CHAPTER II

GALSWORTHY’S CONTRIBUTION TO BRITISH DRAMA

2.1 Preliminaries

In Modern British drama Galsworthy occupies prominent position especially for his brilliant and realistic exposure of the ills of English society. Though he resembles to his predecessor and contemporary dramatists he cautiously maintains his original dexterity of whittling his plays. He is close to Ibsen in his realism and adheres to moral sincerity of Bernard Shaw. Galsworthy’s concern for social troubles and deterioration of values is like Brieux. (JGDA 1926:9) His intense psychological approach, social fervor, artistic economy and control over the theme, the characters, and the plot are witnessed by his audience and readers of his plays. His plays are closely related to his novels.

Galsworthy is a sincere dramatist and his integrity of the profession is evidently perceived in the way he shapes his plays. He is aware of the purpose of writing plays. His artistic compassion for the weak in society is remarkably perceived in majority of his plays. He sets certain rules and regulations for people to practice as he has already followed them in his life. This is clear in his following expression:

“There is third course: To set before the public no cut-an-dried codes, 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. This 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 immediately practical result.”

(SPCK, included in IOT, web source)

His characters are not puppets, nor are they remarkably intelligent but odd people; ordinary human beings from daily life. For him character comes before the plot. It is true that the primary function of the play is to provide joy but it should also educate and instruct on moral issues. Galsworthy maintains that the later objective of the play should be subsidiary to the former that is supplying with imaginative ecstasy. He is not a missionary reformer, but a keen observer and artist. He has some definite idea to convey and it should creatively exemplify in the art.

Galsworthy is impartial in the treatment of his drama. Despite being unbiased his strength lies in sustaining the suspense of the play in reader’s mind. Unquestionably he is successful in employing this device in art. Perhaps this is because of his legal background. His impartiality is clearly stated in the following words:

“Let me try to eliminate any bias, and see the whole thing as should an umpire—one of those pure beings in white coats, purged of all the prejudices, passions, and predilections of mankind. Let me have no temperament for the time being—Only from an impersonal point of view, if there be such a thing, am I going to get even approximately at the truth.”

(As quoted in JGDA pp.17, 18)
2.2 Galsworthy as a Playwright

To study steady development of Galsworthy as a playwright it is imperative to consider his shift from novelist to dramatist. As a novelist he had already gained immense popularity. His trilogy *The Forsyte Saga*, attacks the upper middle class society. In his novels he gives us negative criticism of his society. Here he deals with human psychology in the most compassionate manner, the more he fathoms the character, and the more sensitive are his tools for registering the feedback. He explores human psyche with utmost dexterity and delicacy. The readers of his novels come across sensitive details of beauty of nature. He also tries to establish association of nature and human life.

In his novels, Galsworthy, especially in *The Forsyte Saga*, it is the emotional emptiness, inflexibility and the tautness of the blind bourgeois that have engaged his particular concentration. Their emptiness and larger interest in accumulation of wealth they have lost interest in real life resulting in catastrophe and ruining of life. Their unimaginative and unbending outlook to life inflicts calamity on them and those in their proximity. Soames is unkind towards Irene and makes her lead tragic life.

The drama, however, demands more meticulous treatment of the subject with economic use of the language. For a novelist who seeks to take up to writing plays has to go through different and difficult course of practice. His plays are written on the same themes as his novels. In his plays he criticizes social evils as he did in his novels. The question then remains why he diverted his writing in another genre of drama than novel. Perhaps the reason was that he wanted more concentrated medium of drama for character analysis. Moreover, the play gives more liberty and scope for writing dialogue. Galsworthy believes that the novel has limitations in painting the complexities of modern age, extreme conflicts of
bourgeois culture. In a letter to R H Mottram, Galsworthy supports his stand as a dramatist:

“The artist takes life as he finds it, observes, connotes and stores with all his feelers, then out of his store constructs (creates according to his temperament) with the primary object of stirring the emotional nerve of his audience, and thereby, directly actively giving pleasure.”

(As quoted in LLJG, p.193)

Galsworthy’s consideration for the wretched makes him criticize society for its unsympathetic and disproportionate conduct towards the individuals. In most of his plays an instance of pity dominates, essentially due to by his sympathy for the poor. Galsworthy’s attaching more importance to the individual is conspicuously seen in his later plays. His writing is a sincere effort towards realistic representation of modern society with its all ills, cruelty, follies and hypocrisy. Due to his portrayal of true life and criticism of social problems earned him reputation as a dominant realistic and social dramatist of England. The way society dominates and dictates the life of the individual finds expression in Galsworthy’s dramas. Since his plays do not touch spiritual and subconscious level, he cannot be regarded a realist in true sense of the term. Galsworthy’s analysis is merely on the surface level of social structure of modern society and not the human cries hidden at the bottom. Excessive sentimentality has certain limitations in comprehension. (Choudhuri1961:7) Galsworthy took up to writing plays as a revolt which is mentioned in the following statement:

“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”.

(As quoted in LLJG p.793)
As a playwright Galsworthy depicts harsh and unjust side of life of unfortunate lots in the English society of his time. As most of his plays deal with some or the other social questions he is regarded as a social dramatist with strong inclination for social transformation based on morality and values. It is because of this he is described as more a moralist and less an artist. Thus his plays function as a forum to vent social grievances without any idea to preach or propaganda.

