CONCLUSION

The Forsyte Saga is a bourgeois generational novel written in the well-established mode of realism. It is very substantial in the sense that it conveys "the sense of social substance, of historical motion, of familial rise and fall, of the interlocking of a family and a culture".¹ Galsworthy when he published The Man of Property in 1906 had no specific intention of continuing it as The Forsyte Saga. "At that period Galsworthy's idea seems to have been to make his study of English society in extenso rather than to specialise intensively in the manners and customs of the Forsytes".² The two later novels that complete The Forsyte Saga, In Chancery and To Let, were published after the Great war.

Galsworthy, the novelist is not an innovator. His contribution to the development of the novel as a form is nil. But this does not mean that he is not readable and lacking in imaginative insight. To a modernist reader the narrative strategy of Galsworthy appears obsolete, but it must be said again that narrative strategy and technical brilliance are not the only

standards for assessing the worth of a novelist.
All the three pieces that constitute *The Forsyte Saga*
are what J.W. Beach has called "well-made novels".
A well-made novel need not necessarily be one with
a restricted point of view. Like most of his contem­
poraries Galsworthy maintains the authorial silence
and this makes his narrative dramatic and swift.
His language has a certain polish and neatness and
his irony is mild. They all work towards a balance
that is often lacking in some of his contemporaries.
One may complain that the narrative tone is somewhat
dry, especially, in the two later novels. But this
can easily be explained. *The Man of Property* has
effectively set the scene for the enactment of the
Forsyte drama. The two later novels eliminate the
background by making the background itself the fore­
ground. A strong sense of social criticism which is
characteristic of *The Man of Property* gets muted
in the two later novels.

Galsworthy the playwright was interested in
various social problems. The author of *The Silver Box*,
*Justice* and *The Skin Game* appears to be a man interested
in social reform. As Herman Ould has rightly pointed out: "Man versus society, the free mind versus the conventional; in a word, the individual versus the mass; this theme was very persistently in Galsworthy's mind." Endowed with first hand knowledge of law he felt that law and justice were not one. Galsworthy the novelist appears to be a keen and shrewd observer of manners and morals. Like one of his characters in The Forsyte Saga he has "impersonal eye" for what is wrong with the victorian "self-culture."

II

Our purpose in reading an Edwardian classic like The Forsyte Saga is to familiarise ourselves with the idea of self in a society ridden with conventional morality. The Edwardians did not devise a significant idea of the self. Taking stock of the situation which they inherited, they reacted in their own way to Victorian notions of moral faith, selflessness and self-culture. "The radical failure of Victorian morality as a "faith" was that it canceled rather than nourished "the sense of life." If Tolstoy is

right, if the felicity of faith is its gift of the sense of life, then the Victorian form of faith was self-defeating; it enhanced nothing, and if it saved pride, it wasted life to the same degree. It emptied the self out into a vacuum of existence. Though the Victorians won the moral right to hold their heads high, it was at the cost of finding anything to see there. Moreover, the imperial thrust and the commercial materialism have created a certain amount of unintentional self-critique we notice in some of the Victorian moralists. But the emergence of the practical and the money-minded middle class had brought in its wake a certain complacency in spiritual matters. Material progress and undisturbed peace were no doubt the chief causes for self-congratulation. One's sense of duty had served the purpose of creating vested interest in those statutory provisions that retarded the progress of the self in introspection and self-analysis. Even in matters so intimate and personal like marriage and sex, the statutory safeguards were invoked to imprison the self in a cage. Ill-matched marriages, marriages devoid of love and

4. Calvin Bedient: *Architects of the Self*
George Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and E.M. Forster,
marriages forced on unwilling persons owing to various social and unsocial reasons, had to survive inspite of the inner suffocation they create. From all this it follows that a person like Galsworthy who himself had passed through a serious psychological crisis before and after his marriage, no doubt, would react not with bitterness but with understanding and compassion. In *The Forsyte Saga* it is these questions that assume greater importance than the condition of common man in a complacent society. The simple truth underlying *The Forsyte Saga* is the tragic consequences of ill-matched unions. Since Forsyte family is society in miniature, it can be argued that the Forsyte scheme of values gives scope to loveless marriages. But what is to be noted is that the middle class view of the self is so restricted as to deny any freedom that is outside the pale of puritan and conventional morals. This amounts to a denial of the self, if not active suppression. Thus *The Forsyte Saga* is a social criticism directed against conventional marriages, manners and morals.

The priggish notion of duty to oneself and to others may lead to imaginative blindness as it has
happened in the case of Soames Forsyte. A typical product of the late Victorian social ethic and economic philosophy, he is unlovable in *The Man of Property.*

The idiom of aggressive self, characterised by the words duty and sanctity, distorts Soames's view of home, man and wife relationship. The value of *The Forsyte Saga* consists in its urbane and inherently moral view of marriage, manners and morals. Although he was aware of social malaise that largely contributed to the degradation of the self, he did not create a significant idea of the self. This is largely because of his lack of knowledge of human nature outside his own social circle. No doubt, he had sympathy for others but it could not be exploited to create an aesthetic insight. All his contemporaries and admirers have agreed with Charlie A. Evans who, soon after the writer's death, said:

Galsworthy stands in the present age for all that is best and sanest in the idealism which brings the version of a better world. He speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves, and if, sometimes, he disturbs our easy complacency, that in itself is one of his greatest virtues.

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