Chapter II

Biographical Sketch

and

The Leit Motif in

Galsworthy's Major Works
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND MAJOR WORKS

Unlike many popular writers of the age Galsworthy has kept his private life secret from the public gaze. Consequently, not much is known about his life. The few events that have been gathered do not throw much light on the development of his mind. Therefore they are not of much value to a researcher of Galsworthy. Galsworthy was born on the 14th of August, 1867, in a Victorian mansion amid the woods of Combe Surrey at Kingston Hill. His father, also named John Galsworthy, was a practising solicitor in London. He was a wealthy man and had the refinement and culture of the best British aristocrats. “Galsworthy came not from the lower-middle class but from the landed gentry, and he was able to pass judgment upon a section of society of which is known little.”

The portrait of old Jollyon in ‘Forsyte Saga’ bears considerable resemblance to the senior Galsworthy. Galsworthy had great respect and admiration of the father. He enjoyed all those advantages and privileges which are available to the sons of rich parents. He had his early education at a preparatory school at Bournemouth and was sent to famous public school, Harrow, in 1881. There he did well in studies but was not an outstanding
scholar. He distinguished himself as an athlete or runner. He was Captain of the school football team and the Head of his House. He did not take much interest in literary pursuits and from his career at Harrow no one could guess that one day he would turn out to be a famous figure of English literature. (1)

From Harrow Galsworthy passed on to the New College, Oxford of which he was later an Honorary Fellow. He thus had the best education available in England. He got the best out of the institution where he studied and they did not make him a snob, as these institutions are reputed to do. He had a warm heart and he was deeply touched by the sufferings of the poor, the infirm and outcasts. He had experience of these when he went to collect rent on his father’s property. All these experiences were proved fundamental elements in his literary creation.

Galsworthy’s father wanted to make him barrister. As his father was a prosperous solicitor, he qualified for the Bar and was called in 1891. But he never practised. He says, “I read in various chambers, practised almost not at all, and disliked my profession thoroughly. “Law courts were very boring to him. He was, however, reacquainted with legal procedures and he has beautifully depicted court scenes in many of his plays.
We can compare the early life of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to that of Galsworthy's Nehru was, like Galsworthy, a son of wealthy father. Both were designed to take legal profession by their fathers. But both disliked the profession. Whereas Galsworthy never practised, for Nehru the work interested him to a certain extent. "But gradually the life I led, in common with most others of my kind, began to lose all its freesisas and I felt that I was being engulfed in a dull routine of a pointless and futile existence." (2)

Galsworthy was very fond of Journeys. His nature was nomadic. For the next four years he travelled extensively in America and British Colonies on his father's business. His father sent him to investigate the affairs of a mine and to the South sea and Newzealand, to learn something of navigation, with a view to the Admiralty bar. He had no dearth of money and he developed a wanderlust and he travelled roundish world for two years. During his voyages he read Dickens, Turgenev, Maupassant, Tolstoy and Ibsen and they influenced him greatly. On his way home from Australia, in the calling ship Durens, he formed the friendship of the great Polish sailor novelist, Joseph Conrad. The two remained intimate until conrad's death in 1924.
The above mentioned writers left little influence on Galsworthy. But according to Legouis, “His (Galsworthy’s) training was classical, not scientific, and he had a wide knowledge of continental literature, being especially influenced by that of France and Russia. He always kept a literary ideal before him. The concise and noble realism of Turgenieve served him for a model.”

Galsworthy’s wife, Ada, played perhaps the largest part in stimulating him to write. Shw had been the wife of his cousin, Arthur Galsworthy, but the marriage was dissolved in 1904 and John and Ada were remarried in 1905. Mrs. Galsworthy proved to be an ideal partner of the author. She helped him immensely in his literary exercises. They had no children. Both of them had like tastes and temperament. Mrs. Galsworthy had understood thoroughly, and he in his turn held her in high respect. He expressed his sedimentation for her in the dedication to ‘Forsyte Saga’. She had created in him the desire to write. He says, “If one has been brought up at an English public school and university, is stitched to sport and travel, has a small independent income, and is a briefless barrister, one will not take literature serious, but one yearly I wrote nine tales. They had every fault.” A critic says, “We might never have got anything from him except an account
of local fox hounds had it not been for Ada.” He called Ada “the most dearest and lovely companion, the most faithful helpmate, and the best natural critic a man ever had.” She was a source of encouragement and inspiration to him and she acted as his secretary and critic throughout his literary career. They had no children but they led very happy lives in mutual love and admiration.

Ada helped and encouraged him constantly as a writer for the rest of his life. They discussed every detail of his work and she typed it nearly all of it herself and as he revised everything with great care and exactness, his manuscripts had to be typed several times. He was helped considerably by her when he wrote with difficulty by playing to him on the piano. She was a skilled pianist and they both loved music.