2.2.1 Social Panorama

Galsworthy is a distinguished playwright and novelist and has decisively placed himself in the growth of modern British drama. His plays were widely acclaimed and admired in London, New York and other parts of the world and even today they are rich treasure of modern English literature. Despite different and fascinating instances to grow and develop modern English drama could not attain a place of global leadership. It is sadly observed that when we refer to modern drama it immediately occurs to us American drama, Norwegian drama, Swedish drama, Russian drama, French drama, and it comes in the end to British drama. (Hatcher 1941: v)

The English were much behind and averse to respond to drama and the dramatists were very cautious to dwell upon new subject matters in new genre of literature. There was so extensive disinclination towards modern drama among British writers that not a single movement or symptom of modern drama took its roots in the English soil or accepted any important development by British playwrights. Archer and Jones were withdrawn and vacillating in taking up challenging themes for their plays. The works of Galsworthy, Pinero and Maugham which stand for the British legacy of modern play were written following the earlier standards of dramatic art and the theatrical norms. (Hatcher 1941: v)
After Queen Victoria’s death in 1901 England was seen to have engaged in mere ostentation of its prosperity. Edward II (1841-1910) influenced English society given to lavishness, extravagance and exhibiting riches. The middle class in England enjoyed some liberty from puritan clutches of different codes, social norms, language barriers and inflexible morality. The period saw women’s liberation with the show of fashion and respite in manners and etiquettes. Soon its adverse consequences were witnessed when the English society and family life began to crumble with its values and morals. Religion which was the final word of Puritan faced severe assaults from intelligentsia, philosophers and the men from the scientific world. People began to question everything in society and things had to go through scientific tests and queries from rationalists. The authority of the church and organized religion began to rapidly drop leading to serious loss of faith and morality. It was also the result to improved mobility and steady rise in the means of transportation that gave more openings to flee from strict family life.

The working class families which were tied together so far began to break away with the rise of industries. With steady industrial growth money began to flow easily and almost all enjoyed some sort of economic freedom especially the younger generation which questioned parental authority. The spread of education was also responsible for it as the younger ones almost in all classes of society had enough liberty to settle on their social position. But soon the result of leisurely pursuits, flamboyance began to raise its ugly head of economic uncertainties. The social progress was accomplished at the expense of doubt and sense of insecurity giving rise to unemployment and, the cost of living had already gone out of control. There was increasing unrest among the working class over wages and monopolies of industrialists led to formation of trade unions and consequent strikes. The employers had amassed wealth and enjoyed social standing absolutely neglecting working class. This is what we witness in
Galsworthy’s play *Strife*. England witnessed labour and capital conflict. Thus, it was the period of political unrest, violence, chaos and confusion.

Thus the commercial world is certainly manifested in the literary works especially in drama of the period. These happenings did not escape the critical eye of the playwrights of the time. The plays were published circulating criticism for readers thus making them aware of the developments in Victorian and Edwardian society. The playwrights questioned conventional beliefs. Some of them like Galsworthy, Henry Jones, Elizabeth Baker, Harley Granville-Barker, condemned hypocrisy, social orthodoxy and discrimination, injustice and chauvinism in their plays. Galsworthy spared neither marriage nor family life or judiciary and commercial life in England at his time. Shaw also criticized religion, medicine and politics of the period. The loss of social and moral values of Victoriana and Edwardian English society provided themes of greater significance for social drama and social tragedy. Galsworthy effectively treated these fundamental questions in strictly naturalistic manner in his different plays.

2.2.2 Plot Construction

Galsworthy criticizes problems faced by the oppressed people in society. His plays register the amount of social influence exercised on the individual and his reaction to it. Furthermore, he does not perceive the expected moral growth of society and man. His evaluation of problems is confined to English society in particular and his moderate, sympathetic and caring outlook at the social issues. Though he lacks spiritual intensity, he still excels in his dramatic craftsmanship. His earlier plays especially *The Silver Box* (1906) and *Strife* (1909) are constructed in an architectonic technique. They are so meticulously carved that they acknowledge the best example of the highest quality of dramatic dexterity. *Justice* symbolizes the archetypal Galsworthy play in both structure and subject-
matter. In the wake of his legal training, Galsworthy identifies prisons as dehumanizing establishments, predominantly solitary confinement.

However, his later plays exemplify modification of technique and attitude. Economically constructed plays *The Eldest Son*, (1909) and *The Skin Game*, (1919) are examples of velocity of action. Rather loosely structured plot of his later plays shows his conciliation with social issues. Galsworthy’s dialogues are natural and suitable for dramatic purpose.

In case of plot, action, character and dialogue he makes the following observations.

“The dramatist’s license, in fact, ends with his designs. In conception alone he is free. He may take what character or group of characters he chooses, see them what eyes, knit them with what idea, within the limits of his temperament; but once taken, seen, and knitted, he is bound to treat them like a gentleman, with the tenderest consideration of their mainsprings take care of characters; action and dialogue will care of themselves”.

(SPCD, included in IOT, web source)

Regarding his technique of dramatic dialogue he clarifies his views in the following works:

“From start to finish good dialogue is handmade, like good lace; clear, of fine texture, furthering with each thread the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated.”

(VTOA, included in IOT, web source)

The other characteristic of his plays is the use of colloquial English. Many of his characters speak cockney, perhaps for their socially lower background in
society. Galsworthy’s use of slang and funny pronunciation are also seen in his plays including Joy (1907). The effective use of dramatic irony, particularly the irony in definite circumstance, irony of destiny and irony of situation are remarkable in his plays. Galsworthy writes his plays in a particular pattern beginning with the introduction of dramatic theme followed by action which is carried forward by a realistic dialogue and other details. Finally, he presents conclusion of the given question and handles without presenting any solution. Moreover, he juxtaposes characters, situations, dramatic settings revealing a larger social milieu based upon and underlined by contrasting riches, destitutions, labour and capital.

Galsworthy is specifically upset by the narrow self-centeredness and lack of complacency in the modern bourgeois culture. The moral temperament in his plays calls for civilized behaviour from people. In his plays Galsworthy tries to show modern disenchantment, disappointment and distress over the loss of morality and hope from society.

