exchange between Ferdinand De Levis, a young rich, Jewish social outsider, and General Canynge, the patrician elder statesman of Establishment values and taste. De Levis has rightly accused Captain Ronald Dancy, a soldier and a gentleman, of stealing one thousand pounds. Canynge regards De Levis as an arrogant, insolent bounder and makes no secret of his distaste for De Levis’s disregard of ‘the esprit de corps that exists among
gentlemen.’ Other significant words or phrases, such as “unwritten code” “duty” and “honour” occur infrequently and unobtrusively; in context, they are appropriate to the plot and are not overly obvious guideposts to Galsworthy’s moral. Just as Galsworthy does not unduly underline the theme of intolerance, neither does he follow his usual practice of overtly pointing up the merit of charity and unselfishness. Instead, the action embodies his theme of uncharitable Christians versus charitable non-Christians in implicit and understated ways.

The play’s three acts emphasize three different kinds of loyalties in three appropriate settings. In the first act, at a country estate near Newmarket, De Levis’s accusations against Dancy are attacked by Canynge and Charles Winsor out of personal loyalty, the code of the gentleman. In the second act, at a London club, social loyalty is the subject; Canynge and Winsor fear for the reputation of the club and the army; De Levis’s loyalty to his race motivates him to refuse to sign an apology. In act three, at the law office, loyalty to an institution, the profession of law, is emphasized. Finally, in the last scene, the inspector embodies loyalty to the similar but more abstract institution, the law itself.

Galsworthy’s ‘Loyalties’ is a play in which the dramatist deals with the subject of caste prejudice or caste feelings. It is a cry against racial prejudice shown by the Christians to one Captain Dancy, a Jew. Different kinds of loyalties are presented in this play. The most noticeable being the loyalty to race, loyalty to friendship, professional loyalty and lastly the loyalty to married life.

**Idea behind the Play**

The history of the Jews in Britain is different from their history in some other countries. They were all expelled by King Edward I in 1290 and were not allowed to return until the middle of the 17th century, under the rule of Oliver Cromwell; but since their return they have not been shut up in ghettos, or massacred, or brutally ill-treated, and thousands of Jewish refugees from other countries have found peaceful homes in Britain, many have distinguished themselves in the arts and sciences, administration, business and other fields. They have not always been fairly treated, however, socially or politically. It was not until 1858, for example, that Jews were allowed to become the Members of Parliament, though since then they have been appointed to some of the highest offices in the land. A small minority of Englishmen have continued to disgrace themselves by behaving as badly as they do in this play. They are now very few, in Britain which has become far more tolerant since it became anti-imperialist, but they were more
numerous when Loyalties was written, over forty years ago, and it was natural for Galsworthy, with his hatred of injustice, to deal with the question.

In some respects Loyalties is one of his finest plays. The terse dialogues, the skilful construction, the mounting tension, the judicially sympathetic characterization are typical of Galsworthy. They all contribute towards making the play good theatre and it made also a popular film. It is for the reader or the spectator to decide whether Loyalties is more than entertainment, whether this too is one of the plays of ideas, dealing seriously with social and personal problems, for which Galsworthy the dramatist is remembered.

The play opens in the house of Charles Winsor, Meldon Court, New Market. The place is famous for horse-racing. It is 11.30 at night Winsor and his wife Lady Adela are talking about their guests and also about horse-racing. The behavior of De Levis, a young and rich Jew, with the Christians is bised. Ronald Dancy, a retired military captain, is a short of money as he is bankrupt in the horse race. De Levis enters and tells them the news of theft that his amount of nearly a thousand pounds has been stolen from his room. He had sold his mare, Rosemary and earned that sum and had kept it under the pillow. Winsor feels so sorry for it. De Levis requests Winsor to call the police. Winsor talks with General Canynge on this issue. They both don’t like the conduct of De Levis. De Levis is firm to call the police and he returns his room. Other guests like Margarate, a young fashionable society girl, Lady Mabel Dancy and her husband arrive at the house of Winsor. They all talk about the behavior of De Levis. The first scene of the first act closes with the arrival of the police inspector, Dede who begins the investigation of the theft.

