ABSTRACT

The present research critically evaluates moral vision of Galsworthy as reflected in his selected plays. Moral is the keynote of all his plays as he essentially focuses on ethical and unethical aspects of Victorian and Edwardian period. One of the focal points of his plays is to bring out rapid decline of the upper middle class and the rise of middle class at his time. Despite being a perfect Edwardian, Galsworthy criticizes and shows how aristocratic life-style and formalities are challenged and opposed by the rising middle class during his time. Galsworthy handles very common themes in his plays. Perhaps for this reason he does not give us towering and noble personalities in the plays dealing with ordinary subject matters. He has no villains, but few heroes.

Thus he presents merely commonplace people like drunkard, socially wretched, destitute and the oppressed on the stage no playwright before him did it in British drama. By selecting social and moral issues he gives ordinary, average and mundane street people as his characters. They are typically Victorian in their outlook, manners and life-style. Thus his characters bear testimony to social conventions and social structure, cultural bearing and general life pattern of the period. His plays conspicuously depict harsh and unfair life of the weak and fewer opportune in society.

Galsworthy foregrounds social questions and class disparity in *The Silver Box* (1906), labour unrest and discontent in *Strife* (1909), criminal and social injustice in *Justice* (1910) and class consciousness and abhorrence in *The Skin*
Game (1920). He presents political and economic world attaching importance to material gain at the expense of social and moral values. His plays mostly concentrate on the failure of laissez-faire to fight methodical discrimination. Galsworthy experienced the devastating economic, political and social effect of World War I. This finds enough space in his plays. He had realized that the plays were a perfect medium to vent social and moral questions without being a preacher. He makes proper diagnosis of social ills and diseases but does not prescribe any medication perhaps for the reason that it does not fall within the purview of the artist, rather it would be against the principle of realistic techniques of putting things in a right perspective.

He is neither a philosopher, nor a missionary reformer and not a socialist either, but his sympathy is always with the poor and oppressed in society. His world of drama is full of social and moral problems caused by misery mostly inflicted by social conventions, economic liberty of a chosen few, lack of imaginative sympathy, want of looking at the weak with considerate attitude. It is because of this that he is designated as a social dramatist and writer of social tragedy. The desire to rule and dominate others also results in chaos, confusion and tension is society. Galsworthy also states that unchecked acquisitive and materialist approach and selfishness is responsible for deterioration of social and moral values.

In his plays Galsworthy adopts realistic and naturalistic techniques to focus on social sores, ills, maladies and evils. He discloses all these aspects with utmost objectivity and impartiality and deals with social themes with dramatic dexterity.

Thus, Galsworthy’s exposure of social evil and injustice is direct without giving any remedy. He leaves the issue of passing the judgment to his readers. The power of money decides justice in the court of law. When the victim of social
institution finds difficult to cope with society it becomes unbearable to him, the final result is decay or loss of life. Thus his plays selected for the present research are examined in the light of these factors which are significantly absorbing to the playwright himself. An attempt is made in the present study to critically evaluate the plays from social, moral, economic, political and cultural point of view to justify the claims made in this research. The present thesis is divided into five chapters:

**Chapter I: Introduction**

The introductory chapter discusses aims and objectives of the present study and ascertains the significance of the research in context. It also includes scope and limitations of the research. The chapter also presents hypothesis, methodology and techniques employed for the research. Towards the end of the chapter an attempt is made to present biographical sketches and other details pertaining to development of Galsworthy as a man and the playwright. In the concluding part of the chapter a brief summary of historical perspective of British drama is given to find out the base of dramatic world of Galsworthy.