Galsworthy was born in a higher middle class, one which includes the polite profession such as Medicine, the law, the Church, the services together with the leaders of the industries and commercial world of the nineteenth century. “Throughout the nineteenth century”, says Richard Church, “these people, these various activities firmly dovetailed into each other by prosperity flourished, exceedingly. As a man, Galsworthy was
aware of the shortcomings of this class of man. But he in his own life rose above these limitations and depicted them in his works with a vision that was just and unsparing. It is, however, a fact that he could never rise above the subtler, all pervasive influence of the traditions of his own upper middle-class breeding. He exposed their hard acquisitive instinct, their unsympathetic social morality, their clannishness, their lack of finer sensibilities, their inability to appreciate arts and culture. Besides, he was gifted with extreme compassion and felt genuinely for the poor and socially depressed sections of the community. He could never think them of coming down from the position of advantage with which he was endowed by his social tradition and his own training. He could never find himself at heart one with the low people in the social scale in sympathy for whom he depicted his life ‘a gentleman’ in the day, the inequalities and injustices of the social system, which became the main theme of his writing.” (4)

Galsworthy was a great social reformer and philanthropist. His nature was humanitarian. He loved every living creature, including dumb animals. He was very fond of his dogs and horses. He labored hard. He usually gave away half his income to the poor and himself lived on a modest scale in London, Devonshire and elsewhere. His heart was “too full of the
milk of human character and kindness.” Humanitarian zeal was the keynote of his character. On his small writing table he had inscribed the maxim: “I shall pass through the world, but once; any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness that I can show to human being or dumb animal let me do it now. Let me not defer it, or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again.” His heart melted at the miseries and sufferings of the poor class of society; yet he understood their problems and difficulties as well as he understood those of the people of his own class. He devoted much of his time to social and political matters, which amongst many others included slum-clearance, minimum wage for workers in “sweated” industries, reforms in the divorce law and the prison system, votes for women, improvement in slaughterhouses and better working conditions for ponies in mines. He extended help to many people in need.

Galsworthy’s lack of conceit can best be illustrated by the fact that ‘in 1919 he refused the offer of a knighthood.” (5) He refused the knighthood because he was afraid it would throw an unwelcome light on his philanthropy during the war years. “But his work was ultimately recognized by the award of the order of Merit in 1929 and the Nobel Prize for Literature four years later.” (6)
Galsworthy diverted his entire literary income to war charities and other causes dear to his heart. In 1921, he became the P.E.N.Club's first President. The idea of a worldwide fraternity of poets, playwrights, essayists and novelists, made an immediate appeal to him. He worked for each of the many causes and ideals he had at heart. He directed that his Nobel Prize money should be devoted to a trust fund for the sole benefit of the P.E.N.

Literature came into Galsworthy's life by accident rather than by design. He had made tentative efforts at writing novels anonymously, but at the suggestion of his future wife Ada he turned his mind seriously to literature as a career. His first publication, "From the four winds", a collection of short stories, came out in 1897 under the pen-name Sinjohn. The volume contains short tales of adventure. Galsworthy was not very happy with it, and called it "My first sins". He withdrew it from circulate. Thus we see his first work as a total failure and was followed by other failures. These works were merely literary exercises and were not noticed by the critics at all. "From the Four winds" was followed by a novel, "Joelyn". This presents a conflict between life and duty. This does not however, give any promise of a great writer.
Subsequently, Galsworthy came under the influence of Maupassant and Turgenev. The naturalism of the one and the realism of the other had a great impact on his art. In 1900, he wrote the novel, "Villa Rubien." In 1901, he wrote "A Man of Devoun", "Knight", "The Silence" and "Salvation." His notable novel, "The Island Pharisees" appeared in 1904. This offered his first powerful social criticism. This novel brought success with him. "Here, by contrast with the bold revolutionary ideas of a continental anarchist, he throws into relief the stagnation of thought in the English privileged classes, with their rejection of any emotion which seems to them too strong, new or disturbing, and their preference for dull settled conformity. He shows how even good intentions they are shackled by their egoism and terrified both by emotional impulse and by audacity of thought."

The year 1906 was a turning point in the career of Galsworthy. He wrote his first great successful novel, "The Man of property" in this year. This novel was to become the first part of the immense family novel, "The Forsyte Saga". The chief male character of "The Man of property", Soames Forsette, has a sense of property which extends to his wife as well as to his house so that he breaks into her bedroom when she locks her door
against him. Irene, who for Galsworthy epitomizes the disruptive effect of beauty on the ordinary routines of life, then runs away with another man, once Soames is deserted by her, Galsworthy’s attitude towards him, which had been very harsh at first, gradually softens. Starting off as something like the villain, he ends almost the hero of the long tale. He is a dry, rigid, limited person, but he is consistent, he has his own code; in the general dissolving of standards after the great war, Galsworthy came to feel that any code, even a stupid and limited one, was better than none. So Soames comes to stand for a sturdy and inarticulate narrow virtue, with its own dignity and pathos—it being part of the pathos, no doubt, that Beauty as symbolized by Irene, develops a fine taste in pictures (which cannot run away) and dies in the end while attempting to save his picketers from a fire.” (8)

Galsworthy’s world was that of the commercial upper middle classes, of large, overfertilized houses in the suburbs, offices in the city of London ramification of family attention and financial interest, solemn dinner parties, the patient accumulation of wealth, the damping down of passion, and the steady honoring of a code. There is a clue to the Forsyte Saga in a sentence of Ezra Pound’s: “So far as I can make out, there is no morality in England which is not in one way or another a manifestation of the sense of
property. A thing is right if it tends to conserve an estate, or to maintain a succession, no matter what servitude or oppression this inflicts. Religion—except as a convention or a sentiment-philosophy, art, scholarship, even politics in any expert sense, lie outside the boundaries of this world.

The Forsyte saga is a study, at first with harsh satirical undertones, but later more warm and tolerant, and finally distinctly sentimental, of this world. The Forsyte Saga and its successor, A Modern Comedy, reflect a real change over the years in the temper of Galsworthy’s mind. He begins by attacking those who cling too hard to tangible things but becomes in the end relieved that so may virtues can grow out of that tenacity. The virtues he admired particularly were loyalty and self-restraint. The defect of his mind was a lack of curiosity and really deep anxiety. Even when he appears to be a satirist, he is not questioning a gentleman’s code, but asking himself how honestly it is being applied. The figures who stand for Beauty and Art in The Forsyte saga are blurred, the figures who stand for convention are sharp yet sympathetic, for Galsworthy was at heart a conventional man.