The second scene of this act opens in the room of De Levis. Inspector asks some questions to him. The inspector observes balcony of the house and realizes that the creeper is crushed. He makes an inquiry to all the guests and the servants. He examines the outside area for foot prints. De Levis shows Canynge the distance between the two balcony’s, his own and Dancy’s. He tells that Dancy is an expert in high jumping. Thus De Levis indirectly suspects on Dancy, but Canynge doesn’t believe in it. He knows that Dancy is a thorough gentleman, a good soldier and a member of the upper class society so he can’t do it, but De Levis is firm that Dancy must have stolen the money. Winser and Canynge call Dancy there, they ask some questions to Dancy and his wife but Dancy denies the charge of theft. When Canynge touches the shirt of Dancy, which is wet, he realizes that Dancy must have gone out of home when it was raining. Dancy must have stolen the money but he keeps mum as he is Christain, on the contrary he
requests De Levis to withdraw the charge of theft on him. He agrees on one condition that Canynge should support his application of the membership of the famous London Club.

First scene of the second act opens at the card room of London Club. Winsor, Canynge and others are playing there soon they hear the news that the application of De Levis for the membership of the Aristocratic London Club has been rejected. De Levis becomes angry and he suspects that Dancy must have been behind it. So he publically talks that Dancy is thief. He thinks even Canynge is not honest person. The quarrel takes place between Dancy and De Levis. De Levis becomes furious on all the Christains. He warns Dancy that he will fetch him in the court.

The second scene of the second act takes place on the very next morning after the club incident. Margaret Oram provides two important news to Mabel Dancy- one is regarding the charge of the theft made by De Levis on her husband, Dancy, and the other is Dancy’s love affair with the daughter of an Italian wine merchant. Mabel is shocked and surprised on both the news as she is not aware of it. When Dancy arrives she asks many questions to him but he hesitates to answer her, on the contrary he suggests her to leave England for Africa. But Mabel does not like his idea and tells him to fight the situation and prove his innocence. De Levis enters, Mabel humbly requests him to withdraw the charge but he does not listen her as he believes that Dancy is one of such Christains who cursed his Jew race. Dancy presents a piece of paper before De Levis on which it is written, “I apologies to Captain Dancy for the reckless and monstrous charge I made against him, and I retract every word of it.”(Act-II,Se.-II,P.57). Dancy requests him to sign the paper but De Levis refuses to sign. The quarrel takes place between both of them and is interrupted by Mabel. De Levis leaves the place. Mabel and Dancy decide to meet lawyer.

First scene of the third act opens in the office of Twisden and Graviter, the soliciter’s of Dancy. Winsor and Margaret explain Dancy-Levis case to Twisden and they tell him about the wet sleeve of Dancy’s shirt on the day of theft. After the departure of Margaret and Dancy, Twisden talks to the client called Gilman who shows a note stolen from the room of De Levis. Gilman gets that note from his old customer, Ricardos, an Italian wine merchant. Gilman brings Ricardos with him. Twisden finds out the love affair between Dancy and the daughter of Ricardos. In order to restrain the love affair, Dancy had given one thousand pounds to Ricardos. Twisden verifies the truth and makes up his mind not to handle the case. He wants to be faithful to his profession, though there is sympathy in his mind about Dancy, he can not defend him.
The second scene of this act opens in the office of Twisden. Twiaden, the lawyer of Dancy, asks him about the notes, Dancy confesses his guilt and tells the truth. Twisden advises Dancy to leave England for Morocco and he promises the economical support to him. Dancy can get a job in Morocco with the acquaintance of his friends. Dancy is ready to go but meanwhile Canynge, Margaet, Calford and Graviter arrive there. They all know the crime committed by Dancy. They feel pity for Mabel Dancy. De Levis comes and says that he is now satisfied because the arrest warrant has been issued on Dancy, thus he wins the battle. Dancy walks to and fro in the room without uttering a word.