The dramatic effect and strength of the play entirely depends on the construction of plot. The playwright presents the text of a drama to arouse excitement, suspense and interest. The logical sequence and unity is methodically achieved to heighten the dramatic effect. Aristotle gave more importance to plot than to character, but Galsworthy changes this order and makes plot subordinate to character. He means that if the characters are selected carefully the action of the play moves smoothly and attains required dramatic result that the artist desires. His plots are based on ideas and situations but hang on characters so that the dramatic effect is reached. Strife displays an outcome of the extended strike and Falder’s fate is decided by a single act in Justice. His plots are well built and scientifically begin with excellent description leading to crisis, followed by climax and ends with tragedy. The suspense maintained from the beginning to the end of the play. The exposition of an idea at the beginning
puts before us an idea of impediments likely to follow at the later development of the play.

Thus, interest produced in the reader and audience is not evaporated. In *Justice*, when two advocates argue for and against Falder, the suspense is intensified until the verdict is proclaimed. The prison scene makes us feel pity for the misery faced by Falder till his discharge from the jail. Galsworthy exemplifies a variety in building his plot. In some cases the crisis is in the very beginning. The plays *The Pigeon* and *The Foundations* do not have crisis, while in *The Skin Game* and *The Fugitive* there is double crisis. We see crisis outside the play in *Loyalties* and *Justice*. He makes cautious use of parallelism in plays like *The Silver Box* where he puts Jack and Jones side by side, the same is in the case of Hillcrist and Hornblower in *The Skin Game*. His plots are organized from everyday activities and familiar occasions of daily life.

In Galsworthy’s plot we come across with a number of common episodes. For instance, a trivial incident of theft and defamation in *Loyalties*, forging a cheque in *Justice*, simple theft of the silver box of cigarette in *The Silver Box*, illegitimate love between the eldest son of an aristocrat family and a housemaid in *The Eldest Son*, infidelity of wife in *The Fugitive* and ordinary strike in *Strife*. There are no sub-plots in Galsworthy’s plays. His plots are simple and straightforward sans any complexities. They are entwined with realistic and naturalistic fibre. With carefully engraving his plots, he sees that actions in the play are beautifully presented. In *The Silver Box*, John Barthwick’s action of closing the window on hearing the sobbing of Mrs. Jones’s little child intensifies action similarly the dumb scene in *Justice*, eloquently speaks for the misery of Falder. Galsworthy’s plot is simple and life-like, for him human being is the best plot.
Galsworthy does not pose himself a master of comedy. His plays are grey, but humour does not totally miss from his plays. Rather it is more plentiful and refreshing. In *A Bit o’ Love*, humour is created when assembly of countrymen fumble in their attempt to choose a chairman. Sometimes, his scene is more humourous than his character. His modest characters, the housemaid Annie in *A Family Man* and Lettie in *Old English* are humourous due their inexperienced, whimsical and insensible oblivious style. In another absurd situation humour erupts when a nobleman surprisingly takes a notebook from an interviewing press reporter and starts interviewing him. There are many such incidents in his plays but they are minor.

### 2.2.3 Problem Plays

The great dramatists of the past including Sophocles and Euripides to Shakespeare and Sheridan focused on love, hatred, jealousy and ambition. The modern playwrights focus on various social problems surrounded by the common man. The plays of the modern dramatic world present social, political, moral, personal and domestic issues. Thus, the plays that deal realistically with problems of modern man are called the problem plays by Sydney Grundy.

The pioneer of this new trend of drama was Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. In his plays he discussed various issues concerning society, the individual, domestic problems, sex and hereditary diseases. His realistic portrayal of these issues created sensation in European dramatic world. In England William Archer translated and presented Ibsen’s play, *A Doll’s House*, but it invited bitter criticism from the literary critics. However, Bernard Shaw eulogized the play and started writing on different issues like marriage, sex, prostitution, war, language, democracy and the like. This created powerful trend in English theatrical world and the dramatists including Granville-Barker and several others dwelt upon the problem plays on the line of Ibsen.
Galsworthy with his reformist temperament followed the same dramatic route. Galsworthy with a warm heart and greater sympathy for the individual specially facing problems in society wrote problem plays. Intimately he expressed his ideas through novels, but later shifted to drama feeling that this genre could find expression of his ideas. All tragedies of Galsworthy cover social, domestic, moral and legal issues. All plays of Galsworthy are problem plays in the sense they deal with some or the other problems faced by the individual or society. His first play *The Silver Box* (1906) reveals how legal system shows disparity due to riches and punishes the poor. There is one law for the rich and another for the poor. *Justice* depicts a picture of how justice is denied to the weak in the society who commits crime under emotional pressure. Another play *Loyalties* shows the conflicting loyalties between different groups and individuals. *The Skin Game* (1920) deals with the conflict between landed gentry and newly rich over a piece of land.

The problem plays realistically discuss the problems in every sense including style, language, setting, situations and the characters from real life. It is essentially a drama of ideas; the playwrights who adopted this style feel that it is the medium for the dissemination of ideas. This is invariably used as vehicle for social reform and propaganda. Shaw and Galsworthy could change the public opinion in their countries and brought about reforms using the medium of problem plays. There is nothing heroic in these plays. The plays are woven around common issues and common themes. The problems are merely discussed from different angles and no remedy is offered, thus the play concludes with a question mark. In most of such plays the characters are merely mouthpieces of the dramatist. In most cases they stand for ideas and do no possess their own personality. The problems are discussed using dialogues, and there are no soliloquies. They deal with sordid and dark side of life and depict them realistically and do not reveal romantic side of human life. They are
reduced to mere propaganda type and project beliefs and ideas of the writer. Many of the plays of Shaw and Galsworthy have survived even though the problems they have focused on have been either resolved or cease to exist.

2.3 Galsworthy’s Major Contribution to British Drama

British response to modern drama was apathetic and the English dramatists were uncertain about attempting the themes using new genre. Thus the period observed lack of fresh, significant and contemporary expressions which belonged to the English soil. Moreover, Galsworthy, Pinero and Somerset Maugham whose plays symbolized the British legacy in modern drama were mainlined within the early standards of dramaturgy and the stage. Galsworthy and even Somerset Maugham who did not divert from the earlier literary standards of the time improved their writing style and put meaningful force in modern British drama. Due to their efficient writing skills no recent playwright could reach the standard of Galsworthy, Shaw and Maugham. In this way Galsworthy confirmed his position in the expansion of the contemporary British drama and of the world, too. Given to more humanitarian sensitivity, humble and sympathetic approach his influence could be immensely felt on his age more than any other man of letters.

