

Social Issue Portrayed in Galsworthy's Play, *Justice*

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Abstract

John Galsworthy (1867-1933), a Noble laureate, is one of the greatest modern British dramatists. Like George Bernard Shaw he writes well-made plays dealing with social issues and social problems. Like Ibsen he is rebel against drama which is not concerned to life. The play *Justice* deals with the contemporary social problems. This drama is different from the dramas of Victorian period. This drama treats real issues of life. After G.B. Shaw, it is Galsworthy Who presents human follies, inconsistencies, social issues and injustice. John Galsworthy wrote plays to reform society. His play "Injustice" is known as problem play. In this play Galsworthy discusses his contemporary social issues and hopes for positive solution from his audience. His protesting attitude and social consciousness towards the evils prevailing in his time have made him a great playwright and an artist with profound humanity. His critical attitude towards intolerance, ignorance, hypocrisy, tyranny, superstition and social disparities in his play *Injustice* makes him a great moral artist with humanistic outlook. This paper traces the humanistic concerns in Galsworthy's *Justice*.

Key Words: Social disparities, intolerance, ignorance, hypocrisy, legal system & social issues.

Introduction:

In this play *Injustice* Galsworthy criticizes and attacks on the unjust law and inhuman treatment of the convict. Galsworthy's impartial treatment and objective outlook of the problem gives us the undistorted outlook of the fault concerned to the legal system. He portrays cruel practice of solitary confinement and its consequences in a pictorial manner. This paper depicts that man is inherently good but the social institutions have often victimized man and hinders his progress.

In this connection, the play *Justice* is an earnest appeal of Galsworthy for a human law to make necessary reform in the punishment of solitary confinement. This paper points out Galsworthy's humanistic

mind. Man is born good but is victimized to circumstances. He appeals for the compassionate treatment of a convict as a patient and human law in place of rigid, mechanical and inhuman system of law.

John Galsworthy's *Justice* (1910) is a problem play with its deep insight on the penal system and solitary confinement of his time. It is a story about a man who forges a cheque to flee with a woman. She is tortured by her husband and finds no solace in her married life and wanted to settle abroad with Falder, clerk. His forgery is found before he escapes from the place and is put to trial. He is given six months solitary confinement and released. He returns to the same company seeking a second opportunity which can be given on condition that he must quit the

pitiable woman. This is against his will and therefore he is perplexed and helpless to determine anything. A policeman comes in search of Falder as it is the custom to sign at the station even after the criminal is released from jail. But Falder, being perilous at the thought of returning to prison stumbles to break his neck and dies. Such is the tragic end of the weak-hearted man who did forgery out of temporary madness. Galsworthy advocated for tolerance, sympathy and compromise as he found these ideals the eternal solution to all the human problems and miseries. Thus, the core aim of humanism is human liberty and fraternity. According to Galsworthy, tragedy arises due to misunderstanding and misunderstanding is the root cause of all the human miseries, disappointment, disillusionment, despair, and finally death. Galsworthy is praised for his humanitarian zeal and balanced criticism of his characters. His focus often lay on the universal issues of humanity and rigid system of law.

The title Justice may lead to varied interpretation in the perspective of Galsworthy. It is ironically referring the injustice and wickedness of man-made system of law. The very meaning of justice is turned upside down by the people of law who should first understand the right sense and essence of the word in its right spirit before they act in accordance with the synthetic system. Hector Frome, the advocate of Falder in the play is a mouthpiece of Galsworthy. His argument in the play clearly exhibits Galsworthy's humanistic faith that the convict must be treated as a patient and not a criminal. The social problem discussed in the play Justice

is in connection with the English penal system. Galsworthy concerns more in the reformation of the bitter and tragic reflection of the penal system. The play is not a well-constructed one just like his play, *The Silver Box* (1906) in which he focused the double-standard of law. But in its action and handling of situations it is unequalled with the rest of his plays. It is interesting to trace that Galsworthy is a follower of Dickens in his humanitarian appeal towards his characters and their conflicts. According to Galsworthy man is subject to become victim to the circumstances but also hopes that man can attain perfection if he strives for it.