Last scene of the play takes place in the sitting room of Dancy. He tells his wife whatever is happened in the court. She knows that it is too late to save her husband from the charge of theft. Now she remembers, why he was insisting her for Africa before three months. Dancy tells her the real fact that made him to steal money and his love affair with the young daughter of Ricardos. She feels sympathy and forgives him and requests him to leave for Morocco. When they prepare the plan of escape, the police inspector, Dede arrives there to arrest Dancy. Dancy hides in another room to avoid arrest. Inspector asks about Dancy, but Mabel requests him to help them for their plan of escape to Morocco. As a faithful and honest police officer, he has to do his duty. Inspector knocks the door of inner room but soon they hear the noise of pistol inside the room, they break the door of the room and find that Dancy is laid in blood with a pistol in one hand. Thus he commits suicide leaving behind a letter, addressing his friend, Major Colford. In the letter he requests Colford to take care of his wife, Mabel. He also writes in it, that the only decent thing he could do in his life is to kill him and the pistol is only loyal to him.

Social Realism

‘Loyalties’ is a social tragedy. Galsworthy has depicted the conflict between the Jews and the Christains. That struggle has been going on in England since the beginning of the world. It is a class discrimination. The Jews are always looked down upon by the Christains. De Levis is the representative of the Jews. He is ill-treated by the Christains. Once he gets an opportunity to take revenge on the Christains. Dancy, a chriatain fellow steals one thousand pounds from the room of the Jew, De Levis, the theft is disclosed and Dancy is arrested. Crime of theft is not so serious, but it is taken to the court and out of fear and mere shame Dancy commits suicide. It is quite remarkable that there are no deeper conflicts in the play, but Dancy’s suicide is the result of outward social system which is responsible for his tragedy. Galsworthy wants to point out how
social forces swallow up the individual in the modern society. In *Loyalties* Galsworthy is succeeded in expounding the very idea of social realism.

**Galsworthy’s Defects as a Dramatist:**

Undoubtedly Galsworthy is a great dramatist but it can not be denied that there are some blemishes or the shortcomings in his work. These defects are summarized below;

**His Characters are flat:**

Galsworthy has written problem plays, he is more interested in the discussion of a problem than in the living human beings. His characters are the embodiments of ideas. Their actions are so manipulated as to bring about a full exposition of those ideas. His characters remain flat. They do not grow as a reaction to different situations. He sees them at one point, they are real enough at that point, but they do not grow, as real human beings grow, from situation to situation. Falder in Justice remains the same from the beginning to the end of the play. Anthony and Roberts in Strife are broken at the end but they do not change. This is not life like human beings do not stand for fixed ideas. Human nature is very complex, human beings react in different situations. We, therefore, often have the feeling that Galsworthy has not been able to breathe a soul into his characters.

**His Dialogues are not effective:**

His dialogues are written in good prose but they are not very effective on the stage. Shaw’s dialogues are a feast of wit and repartee, but Galsworthy’s dialogues lack this brilliance. They are somewhat dull. Shaw’s long plays are kept alive by the charm of his conversation. Galsworthy’s dialogues have the dullness of common, everyday conversation.

**His Characters are Small Beings:**

Galsworthy has not created any great personalities like Othello or Hamlet or Macbeth or Falstaff or Dr. Faustus. His characters are petty beings that are easily crushed down by strong social forces. They do not struggle heroically up to the end. They easily give up the fight. Falder is a weak clerk who, when faced with a devastating situation, seeks refuge in suicide. Roberts has some leadership qualities but he is unable to carry his people with him. Hillchrist does not have the magnanimity and refinement of an aristocrat; he is petty and mean. It is not necessary that a great man must be a king or a general. Even a middleclass individual can have the spark of greatness. But Galsworthy’s characters lack that spark.
**Galswoerthy’s Tragedies do not create awe and Terror:**

The great tragedies of the world strike awe and terror in our mind. Galsworthy’s tragedies only produce pity and compassion. The heroes of Sophocles struggle bravely against the all-powerful gods and we admire them even when are crushed. We sympathise with them but we are not moved to any stronger emotion. Prof. Nicoll says, “Galsworthy has given a new dimension to tragedy by showing the waste caused by the destruction of innocent human beings by the social forces which are the strong today as the gods were in the past. Waste is certainly one of the elements of great tragedy, but when a petty clerk or a mean drunkard is crushed down and his life is wasted, we only feel pity for him and pity is not a tragic emotion.”

