

HUMANISTIC APPROACH OF JOHN GALSWORTHY IN HIS DRAMATIC WORKS

Naseer Ahmad Bhat

Research Scholar ,School of Comparative Languages ,Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore, M.P. India.

Abstract

John Galsworthy is a British playwright committed to writing with reformist zeal. His plays are known as 'problem plays' discussing his contemporary social issues and anticipating possible solutions from his audience. His social consciousness and protesting attitude towards the evils prevailing in his time have made him an artist with profound humanity and his critical attitude towards intolerance, ignorance, hypocrisy, tyranny, superstition, and all the rest of the social disparities in his plays confirm his stand as a moral artist with humanistic concerns. Socialism, towards the end of the nineteenth century, was becoming an increasingly effective sounding board for the wrongs of humanity. These wrongs could not be ignored by the later nineteenth century Englishman Hence, this paper attempts to trace the humanistic concerns in Galsworthy's dramatic works. His attack is directed on the blindness of the judicial system, racial prejudice and egoistic prejudice, delusion and numerous other vices that eat into the vital of our life. His objective outlook and impartial treatment of the problem give us the undistorted outlook of the elemental fault ingrained in the legal system. This paper focuses on his humanistic belief that man is inherently good but the social institutions have often victimized man and hinders his survival and progress.

Keyword: Galsworthy, problem play, humanism, inhumane, sympathy, impersonality and legal system

1.INTRODUCTION

Late Victorian drama was essentially didactic. Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright, considerably influenced

the attitude of the English dramatists with his realistic plays and naturalism. But Galsworthy was one of the greatest dramatists of the school of realism and naturalism in drama, and played a conspicuous part in popularizing the problem plays in the twentieth century. He was the dramatist of social life and concentrated his attention on problems facing us in society. He found his material and inspiration in the world of everyday life and affairs, and describe himself 'as a painter of pictures, a maker of things, as sincerely as I know how, imagined out of what I have seen and felt' leaving aside *the little dreams*, he maintain the realistic attitude in his dramas consistently and it was his avowed object as a dramatist to idea with the actual facts and conditions of contemporary life, instead of making excursions into the realms of fancy and romance. Like Scottish dramatists Barrie, Galsworthy was wedded to the phenomena of life and character without fear, favor or prejudice. He made no attempt to glorify and embellish the dreary realities of a dull life with false colour of romance, but strove to create an illusion of actual life on the stage "as a compel the spectator to pass through an experience of his own, to think and make and write with people he saw thinking, talking, and moving in front of him." His work is rooted in contemporary life and provides a vivid and fairly accurate picture of the condition society of the time in which he lived. He as define art as "the perfect expression of self in contact with the world" and hid dramatic art at least is based on his reaction to the world at large.

He is the critic and the interpreter of contemporary English life in his English dramas. In his plays we have a fine discussion of the problems of marriage, sex relation, labour disputes, administration of law, solitarily confinement, caste feeling or class prejudice .in *Silver Box* and *Justice* he deals with the problems of justices and the cruel working of legal machinery. In *Strife* he concentrates on the conflict between capital and labour,

and in *The Skin Game* he begins out the conflict between the landed gentry and the new capitalistic class. The main plays of Galsworthy deals with social problems. These varied problems of our social life are treated by Galsworthy in the relation with the social organism as a whole. Ibsen had also had dealt with problems in his dramas, but he treated social problem in relation to the individual or the family. Shaw occasionally dealt with the problems of the individual in relation with society, but Galsworthy always discussed problems in relation to social organism. He studied law and practiced as an unofficial but judicial advocate of tolerance, sympathy, and compromise as he found these ideals the eternal solution to all the human problems and miseries.

- 1 Galsworthy: "some platitude concerning drama"(essay)

2.HUMANISM: AN OVERVIEW

The root-word for humanism is humble (*humilis*). The Latin *humanus* means human or earthy. The word *humanitas*, during the middle Ages, was known by scholars as those relating to the practical affairs of secular life (the study of languages and literatures is still sometimes referred to as 'the humanities'). Since the *humanitas* drew much of its inspiration and sources from the Roman and Greek classics, the Italian translators and teachers of those writings came to call themselves *umanisti*, 'humanists'.

