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Dr. Ramu Tiwari
Lecturer, Department of
English, K.K.P.G. College,
Etawah, Uttar Pradesh, India

Portrayal of the legal system in Galsworthy's 'Justice'

Dr. Ramu Tiwari

Abstract

Galsworthy's 'Justice' is the mightiest social tragedy. It is a strong satire on the contemporary English system of law and judiciary. The playwrights reveal to us the most abusive and abhor-able shortcomings and perpetual drawbacks in the legal system of England. One of the most inhuman aspects of the judicial system and consequent punishment for the criminals is their condemnation to solitary confinement. Solitary confinement is the most inhuman punishment that can be inflicted on man; it is to this great melody that Galsworthy draws the attention of the people and authorities in this play.

Keywords: Legal system, galsworthy's 'justice', portrayal

Introduction

'Justice', exposes the evils and shortcomings of prison system and judiciary. Not only are his themes realistic, but his treatments of those themes are equally realistic. While writing 'Justice', he interviewed convicts who had experienced months of solitary confinements. As Allardice Nicoll aptly remarks:

"In 'Justice' we will feel the waste implied by Falder's suicide, and the same spirit is technically expressed in 'The Mob', 'The Pigeon', 'Loyalties' – all alike in producing this atmosphere and in making the faith of man his master In these ways Galsworthy's drama, true as it is to the finest tradition of tragic art, is fundamentally modern, expressing to his age the spirit of the 20th century as Shakespeare's tragedies inspired the spirit of the Renaissance."^[1]

In 'Justice' Falder, a young clerk forges a cheque to help a beautiful young lady, Ruth Honeywell, who has been constantly ill treated by her husband. He is drunkard and attempts to strangle her. Her life has been threatened. Falder loves her and deems it to be his duty to help her in her distress. He plans to leave for another country along with her and her children. The forgery is detected before their departure to a foreign country. Here Galsworthy exposes the shortcomings of the English legal system. A miserable woman cannot obtain a legal divorce because violence alone on the part of the husband is not enough for obtaining legal separation. The real culprit, Honeywell, who never appears in the play, is a real criminal but under the British law neither she can be punished nor can she find an escape from him.

James How, who represents the old generation of the custodians of law, has no imagination, no vision, no understanding and sympathy for the age and the circumstances in which Falder altered the cheque. Walter How assures his father that Falder will never do it again. Robert Cokeson the managing clerk, also wants that Falder should be given a chance. But James How is determined to prosecute Falder, the unintentional criminal according to law. Falder is arrested. Walter ironically remarks. "We shall regret it."

Falder is sent to prison in Act II from, the defense counsel, pleads for Falder on humanitarian ground. He submits that men like the prisoner are destroyed daily under the British law for want of human insight which sees them as they are patients, and not criminals. He shows that Falder altered the cheque in a moment of great mental tension, amounting to the temporary insanity, caused by violent distress under which he was laboring. He did so to help the miserable woman, he loved. She married a drunker and violent husband. She had no power to get rid of him because the English law is inadequate to help such a woman.

From further appeals to take into consideration the humanitarian aspects of the crime, what he calls "that Palpitating life which...always lies behind the commission of the crime." Falder may justly be acquitted of criminal intent and treated as patient.

Correspondence
Dr. Ramu Tiwari
Lecturer, Department of
English, K.K.P.G. College,
Etawah, Uttar Pradesh, India

The defense counsel pleads before the Judge...

“Gentlemen, men like the prisoner are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are patient and not criminals.” [2]

From further says that our law sees them not as a patients of abnormal psychology but as a criminal. If this prisoner, who is infect a patient rather than criminal is treated as a confirmed criminal and imprisoned as such, he will most probably as out experienced tell us, grow into callous criminal in the end. I, therefore appeal to you not to pass on him the verdict of guilty and thereby send him back to the prison and damn him forever. He exposes the defect of legal system before Judge and says;

“Gentlemen; Justice is a machine that, when someone has given it the starting push, rolls on of itself.” [3]

Galsworthy says that law is an inhuman and malignant institution. It is a blind force and mechanical process that crushes a man caught in its trap-once an unfortunate person is caught in its network, there is no escape possible for him. It is a huge dark cage ‘which never again quite lets a man go. Once a man is caught in its trap, it continues to work upon in automatically. Its mechanical grinds young people to pieces for an act which at the worst was one weakness. Falder has no criminal record. He has been in prison for the last two months. He has already suffered great deal. From has brilliantly and eloquently exposed the short comings of the administration of justice.