**His Themes are Trivial:**

The great dramas of the world deal with the fundamental emotions of the human heart like love, jealousy, hatred, bitterness, madness etc. The vision of Galsworthy, on the other hand, is narrowed down to the petty problems of daily life. A small factory or a petty theft or a strike in a small factory, a defect in the prison administration or in the marriage laws can not create deep emotion in us.

**He Makes the Stage his Pulpit:**

Galsworthy was at heart a social reformer and he wanted to use the stage to bring the evils of society to the notice of the public. He felt that a lot of things were rotten in the state of Denmark and it was his business to set them right. For instance, he felt that solitary confinement was a very cruel practice that the poor did not get justice in law courts that most of our social, political, economic and religious conflicts were due to the lack of understanding and sympathy. He wrote plays to drive home these points, but art is one thing and morality another and the two should not be mixed. At times Galsworthy seems to be a preacher rather than an artist.

**He Has no Humour:**

Galsworthy is singularly lacking in humour. Shaw makes his lengthy dialogues charming by the use of wit and humour. His long plays dealing with dry themes like evolution are made interesting only because of humour. Shakespeare uses humour even in his tragedies, after the horrible murder of King Duncan by Macbeth a porter comes to the stage and amuses the audience by imagining that he is porter of hell-gate. This amuses us and relieves the tension. Galsworthy’s plays, however, have no humour at all; his pessimism was never relieved by laughter.
There are formidable defects and would prevent a dramatist from coming to the front rank, still Galsworthy has an important place in modern drama because of the structure of his drama, his humanism, the sincerity of his art and the faithful picture that he has drawn of the life around him with all its conflicts and problems.

Some Critical Opinions on Galsworthy as a Dramatist:

Coats remarks on Galsworthy’s dramatic craftsmanship that Galsworthy is a master of dramatic technique and his plays are well worth studying from this point of view alone. His plots are not the unwinding of a skein of complicated happenings, so intricately contrived that the interest mainly depends on the ingenuity of the story. His climaxes are good. Dialogue is successfully employed by Galsworthy for the purpose of revealing character.  

A.C. Ward on Galsworthy’s Theory of Drama: Galsworthy speaks of naturalistic technique in relation to both the novel and the drama, not indeed as the ideal technique but as a method offering definite advantages. Naturalistic art is like a steady lamp, held up from time to time in whose light things will be seen for a space clearly and is due proportion freed from the mist of prejudice and partisanship.

Human Relationship

Galsworthy was a social reformer. He was very much conscious of the manners, eticates and the code of conducts of the people in his contemporary society. The relationships of the human beings are reflected in his selected plays, *Justice, Strife, The Silver Box and Loyalties*. The play *Justice* deals with the life of a common man, a junior clerk, William Falder. He commits a forgery under the pressing need of money for helping the wretched woman, Ruth Honeywill. She is tortured by her husband and Falder wants to drag her out of that drudgery. Falder is sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment for the act of forgery. But when he is released, he is not treated as a citizen of the civilized society. He tries his best to get some re-employment but he could not get job at all. When at last he goes to James, he is again arrested by Wister on another charge of forgery. But being afraid of the horrible prison life, Falder throws himself down and finishes his life.

The play shows the indifference of the rich and the highly placed or highly stationed people of the society towards the weak and the down-trodden, the socially degraded and the poor, the wretched and the uncared for. They lack a complete understanding of what human nature in its practical aspect is. They are absolutely unaware of the realities, the strong points and the weak
points of human nature. Temptation plays a significant role in human life this very factor of human nature was nowhere prized, valued, computed or considered throughout the play. After his release from the jail, Falder goes to see his sister thinking that she will help him, but his brother-in-law does not allow her to meet Falder because he was ashamed of Falder. The clerks, when they came to know that Falder was an ex-convict, they began to jeer at him and mocked at him. Consequently, he left the job. Only reluctantly James How gives him job again on the condition that he should cut his relation with Ruth Honywill, but now Ruth is the only source of his living.