**Chapter II: Galsworthy’s Contribution to British Drama**

This chapter is devoted to Galsworthy’s contribution to British drama. In the beginning of the chapter efforts are taken to emphasize Galsworthy as a playwright. Galsworthy’s major contribution to British drama is also discussed in brief. His impartiality in handling the themes with the help of realistic techniques is also discussed in detail. In his dramatic art there is no scope for mysticism, romanticism and symbolism, but the common issues are objectively dealt with. The chapter is a critical appraisal of themes chosen by the playwright for his drama. He writes about social and moral issues, social injustice, class consciousness and caste feeling, prison reforms, sordid struggle between capital and labour, disintegration of family life, unhappy marriages, moral decay and
degradation of social values leading to chaos, confusion, frustration and the loss of human life.

An attempt is also made in this chapter to evaluate remarkable skill of Galsworthy’s characterization. His plays mainly present average, mundane and ordinary characters from the street who have hitherto been not introduced on the English stage. It is the ethical force of the playwright that makes him one of the distinguished dramatists the presiding figure of British theatrical world.

**Chapter III: Moral Vision in *The Silver Box* and *Strife***

The major thrust in this chapter is on critical appraisal of moral vision of Galsworthy as reflected in the selected plays viz. *The Silver Box* and *Strife*. Galsworthy is a writer of social tragedy dealing with social issues showing how the weak in society face utter social injustice. However, when he presents the case of the miserable and destitute on the stage his appeal is more to the reason than to sentiment and thus proves that play writing is art not a profession. The critical evaluation of *The Silver Box* is made on the basis of the facts that how political, socially powerful and rich family is determined to completely ruin the weak family. Galsworthy achieves dramatic effect without presenting any violence, or under press of sentimentality. In this play Galsworthy gives a fine example of the wayward and ignoble son of a rich and influential politician, claiming to be liberal. He introduces us a corrupt and vindictive judge who lets the rich scot free in the court of justice. It is natural that our blood boils with fury at the glaring injustice done to the poor and weak in society.

*Strife* is a social tragedy of caste feeling. It is a disgusting struggle between capital and labour which aggravates due to adamant human nature and ego. Finally it leads to miserable life and starvation of striking workers. Labour and Capital are mortal antagonists and have to fight to finish. The play is not just about a conflict between labour and capital but human impulse to exchange
blows. Both parties continue their losing battle until they understand the futility of the fight leaving one woman dead. The final result is misery and mockery of the struggle, agony and pit where no one really wins.

**Chapter IV: Moral Vision in *Justice* and *The Skin Game***

This chapter attempts to present Galsworthy’s moral vision as reflected in his selected plays *Justice* and *The Skin Game*. The plays of Galsworthy mainly expose moral issues and their consequences on society and the individual especially when ethics are at stake. The title of the play is ironically used in the sense that it is not about justice but how injustice is done to the helpless and weak in society. Society at large and its institutions like judiciary cause injustice to the individual and destroy his life in the end. Here justice is not delivered but injustice is obviously done, what we witness is a biased, corrupt and vindictive magistrate holding pairs of scale unbalanced. The real culprits in this play are civilized society, prison system and we, too. Galsworthy focuses on solitary confinement which destroys the convict. He tries to show that lack our understanding and sympathy towards the oppressed and the wretched in society needs to be seriously taken to improve social situation.

*The Skin Game* is yet another example of the worst type of caste feeling and class hatred. In this chapter an attempt is made to bring out a squalid struggle between the hostile English nobility and the rising nouveau riche, the manufacturer. In this tragi-comedy Galsworthy underscores social problem along with individual psychology revealing the playwright’s moral vision in this play. The struggle is between the aristocratic family and the newly rich antagonist. The fight is over a piece of land admeasuring two hundred acres. Galsworthy brings out that the fall of upper middle class e.g. Victorian and Edwardian life style and social formalities, the growth of middle class which challenges aristocratic airs in English society. Galsworthy also exposes
aristocratic hypocrisy in this play leading to social injustice and forcing the weak to lead miserable and wretched life.

Chapter V: Conclusion

This is the concluding chapter of the thesis. It briefly recapitulates the vital points and issues discussed in previous chapters. The chapter also underlines pedagogical implications of the study and presents the major findings of the research. Towards the end of the chapter some significant suggestions are made for further research in the related area.