The majority of modern dramas exemplify added technical skill, larger consideration for real life and comprehensive attempt to give subtle picture of society as it is. We find these characteristics in Galsworthy’s plays. The greatest achievement and contribution of Galsworthy to British drama is that though he did not practice new movements in the theatrical world, it his own style and technique that he developed empowered the English drama making it highly regarded in Europe and America. Galsworthy and also Maugham bestowed upon the English drama a status in the modern age. The fact is that not a single modern playwright rose to the literary altitude of Galsworthy, Shaw and
Maugham. Galsworthy left tremendous impact on his era just by being a human being he was. Granville-Barker and Galsworthy contributed to the growth and expansion of modern British drama more than any other English dramatist. Both have definite idea of selection of theme. Barker attacks the subjugation of the individual by the coercion of Victorian customs while Galsworthy revolts against the devastation of the individual in the society. There are no men of high stature in his plays that eclipse other characters. He abstains from using the powerful language of desolation and denial. Thus, Galsworthy foregrounds social and moral questions.

His plays written in quiet and definite manner is an appropriate reply to the allegation that modern British drama is a kind of literary genre followed with characteristics essentially by Irishmen and Scotchmen. (Hatcher1941:69) Galsworthy, Shaw and Granville-Barker made individual contribution to the dramatic growth of English drama.

The twentieth century drama saw life full of obscurities and witnessed a number of conflicting situations than any other period in the history of English theatre. From 1890 onwards modern theatre was influenced by Henrik Ibsen. His plays depicted men and women from most ordinary life. Dominated by Ibsen and Shaw, the serious drama in England made social issues, domestic and personal grievances as the theme of art. It was an appropriate hour to expose social malady and the period was ripe for the growth of drama of ideas, too. The religion, youth and age, class consciousness, capital and revolt of labour were chosen as theme for the drama. Galsworthy wrote depicting these issues in a manner of new drama, a naturalistic form of drama encouraged by Ibsen. (OEBL Vol. II 2006: PP. 277,278)

Like Bernard Shaw, Galsworthy made his plays medium of expression of the problems of modern age. Before their arrival the English theatre was dominated
by the French romantic comedies. Galsworthy’s contribution to English stage is an intense receptivity and delicacy of observation.

As a notable playwright of modern times Galsworthy shows sincere sympathy for the poor in general. He says the dramatist should portray the picture of the society as he discerns it. However, too much sympathy becomes obstacle in meaningfully enjoying life. He is also impartial in depicting true picture of the society. However, major flaw of complete treatment of impartiality may leave the play open to doubt.

Galsworthy observes that social depression and turbulence results from unchecked individual insensitivity and wide spread general selfishness. Moreover, excessive supremacy of the materialistic nature to exercise authority to control social rulings and penalty including sympathy at large gives rise to social problems. Galsworthy feels that medication for these social ills cannot be expected from the government which is run by corrupt politicians. Rather there is general feeling that the state fails to give justice and protect the interest of the citizens. For example, Barthwick, the Member of Parliament in Justice, is good for nothing. All politicians are alike as it is proved by Mrs. Barthwick in her expression:

“You Liberals, and Conservatives, you’re all alike.” Cries Mrs. Barthwick to her husband; “you don’t see an inch before your noses. You’ve no imagination, not a scrap of imagination between you”

(SB Act I, Scene III, pp. 10, 11)

Like politics, education does not provide any solution to the problem as it is expressed by Galsworthy in his play The Foundations. Similarly, no amount of benevolence or charity can provide justice to poor and sufferers in the society. It is true that you cannot make poor rich or solve their problems by way of chivalry. It is true that Galsworthy is neither a politician nor a philosopher to
preach morality. He is primarily an artist who sees the world around him with artistic vision. The real nuisance of the modern society lies in all of us with our selfish disposition, our lack willingness to put ourselves in place of others. Of course, the world will positively become a better place to live in safe without suffering if we walk in moccasins of others. Galsworthy feels that art is the significant medium to correct the wrong.

2.3.1 Social Tragedy

Galsworthy’s another major contribution to modern English dramatic world is his social tragedy. He does not imitate the aspects of Greek and romantic or psychological tragedies and give something that is not true to life and realistic tradition. All the elements of Grecian and Elizabethan tragedies are absent in his tragedy. Hence his plays show his own dramatic dexterity without any influence of Greek or Shakespearean tragedies. By presenting mediocre persons as heroes of his tragedy, Galsworthy might have thought that the pressing social issues which cause distress and worry to the common people leading to his final catastrophe are enough for his dramatic purpose. Hence, there is no high ranking person, no external fate in his tragedy. It might be that reality is found in the common and ordinary human beings and not in high ranking characters. The use of great characters in his plays he might have thought that it can be deceptive and may not present a true picture of society.

In Galsworthy’s tragedy there is no external agent called fate. There are no supernatural forces that influence the panorama. There is no fight between a hero and God. When there is no room for external fate in his tragedy there is no hero either. His does not employ towering and high ranking or noble personage in his tragedy. Neither does he elevate his characters by making them bigger than the life size. It would be rather an act of violating the dramatic decree of realism and would also mean a failure to attach prominence to the social element of contemporary tragedy. It is with this feature that he creates most of
his characters mediocre and even miserable that we may identify in them our own common personality.

His tragedy is not like that of the classical tragedy of ancient Greek where the conflict is between the hero and fate or another powerful agent. In this type of tragedy the hero is high ranking character and dignified person, may be a king, a prince or a great a personality. Due to commitment of sin he comes in conflict with God. Though his struggle is heroic, ultimately he is defeated and punished by God for violating the divine order or committing sin. Many a times the hero is not aware of his sin or infringement of the divine law, or it may be his unconscious action or thoughtless folly. But it is enough to punish him. For example, in a tragedy of Sophocles, Oedipus invites fury of God for his unconscious breach of the divine law. Oedipus, without knowledge kills his father in ignorance and marries his own mother. In this kind of tragedy fate plays a vital role and human being struggles hopelessly against his fate and is ineffective in front of supernatural forces.