Falder becomes the victim of the social forces; he is too much tortured by the people in the society after his release from the jail. He tells Cokeson; “the fact is I am struggling against a thing that is all around me, I can’t explain it, it’ as if I was in a net, as fast as I cut it here, it grows up there”. It reflects that in reality the society does not treat the ex-convicts very well. According to sociologists the rigid or the rigorous law is incompetent to deal with humanness in its reformative perspective. The rigorousness of the penal system makes a brute of a man. It is the law that makes a criminal’s life hellish and unworthy. As a result, sometimes the effect of punishment is catastrophic instead of being reformative. Falder is young, affectionate gentleman but he is victimized by the society. In the humanitarian point of view and for the sake of his love, he tries to help Ruth, but his fate doesn’t allow him to do so and he pays the heavy penalty of it by his death. No one shows mercy on him though his crime was not serious. His suffering ends with his tragic death. Ruth suffers terribly at the hands of her callous, cruel and heartless husband who always tortures her. Her sufferings are more painful than the death. Cokeson is kind hearted gentleman whose heart melts at the sight of injustice and undeserved suffering. He deserves a high sense of humanity, pity and compassion in Justice Falder becomes the victim of the machin of law under which he is severely crushed, Ruth suffers because of her callous husband who always drinks heavily and beats her, neither has she escaped from his clutch nor she gets a divorce. In Strife the families of the workers are suffered because of the prolonged strike and Mrs. Annie Roberts becomes victim of the strike. In The Silver Box poor Jones and his innocent wife and children are crushed down under the powerful force of the Almighty Dollar and in Loyalties Dancy suffers because of class prejudice. Galsworthy has presented human relations and their sufferings in these selected plays.

Techniques used in the selected plays of John Galsworthy
Plot

The plots of Galsworthy have a few common characteristics. All the plots are built on a single incident or situation. The plot of the play *Justice* revolves round the alteration of a cheque by Falder. Galsworthy’s primary aim in writing plays was to make known to the complacent Victorian public, certain deep rooted evils in society. As he took up a basic social problem—penel servitude in *Justice* in which he advocated amelioration of prison laws. Galsworthy made a thorough investigation of the existing system which caused the problem. He then adopted the naturalistic technique to project the situation dramatically, without much embellishment. The portrayal of stark reality had the effect of arousing public conscience and Justice illustrates this point.

The plot of *Justice* reveals the careful economy exercised by the author in its construction. Each character and every scene is strictly functional, offering a specific aspect of the subject and thus building up a complete picture of the situation. The plot itself is simple and straightforward. The action takes place over a period of two and a half years. It is a four act play, moving from the lawyers’ office—the scene of the crime—to the courtroom, thence to the prison, and back again to the office. The circular motion of events serves to emphasize the relentless motion of Justice, which crushes those very victims of society whom it should protect. Irony plays an important role in the progress of events in Justice. Falder, an essentially honest man at the beginning of the play, has become a vagrant by the end of the play, rejected by the society. Ruth, for whose sake he committed the crime, has become her employer’s mistress in return for the material support he gives her. Cokeson and Hows who want to help Falder, can not do so. Galsworthy adheres to the traditional concept of the interdependence of plot and character. Unity of action is maintained in the gradual unraveling of the theme—that of the unjust and inhuman treatment inflicted on prisoners in the name of justice.