The earliest of The Forayte Saga series is The Man of property. “It is a sort of natural history of a rich upper middle class family, the
epitome of English conservatism. Galsworthy's object is to describe the successive generations and their attitude towards the history of the last half-century and to some extent as the Great war, the growth of socialism, unemployment, the coal strike. Though the entire work exhibits the same quality of irony in its treatment of social prejudices and of the possessive instinct, Galsworthy's views do not remain fixed and unalterable. From the start of the 'Saga' he shows that he admires grand Victorian figures like old Jolyon; but he gradually begins to display a tardy indulgence, even a kind of growing sympathy, for the character who was originally the central object of his satire, Soames Forsyte, 'the man of property' who first appears as a selfish, brutal husband, grasping and covetous, but shows that he can be a strongly affectionate father, full of self-denial and ready to sacrifice himself, and dies almost as a hero. In this change we can see Galsworthy gradually drawing closer to the characteristic English standpoint and returning more or less to traditional paths, without however, losing the warmth of impulse which marked his attacks upon social customs and institutions. (9)

Further legouis makes a comparison between the Forsyte Saga and Balzac's Comedie Humaine or Zola's les Rougon Macquart. "With its ample sweep the Forsyte Saga recalls the ambitious structure of Balzac's
Comedie Humaine or Zola’s Les Rougon Macquart; or still more, in its extreme modernity, the series of scenes of contemporary life created by Anatole France around the figure of ‘Monsieur Bartered’. Every section of it is distinguished by subtle analysis, by truth and diversity of character-drawing, both in men and women, by the poetical quality of the descriptions of natural scenery, above all by a sensitive, flexible, and delicate style which remains artistic even when it is audaciously colloquial.” (10)

The Forsyte story continues in A Modern Comedy, consisting of the white Monkey (1924). The silver spoon (1926) and Swan Song (1928). The substance of these six novels is the relationships and intrigues of a wealthy upper-middle class family from the 1880s. “The books have a comforting readability and a documentary value in their charting the outlook, habits and possession of the family.” (11)

The Forsyte Saga includes two ‘Interludes’ : Indian summer of a Forsyte’ (1918) and ‘Awakening’ (1920), and there are two in ‘A Modern Comedy’: A silent Wooing’ (1927) and ‘Passer By’ (1927). In 1930 appeared a collection of Forsyte tales’ under the title’ On Forsyte Change’
The five works entitled The Country House (1907), Fraternity (1909), The Patrician (1911), The Dark Flower (1913) and The Freelands (1915), reveal a similar philosophy. Here he brings his penetrating criticism to bear in various surroundings, dealing with country squires, the aristocracy, and artists, From the novel Galsworthy drifted on to the drama. The question now arises why Galsworthy started writing plays instead of perfecting his novels. He wrote plays, perhaps not as a new artistic enterprise. But as an opening for propaganda. In his plays he took up the same criticism of social evils as he had voiced in his novels earlier. Then why did he change his medium? Perhaps the reason was that the more concentrated and more plastic medium of drama gave his power of character analysis and dialogue writing greater scope, and he could more effectively bring home to his audience the ideals he stood for in matters of social reform. Drama gave him one more advantage. That was that in drama he could cover a certain flatness in his mirror.

The Silver Box is Galsworthy’s first venture on the stage. This play draws its material from contemporary life- it deals with ordinary people, ordinary incidents and ordinary motives. It exhibits how the law favours the rich at the expense of the poor. Jones is a typical worker-weak-kneed,
unheroic, addicted to drink. Unemployment makes it worse: and he drinks more as a means of escape Mrs. Jones's opinion about her husband is expressed in her talks with Wheeler. She says: "But you see, Bettina, he has a very hard time" - he's been out of work two months, and it preys upon his mind. When he's in work he behaves himself much better. It's when he's out of work that he's so violent." (12)

Mr. Jones has his ordinary quota of human jealousy. Mrs. Jones is the ordinary charwoman, who has been grossly mistreated by life; she had an attitude of numbed fatalism. Everything is a matter of course. She prefaces almost all her remarks by 'of course' as if her whole life obeys a universal law against which it is useless to protest.

John Barthwick is a rich upper-middle class Liberal M.P. Mrs. Barthwick is the sheer opposite of Mrs. Jones. Jack Barthwick is the young-lad who finds time hanging too heavy on his hands. He, too, is unemployed only he does not need a job. And he too, like Jones goes in for drink and flighty women. And Galsworthy interweaves the fortunes of these two families together to provide us with the stuff of drama. Here is a grouping of character- the Barthwicks, lucky, favoured by fortune, enjoying life, even
though Jack may be "a nuisance to society" (According to his father) and the Jones unlucky, poor downtrodden, hag-ridden, by life. The tragedy of the Jones is brought out even before the play has begun-life will treat accepts this fact; Jones does not; he thinks that there is a change; he will fight for it and learn the lesson the better way. He thinks that justice is fair, he will discourse that it is not. Not because the Barthwicks, or the law bear more heavily on the poor than on the rich. Everyone is doing his duty. It is natural that the Barthwicks should try to save their own skin. It is equally natural given things as they are that the magistrate will treat Jack with leniency and Jones without sympathy. This is the inherent moral of the play; the law does bear more heavily on the poor than on the rich, but so does life. And the moral is hammered home. We may contrast the breakfast scene at the Barthwicks' house with the scene at the home of Mrs. Jones, one of Jack's claques has been dishonored; he might have been sent to jail if he was not a Barthwick. He is saved because he is lucky, life has made him the son of a richman. Jones and Mrs. Jones too at home are being worried to death over money-they are not in a position to pay their rent. Jones pays it out of the money from the woman's purse which he has stolen form Jack Jones is in the same position as Jack-but is it the same position? There is a world of difference between them- and this difference is brought out in the way
Galsworthy has grouped his characters. He has brought out the inherent moral, that in a class society, life treats the poor with a greater harshness than the rich. The poor can expect no thing either from life or from the law.

