



*Journal of Advances and
Scholarly Researches in
Allied Education*

*Vol. IX, Issue No. XVIII,
April-2015, ISSN 2230-7540*

REVIEW ARTICLE

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AN
INTERNATIONALLY
INDEXED PEER
REVIEWED &
REFEREED JOURNAL

Freedom of Individual within the Domestic Sphere in an 'A Family Man': A Study

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Abstract – *This play is an interesting study of the disastrous effects of family coercion true to his ideal of upholding the pride of the individual, Galsworthy, in his play, champions the value of personal freedom and opinion in the domestic sphere. It is an advocacy for greater tolerance and understanding for larger individual freedom in family surroundings.*

Keywords: *Disastrous, Family, Coercion, Pride, Individual, Opinion, Domestic, Advocacy.*

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Family Man is an interesting study of the disastrous effects of family coercion, True to his ideal of upholding the pride of the individual, Galsworthy, in this play, champions the value of personal freedom and opinion in the domestic sphere. It is an advocacy for greater tolerance and understanding and for larger individual freedom in family surroundings.

A Family Man reveals, in stages, John Builder's disillusion regarding his authority in the family. His tyrannical ways finally isolate him from all other members of the family. The theme of the tyranny of parental authority recalls maxim Gorky's play. The petty Bourgeois (1902). Vasily Bessemenov, a well-to-do house painter, resembles John Builder in his covetous tyrannical ways. Like John Builder vasily Bessemenov too had actually the aspiration of becoming the mayor of his home-town and he was frustrated in that desire partly because of the scandal of his daughter's attempted suicide. Gorky's characters are, however, more vital than those of Galsworthy and the scenes are more convincing and true to life. Gorky succeeds in evoking fury of the old. And the hope and promise of a fuller life. The dream of a noble future and a peculiar bitterness for all the petty meannesses of life seem to vitalize the creative strength of this particular play. Vasily Bessemenov, like John Builder, at last finds he alone. Only Tatyana, the spirited frustrated daughter and akuliana, his old wife, are left with him.

A Family Man, though a comedy, deals with the fundamental problem women's freedom in the modern age. It voices the spirit of protest and revolt by women, against authoritarianism in family circles. It "derides the idea that a man can treat the members of his family like a piece of property." [1] In spite of garcial scenes and situations, the spirit of the play is serious in the sense that the wielding of too much authority in family life may lead to serious consequences. Who would like

to be cowed down and suppressed? Family or otherwise such oppression of one's spirit and independence is bound to result in rebellion and revolt. No wonder then that John Builder's young daughters rebelled under his strict authoritarianism.

Galsworthy here wishes to make a point of telling us that woman in any household need to keep their own individuality in any household need to keep their own individuality and independence. They cannot be treated as pieces of furniture. No father or brother has the right to subdue their spirit. The women should be allowed to enjoy their due share of freedom as much as the men, without any discrimination what-so-ever. Excessive domination causes repugnance and revolt. And this is exactly what happens in the Builders' family. Male chauvinism on the part of John Builder leads to his being alienated from his own wife and daughters.

John Builder, a man conservative by temperament and an important social figure, is a perfect paradigm of a family tyrant. He makes his authority felt in all sorts of matters. He, himself enjoys full freedom but preaches a strict code of conduct to his women folk. He is very overbearing in his behavior towards his family and cares little about their feelings. His domineering nature coupled with prudery creates a storm in the family with his wife and daughters running away from him. Athene Builder, his elder daughter, is the first to rebel. Being fed up with her father's dominating demeanour she leaves home to go and live with her boyfriend, Guy heminghome. Maud Builder, his second daughter, too is annoyed by his oppressive behavior and is reluctant to continue staying with him. She wishes to be independent and be rid of her father's rebellion. He tries his best to refrain them saying "a family is a family." [2] He thinks that it is not in keeping daughter as young as Athene living by herself away from

home. Little does he realize that he himself is responsible for this errant behavior of his daughter.

