

## Galsworthy as a Liberator of Humanity: A Study of his Plays

**\*Dr. Sneh Singh**

### **Abstract**

John Galsworthy is an ardent champion of the oppressed woman. He is a feminist, though mild and mellow in his approach. He did not, like Shaw, press into service the demolition squad to bulldoze and dismantle all that is old and antiquated in a desperate bid to build a new social order. It is not through iconoclasm but through love and compassion that he aspires to build a better social order, free from iniquity and exploitation. His prime concern throughout his life has been to bring about the liberation to men and women from the yoke of slavery, worn-out customs and traditions, socio-economic mess and misery.

**Keywords:** Ardent, champion, oppressed, feminist, demolition, dismantle, antiquated, iconoclasm, iniquity, exploitation, liberation, slavery and misery.

The discussion in the preceding chapters reveals John Galsworthy as an ardent champion of the oppressed woman. He is a feminist, though mild and mellow in his approach. He did not lend support to militant feminists who, in their fury, professed to pull down the entire structure. He did not, like shaw, press into service the demolition squad to bulldoze and dismantle all that is old and antiquated in a desperate bid to build a new social order. His attitude and approach is very different. He does not believe in demolition. It is not through iconoclasm but through love and compassion that he aspires to build a better social order, free from iniquity and exploitation. Crusader. His is an unceasing campaign against physical, mental, moral and spiritual squalor ugliness which debase and disfigure life. His prime concern throughout his life has been to bring about the liberation of men and woman from the yoke of slavery, worn-out customs and traditions, socio-economic mess and misery. His endeavor for the emancipation of oppressed women in particular, from numerous evils and vices, is an inalienable part of his social philosophy. He has constantly and consistently sought to envision a social system founded on justice and fairplay, freedom and equality, compassion and commiseration. Like Shakespeare, he things that a woman is not a man's "harlot" but his "wife". Like Shelley he believes that man cannot be free it woman is a "slave". He pleads that woman should not be kept in bondage, physical, mental or moral. They should be meted out a juster treatment. Men's outlook must

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change so that they accept women as their companions, equals, compatriots, not as chattel or a piece of furniture.

In order to achieve his goal of social justice and freedom for oppressed women, Galsworthy set himself to the task of arousing people's conscience. He maintained that the attitudes and institutions which have enslaved and oppressed woman through the ages must be humanized and enlivened with the new spirit of social transformation. Galsworthy recognized the need of broadening people's mind and to achieve this, his constant effort as a playwright has been to widen people's mental horizons with imaginative sympathy he holds that male chauvinism should give way to understanding and comradeship. A complete reorientation in men's outlook on women is imperative. His passion for the suffering women's plight never obscured or eclipsed his vision as to their faults, frailties and failings. He has been wide awake to their merits as well as faults. If he has aroused sympathy for them, he has also censured them for their weaknesses.

The predicament of oppressed women, which had urged the playwright to espouse their cause has found a powerful portrayal in his writings in general and in his plays in particular go back. As we have already seen, there is hardly a play in which he does not paint or project suffering women's problems in one form or another. In about a dozen plays, women's life of mess and misery, oppression and exploitation, arising out of incompatibility and misalliance has been depicted with profound power and misalliance has been depicted with profound power and passion. It is, of course, true that the playwright has not resorted to rhetoric to present their cases like an avowed and partisan advocate. On the contrary, like a discerning and judicious judge, he has tried to sift and examine every issue with utmost objectivity.

It is often said that Galsworthy poses problem but suggests no solutions. This may be true up to a certain point. In fact, the remedies suggested by him are inherent in the very anatomy of the problems. Frankly speaking, there is no real remedy for many of the ills. It is no use suggesting desperate remedies unless, of course, one is sure of their efficacy. This presumably disposed Galsworthy to point to the sores society is afflicted with, without venturing to suggest cure. It should, however, be kept in mind that Galsworthy does not preach and sermonize though his outlook is imbued with moral fervor and social ardour. He puts the problems as he sees them into proper focus and leaves it to the people to think of solutions. He does not desire or try to transport people to the cloud cuckoo-land desire or try to transport people to the cloud cuckoo-land far removed from the hard earth of mankind. He has his feet firmly planted to the ground, and at times, like some of his characters, he is bound hand and foot. And yet the spirit to struggle and seek liberation is manifest everywhere.

Galsworthy has remarkably succeeded in bringing into bold relief multifarious aspects of suffering and oppressed women's problems which have plagued and dogged womankind through the ages. He has made a powerful plea for a radical change in men's attitude towards women so as to enable them to work out their own salvation. Men's authoritarian and punitive attitude towards women has led them to be up in arms for their emancipation. It is not enough for Galsworthy to just pay lip-service

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by showing his sympathy to oppressed women. He strives in his plays to show that woman is not man's shadow, she should not be kept on the periphery of men's world. It is man's duty to give women her due place in family and society, he should shake off snobbery, superiority, chauvinism and authoritarianism. Living without loving is nothing short of prostitution.

Galsworthy is a realist in the sense that he tries to present a picture of real life on stage. His dramas are not just dissertation on socio-political problem, rather than illuminating documents of human interest. Many a time he has made it clear that his plays are without and political or social motive. He has painted social conflicts and ills, not because he champions any abstract theory but because he has seen them in his own surroundings. In a letter to his young friend Ralf Mottram, Galsworthy writes. "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 nerves of his audience, and thereby directly, actively giving pleasure."