Galsworthy has some definite views about the art of plot construction. A good plot, he says, is that sure edifice which slowly rises out of the interplay of circumstances on temperament within the enclosing of an idea. A human being is the best plot. This shows that he made the plot subordinate to character. His plots are based on the study of the characters. He reverses the Aristotelian conception of the relationship between plot and character. With Aristotle plot is first and character is second but with Galsworthy character is first and plot second. The plots of Galsworthy have a few common characteristics. In the first place, all his plots are built on a
single incident or situation. Thus in *Loyalties* the plot is built on the incident of robbery of one thousand pounds. The central incident in ‘*The Silver Box*’ is the theft of box. *Justice* revolves round the alteration of a cheque by Falder. The second factor common to all of his plots is that every plot of Galsworthy is calculated to give some social message. The *Strife* represents the conflict between workers and employers. The *Justice* dwells on the evils and shortcomings in the English system of law and judicial procedure. All his plots attain a certain kind of climax. Coats says, “On the whole, Galsworthy’s climaxes are good, they are not included in every play, but where they do occur, they are reached naturally and inevitably by a kind of sure pointing forward and acceleration from the beginning.” Every incident and development directly leads the plot towards the climax. Most of the plots of Galsworthy end in the death of the hero. The heroes in *Justice, The Fugitive, The Mob, Loyalties* and *Old English* die in the end. His plots in the selected plays are marked with a certain amount of suspense from the beginning to the end. In connection of his plot construction G. S. Fraser says, “Galsworthy’s plays are carefully constructed and very well meaning but one is too much aware all the time when reading them or watching them of the authors intension to present an example and state a case”.

**Dialogues**

The plot naturally develops through dialogues. Galsworthy was the master of short, crisp and lively dialogues. Dialogues in the plays of Galsworthy serve two purposes. In the first place, they help in the revelation of the character; and secondly, they contribute to the advancement of the plot. There is a close intimacy between character and dialogues. Galsworthy says, “Good dialogue is character marshalled so as to continue to stimulate interest or excitement. The art of writing true dramatic dialogue is an austere art denying itself all licence, grudging every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, suppressing all jokes and epigrams, severed from the characters, relying for fun and pathos on the fun and tears of life. From start to finish good dialogue is hand-made, like good lace; clear of fine texture, furthering with each thread, the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated.” His dialogues are calculated to serve this end. They are short, crisp and witty. They are never long speeches or soliloquies. The natural characters talk in a natural way. In the plays selected for the study Galsworthy has used crisp and lively dialogues. Galsworthy’s dialogues are skillfully written, they are ordinary conversations but they are interesting and lead to the development of the plot and character. They are witty, terse and crisp. His dialogues in *Justice, Strife, The Silver Box* and
in *Loyalties* are perfectly natural, convincing and free from rhetoric and turgidity. The leading characteristic of Galsworthy’s dramatic dialogue is the complete harmony of the characters with the dialogue which is seen in his selected plays.

**Action**

Galsworthy says that the true dramatic action is what the characters do at once contrary as it were to expectation and yet because they have already done other things. No dramatist lets his audience know what is coming but neither should he suffer his character to act without making his audience feel that those actions are in harmony with temperament and arise from previous known actions of other characters in the play. The dramatist who hangs his characters to his plot instead of hanging his plot to his characters is guilty of cardinal sin. In *Justice* for instance, like his other plays selected for the study, the action ensures from the character of the hero.

**Conflict**

Conflict is one of the prominent features of the drama. It is the main part of drama. Without conflict drama means a person without soul. Aristotle states the necessity of conflict in drama in his Poetics. The conflict in the plays of John Galsworthy is between the individual and a social institution. It is an unequal fight and the puny little human being is easily overwhelmed by the powerful social forces. The characters of Galsworthy such as- Jones (*The Silver Box*), Falder & Ruth (*Justice*), Roberts (*Strife*) and Dancy (*Loyalties*) are weaklings and they are easily crushed when strong social forces confront them. In *The Silver Box* the conflict is between the ‘haves’ and ‘havenots’, the rolling engine of law crushes down the Jones family, there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. In *Strife* the conflict is between capital and labour. In *Loyalties* there is a conflict between different loyalties and the race prejudice and in *Justice* the main conflict is between an individual and the social forces, Falder is crushed not by malignant destiny or the cruel gods but by the mighty edifice of so-called Justice. In all these selected plays of the study the conflict is between powerful institutions and the social forces.

**Language**

One of the greatest marks of Galsworthy’s dramatic craftsmanship is his use of language. Galsworthy has used the language of common people in all his selected plays. The language in these selected plays prepares the necessary social and environmental background for the development of the plot and character. The language essentially contributes to heightening the
poignancy of tone and situation. Coats says, “A feeling of continual strain and tension from beginning to the end accompanies the progress of events in The Silver Box, Loyalties and Strife. In Justice, The Fugitive and in The Mob it is oppressed by a sense of inevitably impending gloom.”