Clever, the counsel for prosecution disregards the humanitarian pleas of Frome and tries to prove that Falder committed forgery in a pre-planned manner. The members of the jury also hold him guilty and refuse to consider as ‘Insance’ at the time of altering the cheque. Felder is convicted of felony. The Judge who is the servant of blind Justice, fails to look into reality so majestically expounded by Frome. Nobody accepts From’s plea. Sentencing Falder to penal servitude for three years. The judge says;

“The law is what it is – a majestic edifice sheltering all of us, each stone of which rests on another. I am concerned only with its administration.” [4]

The second stage of judicial process starts with Falder’s entry into the prison the most wretched place of callousness and inhuman behavior. The punishment of solitary confinement is worst than death which is indiscriminately meted out to every prisoner. The governor of the prison and the chief Warder go round the prison, meeting all the prisoners one by one. We can know so many woeful tales of distress of these prisoners from their talks. Moaney is the first prisoner to be talked the border reports to the governor that Moaney has made a small saw, possibly to break away from the prison cell. But Moaney clarifies that he has no plan to escaping from the prison. He explains that he made the saw just to keep himself busy. The common tragedy facing all the prisoners is that neither there is any person with who they can converse even occasionally nor there is any work to be done by them. In the absence of these two basic requirements, they remain idle and have nothing to keep themselves engaged. Idleness rusts their mind. Moaney says;

“I have got another six weeks to do in here alone. I can’t do it and think of nothing, I must have something to interest me.” [5]

Another convict named Clapton complains that they are so mercilessly and in humanity confined in solitary imprisonment that they are rarely permitted to see sunlight. They live in their dark cells for months and years. All this tells adversely upon their eyes. When the governor questions him about the condition of his won eyes, he contemptuously replies, “I do not complain of them. I do not see the sun here.”

Some of the prisoners felt so much dejected, oppressed, depressed and mentally upset that they starts banging and knocking at the doors and walls of their won cells or the adjoining ones of other convicts. They carve to hear human sound as early as possible. Clapton complains O’ Cleary that the latter does not allow him to sleep, “He knocks about like a wild beast in the early morning. I am not used to it stops me getting my sleep out in the evening too. It is not fair. Sleep is the comfort I have here. I am entitled to take it full.” On being questioned by the governor O’ Cleary replies that in the absence of companion to talk to he begins to talk his door by banging or striking against. “It is great conversation I would be having.”

It is the most infectious disease. As one start banging and knocking others to start same practice, which resounds and echoes the whole atmosphere, surcharging it with alarming disturbance.

The greatest sufferer of solitary imprisonment is Falder, who is not at all a confirmed or a professional criminal. He is a sensitive and sentimental convict. He spoils his mind and body by constant brooding, thinking worry and anxiety, which sap his vitality day by day; it is longer than a year outside. “So he keeps on pacing impatiently in his cell like a will bear. He feels like knocking his head against the wall and doors of his cell. He behaves like an animal confined within the cage, moving within it up and down. Cokeson Feels much disturbed to see the horrible plight of the prisoners. He says that he would not even like his dog to convicted to solitary confinement.

He deplors that the authorities and custodians of law and justice feel that by inflecting such atrocities and penalties upon the convicts. These authorities only keep a look at their physical well being. They do not care for mental and moral life which is severely damaged and haltered for goods. He suffers acutely. He passes through sheltering mental distress and emotional crises. The fact that justice led to reforms in prison administration is more to Galsworthy’s credit as a humanitarian than as a dramatist. Falder the protagonist, is neither innocent nor incorrigible criminal but when after the theatrically effective trial scene and the harrowing episode of the solitary confinement, Falder, now a ticket of leave man, forges references in order to find employment is again arrested and in the act of escape meets his death.

