

John Galsworthy's 'Justice' : An Eternal Warning Against Crimes Of Passion

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial different human societies have devised their own methods to deal with those who dare to deviate from established norms or prescribed code of conduct of society. The dispensation of punishment to such offenders by due process of law through judicial system is an age old practice prevalent in the social system of almost all human societies. Though such systems have evidently most conspicuous limitations, yet these institutions have somehow successfully maintained their relevance and utility in managing human affairs smoothly so far. But ,time and again, there are voices vociferous enough to question authenticity of this criminal justice system which is frequently accused as an inefficient system taking toll upon innocent individuals and underdogs of society. Such intellectuals or critics have taken up cudgels against prevailing Justice system in all societies and want it to be disbanded for larger interests of humanity. Published in 1910, John Galsworthy's ' Justice' is one such play which presents an exhaustive and holistic picture of prevailing criminal justice system in England of those days . Most of the critics who lavished high praises on play as championing cause of prisoners and victims of courts have regrettably failed to appreciate and underscore the various underlying voices of play which, if ignored, can forfeit the very essence of play. The present play, if on one hand, condemns brutality practised in prisons, on the other hand, it also sends a strong signal to all individuals to refrain from committing crimes of passion. The paper focuses on Galsworthy's concerns regarding need of inherent strength in human character to resist such moments of passion which tend to ruin one's life in few moments.

Key Words : Justice, Courts, Prison

CONTEMPORARY TIMES AND GALSWORTHY

Writers, by default, are bound to reflect spirit of their age and same was case with John Galsworthy. This paper endeavours to show how Galsworthy could also not remain insulate to inquisitive spirit of his age and his plays bears a testimony to fact how like all responsible writers of literature John Galsworthy too succumbed to existing dilemmas of his period. Right from Victorian age a kind of uncertainty and doubt started enveloping every human activity. Though Tennyson left no stone unturned in acting as a compromiser, yet the spirit which once penetrated in had to stay. Older order was undoubtedly giving place to new things. This feeling alienation and rootlessness was further escalated in last phase of twentieth century. The rise of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and other scientists was a phenomenal event which took everything by storm. Conventional and stereotype structures started tumbling gradually but surely. Everything was questioned and put under scanner.

The first among whistle-blowers was German thinker Karl Marx whose impact on every sphere of human activity subsumed all other impacts. He introduced concept of "Class" and called for a comprehensive revolution to jettison existing manoeuvred political order which was precipitating the menace of poverty. He offered elaborate remedies to eliminate this monster. In his celebrated work, "The Communist Manifesto" he fired imagination of masses by making a fervent appeal, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, that each time ended, either in the revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes." It inaugurated a new era of restlessness and made people doubt the varacity of existing social and legal institutions. Sigmund Freud also made a significant contribution to study of human mind. He made considerable contribution in field of human mind. He explored dark realms of human mind which were hitherto unexamined. He dissected human mind and made us see how humans are governed by subconscious mind which is inhabited by frustrating human desires getting accumulated over time.

If we look from both perspectives, we wonder to see how Galsworthy's 'Justice' illustrates both Marxian perspective as well as Freudian perspective. It is another thing that he nowhere justifies Falder's crime and the end of Falder is a message to all of us to resist the tide of Passions that lies at bottom of every human tragedy.

INTRODUCTION

Before one jumps at any hasty conclusion we need to understand how concept of criminal justice system originated in human societies and which conditions necessitated its birth. Humans, as we all know, had barbaric origin. Deprived of adequate food and shelter, they were made to confront hostile surroundings and harsh weather conditions. It naturally made them wild as Charles Darwin, an eminent naturalist and biologist concludes in his celebrated book 'On the Origin of Species' that evolution of man resulted from a process in which "struggle for existence" was necessitated by surroundings. During his voyage on HMS BEAGLE, he observed, "As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form." In this way we can see how struggle becomes something quintessential for man's survival and to ensure it one had to resort to all fairs and fouls.

However, humans were quite intelligent creatures. With passage of time they successfully introduced concept of "civilization" which was only viable option to accommodate all doing away with barbaric concept of what Herbert Spencer popularized as "Survival of the fittest" which found immense favour till times. The new concept of human civilization envisaging piece and sustainable development for entire humanity had no place for human depravities or eccentricities. It was to be a democratic set up which was designed to suitably jettison stereotype systems based on barbarity or strength of muscle. So much so, Darwin himself acknowledged the sordidness of this concept and subsequently defined it as, "Thus by survival of the fittest, the militant type of society becomes characterized by profound confidence in the governing power, joined with a loyalty causing submission to it in all matters whatever". Now onwards, a kind of code of conduct became mandatory for all and those who would deliberately violate it most likely will attract penalty appropriate to their crime. Deviators needed to be dealt with iron fist. Therefore, it becomes abundantly evident that to develop a well defined legal system was the only remedy to practically execute all these lofty notions encapsulating a brave New world based on liberty, equality and fraternity.