The conception of society, dominating over and dictating the life-pattern of the individual, forms a basic idea in his dramas. Society here takes the place of the Greek conception of Nemesis, with the difference that the Greek tragic playwright upheld the conception of the retributive justice whereas Galsworthy's comparison for the sufferer makes him accuse society of unfeeling and unequal treatment of individuals. His dramas are avowed attempts at realistic portrayal of modern society. Galsworthy has depicted portrayal of modern society. Galsworthy has depicted contemporary life and a variety of its problems in his dramas. In that sense he is a realist adhering to ideas and problems of contemporary society. His presentation and criticism of social question, especially his efforts for the emancipation of oppressed women, earned for him the reputation of being a powerful realist social dramatist of England. As Galsworthy says himself, his ideal is.

"to set before the public no cut-and-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."

Galsworthy has brought to his dramas an awareness of problems and complexities of modern times and, faithful to the naturalistic, realistic style, he has portrayed men and women in different stations of life. Mrs. Jones in 'The Silver Box' is a patient, long suffering and faithful wife, she has put up with her husband's erratic behavior far too. She wishes to leave him but does not do so for the sake of the children. Jones is a loving husband but. Ill-treats her when out of work. Mrs. Livens is an irresponsible wife and mother. She wrecks the home and goes on the streets. The defiance of Mrs. Gwyn in joy is born of misalliance. When the husband goes away. She seeks. Another mate to fill the void in her life in the teeth of opposition from her young daughter joy. But as she should. She rightly decides to live her own life. Mrs. Roberts in Strife displays infinite domination and rigidity. Madege shows a little courage to find fault with man's dominating behavior.

Social snobbery and egoism create an unbridgeable gulf in The Eldest son. The marriage of Bill and Freda is a sort of misalliance, resulting in disaster. Fera is defiant like faith bly in windows Ruth Honey will in Justice is a victim of an unsuitable union. Her husband is a drunken brute and has made

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her life a veritable hell. She is constrained to flee the stranglehold of infernal wedlock. The machine-like legal system is equally oppressive. She is compelled to resort to the sale of her body for the sake of her children. In spite of all her suffering. She cherishes love for falder who in his turn faces all odds for her sake.

Egoism results in the snapping of marital ties in *The Fugitive*. Clare Desmond is made up of stronger stuff than Mrs. Jones and Ruth Honeywill. She is disgusted with her dominating and egocentric husband. She openly revolts against him and prefers to live a life of struggle, even of sin and shame, to wedded misery. She is the new woman in the making, who in her quest for identity, plunges headlong into the hard world. Though ruined physically, she triumphs spiritually. In *The Pigeon*, Mrs. Megan's marital life is dislocated by economic hardships. Her good-for nothing husband does nothing to dissuade her from the immoral course. The fanaticism of Stephen more in the mob drives his wife to take the desperate step of leaving him. He fails to fulfill his conjugal and family obligations. This causes havoc in the family. In the family. In a Bit 'O' love Strangway, a loving and loyal husband, suffers because of his faithless wife. Instead of making a pretence of love Mrs. Strangway leaves her husband to live with her former lover.

*The Skin Game* shows how the relentless spirit of a cut-throat competition for social Superiority ruins the reputation of woman with a past. The suffering is disproportionate with the lapse committed. A family man voices a vehement protest against man's authoritarianism in family life. Authoritarian John Builder's two daughters Athene and maud refuse to be treated as a piece of furniture and leave their father's house which is a kind of prison. Even submissive Mrs. Builder, in her disgust, finally parts company with him John Builder's unreasonable chauvinism has created a needless storm in his family. *Windows* reveals that social status and pseudo-idealism come in the way of the union between persons of higher and lower classes. Faith bly, a poor young maid, is a victim of a rich man's lust. No union between them is possible because of the yawning social gap. Faith bly defies and spurns the offer of help. Like Mrs. Megan in *The Pigeon*, She is driven to end her life on the streets.

To sum up, Galsworthy has presented the problem of oppressed, exploited destitute women with profound conviction and compassion. He has stirred people's social and moral conscience to help women in *Monsieur*, all is dry as a parched skin of orange" (*The Pigeno*). But in some of the plays there is no such explicit advocacy. He lays bare the roots of evils in society and thereby leaves the reader with an implicit question whether it is not better for man to understand and appreciate each other. All these plays attack social snobbery and prejudice, urge for a larger outlook, more tolerance, more intimate and benevolent understanding and more self-sacrifice. They seem to stress one thing; that intolerance and egoistic feelings are at the root of all our social and personal troubles.

All these plays present the individual at odds with society, its conventions, its limitations and they depict the individual's courage to endure life, the idealism that goes forward in the face of indifference and hostility. Galsworthy devotes his efforts to the task of freeing men from the illusions which oppress and mislead them. He wishes them to realized the importance of women in their life. The women should be treated as equal partners in each and every field of life. Men have to change

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their attitude towards women and treat them as companions and learn to value them.

Without the militancy of writers like Shaw, Galsworthy espoused and advanced the cause of oppressed women. The New woman is at the threshold of a new era ready to take the plunge. That Galsworthy is their fervid champion is abundantly clear in this attempt to study his plays.

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