John Builder holds very outmoded and orthodox opinion regarding women's freedom. He asserts that "men don't like the new spirit in women".[3] He believes that as Athene has not faced the "realities" of life, she will soon come back home. He is unreasonably hostile to the spirit of freedom pervading the society. He is sorry about the wind of change blowing all around and blames the war for it. "The war's upset everything. Women are utterly out of hand".[4] It is a matter of great shock to him that his own daughter, Athene, is living with Guy Heminghome without being married to him. He finds such state of things maddening. When he insists on being told the reason for such conduct, Athene very frankly says that he, John Builder, her father, is responsible for it. She even twists the knife in the wound by telling him to his great consternation and annoyance that "Guy wants to marry me".[5] But she is reluctant because she had "such a scunner of marriage from watching you (John Builder) at home".[6] She discloses the unpleasant truth of his domineering conduct at home. For this reason only she has not been able to bring herself around to getting married. She tells her father. "You never noticed how we children have watched you."[7] Galsworthy here makes a point of telling us how imperfect John Builder has been. He has failed in his duties of both husband and father. He simply wishes to be obeyed and does not care to be loved. No wonder then, that his family too deserts him in the end with no consideration whatsoever of his feelings.

Athene, when a once start does not stop before shattering John Builders illusions. She accuses him of hardly ever treating his wife as a companion. The result of such an ill yoked marriage has been "the production of such as me".[8] (Athene). She blames her father for what she is saying that he should not have set such an example. He snubs Athene for having "disgraced" him and for behaving like a common "street flapper". She exposes her father's character to harsh light of criticism. She tells him that her mother is married in a way she has no "will of her own. She has been just a shadow, a passive figure, with no identity or individuality of her own. This is a travesty of marriage indeed".[9] Athene's she is John Builder is a dominating family man who thinks and cares for no one but himself. He is only worried about his daughter's behaving badly because it will reflect on his own future as mayor and magistrate.

John Builder is so selfish a man that he has no qualm in bebunking his own daughter. He calls Athene "the most immodest" and "unnatural girl." He is ashamed of calling her his daughter. He has very conservative views regarding love and marriage: "love leads to marriage- and to nothing else, but the streets".[10] He emphasizes the need for marriage. From his point of view, love is incidental. He orders Athene to marry Guy Herringhome at once.

"You must marry this young man-at once, before it gets out. He has behaved like a ruffian but, by your own confession, you've behaved worse. You've been bitten by this modern disease, this-this utter lack of common decency. There's an eternal order in certain things, and marriage is one of them; in fact it's the chief".[11]

He also tells Guy Herringhome that "if you start by allowing a woman to impose her crazy ideas about marriage on you, all I can say is – I despise you".[12] However, Athene remains undaunted by her father's preachings as she knows very well that he is a man with double standards. She holds fast to her convictions. She is aware of the hollowness of so-called "family life." Her own mother's predicament stares her in the face. It is really surprising how the poor woman has survived this marital tyranny over the years. Mrs. Builder's only plea is that John Builder is in "Passion." She has been so used to her husband's autocratic ways that she regards this present development as a "Comedy".

The conversation between Athene and her maid Annie also throws light on the problem of love and marriage. A young man wants to marry Annie, and she feels that she cannot avoid it. She tells Athene that she has no idea of how her parents treated each other. They had no time. But Annie must have equality with her man. She insists on following the maxim of tit for tat.

If after marriage her man treats her like "a piece of furniture", she could "treat him the same".[13] She is sure that her man would not "hammer" her, she does not disapprove of Athene's living with Guy Herringhome without marriage. The underlying idea of this conversation is that marriage without love is a journey thought barren lands. A girl of the poor class is freer than a girl from a staid family. No barriers of class consciousness come in her way.

Athene advocates equality between husband and wife. A man should not "mother" his wife. She dislikes her own father because he has turned her mother into a submissive and passive creature with no say of her own. She tells Herringhome that her father used to "weack" her, but with the best of intentions. He has been acutely conscious of his social position. As a typical Englishman- conservative- he was "firm" and sided with men, thinking that this is in keeping with the age-old tradition, he would "talk about freedom like a politician".[14] But for granting that freedom to others, there was no room for it in his lexicon. One can see that "by the foolish exercise of misplaced masterfulness he (Builder) alienates first of all his elder daughter, Athene, who goes off to live with an artist fellow".[15]

John Builder's ordeal does not end with the rebellion of his elder daughter, Athene. More is in store for him. His younger daughter, Mud, follows suit. She, too is sick of her father's autocratic ways. She has "film face" and she must seek her "fortune", independent of her

father from whom she receives nothings but temper, pieties and platitudes. She also rises in revolt, completely unmindful of the disgrace it might bring to the family and her father. It is strange that John Builder has not learnt any lesson from the rebellious behavior of his eldest daughter. He is shocked when Maud tells him that she is twenty one and has always wanted "to earn my own living".[16] Her father's "Indulgence" has hurt her on several occasions. She has been injected by the modern notion of freedom and self-dependence. He asks her to give up the "silly notion" of going to the movie world. She is firm in her stand and tells her father, "women are the same as men, now. It's the law of the country. I only want to make my own way." [17] But it is a matter of indignity for a man of John Builder's Position to have the social stigma of one "daughter living with a man she isn't married to and another too leaving home to work in the movies." [18] Maud has no patience with her father's prudery and dual morality and makes his character transparent.