As the curtain goes up, Jack Barthwick, completely drunk, stumbles into the dining room. Jack will stumble through life and yet find a safe anchorage for himself. The first words he utters are symbolic; “ HALLOW; I’ve got home all Defiantly” (13) Whatever Jack may do, he will always get home all right, always manage to save his skin. The keynote of the play is sound when Jack in his befuddled state declares to Jones: We’re equal before the law—that is rot, that’s silly. “But Jack Barthwick did not make the law— he is only stating a fact, and the law may be the law of life and not merely the law of society. Here Galsworthy is using the power of suggestion, and evoking feelings in us which would not be raised in an ordinary problem play. He is using the problem of justice in a class-society to reveal “a meaning, a truth, beauty and irony of things.” Galsworthy called The Silver Box, a comedy. Perhaps because the play is based on life’s little ironies. Though the Barthwicks are mildly satirized and John Birthwort is revealed as a cad, but nobody can do for trying to wriggle out of a difficult situation. They are acting in a way which is most natural for them: Does not
the solicitor point out, that he has a few more cases of this very nature to attend to? That is the difficulty under the circumstances, life being what it is, Jones is bound to be convicted and Mrs. Jones bound to suffer.

The Silver Box thus deals with a social problem'; its theme is ordinary life, a police case. Galsworthy does not exaggerate, nor distort, nor preach. He reveals ordinary people acting in ordinary way, moved by ordinary feelings, obeying natural impulses. It is natural for Jack to forget all about the theft. But is it not natural that in the case of Jones we should misunderstand his motives. He was a worker out of work; he needed money to pay the rent; he was not in a position to play off that kind of a joke on Jack. Through his realize, Galsworthy does present the illusion of real life, but the play is inspired by a high intention. The play has proportion-only material by a high intention. Which is strictly revellent to the play is brought in. The Livens case, apart from being a device which heightens the illusion of the magistrate's court, provides an ironical comment on the action of the play. Mrs. Livence left her husband, and her children are provided for by the court. Mrs. Jones does not leave her husband and her children are uprovided for.
The Silver Box deals with the social problem that there is one law for the rich and another law for the poor. But the way Galsworthy poses the characters, the way he makes them act, the things he makes them say, suggest that there is a new angle to the problem. The law alone is not the villain: life itself plays such ironical tricks as creating the Barthwicks and the Joneses and then throwing them together.

R.H.Coats’ comment on the play is, indeed, admiral: “There is no exaggeration in the Silver Box, no indulgence in rhodomontade, no cheap claptrap, or sentimental melodrama. We simply meet with a company of ordinary people who go about their affairs in a way, we recognize as natural and common, yet out of it all comes an act of monstrous injustice and the influence of cruel suffering on the characters in the play which least deserve it.”(14)

Strife is Galsworthy’s more mature, and in every sense, a more profound play. This play shows us the caste-feeling of capital pitted against the cast-feeling of labour. As in The Silver Box, the effects in the play are carefully calculated. Galsworthy does not rush off to throw side lights on the life or the attitudes of a particular class: he only brings out those charac-
teristics of mind and heart which are strictly relevant to the play. Strife deals with a prolonged strike—a strike which has been going on before the play begins. In the play Galsworthy suggests that the bitterness and the suffering of the men are the result of a protracted struggle. The employers are in a position to ‘starve the men out and make them surrender not a very human way of enforcing one’s will. But the employers have no other means. They did not create the situation. The workers have nothing else to sustain them in their struggle except their pride and the feeling that they are hitting the employers where it hurts most, namely their pockets. The workers too are not responsible for the situation—they must fight for better wages, otherwise they won’t get them. The “ABC of commerce,” stands between a compromise. The God of Capital is not the God of labour: their interests are poles asunder, and they must clash, bringing suffering to all concerned. The suspicion in Strife is an embodiment of modern economic conflicts but it is not treated merely as a problem of social and economic tensions.

These tension sexist, and determine the fate of the characters in the play. They provide one motive. There are other motives also, and the relationship between the characters is brought out as to bring other motives of the conflict into prominence. “The chief protagonists in the play..... are
not groups but individuals; and yet these two men interest us, quite apart from the inherent interest of their personalities, largely because they represent slowly evolved social forces of great magnitude and importance, whose dire coming together is like the meeting of vast accumulated thunder clouds.”(15)

In ‘Strife’ Galsworthy has used the problem of a clash between capital and Labour to illustrate the “restless creeping spirit.” Strife generates bitterness and hatred, it is inevitable that it should, but it does more, it makes you what you are not, it makes you do things which you do not want to do. The directors want to starve the men out; what we’ve done, “says Edger” is to starve one woman out,” a thing which nobody wanted. The Directors are all sensible, humane, men, one of them is a Radical, even Anthony feels for Annie Roberts. And yet something comes in between the men and the employers - a barrier which can be crossed only with the aid of the imagination which neither side has. It is the tiger-spirit, a fanatical, devouring conquering aspiration to have things the way one wants them to have.
Strife does take up a social problem— the clash between Capital and Labour, but Galsworthy weaves this problem into the fabric of the play. He uses the problem to reveal the essential nature of the conflict in society. Galsworthy does not preach, though he does condemn the society which creates condition in which the best and the most heroic are always brushed aside. But that too is no body’s fruit. We are all cast in the same mould, touch us at our blind-spot, as their struggles are lilable to do, and you rouse in us the tiger-spirit.