Another important kind of tragedy was developed by the great playwright William Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries and successors. In this romantic tragedy characters take place of fate and supernatural forces are eliminated, the struggle is limited to human beings. The hero is some outstanding personality; he may be a king, or a great general or a prominent individual whose downfall is witnessed by a large number of people around him. Despite noble qualities he suffers due to character flaw which brings about his end just like in the case of Macbeth. However, there is dignity in the end of the hero, which creates the feeling of admiration, awe and fear.

A type of modern tragedy sans a dignified hero is called a social tragedy. In social tragedy Galsworthy deals with the victims of injustice. The individual in his tragedy finds helpless in the face of mighty social forces. In Greek tragedy
there are supernatural forces but in Galsworthy’s tragedy the forces are man-made. There is no element of external fate that influences the characters, but there is hope which is not seen in Greek tragedy.

The so-called hero in such tragedy is a weak, erring person who fights against the forces of society and is finally defeated and crushed. When there is no hero; there is no villain either. There is tremendous suffering and a sense of human wastage that moves the spectator. Galsworthy weaved social tragedies such as *Justice* and *Strife*. The principle character Falder in *Justice*, cannot be described as a hero. He is not a high ranking or towering personality of high repute. He is a weak-willed who forges a cheque where he works as a clerk. He is not ruined by fate or by a villain. This is a tragedy of feeble young man who lands in trouble due to social system. The individuality of the hero is not highlighted as any one of us may face the similar situation in life. The suffering of the poor workers is caused in *Strife* due to the conflict between capital and labour. Here the tragedy is shifted from the individual to the community as classes, groups and interests pull in different directions causing conflict with one another. No one can be blamed for this; still the innocent poor workers immensely suffer. In Greek and Shakespeare’s tragedies the hero is high ranking personality who fights bravely but in Galsworthy’s tragedy the major figure is too weak to fight against the powerful social forces.

Galsworthy makes us witness an unequal fight between a miserable drunkard Jones and his rich counterpart Barthwick in *The Silver Box*. In social tragedy the situation is more important than character but in Shakespeare’s tragedies it is essentially a tragedy of character and situations are subsidiary. Social tragedy reveals the wastage caused by struggle. In *The Silver Box*, an innocent Mrs. Jones loses her job and her children suffer starvation. In *Justice*, legal system ruins the major character Falder and in *Strife*, labourers suffer privation and Mrs. Roberts dies due to adamant stand taken by the fighting leaders. It is an
utter wastage of human lives. In classical and romantic tragedies the hero fights so bravely against his fate and villain that he stands out for admiration, but in the case of Galsworthy’s heroes their suffering creates a sense of pity. The effect is pathetic and not tragic, the characters are frail and deplorable and not heroic.

In Shakespearean tragedy the hero always dies a violent death at the end. This is not required in social tragedy. When Grecian and Elizabethan standards and norms are applied to Galsworthy’s tragedies they are not great tragedies. His tragedy does not give a single hero who stands out as a prominent and dominant figure who rises higher than other characters. However, a close observation of his tragedy reveals that it is the tragic atmosphere that dominates the play. The heroes of Galsworthy’s tragedy are the products of the modern way of life against which the poor, helpless characters struggle and pathetically shed tears in the moments of distraction and dismay. In most of his plays the clash is caused by excess of human greed, folly and self-interest which is wastage and cruel to sufferers. When the individual is being crushed by the legal system, there is some hope as the system could be ameliorated. A little sympathetic understanding can find a remedy. Any situation can be corrected as there are answers to all problems and within reach.

2.3.2 Realism and Naturalism

Modern British drama adopted the techniques of realism and naturalism to deal with fundamental social and moral themes naturally and realistically. It was a revolt to depose strongly rooted artificiality of the 19th century theatrical world of England. Moreover men were tired of artificial life presented in the drama of the 19th century.

Galsworthy depicts realistic and impartial picture of his period and reveals the problems faced by ordinary people. He has sympathy for the downtrodden and
outcaste. The dramatic techniques he uses to present different issues are unique. As he offers no cure for social ills and problems, most of his plays conclude with a question mark. It should be noted here that realism that Galsworthy speaks for is related with the New Drama which emerged in England in the middle of the nineteenth century and was practiced by Henrik Ibsen. It is remarkable to note that Shaw and Galsworthy made first attempt to oust romanticism from English stage.

Naturalistic drama and realistic drama of ideas flourished during his period. The naturalistic school of drama believed that the drama should be a true mirror of society. Thus drama based on this technique presents what is common or based on everyday experience. Henrik Ibsen was the chief exponent of naturalism and it is witnessed in the plays of Galsworthy, too. Ibsen was the most encouraging force in shaping of the English theatre. He surpassed all English dramatists of the period by exposing himself as a colossal figure of the dramatic world. Thus a new and accomplished form of drama emerged England. (Nicoll 1954:524)

While dealing with realism Galsworthy observed:

“To me, at all events – I thought -- the words realism and 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 naturalistic technique---he may be poetic, idealistic, fantastic, impressionistic, anything but -- romantic; that, in so far as he is realist, he cannot be. The word, in fact, characterizes that artist whose temperamental preoccupation is with the revelation of the actual inter-relating spirit of life, character, and thought, with a view to enlighten himself and others, as distinguished from that artist-whom I call romantic---whose temperamental purpose is
the invention of tale or design with a view to delight himself and others. It is a question or temperamental antecedent motive in the artist, and nothing more”.

(VTOA, included in IOT, web source)

However, Galsworthy’s departure from this ideal is perhaps due to his extreme sympathy for poor and outcaste.