According to Galsworthy, this conception of the legal authorities is totally wrong. It spoils them for good and prison life in solitary confinement turns them into the worst criminals. Thus this process not only mars their career but also proves menace to the entire society. Mr. Frome describes the prisons as ‘ill – starred ship’ manned by luckless crew, No one who goes on a voyage in these ships ever comes back. He is lost forever. Yet the fun is that the

authorities and administrators of justice hardly realize what havoc it makes in the life of the poor convicts. They judge them on the physical plan only. Cockson says; what they don't see doesn't trouble them.' On the contrary, they say that 'it is just at this period that we are able to make some impression on them. There is no escape possible for him in life. In this context A.C. Wards learned opinion about justice is that:

"Justice is commentary upon the prison administration of that period.

Falder a young unstable – minded solicitor's clerk, alters a cheque

With the idea of getting money to help Ruth

Honeywell to escape from a brutal husband, and is sent to penal servitude. Cokeson the managing clerk of the office where Falder was employed, visits him in the prison a month before his term of solitary confinements expires. In a subsequent interview with the prison chaplain, Cokeson says: I can't help thinking that to shut him up there by himself will turn him silly. And nobody wants that, I spose. I don't like to see a man cry. The Chaplain – It's very rare thing for them to give way like that.

Cokeson – (looking at him – in a tone of sudden dagged hostility). I

Keep dogs.

The Chaplain – Indeed!

Cokeson – ye – es. And I say this: I wouldn't shut one of them up all by himself, month after month, not he'd bit me all over If you treat em with kindness They'll do anything for you; but to shut 'em up alone, it only makes 'em savage. The soundness or otherwise of Cokeson's view is not in question; the point is that te effect of his remarks upon a average audience is that of an emotional bludgeoning; and such emotional reaction as follow from this are a hindrance to impartially and justice."^[6]

The third stage of Falder's hardship starts after his release prison. The blind and cruel of England doesn't allow him to forget his unlucky past. A prisoner is required to report a out his whereabouts to the police authorities almost daily. The failure to do so, as it happened in the case of Falder would invite penal action. This part of legal system doesn't allow him to start a new and clean life. The machine of justice stop; once it has been given a starting push, the chariot – wheels of justice on rolling. "They come down on you", Says Swaddle;

"Like cart-load of bricks, flatten you out and when you don't swell up again, they complain of it."^[7]

Thus the process goes on. Blind and malignant law peruses criminal forever, even after his release from prison, after suffering and undergoing full them penalty pronounced by the court.

As Falder fails to report to police station he is re-arrested the horrors and gruesome terror of jail life experienced by him earlier so much terrorized him that he makes an attempt to escapes but unluckily he falls and rolls down the stairs, break his neck and dies. Thus the cruel law completes its circle of terrorization and utterly ruins and ends a young career even physically.

The malady of the poor and down trodden criminals continues unabatingly with no appeal heard in any court. The whole atmosphere and procedures of legal administration, Law Courts and Jails is vicious, vitiated, callous, inhuman, intolerable, wretched and unjust. The framers of law, the custodians of justice, the administrators of prison houses are all unmindful and dumb and turn a deaf ear to the miserable plight and humble entreaties of the poor, innocent, much harassed and victimized criminals. They do not consider their inherent nature, human passions weaknesses, conditions and circumstances compelling them to take to criminal course of action. Had they been treated fairly like patients, they could have been reformed and proved a boon to themselves and to the society as well.

Justice; is thus, an indictment to the administration justice and prison system. Galsworthy drew the attention of the English public and authorities to this great social evil. The play brought about a radical reform in prison administration. The message of the play is suggestive. One should not be punished for the first crime – one should be given a chance to reform oneself. This tragedy created a great impact on the social life and judicial system of England.

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