Galsworthy’s indictment of society in Strife is ethical and moral, rather than political or social. What has gone wrong is not that the forces of capital and labour have clashed, what has gone wrong is that our imagination has not risen to the occasion. The Directors do not realise that in such struggles all suffer, but the weakest suffer most; and the weakest are the women and the children who had nothing to do with the struggle. The spirit of duty to one’s class or caste which is raised by Anthony and Roberts to the level of the only duty, is in itself, a product of the tiger-spirit, a thing born out of caste-feeling and class spirit, ‘Stife’ is not a play which pleads for socialism. It is a play which cries out—“without Imagination without sympathy, without a wiser understanding, the unseen forces, powers, or
fates of modern existence will crush the weakest to death and make mince-
meat of the strongest."

‘Strife' as a play has a purpose - it is shaped so as to have “a
spire of meaning”. But this meaning is ethical, moral human rather than the
meaning which a social reformer is likely to give to a social evil. Strife has
what Galsworthy called “the finality of feeling” it is soaked in inevitability;
there is no falsification give the kinds of temperament, the characters cannot
but behave in the way they have to do. They are ordinary people, moved by
ordinary motives, and throughout the play Galsworthy has successfully cre-
ated “the illusion of real life.” The environments are reproduced with fidelity
-and yet not for their own sake. The picture of working - class misery in the
II Act is not an isolated thing; it explains and comments on the bitterness of
made Thomas. Though Galsworothy has used the techniques of realism and
naturalism, yet throught this medium he has given the poignancy and the
relevance of the theme. Only the essentials are brought within the play-no
emotion which is not strictly relevant to the theme of the play is brought in;
no character is allowed to upset the moral and the psychological balance of
the play. The play deals with the interaction between temperaments and
reality - between character and situation, within the “ring - fence of an
idea.” And through the social problem of a clash between Capital and Labour, Galsworthy has given us, is almost classical, even the nemesis which descends on those who allow themselves to be carried a little too far by their pride. The moral of Strife is a human moral–it is not a political or a social moral, and the moral is suggested throughout the play. Don’t rouse of the tiger-spirit. “Fight, yes but choose fair weapons, believe in the cause for which you fight, make sure that other fellow has a fair deal, and expect no reward.”(16)

In Strife Galsworthy is dealing with a new kind of stoicism, a stoicism which as he points out in his speculation, has been gradually growing in the modern age. “Those who are watching human nature, says Galsworthy, “are pretty well aware of how, under the surface, unselfishness, iron, stoicism and a warm humanity are growing..... without quite realising it, we have envolved a fresh species of stoic, “ Anthony and Roberts are both stoical, in the modern sense. And the fresh species of stoic, continues Galsworthy, is “even more stoical, I suspect, than the old stoics, “The Trojans were fulls to your father” (as a character puts it in Strife). “Modern man has cut loose from leading strings; he stands on his own feet. His religion is to take what comes without flinching or complaint. Alone he confronts life and death.” Strife is a play on this modern stoicism. Anthony
will not flinch, will not waver, will not even complain in is defeat. But again as Galsworthy puts it, modern stoicism struggles against another growing tendency in our age, “an awakened humanity in the conscience of our time” which leads us to say that “God is the helping of man by man.”

There exists among Galsworthy’s papers a list of some of the causes to which he gave active support. One of these relates to solitary confinement in the prison. This topic he takes up in Justice. But it is not its main theme. The play has a deeper and winder implication, and it is only incidentally a propaganda against closed cell confinement. Its aim is to show the mischief which justice can do when administered in a mechanical and unsympathetic way, as is often done in courts of law. The aim of justice is to protect the weak and help and reform the criminal. But this noble aim is frustrated if it is, administered without imagination and understanding. Justice then becomes a blind and cruel machine, more prone to crush humanity than to uplift it, more potent to kill and turn the first offender into a veteran criminal. This is what Galsworthy says in this play and hence the title ‘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 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 cagest of a ship in which thousands of prisoners perish. Once a man is
cought and convicted to imprisonment, there is no escape for him. This
was the circumstance of the age of Galsworthy. In India, today, two find the
same miserable condition. 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. This idea is brought
home through the conviction and death of an innocent and noble hearted
young man Falder. Falder, a clerk in the office of James and Walterthow,
fell in love with Ruth Honeywill, a married woman who was systematically
ill-treated by her drunkard husband. The tale of her suffering deeply move
the heart of this emotional young man of twenty three. She made up her mind
to elope with to South America. But money was wanting. Falder, in a fit of despair, forged the cheque which he was given to cash by a brother clerk Davis who had already left England. The cheque was for nine pounds and he made it ninety. Once this rash step was taken, he determined to forge the countervail, the crime was detected and Falder was handed over to the police. Davis would have been suspected and the crime would not have been detected but for an accidental fact. The cheque book was in the possession of Walter. He left London on the very day on which the cheque was cashed and came back sometime after Davis had left England. It was found that not only the cheque was forged but the counterfeit in the cheque book was also tampered with, so Davis who had gone away from England by that date, could not have done that. Hence the other man Falder who was given to cash the cheque, was held responsible. He was arrested.