Galsworthy is one of the predominant figures of realistic tradition. He effectively exercises the realistic technique to mould his material. In Galsworthy there is no romanticism, mysticism and symbolism. His characters are life size, just ordinary men and women around and among us. When he defines the term realism in relation to drama he takes us to his literary workshop. The style adopted by Galsworthy to write about the problems of the period is mainly realistic and naturalistic. He believed that moral sentiment could be achieved only by replacing something positively concrete. The realistic playwright like Galsworthy found his literary standards of life in the society itself. As a member of the realistic tradition he thought it was required of him to revolt against the artificial life of the ninetieth century. In the realm of dramatic realism, Galsworthy obviously prefers the device of realism and naturalism. In defending his adherence to the technique of realism and naturalism he remarks:

“The question of naturalism technique will bear much more study than has yet been given to it. The aim of the dramatist employing it is obviously 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 to talk and move with the people he sees thinking, Talking, moving in front of him. A false phrase, a single word out of tune or time, will destroy that illusion and spoil the surface as surely as a stone heaved into a still pool shatters the image seen there”
Despite his realistic approach in shaping of the drama, Galsworthy is not photographic in his realism. His plays are the fine examples of art seen through temperament of the artist. In a preface to “Manaton” edition of his plays, Galsworthy defends his priority to naturalism. He says:

“I may find this severe technique good”, he puts, “not for the dramatist, who is cleansed by a sort of self-inflicted purgatory, but for the audience, who, not getting the passions torn to tatters for them, must use their imaginations more freely to obtain a full effect. There is certain poignant value in suggestion, even on the stage, which has not received full recognition.”

(As quoted in JGDA, p.29)

However, there are some critics who severely challenged and criticized naturalism. One of the strongest rebuke comes from Sean O’Casey in his article Pro-per Proscenium he observes:

“Naturalism, or the exact imitation of life, or the cult of real plays for real people, has brought the reader down very low in the plane of imagination. A playwright now is something of a real estate agent”.

(As included in CCD p.398)

2.4 Themes of his Plays

The themes of most of his plays are social problems and malady of modern English society. He is entirely realistic in the management of his themes. He does not wander around in search of his dramatic themes but easily takes them from his own surroundings, from real-life situations. He is a solemn observer of life with sincerity, sympathy and detachment. The periphery of his dramatic
setting is modern English society with its pros and cons. No other English dramatist of his time showed so keen interest in the problems of the oppressed in the society. He touches a variety of subjects and successfully interprets them in his plays with dramatic dexterity exercising devices such as realism and naturalism. Therefore, he stands apart from other playwrights of his age. He takes his material from the very English society. The settings and scenes of his plays are chosen from the English background. His characters are English men and women and he talks of their own problems. An individual suffers due to lack of compassion in general and negligence by society. He ascertains that society which should be sympathetic to the individual it eschews accountability to its members. On the contrary, it is the society and we who are the real culprits who make criminals out of otherwise good people.

In *Justice* Falder’s forging of a cheque consequent imprisonment and suicide is the miserable production of the society. His requirement was paltry amount. Moreover, his request for references for job was also turned down by people. These untoward instances imposed death on the poor creature. Galsworthy blames us all for our lack of sympathy and unaccountability as members of society. He says a thief is not made, rather he a sorry product of our egoism and lack of sympathy. Galsworthy is of the opinion that society cannot eschew its duty of assisting the poor in every respect.

Another social evil that Galsworthy is worried about is the class consciousness. People are given to egoistic grouping on the basis of caste, creed, communities and class. Such happenings have resulted in social erosion, friction and tension in society. Hostility among and against the groups is detrimental to peaceful and harmonious existence of society itself, the result is sordid scuffle and death. Capital is against labour, the Christians against Jews, land-owning gentry against newly rich, the idealists fight against the mad mob.
Galsworthy is disgusted at the bourgeois way of thinking of the upper middles class of England. They are dominated by materialism, possessiveness, conventionalism, philistinism, and unimaginativeness, indifference to rich values of life, self-complacency and observance to the codified life. Galsworthy wages war against the artificiality of life and a sort of flight from real life. He charges that the judiciary is not true to its trade. It is not sans faults. Justice is purchased with the help of a long purse. There is an apparent discrimination in the court as there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. Galsworthy objectively pursued these issues in his plays with absolute neutrality.

Galsworthy believes that the dramatist should paint life truthfully as he sees it. The earlier playwrights before him were interested in dealing with themes like jealously, love, ambition, hatred, bitterness and friendship and revolt against tyranny, God and kings. These themes never occupy mind of Galsworthy because his major concern is for the social problems. He castigates that society is callous and cruel than the individuals who make it. The moral strength of his plays remains in meticulously handling of the social issue. In the selection of style and the theme he seeks dramatic choice of the everyday life. There is outstanding unity in the development of his plot.

He covers various themes related to family relations. Galsworthy shows interest in various areas including faithfulness and disputes between husband and wife, an attempt to run away from unhappy marriage, rebellion of younger generation against the parental authority and dominance. For instance, in the play Joy, most of the characters suffer from some or the other ego. Here Colonel Hope’s ego is his injured pride. He thinks that no soldier is so badly treated like him. The play focuses on various forms of egoism A Family Man, reveals too much of authority in family life. John Builder is a boring and irritable type of a person who takes pride in dictating terms on his wife, young people in the house and runs it the way it suits to him.
The theme of relations between husband and wife in his plays are very remarkable. The worst examples of nuptial violence and lack of understanding in the case of Jim Jones in *The Silver Box*, John Builder in *A Family Man* and George Dedmon in *The Fugitive*. Galsworthy’s presentation of tension between Kathrine and Stephen More in *The Mob*, tension between Hillcrist and Mrs. Hillcrist in *The Skin Game*, and between Sir William and Lady Cheshire in *The Eldest Son*, and between Barthwick and Mrs. Barthwick in *The Silver Box*. There are six wives in his plays who desert their husbands. For example, Katherine More, in *The Mob*, Clare Dedmond in *The Fugitive*, Anne Morecombe in *The Show*, Beatrice Strangway in *Bit O’ Love*, Mrs. Livens in *The Silver Box* and Mrs. Builder in *A Family Man*.

