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SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN JOHN GALSWORTHY'S *THE SKIN GAME*

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ABSTRACT

Social injustice arises when equality treated unequally. Each time when someone cheats of what one deserve, there is injustice. Galsworthy has dealt with the theme of social injustice by portraying society as a sharply divided entity consisting of totally opposed classes. His *The Skin Game* deals with the theme of social injustice. A class struggle is in progress. But it is not between the rich and poor. The struggle is not based on economic inequality but on social inequality. *The Skin Game* portrays a class conflict between the aristocratic family of Hillcrist and the equally affluent but socially inferior Hornblower family. Hornblower is an ambitious and ruthless businessman. Hornblower has bought some land from Hillcrist. He plans to build a ceramics factory there. This leads to a confrontation between the two families. Hornblower fights straight and bold. He does not cause any suffering to his opponents. But the same skin of fairness is not exhibited by his enemies. They are ruthless and mean and ultimately destroy him. Other sufferers are the victims of an unjust social order in which injustice is inevitably meted out to the poor, the starving and the socially low.

Social injustice arises when equality treated unequally. Each time when someone cheats of what one deserve, there is injustice. Galsworthy has dealt with the theme of social injustice by portraying society as a sharply divided entity consisting of totally opposed classes. His *The Skin Game* deals with the theme of social injustice. A class struggle is in progress. But it is not between the rich and poor. The struggle is not based on economic inequality but on social inequality. *The Skin Game* portrays a class conflict between the aristocratic family of Hillcrist and the equally affluent but socially inferior Hornblower family.

Galsworthy has shown the rich as the ruling class and the poor as the suffering. His basic sympathy continues to be in favour of the sufferer. His humanistic concern and demand for justice

remains alive. The class-struggle appears to be in realistic dimension. Galsworthy realizes that the conflict between the rich and the poor, the haves and have nots is not merely the economic conflict. Economic imbalances alone are not responsible for class-struggle. Both the rich as poor are portrayed with their excellence as well as weaknesses. The struggle ceases to be a cruelly one-sided business. .

Hillcrist is an old fashioned country squire. He has an innate desire to protect his class interests and maintain the undisturbed normality and comforts of his life. His wife is a a high-brow person of the fashionable society and a total snob. Hornblower family arrives with their wealth and ambitions to further their prosperity and social position. "Have a sense of proportion, man. My works supply thousands of people, and my, heart's

in them. What's more, they make my fortune. I've got ambitions--I'm a serious man. Suppose I were to consider this and that, and every little potty objection--where should I get to?--nowhere!" (SG 15)

Hornblower is an ambitious and ruthless businessman. Hornblower has bought some land from Hillcrest. He plans to build a ceramics factory there. This leads to a confrontation between the two families. Hillcrest feels offended by this audacity and decides to preserve his family prestige and the peace of his surroundings. Mrs. Hillcrest adds fuel to the fire. The land in question worth four thousand pounds is brought up for auctioning. "Not by you because ye've got no need to do it. Here ye are, quite content on what your fathers made for ye. Ye've no ambitions; and ye want other people to have none. How d'ye think your fathers got your land?" (SG 16)

Hillcrest is in no position to compete with the buying power of Hornblower. He raises six thousand pounds through loans and mortgages. Hornblower is equally determined to buy the land at whatever cost. Each tries to outbid the other. Even when the bidding exceeds the six thousand pound limit, Hillcrest continues with sheer bravado. It is a question of honor for him. But in the end, Hornblower proves that he is the better businessman. He tricks Hillcrest through an agent of his and buys the land finally for an exorbitantly high price of nine thousand pounds. Hornblower too has paid a very high price for the land. Hillcrest accepts his fate with resignation. But it is not to be so for his wife.

Mrs. Hillcrest is always hostile and insulting the Hornblower family. She stumbles across a piece of sensational news about the shady pact of Hornblower's daughter-in-law, Chloe. She comes to know that Chloe has an unsavoury past. The ruthless Mrs. Hillcrest blackmails Hornblower. She goes to the extent of arranging witnesses to prove the story. Hornblower totally breaks down at this threat. He knows that his family honor will be lost. He signs under the threat a legal sales deed handing over the newly bought land as well as the long meadow which he has first bought from Hillcrest.

He is forced to sell for a paltry amount of four thousand five hundred pounds.

Hornblower, the rank outsider and social underdog loses everything. The aristocratic family does not mind stooping to any level to get what it wants. Mrs. Hillcrest degenerates into Lady Macbeth by resorting to unworthy tactics and finally breaks down Hornblower and his family. "I never had any say in mine till I had the brass, and nobody ever will. It's all hypocrisy. You county folk are fair awful hypocrites. Ye talk about good form and all that sort o' thing. It's just the comfortable doctrine of the man in the saddle; sentimental varnish. Ye're every bit as hard as I am, underneath." (SG 18) At the end, she feels a little guilty but she tries to justify what she has done. Hillcrest is opposed to his wife's design. He has no power to stop her. He sits back and closes his eyes once he knows that his wife is not going to stop her plans. The Hornblower family is broken. Chloe commits suicide. After the injustice to their neighbours, the Hillcrests can feel only sorry for what has happened.

The conflict is between a representative of the land-owning gentry and representative of the newly rich. Hillcrest is basically a good man but he believes in the superiority of the higher classes. His attitude towards Hornblower is one of superior condescensions. He tells his daughter Jill, "Well, Jill, all life's a struggle between people at different stages of development, in different position, with different amounts of social influence and property. And the only thing is to have rules of the game and keep them. New their only rule is to get all they can" (SG 6)

When Hornblower vacates the Jackamans from their hut, Hillcrest feels offended. He objects Hornblower for breaking his promise. When the land is auctioned for the sake of his prestige and family tradition, he tries to outbid Hornblower. But he is not ruthless like his wife. When she decides to blackmail Hornblower, Hillcrest objects to it. Hornblower views himself as a dynamic and bold business adventurer; He has great business plans and the money to execute them. He hopes to gain respect and popularity among the people and plans to contest to the parliament. "You think your power is what shapes the world you walk in. But that is an

illusion. Your choices shape your world. You think your power will protect you from the consequences of those choices. But you are wrong. You create your own rewards. There is a Judge. There is Justice in this world. And one day you will receive what you have earned. Choose carefully.” (SG 127)

Jill, Hillcrist’s daughter and Rolf, Hornblower’s son are the two youngsters who remain as dispassionate and neutral observers. They watch the strife between their families right from start with anguish and try their best to stop the skin game. But they are powerless in a world of class and caste antagonisms. Galsworthy appears to pin his hopes on the modern young generation for a solution to the world’s ills. “Hands that wrap us in warmth, that hold us close. Hands that guide us to shelter, to comfort, to food. Hands that hold and touch and reassure us through our very first crisis and guide us into our very first shelter from pain. The first thing we ever learn is that the touch of someone else’s hand can ease pain and make things better.” (SG 30)

Galsworthy’s concern for social justice is central in this play. He expresses his anguish at the wasteful strife that exists among people. Those who suffer at the end of the conflict are the society’s underdogs. His womenfolk are not considered fit enough to be in the fashionable circle of the landed gentry. Hornblower fights straight and bold. He does not cause any suffering to his opponents. But the same skin of fairness is not exhibited by his enemies. They are ruthless and mean and ultimately destroy him. Other sufferers are the victims of an unjust social order in which injustice is inevitably meted out to the poor, the starving and the socially low.

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