For three months Falder has to rot in the jail as an under-tria prisoner. At last when the case came up for hearing the accused pleaded guilty and the defence taken by his advocate was one of undue influence, temporary insanity caused by violently falling in love with a woman. The counsel attempted to prove that he was in such a frenzied state of mind that he hardly knew what he was doing. It was a sort of temporary insanity,
though not of that degree which would mitigate the guilt of an offence. The council for the prosecution showed the absurdity of this sort of defence and the jury refused to believe it. The judge, agreeing with the verdict of the jury, sentenced him to imprisonment. But the jail, instead of curing him, only made him more and more morbid. He was a broken man when he came of the jail. He tried to start afresh, but the van proved too much and he failed to settle in life. At last through the kindness of Cokeson and Walter How, he was once more on the point of being reemployed in his office. But the harassing even here had arrested him for failure to report himself regularly. Driven to despair and continually embarrassed by an awful sense of insecurity, he committed suicide by jumping from the staircase of the office and breaking his neck. Thus the course of "Justice" which aimed at reforming him, helped to send him at last to an early grave.

"Justice" made a powerful impact on the social life and judiciary of England. The legislators became aware of the heartless process of the 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 not about it in his diary: "Justice" made a great sensation, especially
inparliamentary 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.” Thus Justice is one of the most important sociological plays of the present century.(17)

Commenting upon the realism of ‘Justice’ and presenting a true picture of society William Archer writes: “Let us suppose it just and hopeful to say that Mr. Galsworthy goes to work, not with a palette and brushed, but with a camera. If so, what an extraordinary camera is: A camera that selects the significant and leaves out irrelevant and insignificant trait. A camera that seizes upon those moments in a story, which while barbarically dramatic in the past. A camera which though its lens remains absolutely true, steady, and in focus, is yet, by some strange paradox, quivering with indignation and thrilling with a passion of humanity.(18)

‘Joy’ and ‘A Family Man’ deal with problems of family life. ‘Joy’ is a study of the egotism of human nature which is clearly seen in
family life. In this play, we have Colonel Hop, a retired army officer, his wife, Mrs. Hope, their daughter, Litty, married to Ernest Blunt, a youth of twenty eight, joy, aged seventeen, who is loved by Dick Merton, her senior by three years, a maid-savant named Rose, and Miss Beech, or "Peachy" and old governess friend of the family. At the opening of the play, they are expecting the arrival of Colonel Hope's niece, Mr. Gawyn, aged thirty-six, Mrs. Gawyn is Joy's mother by a husband who had gone out of her life many years ago, and she is seeking another husband, who is expected to arrive with her, in the person of the Hon. Marries Lever. A discussion on the rearrangement of bedrooms is made to accommodate all the expected guests. They also discuss a game of tennis, various preparations for a dance that will take place seem evening and some mild love making.

From the conversation that is going on we learn about the egoism of Colonel Hope who is of the opinion that no man in the army has been treated so badly as he himself, and in order to assert his own importance, he invests a large amount of money in a mining company. Mrs. Hope's egoism is about a housewife who wants to order people about and who is unhappy because her husband has invested such a large amount of money without consulting her. Other characters also have their own particular kinds of
egoism. The egoism of characters brings tensions and conflicts. 'Joy' at first introduces a note which is sounded again and again in the plays of Galsworthy. Most of the troubles in life arise from some failure of sympathy or imaginative understanding and this failure of understanding is the result of egoistic self absorption and the absence of love.

In 'A Family Man' conflicts arise from the over-assertion of authority in family life. John Builder is an imaginative, hot-tempered man. He thinks that he can boss over his wife, control his young people and govern his household in any way he wishes. But the womenfolk soon get out of his control. "Even wives object nowadays," he complains. The times clearly are out of joint. The maudlin sentimentality in these days is absolutely rotting the country. A man can't be master in his own house, can't expect his wife to fulfill her duties, can't attempt to control the conduct of his daughters, without coming up against it and incurring odium. A man can control his employees, he can't put his foot down on rebellian anywhere a lot of humanitarianism and licence-lovers howling at him. Frustration an alienation are on the increase due to this over assertion. The woman-folk leave him one after another, and in the end he lives only in "splendid isolation". Lack of imaginative sympathy and understanding is the cause of undoing and ruin, as in 'Joy'.
Like 'The Silver Box' 'The show' and 'The Forest' deal with some aspect or the other of social injustice. 'The show' though a fine play, is not one of Galsworthy's popular plays. It deals with the suffering caused to individuals through public curiosity shown by the press and other media of mass communication. "There is nothing, we like better", says Margaret orme in 'Loyalties' "than seeing people skinned". One of the most debatable forms of social injustice is seen in the love of scandal and sensation, the depraved appetite for the most nauseous details of divorce court cases or gruesome murders, and a vulgar carving to poke and intrude into the private affairs of eminent public men. "The restrained yet passionate indignation of Galsworthy on the subject is nowhere more evident than in the closing scene of this powerful play."