Injustice denied to the individual in the society also interests Galsworthy as he scrupulously deals with such serious issues in his plays. He believes that most of the time society acts more cruelly to the individual than the individual who is discarded as being a criminal or unworthy to live in society. The society which designs its own social machinery within the framework of social order for its protections and to punish the guilty sometimes imposes extreme misery and sufferings. It also inflicts injustice upon innocent people and many a times those administering the action may by honest and kind at heart. These and many more provide suitable material for Galsworthy to dwell upon. *The Silver Box* reveals mechanical favouring of the rich in a court; *The Show* discovers how keen is the distress and wrong imposed on the individual. *The Foundation* shows vulgarity of the inferior type of the press.

Galsworthy also deals with the issues of social deterioration very effectively in his plays. These issues crop up mostly due to denial of social justice. Galsworthy questions that if the unwanted people in society such the drunkard, the cheat, the prostitute and even the criminal were wrong than the other members of the society or whether they have become so because of the
treatment they are given in the community. It is possible to correct the situation and check the fall if the history of such wicked is traced compassionately and they are rendered reasonable humanitarian treatment. Galsworthy carefully handles the subject of social deterioration. In Justice, Falder lands himself in a problem due to his chivalrous nature. In Windows, Faith Bly suffers for being a mother of an unlawful child at the age of eighteen. In a foolish attempt, despite her love she suffocates her two-day old infant in the bed and consequently sent to jail for two years on the charges of infanticide. She is just a wild youth given to joy of life just like any other youngsters.

There are grave examples of social tragedy and disappointment which result out of caste feeling. Here the shift is from the individual to a class or supremacy of a class, or allegiance to one’s own class. Here Galsworthy finds themes for his plays in the conflict between capital and labour, old land-owning gentry and new manufacturing bourgeoisie. The infighting factions within one’s own group also draw Galsworthy’s attention. In The Eldest Son class sentiments of a rural family are in collision with moral principles.

2.5 Characterization

Regarding characters in a play J. L. Styan observes:

“In drama ‘character’ is not an authour’s raw material: it is his product. It emerges from the play; it is not put into it. It has an infinity of subtle uses, but they all serve in the orchestration of the play as a whole; and so character finds this place in the scheme......Some of the dangers of falsely assessing character are obvious, but none the less awkward to avoid. We set up our own barriers to full appreciation if we take a misplaced interest in a functional character for its own sake and out of context....a dramatists who works with human nature as his material is surely interested in character. Yet every time we look for character as
something which can be neat and complete and satisfying objective, we are liable to blind ourselves, and judge the play by character alone, perhaps by a self-created thing. Since Aristotle, the student of drama has been led into considering character as a separate entity, without full regard to its being cause and effect...the character must be sufficiently human for the actor congruously to present it in his own person and for the spectator to recognize it. It is the test of a good morality play that it should make human where its lesson is most abstract.

(As included in CCD 1964, pp.98-100)

If we observe Galsworthy’s characters from this point of view we come to know that when he handles the question of morality in his social drama and social tragedies his characters are always human beings with feelings and emotions like us. They sufficiently serve orchestration of the play as a whole and they find their place in entire dramatic scheme.

Another critic Raymond Williams observes of the function of character in a play and Galsworthy’s plays obviously establish this idea:

“We must be careful that our judgment depends not on whether the characters are lifelike, but on whether they serve to embody experience which the actor has shown to be true”

(As included in CCD1964, p. 101)

Galsworthy is very careful in the selection of his characters as he thinks that the character is the most important aspect of dramatic art. Thus, he has his own concept of character and does not follow the Aristotelian order of element of drama. Aristotle gives precedence to the plot rather than to character. For him the plot is the most essential element of drama. His characters are living and individualized.
Galsworthy’s characters are not puppets controlled and moved at the mercy of others. They have their own life to lead. He believes that the character is the very basis a plot. He makes people around him as his characters with careful and keen observation. Therefore, his characters are living human beings of flesh and blood. He deals with just common people as he considers them as important in life as great people. He does not portray the great tragic heroes of that level of Shakespeare’s Macbeth or King Lear or Othello. Nor does he depict the villain such as Iago. Galsworthy’s tragic characters are ordinary human beings. Falder in Justice is merely an ordinary clerk, Roberts in Strife is a simple labourer, and Jones in The Silver Box is a commonplace poor creature. They are wretched people in society and hence cannot be described as heroic figures. Galsworthy makes society, social organizations and circumstances around us as his villains in his tragedies. He gives us a large variety of characters. In his plays characters are assigned certain functions, therefore, their existence in the play is not for the sake of existence. His characters are street people who come to Galsworthy to assist him to explore social problems they come across.

He effectively introduces contrasting characters to bring out conflict in the play. For example, Barthwick and Jones in The Silver Box, Anthony and Roberts in Strife and Hillcrist and Hornblower in The Skin Game. As Galsworthy’s characters symbolize ideas and speak of problems in the society they become types rather than simple individuals. Hillcrist is a representative of land-owning aristocrat while Hornblower stands for the owner of industry. Anthony signifies capital and Roberts is the example of labour class. Galsworthy’s romantic character Falder in Justice comes from the middle class who suffers for want of money. His characters are so emotional that they are unable to meaningfully convey their feelings.

His characters are mainly flat, as they do not develop and remain the same throughout the play. By development of character means not modification, but
presentation and revelation. According J. L. Styan, (1975:67) the characters are ‘flat’ in the sense that they are identifiable and unsurprising, and show us one characteristic of human temperament; they are ‘round’ when they are individual and incomprehensible and to be seen as an absolute individual. In many twentieth century realistic and naturalistic plays we have flat characters obliterating reliability of the play which present caricatures of average persons.