JUSTICE : AN OVERVIEW

The play begins on a quite peaceful note giving us no hint about the tempest lurking behind seemingly all is well system in office of solicitors James How and Walter How. In the very beginning of play we are introduced with all major characters of play who are going to determine future course of action in play. Cokeson is a managing clerk of sixty having an honest and pug-dog face. Falder, a young man in early thirties, the protagonist of play is a junior clerk in the office. Soon it is revealed that Falder has committed a forgery by altering a cheque. Falder has been in a relationship with Ruth Honeywill, who is a long suffering wife of someone. Ruth and Falder plan to flee to some foreign country and there to live together as husband and wife. But sadly, their plans are thwarted by destiny and a trial has been initiated against Falder who is accused in forgery case. Now the trial commences which brings Falder on his knees. This trial scene, which became a reference point in literary history, has much more to offer than a simple interpretation. It is through this scene Galsworthy's idea of 'Drama of Ideas' is effectively illustrated. We are made to listen three powerful voices representing three different perspective on a same event and Galsworthy like all great men of letters leave it on discretion of readers what to grasp and what to leave. We are made to listen, Harold Cleaver, counsel for Crown, pleading stringent punishment for Falder. Hector Frome is a voice of charity and Goodwill who represents defence for Falder and last, but not least, judge who represents collective society who had to decide on fate of Falder.

As the trial proceeds, Frome sets defence which is based on mental condition of Falder amounting to temporary insanity during the moments he committed crime. He explains how people disappointed by delays of law sometimes are tempted to assume personal responsibility for putting things in order which later on destroys their lives. He appeals for a lenient treatment :

" It was all work of a moment. The rest has followed. Believe me, gentleman there is nothing more tragic in life than the utter impossibility of changing what you have done. Once this cheque was altered and presented, the work of four minutes-- four mad minutes--the rest has been silence "

He further admits that he is not trying to defend the crime but the criminal who can be saved by a compassionate approach:

"Gentleman, men like prisoners are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, patients, and not criminals"

After this plea he sits. It is in his arguments the defence lawyer tried to bring it home to us how there comes certain moments which make us wary and we lose our patience. The situations in life have a propinquity to make us disgusted and behave in unceremonious manner. The case of Falder is a perfect testimony to this. Having no criminal record till date, he fails to visualize any other remedy except to commit this heinous crime. It is here we echo sentiment of what JRR Tolkien observes in 'The Lord of Rings', "Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends".

Then comes turn of Hector Frome who rises in a very confident manner and is full of aplomb. He is almost sure that nothing on this earth can save Falder from clutches of Law. He talks in a plain but impressive manner. Without delving into details of case, he tries to prove how Falder was in full consciousness when he committed crime. He appeals to court to award exemplary punishment to Falder :

" The offence with which prisoner is charged is one of most serious known to our law; and there are certain features in this case ,such as suspicion which he allowed to rest on Innocent fellow--clerk, and his relation with married woman, which will render it difficult for you to attach much importance to such pleadings".

After Cleaver, we hear the final voice, voice of authority which is entrusted with a larger responsibility to do justice. This voice offers a balanced and objective perspective which must be appreciated without any bias. The judge here is a quite sagacious person who maintains his equanimity which is characteristic of any person occupying high office and pronounces a verdict which is not only in accordance with law but also satisfies certain basic parameters of humanity. Though judge displays considerable sympathy with Falder, but these personal feelings seldom have any influence on his judgement. He refused to turn a blind eye to crime. His exalted voice looks like some sort of a prophecy which every criminal must hear before he indulges into any such unappetizing behaviour. Rejecting the plea of defence lawyer, he closes the matter with following words :

" I have to consider on the one hand the grave nature of your offence, the deliberate way in which you subsequently altered the counterfoil the danger you caused to an innocent man- and that to mind, is a very grave point -- and finally I have to consider the necessity of deterring others from following your example"

METHOD

'Justice' is a tragedy of Passions. So, the paper relies upon character of Falder and events in which the main action of the play is triggered. The discussion is limited to characterization as structural element of drama. A close study of play has substantially improved writer's understanding of the play. The paper is based on data collected from two sources. Primary data is collected from text itself and secondary data from other writers to substantiate the argument of paper.

CONCLUSION

No doubt any great work of literature does not stick to any particular agenda or circumscribe itself to any particular ideology or reform, but it is equally true that writers do have a mind, a tilt, an orientation and are capable of offering some sort of pragmatic remedy to a problem however vague it may be. Though all great writers possess what Keats so fondly describes of Shakespeare as having "Negative Capability", yet a writer comes out with a message and sometimes that message is lost among multiple voices. Like other great works, the message here is also loud and clear. Galsworthy appeals to all of us to have strong character in face of moral crisis. The moments will keep on coming in our lives when our faith in goodness and system stands shaken but to surrender ourselves to such aberration of behaviour further aggravate our problems. Falder could avoid all this by displaying a firm character. Sheila Key Smith observes, "Galsworthy suggests no remedy, no alternatives. He does not hint anywhere that Falder has been badly treated, so many men are victims of injustice, so is victim of justice" Though a critic like Smith is true in its own way but then what is the sense of appreciating such masterpieces. We must not forget writers have implicit meanings. There are moments in a play when a reader is expected to display intelligence and grasp the heart of the matter. We are time and again made to feel that only a well cultivated character can rescue itself from all such turmoils. Let us accept that system needs overhaul; let us accept society must be more humane. All this is fine, but eventually we cannot wash our hands from our personal sense of right and wrong and allow us to forget that wrong choice will eventually put us on a wrong path.

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