In The Forest too a fine play, but not very popular, social injustice and misery are caused by gross swindling of the public by the big capitalists. Law of the jungle prevails and capitalists like Bartaple stood ruthlessly cheat and exploit the people and become rich at their cost Egoism, lack of imagination, understanding and sympathy lie at the root of social injustice.
‘The Window’ and ‘The Fugitive’ deal with the social forces that make a criminal, the disreputable and the out cases of society. ‘The Windows’ deals with an equally unfortunate person Faith By. She is brought up by her father to follow her instincts and become the mother of an illegitimate child at the age of eighteen. In a frenzied moment she kills the two days old infant in bed, although she deeply loves it. This leads to her imprisonment for infanticide for two years. When she is released from jail she first learns weaving and later takes up the job of a domestic service. After remaining in prison for two years, she is filled with a desire to see a bit of life and enjoy its freedom. She flirts with Johnny, who is the son of her mistress. When the mistress learns about it, she insists that Faith must go, though Johnny tries to defend and protect her. A lover at last appears from round the corner, whom even a man like Johnny is able to see that he is a scoundrel. Faith does not believe in this fact, as her imprisonment for two years has thoroughly impaired her development and has kept her ignorant of the evils in the world. But as has been made clear from the remark of the Police Inspector that the young man makes a living out of the earnings of fallen women. Offers are made now to Faith with the object of persuading her to say on. But she does not accept either help or charity and desires to go out.
'The Fugitive' deals with the story of the unfortunate career of care. She has been brought up in a country, where her father, a widower with a small income and a family lived. She is married to George Dedmond and soon afterwards discovers that she and her husband do not have the same views. Blare is interested in poetry and music, George is prosaic and matter-of-fact. They lead a life of miserable married life. When she finds that she is unable to give to George what he desires from her more and more. This results in clear deserting her husband. She goes for advice to a artistically minded frineded, Malise, and she is fond of him. But soon she leaves him too and take to selling gloves behind the counter of the shop of a draper. Soon she finds that she is not fit for the routine and of this position both by temperament and training. No other door being open to her, as she realises after sometime, she comes back to Malise, this time as he mistress.

On learning about this all, Georage has the decency to offer her his home again, an dependent income and even the privacy of her room. Clare declines the offer. In revenge George initiates divorce proceedings and asks for costs of about £ 2000 from Malise. The struggling literary man gets ruined by this and is dismissed from service also. Clare then struggles all alone in the world and at last commits suicide.
The characters in these plays are not vicious by nature. They could lead a happy life under ordinary circumstances. But they are poor and take a false step in a moment of sudden frenzy. Their impulsive act is the cause of their ruin forever. These Plays are severe indictments of social justice and the general harshness and callousness of the world. They advocate for a more imaginative and sympathetic understanding of the poor and the down-trodden. The law is not fair to them and when they come out of the prison fully expiated by the punishment they have suffered. They are not welcomed by the society on reasonable and fair terms or given a chance to recover their good name. As a result of this they go down the social scale and ultimately are led on to commit suicide.

The theme of the play ‘The Pigeon’ is social deterioration at a much later stage than the plays of the previous group show. It offers a study whether society can do anything to reclaim those who are its victims. It is considered as one of the best plays of Galsworthy.

Wellwyn is an amiable artist. He lives with his daughter, Ann. He is the pigeon of the title, being generous and kind and gives money to the poor and the needy. Three people take him to be a pigeon and prey upon
him. These three are Mrs. Megan, a beautiful flower-seller, Ferrand, a French interpreter, and Timson, and old Cabdriver. All the three are fond of the artist for his money, but they do not improve or mend their ways. As a result of this, the well-meaning artist gets ruined and his belongings are sold.

There are three social reformers. They try to mend the three incorrigibly but they find that they cannot succeed in their mission. Canon Bradley, the clergyman, is of the opinion that Mrs. Megan ought to be restored to her husband but in the meanwhile he engaged her as a domestic servant in her own house. Professor Calway holds on to his pet theory that in all circumstances we should lend our support to the state to help the undeserving Sir Thesis Hoxton is a Justice of the peace and a self-styled practical man. He holds on to his view that unquestioned support is to be given to the private originations to assist only the deserving.

These three continually squabble among themselves and much of the humour of the play is the result of this.

Professor Calway by merely standing on a chair and peeping through the glass-panel of a door, is confident of the fact that his theory is
correctly applicable so far as Timson is concerned. Both he and Hoxton actually trip over the drunken fellow while they are arguing what is to be done with him. They is reality lose sight of the individual.

It has been emphasized in the play that reclamation of the social outcasts requires something more than amiable philanthropy. “Busy bodies especially and even sympathizers, must hopelessly fail to reclaim the irreclaimable, when they themselves are handicapped by fundamental weaknesses of their own. Professional reformers too, often have theories, but lack of humanity; others have humanity enough, but they lack judgement. Each virtue is negatived by a corresponding defect.” (19)

“The Mob” and “A Bit of Love” deal with conflict and tragedy occurs when a man of high principles and firm convictions is confronted with forces of worldliness, which want him to conform and surrender.

Stephen More is a man of strong convictions. He is the focal point or central figure in the play. As an idealist, he is of the opinion that war is wrong. England at this time is about to enter war. He condemns the decision in the House of commons and is at once involved into difficulties.
His own family and relatives oppose him and he is fiercely attacked publicly. He has to sign from his job of an under-secretary and his political career is ruined. He is, however, killed when he is addressing an angry mob. A statue is built in his honor after his death with the words: "Faithful to his ideal" inscribed on it.

"The war" deals with the internal warfare ever being waged between fidelity to principles and worldly compromise. More sticks to his guns and ultimately dies. He is of the glorious company of the idealists whom the world at first crucifies and then canonizes, they see to it that erections of moments in their honour is delayed till they themselves trouble the world no more with their disturbing dreams.

"A Bit of Love" also deals with idealism but it is of another kind. It has for its theme absolute forgiveness as a guiding principle of policy for life. Michael Stangway is a saintly clergy. He is an idealist and the protagonist of the play. He teaches his class and as he does so "he frees from its cages an imprisoned lark, which one of the girls has brought with her." On hearing the sound of the cuckoo, he remembers his wife, Bacterize, who proved faithless to him. She goes off to live with her former lover,
Dr. Desert, who is the only man whom really she took care of. Beatrice herself comes on the scene. She requests him for her sake and her lover's to grant her release and not insist on the publicity and disgrace of divorce proceedings. Strangway has had an experience with the imprisoned lark. He cannot but release hard. Her heart is cut into pieces by doing so. He has lost his wife thus by desertion and he is called upon to console and encourage Jack Creamer, a village rustic, whose wife died.