The term 'humanism' was first used by a German educationist in 1808 to refer to a course of study based on Latin and Greek authors, a curriculum that had been established by Italian Renaissance humanists. Their curriculum covered moral philosophy, history, literature, rhetoric, and grammar; it has expanded over time to include other subjects as well. Eventually, the word humanism came to indicate a certain perspective, an approach, a mentality, a vision stressing the importance of human experiences, capacities, initiatives, and achievements (Peltonen).

Though classified under many heads, all the humanisms focus, "the ways in which mankind have, do might live together in and on the world contained" (Davis, 131). Davis further says about the broadest philosophy of the theory and its cherished ideals in general, "the freedom to speak and write, to organize and campaign in defence of individual or collective interests, to protest and

disobey: all these, and the prospect of a world in which they will be secured, can only be articulated in humanist terms" (132). Humanism, in short, fights against the ignorance, tyranny, persecution, bigotry, and injustice and promotes the cause of human freedom, dignity, and values.

Since *Gorboduc* to *Waiting for Godot*, drama has been focusing on the internal and external progress of man's nature. It perseveres to perfect human nature with its wit and action. The plot in drama is always anthropocentric. Though recent critical theories try to trace the human psychology through the lexical brilliance of author, the ultimate aim of the drama has not been transformed since its inception. The modern liberal humanism and existential humanism may be juxtaposed to traditional humanism but they cannot exactly be antithetic in their spirit of human liberation. Thus, the core aim of humanism is human liberty and fraternity.

3.HIS IMPERSONALITY AND DETACHMENT

Galsworthy deals with the problems of life with impersonality. He is an artist and takes a detached view of the problems; through by probing deeply we can feel his sympathy with one side or the other. But as a rule he examines both sides of the case with equal carefulness and presents them without expressing any opinion. He strikes the note of impersonality in the following words, "Let me try to eliminate any bias and see the whole thing as should an umpire, one of those pure things in white coats; purged of all the prejudices, passions and predilections of mankind. Let me have no temperament for the time being. Only from impersonal point of view. There be such a thing is I going to get even approximately at the truth." while presenting the picture of contemporary life, he keeps himself on the background. He does not allow his own personality to intrude in to the dramas. In his plays he has always tried to present both sides of the problem with strict impersonality. To maintain balance and poise in his dramatic technique, he has not been swept off his feet by emotions. He might be emotionally sympathetic to his character or that, to this class or the other, but as a dramatist he successfully checks the temptation of treating any particular character with under partiality

In silver box Jones, an unemployed young man, steals a silver purse in a fit of drunkenness, from Jack Barthwick,

the idle son of a wealthy liberal M.P. we can hardly blame Jones for this trifling crime when unemployment was prevalent everywhere and when even Jack Barthwick himself could steal the silver purse from an unknown lady and goes unpunished by law. But a strictly impartial judge like Galsworthy cannot allow this crime to go unpunished, through he allows Jones to have his full say and hints at the fact that there were two laws prevalent at that time, one for the rich and the other for the poor, and Jones because he is poor, cannot hope for that justices which he could easily buy if he were rich. "If Galsworthy had made of cheaper clay he would have made the Barthwick unspeakable villains and the Joneses the innocent victims. But old Barthwick is a well meaning man, and Jones is a scoundrel and a wife-beater. There is good and bad on both sides. The blame is made as for as the dramatist can make it."³

In *Strife* also the balance is kept intact with perfect impersonality. The dramatist presents both sides of the case. He presents the case for capital and labour with strict impersonality. In the play

2 J.W. Marriot, *modern drama* London, T. Nelson & Sons, Ltd. 1934

the scale are held dispassionately and there readers only feel the futility of the tragic pride and prejudice on both sides; the side of Anthony, the capitalist and Roberts, the labour leader.