In the play Justice, he finds fault with the legal system which functions mechanically without considering the victim's motivation behind the conviction committed. Frome argues that Falder has not intentionally committed the forgery. It is because of temporary madness that he alters the cheque. It is a simple crime but the punishment given to him is more than what he actually deserves. The system of law must consider the intention of Falder. He has not deliberately changed the cheque. Falder could be considered a hero but there is actually no hero to be mentioned in its strictest sense. He does not possess any of the noble or lofty qualities of a tragic hero. In fact, he is an ordinary clerk who barely survives and no ray of hope is found to his great progress in his life and in the plot of this play. Thus, the humanistic artist has championed the cause of a common man and downtrodden through defending the protagonist of the play. The play, in fact, has no hero, heroine or villain. Galsworthy's role as a humanist makes him evasive to the

heroic portrayal of a tragic kind like Julius Caesar or a young romantic heroine like Juliet to develop his sense of tragedy.

Falder even confesses to James, after his rigorous solitary confinement. Society is the real villain; the dramatist is the hero and the audience is the judge. He merely records his aversion towards the conventional penal system that is of no help to the weak-willed individual who unintentionally commits a forgery only because of a moment aberration of mind. Galsworthy's concern for humanity on the whole is often seen through his characters' compassionate appeal in his plays. In *Justice*, Cokeson and Frome are his perfect mouthpieces in the sense that they sympathize and see things with a humanistic lens. For instance, Cokeson goes to prison before Falder's six months of solitary confinement is about to end. In an interview with Prison Chaplain, Cokeson's compassion and sympathy for human in general and Falder in particular is reflected:

Ruth's husband is considered probably as a villain in the play as he causes her a great trouble to flee from him to seek her refuge in Falder, a poor clerk. The rich law has no answer for her plight, how the poor Falder can remedy her mammoth problem with his meager income. This question is unsolved in the play and cannot be solved at all. Falder commits such an unintentional forgery. Universally law is often not humane but rigid and mechanical. The poor is seldom squeezed under the machine called law. Galsworthy, as an artist, comprehends the reality that human understanding is lacking everywhere. Courts and laws are ineffective in reforming the convicts and they instead intensify their agony and desperate fate.

Phelps observers this idea. There is only one villain in the play and he does not appear. He is the drunken ruffian, Ruth's husband, who beats both her and the children, and from whom under the English law she can find no way of escape. In fact, in this play Galsworthy juxtaposes his balanced view of life. At tragic end of Falder, the clerk shows Galsworthy's victory as an emotional and sympathetic man rather than trumpeting his glory of true impersonal artist of perfect balance. But the fact is that not everything be seen through a political spectacle or artistic excellence in a work of art, particularly from Galsworthy, a naturalist and realist.

He lets the audience to contemplate the after-effect of the final statement. There is no good and evil conflict as if in *Morality* plays; no conflict between men vs. destiny; no dilemma between internal and external force. Social system vs. weak hearted victim is the combat here. Finally the society, a villain wins over the victim.

Solitary confinement is the most inhuman punishment to be given to the least degree of conviction like forgery. Though the punishment is reduced to three months from six months by Winston Churchill, the man to man concern on compassionate ground is not thoroughly achieved in the mechanical penal

Conclusion:

Galsworthy, as a social critic, depicts the human intolerance and harassment in the name of penal servitude, solitary confinement, and ticket of leave system in a vivid manner in this play. The intellectual, moral and social stand of Galsworthy rightly

places him amidst the humanists with a concern for the welfare of humanity. This paper endeavours to identify the humanistic perspective of Galsworthy who has expected the officials of court and prison to treat a convict as a patient and suggests a flexible

and humane law to remedy the eternal problems confronted by weak-willed individuals like Falder. His rest of the plays can also be studied with respect to his humanistic ethics and profound moral vision.

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