The news of what has happened soon spreads and is the topic of discussion everywhere. Strangway is considered by and large as a coward. If he had been a man, he would have certainly stood up to Dr. Desert for meddling with his wife.

Strangway, like Stephen more, is surrounded by people who misjudge and vilify him. His very soul is cut into pieces by the spiritual struggle going on within him. Strangway at first decides to leave his village and go elsewhere. But he afterwards decides that it will be better if everybody takes to his own life. He cannot remain a clergyman, when he doubts whether there is God at all. He therefore, retires into a barn (storehouse for grain) on a moonlit night, hangs a rope from one of the beams and makes a
noose in it. He is, however, stopped from carrying out his purpose by two people. One of them is Tibby Jarland whom he finds curled up in the hay and sleeping soundly and who by her artless simple innocent prattle brings back in him his old love for nature. The other person is Jack Cremer, the bereaved husband whom he formerly befriended and who now by reminding him of his own previous advice to play the man brings him back to the love of man. Strangway is thus an idealist who believes in the potency of the spirit of love forgiveness. The glory in life is ultimately secured by him which more of ‘The Mob’ got after his death.

Some of the plays of Galsworthy deal with caste feeling. In the Eldest son’ the caste feeling of a country family comes into conflict with morality. In ‘The skin Game’ the caste feeling in the landowning class collides with caste feeling in the manufacturing class. As we have mentioned ‘Strife’ shows the caste feeling of capital pitted against the caste feeling of labour. ‘Loyalties deals with the conflict of various kinds of caste with the another. ‘Old English’ is a study of a personal representation of caste-feeling in its weakness.

We have then a religion of kindness praised as a corrective to
caste in 'Foundations'. In 'Escape' various kinds of caste feeling are nega-
tived and overcomes by the spirit of sympathy and humanity. It brings to a
collection the entire series of Galsworthy's plays.

'Loyalties' deals with the caste feeling of the Christians against
the Jews who too are a part of the English society but in real life are treated
as second class citizens. Caste feeling among the Christians gives birth to
caste consciousness among the Jews who on their part, get embittered against
the Christians. This leads to a tragedy: Dancy is a Christian. He steals the
money of De Levis, a Jew. Dancy has the strong support of his Christian
friends. De Levis is looked down upon by them as a vulgar trader, as the
first insists on calling the police to investigate the case. He then goes to the
Court. It soon becomes evident that Dancy is the thief and De Levis who
has succeeded in establishing his point is now prepared to let bygone be
bygone. But matters have really speaking gone too far. When the officers of
the Court come with a warrant of arrest for Dancy he shoots himself. If
Dancy's Christian friends were impartial and if they had not closed their
eyes to the truths, and if they had realized the force of De Levis' case,
matters would not have gone so far and the tragedy would have been avoided.
But they are blind to truth due to their caste feeling which is not exactly
loyalty to a friend but prejudice against a Jew. They have the best of motives yet they cause tragedy. Imagination and sympathetic understanding are required for importance of human lot.

Other significant plays of Galsworthy are 'The Show' 'The Exiled' 'The Roof' etc. In 'The show' he expresses his opposition to the press and the general behavior of the journalists who indulge in scandal of the public life of people by unnecessarily exposing their private affairs to the public gaze. The play denounces the press which has been the subject of his attack in his other novels and dramas such as 'The Maid in waiting'. 'The Exile' another of John Galsworthy's play deals with a serious social problem of the uprooting of the British landed aristocracy by the rising industrialists. 'The Escape' treats of the problem of the individual pursued by society. 'The Roof' the last of Galworthy's play, does not deal with anything serious or deeper that merely examines the reactions of the occupants of rooms in a hostel. It skilfully makes use of the technique of the cinematographic aspect of modern life in its episodic and disconnected aspects. It is destitute of plot, obviously because the modern life too has no plot worth the name.
Galsworthy also wrote about a hundred poems. Many of them appeared in periodicals and a collection was published in 1912 under the title "Moods, song and Doggerels". Another volume entitled, 'Verses, New and Old' appeared in 1926. None of the poems is great as a poem but they are interesting because they reveal his personality and his philosophy of life. Poetry is the expression of deep emotion. It cannot be written by a person controlled. His qualities suited prose better. His poems have already been forgotten. But he ranks as one of the great novelists and dramatists of our time.

Galsworthy passed his last days quietly in his country home in Sussex like a typical county squire. He enjoyed music and the company of his large family of cats and dogs. He was very fond of horses and loved to ride even in his old age. He died at Grove Lodge on the 31 January 1933, and his ashes, according to his directions, were scattered to the winds.

John Hampaen's remark about Galsworthy is worth quoting. He says, "Since his death in 1933 the level of his popularity has remained remarkably constant. He depicted an epoch of smug conventions and social in justices with incisive clarity and he depicted facets of the English
character inherent in that Epoch, and the social system that typified it, without either animosity or fulsome indulgence. If the word 'genius' is denied him- he would certainly never have claimed it - he can never be denied the less controversial qualities of sincerity, sympathy and superb craftsmanship.”
FOOT NOTES

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND MAJOR WORKS


5. Ibid. p.471

6. Ibid. p.471


10. Ibid

12. Galsworthy: The silver Box, Act I, scene II.

13. Ibid

14. R.H. Coate: Galsworthy

15. Ibid

16. Culd: The Art of the Theatre (John Galsworthy)

17. Galsworthy’s Diary

18. William Archer

19. Coats: Galsworthy

20. Hompaen