**Character**

Galsworthy is one of the greatest character-delineators in English literature. He considers character as the most important element of the dramatic technique and craftsmanship. Discussing the relative importance of character and plot, Galsworthy says that character is the foundation of plot. Contrary to the Aristotalian concept, Galsworthy says that character is first, plot is next. Plot is subservient to character. The perfect dramatist, he says, rounds up his characters and facts within the ring fence of a dominant idea which fulfils the craving of his spirit; having got them there he suffers them to live their own lives. Take care of character; action and dialogue will take care of themselves. In his lecture on, ‘The Creation of Character in Literature’ Galsworthy discusses his theory and formula of characterization. He says, ‘A real incident or person impinges sharply on a respective mood of a dramatist, particular nature or temperament; the thing observed and the mood of the observer click as it were like two cells clinging together to form the germ-point of creation.

To this germ-point are attracted suitable impacts or impressions that have been stored in the sub-conscious mind till the germ swells to proportions which demand the relief of expression, and in written words the dramatist proceeds to free him. If the observation be conscious, the description will be altered very soon.’ It follows from the above formula that Galsworthy draws his character portraits from his real experience of persons or situation around him. His characters are therefore living human beings in flesh and blood. Galsworthy was a humanist. He was interested very little in individual. Therefore he offers a penetrating study into the mind and hearts of the individual. His characters even heroes are ordinary men possessed of common human weaknesses and frailties. They are generally highly emotional. Schalit says, ‘His characters are dire in action never far-fetched or self-stupefying. They are always drawn from average man and woman of our immediate surroundings.’ Most of his characters are typically English men. They have English traits. His portraits are drawn in such well defined and clear-cut out line that they make a deep impression on the mind.
One technical flaw in Galsworthy’s character portrayal is that, his characters tend to types. They represent classes rather than individuals. Galsworthy believed that all great characters tend to be types. He said that all the characters of Shakespeare, with the exception of Falstaff, tend to be types. Thus, Hillchrist represents the landed nobility; Hornblower stands for the new industrial class. Falder is the common clerk who represents the modern ordinary middle-class persons, romantic in nature and suffering from want of money. Galsworthy’s characters are generally flat characters. There is little development in them. This is the chief dramatic weakness in his plays. For a satisfying dramatic effect, definite progress is needed both in character and action. A perfect dramatic effect is gained when both are complete. In Galsworthy’s plays this is hardly found. ‘In ‘The Silver Box’, says Coats, ‘there is no sufficient climax, either of incident or of character development. In ‘Strife’ the action has more clearly a beginning, a middle and an end but in character, though there is no true development, John Antony or David Roberts do not grow or change under the influence of events, they are simply broken. In ‘Justice’ character development is shown only in secondary personages, above all in James Haw and Cokeson; Falder remains to the end as he was in the beginning—weak, but with a nervous quality that drives him in despair to desperate action.’ His characters are basically built on his actual observation and experience of life. His characters never tend to be types; most of them represent classes rather than individuals. Falder represents the modern ordinary middle class young men, romantic in nature and suffering from want of money’.26 His characters sharply resemble living human beings, they are highly emotional and they enlist deep sympathy and appreciation. There are some characters, who draw the attention in the plays selected for the study are Falder, Ruth Honeywill and Cokeson in Justice, John Anthony, David Roberts and Annie Roberts in Strife, John Barthwick, Jack Barthwick and Mrs. Jones in The Silver Box and in Loyalties Captain Ronald Dancy, Ferdinand de Levis and Mabel. In Galsworthy’s plays every character has his own ideas, but their fate brings conflict in their lives. Their ideas create problems in themselves, here the victim is in conflict in the form of a system. There is always a conflict in Galsworthy’s drama and under current of irony which is more impressive than open denunciation. The characters are unable to express their sense of wrong but their inarticulateness is moving. In his plays everybody behaves according to their own wishes, but everything happens against their wishes and there is always conflict between wish and problem.

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