A notion of character originates from the mask since it exercises a firm control over the element of reality to introduce it clearly. (As quoted in CCD, Styan 1964:104) For many decades the character was in essence a ‘mask’, a dramatis persona, a depiction of humankind or of various characteristics of it, and not truly a human being. The modern playwrights write in naturalistic vein by individualizing the character with all important traits and individual associations. The characters in modern dramas do their work as playwright’s representative. The characters of Galsworthy enact the story of the playwright.

A dramatic conflict ought to unveil concealed qualities in the character mainly concerned in it. But in most modern plays characters do not develop in the ordinary sense of the term. Galsworthy displays himself as a character-drawer in The Silver Box and Justice while a psychologist in Strife. Character-drawing presents human temperament in its generally distinguished, recognized and customary elements, while psychology discovers character with so far unearthed territories of our understanding and comprehension. Psychology is analytical in nature. Galsworthy is both character-drawer and a psychologist. (Archer 1960:48)

His characters are neither flexible and nor dynamic and hence static. John Anthony and David Roberts and so also Falder do not grow but remain the same from the beginning to the end of the plays. Galsworthy’s characters are not everlasting and immortal like the great characters of Shakespeare. However
some of them are undoubtedly unforgettable. We cannot overlook rigid Anthony in *Strife*, leadership qualities of Roberts in the same play and simplicity and earnestness of Mrs. Jones in *The Silver Box* and the dismal Falder in *Justice*.

As Galsworthy maintains silence over emotional issues his characters appear somewhat wooden. This type of dramatic outlook of Galsworthy fails to create great emotional effect which is one of the characteristics of any great play. Evaluation of human behaviour and the society of which he is a member is at the surface level and the real spiritual problem is left unaddressed. For this very reason he is blamed as being an observer of just outward features of human psyche and society. As the conduct of his characters is on the conscious level, the enormous depth of mind is left unfathomed. In this way realism of Galsworthy is superficial which leaves untouched the vast range of spiritual side of human existence. Galsworthy’s taciturn nature expressed through his characters is perhaps his incapability to give practical answer to the problems. As he became aware of this shortcoming he tried to conciliate himself with the problems in the later plays: *The Foundations* and *Windows*. His inability to offer any practical solutions to questions he seeks for compromise and sympathy. Galsworthy’s dialogues are suitable to the characters in the play. They use that language which is appropriate for the dramatic economy.

His characters are individuals who independently move and behave and act despite their natural association with the main scheme of the play. However, they are slightly or not developed at all. They do not react to the changing situations in the play, though they have their own likes and dislikes. Except for Ruth Honeywill in *Justice*, Chloe in *The Skin Game* and De Levis in *the Loyalties* (1921), and some other characters show some development. The majority of his characters are static in nature. Galsworthy’s women characters are more energetic and good-looking than their male counterpart. It is
remarkable that there is at least one female character in his each of his play that makes us feel sympathetic. For instance, Mrs. Jones in *The Silver Box*, Ruth Honeywill in *Justice*, Annie Roberts in *Strife*, Freda Studdenham in *The Oldest son*, (1909). Galsworthy’s characters are more than medium of ideas. They seek to interpret and convey the ideas what the dramatist designs to do with them in the play.

Galsworthy’s characters appear to lack great fervour. They are extremely rational average citizens, scared to cross the boundaries of standard social conventions. It is their ordinary habits and manners, lack of confidence make his plays predominantly realistic in nature. Thus his dramas and characters show small things in life and society. (Marrot, 1935:790)

In his plays there are no villains but few heroes, just common and ordinary human beings who may meet in everyday life. They may be pressed on by financial requirements, or conventional sentiment, class or national chauvinism. He distinctly stands out as a single dramatist to depict a true, correct and impartial picture of the English society.

Barring a few, most of Galsworthy’s women characters, especially those subjected to oppression, moral and social torture suffer meekly and tolerate injustice done to them. Their social standing and financial conditions suppress them to such an extent that they are forced to keep quiet and not to open mouth against their tormenters. It is only Chloe in *The Skin Game* who has the courage of a tigress to counter-attack her foes. She does not put up with insult and humiliation and argues forcefully that she is being subjected to injustice. She is insulted at different times by different people for different reasons, but is bold enough to face the situation and is not disheartened. She courageously faces the charges made by Mrs. Hillcrist and a morally challenged Dawker, a property agent about her mysterious past life involving her in dark secret.
Galsworthy’s other women characters who are oppressed like Chloe passively suffer everything and do not have enough courage to battle against their tormenters. For instance, Mrs. Jones in *The Silver Box*, who has been suffering due to her alcoholic and unemployed husband, tolerates everything submissively. Even after her husband’s imprisonment she prefers suffering than going against society and its norms. It may be because she is too weak to face the situation, both socially and financially. Similarly Ruth Honeywill in *Justice* is badly treated by her drunkard husband. But she does not desert him and takes shelter with Falder. Mrs. Roberts in *Strife*, where she follows her husband and supports him in the workers strike, even if she is dying for want of nourishing food, and heart problem. Galsworthy shows her faithfulness and fidelity to her husband even in her distressed situation. Mrs. Roberts’s loyalty to her husband is so excessive that it can be called as self-destructive when she does not want children of course at the instance of her husband David Roberts, a union leader.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter covers major points pertaining to Galsworthy’s outstanding contribution to British drama. In the beginning of the chapter an attempt is made to draw attention to Galsworthy as British playwright. Galsworthy’s dealing with social and moral issues with the help of realistic and naturalistic techniques. His impartiality and objectivity to handle his themes is also brought forth. His themes cover various social issues ranging from family life to aristocratic airs, decline of Victorian and Edwardian upper middle class and the steady rise of middle class, social injustice, corrupt and vindictive judiciary, prison reforms, class consciousness, caste feeling and deterioration of social and moral values leading to miserable social life for the destitute and the weak in society. Galsworthy’s idea of problem plays and social tragedy is also discussed in this chapter.