4.GALSWORTHY'S SYMPATHY AND HUMANITY.

Though Galsworthy presents his situations and characters with impersonality, yet if we go deep down in his plays, we can detect his sympathy for the down-trodden and the underdog in society. His sympathy extends even to animals. He has a Tolstoyan reverence for all life. Once the veil of this intellectual impersonality is lifted, the humanist in Galsworthy is clearly revealed, voicing his strongest protest against the cruelty and injustices of our society. The warmth of feeling could hardly be chilled by the cold touch of the necessities of the dramatic art. The humanistic approach to life, and its problems is evident in almost in all the plays of Galsworthy and the best example of it can be given from *Justices*. Galsworthy's sympathy is evidently with Falder. In the defence of the counsel for Falder, we feel the voice of Galsworthy himself. It appears to us that the dramatist has put off his lawyer's gown and his passionately

appealing to consider the case of the accused with compassion. The judge may turn a deaf ear to the sentimental appeal of Mr. Frome, the lawyer for Falder, but it will never fail to find a sympathetic echo in the heart of the readers and the audience, because the voice of the dramatist is presented through Frome. In this respect it is interesting to compare Galsworthy with Bernard Shaw. Shaw has actually more imaginative sympathy than is usually conceded to him, but his satiric gift, his genius for derision causes him to appear cynical. Shaw is carried away by his own view to such an extent that he fails to enter adequately into the view point of others. Galsworthy is never guilty of this lapse of dramatic sympathy and understanding. Where Shaw would scoff and curse, Galsworthy would wince and ultimately find himself constrained to bless 'Shaw's intellectualism runs to witty satire and attack; Galsworthy's emotionalism leads rather to charity and sympathy and toleration'

Underlying the plot of each of Galsworthy's plays, there is a broad current of intense humanity which preserves his work from the revenges of time. *Strife* is not an ephemeral pamphlet but a study of the spirit of diehardism, which robs men of their discretion. Warps their judgment and leads to bitter conflict and sufferings. *Justices* deals with the blindness of judicial system; it was blind in the Greeks and Romans and there is no reason to suppose it will not be blind in future. The system may change, but the lack of understanding and foresight shows by common humanity will persist, and lead to suffering such as was experienced by Falder.

5.CONCLUSION

The general effect left on our mind after reading Galsworthy plays is one of despair and gloom. His dramatic work is mainly grey. His tragic plays are for the most part serious, even somber. But he is not a pessimist. There is a ray of hope that the lot of human beings would be better in the world to come. He believes; that the cause of tragedy is social life, the failure of sympathy and imagination, and hopes that human lot is capable of amelioration. His rest of the plays can also be studied with respect to his humanistic ethics and profound moral vision. As a social critic, depicts the human intolerance and harassment in the name of penal servitude, 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. Galsworthy never suggests any remedy in his play as his plays are strongly suggestive to the social institutions to contemplate and make their own amendments for human betterment. Davis sums up the goals of all the humanistic schools thus, "For one thing, some variety of humanism remains on many occasions, the only available alternative to bigotry and persecution" (132).

REFERENCES

- [1] Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. Vol. II. New Delhi: Supernova Publishers. 2010. Print.
- [2] Davis, Tony. *Humanism: The New Critical Idiom*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- [3] Galsworthy, John. *25 Plays*. USA: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928. Print.
- [4] Kaye-Smith, Sheila. *John Galsworthy*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916. Print.
- [5] Nicoll, Allardyce, *British Drama*, London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1932. Print.
- [6] Marriot, J.W. *modern drama'* London, T. Nelson & Sons, Ltd. 1934
- [7] Peltonen, Markku. *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570-1640*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print.
- [8] Phelps, William Lyon. *Essays on Modern Dramatists*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921. Print.
- [9] Varshney, R.L. *John Galsworthy: Justice*. Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 2013. Print