"I've always disliked you, father, ever since I was so high. I've seen through you. Do you remember when you used to come into the nursery because Jenny was pretty? you think we didn't notice that, but we did and in the schoolroom-miss Tipton. And you remember knocking our heads together? No. you don't but we do, and".[19]

This proves too much for John Builder to bear. He is enraged calls Maud a "disrespectful monkey." But that does not stop Maud accusing him of authoritarianism : "I've often heard you talk about independence, but it's a limited company and you've got all the shares".[20] There is a sharp exchange of hot words between father and daughter. He hints at their economic vulnerability. He tells her that she would be in "the gutter" in a year because she has "nothing". He feels and reacts sharply "I won't come to you to rescue me".[21] At no rate would she stay in his house, she declares. She would "rather scrub floors now, then stay".[22] She points out that, "I want to live a life of my own".[23] Johan Builder edges nearer to her as a gesture of compromise, but she edges to keep her distance, indicating rejection. She has been bitten by "the microbe of freedom".[24] Which is very much in the air. And so, Maud too bids goodbye to her father. This gesture on her part is a prelude to women's movement to seek freedom.

Galsworthy tries to tell us through John Builder's condition that any man who thinks women are there to obey him has to finally suffer his own company. He is not loved by anyone. His is only feared or tolerated. John Builder's household is in disorder and his family in disarray because he is too much of a "family man." He preaches high morals to his daughters whereas he himself is a man of loose morals. He is a flirt and chases every pretty woman, but expects his wife and daughters to behave decorously and decently.

Even now at his age he is susceptible to a pretty face like that of the French maid, camile. She is aware of his weakness and tries to take advantage of his wavering morality. The moment she trips over his feet and sinks on to his knees, he flames up and catches her in his arms. He kisses her and flirts with her. He calls her "a temptation of the devil", "dangerous", "temptress", "a little heathen".[25] – all expressions of flirtation. He is on the verge of succumbing to her offer o herself. All this while he has been uttering profundities like "I'm a family man", "I've got my reputation to think of", "It's all against my – I won' do it! It's wrong".[26] Mrs. Builder happens to see her husband in an amorous posture with the maid. It is the last straw for her. She has borne neglect and humiliation all though her married life but this unseemly behavior of her married life but this unseemly behavior of her husband she cannot put up with. She decides to leave his house and goes ahead with her decision. His timed, submissive little wife too leaves him. Her going away in revolt is the climax of the play. Not that Builder does not try to pacify her. He tries to explain his position but it is indefensible. His wife is not ready to be reconciled. Like her daughters. She too gets infected with a "craze for liberty", and can no longer put up with her husband's ways and finally leaves his house. The climax is reached when John Builder proceeds to make comille the maid, his "mistress"[27] and she too, turns in disgust from him-he is left to himself and to his spirit of domination but there is no one else to listen to him.

On the other hand we have Ralph Builder, John's brother, who is quite his opposite. He is liberal, understanding and tolerant. His family is happy because he is not meddlesome and autocratic in his ways. He rejects John Builder's outdated idea- "a family's a family! Ther must be a head".[28] He tries to bring home to the mind of John Builder the idea that the times have changed. He also tells him. "you profess the principles of liberty, but you practice the principles of government. The dischotomy between profession and practice forebodes disaster".[29]

The court episode exposes John Builder to public ridicule and disgrace. Mrs. Builder, Athene, Maud, Ralph – all feel awful about him. They try to exonerate him. The matter appears in the papers. Street urchins jeer at him at the window. This is very embarrassing for him. Each one having parted company with him, he finds himself alone and alienated. In utter despair he cries out in anguish.

"Splendid isolation. No wife, no daughters, no councillorship, no magistracy, no future not even a fresh maid. And why? Because I tried to exercise a little wholesome family authority".[30]

In the end, things do improve a lot. Athene is married. Maud gives up the movie world and Mrs. Builder returns home. Husband and wife are reconciled : "At home once more, Builder sits like job on his heap of

ashes, but job's humility is lacking: though defeated, he is morally unconquered."

Galsworthy here makes an important point. According to him for domestic peace, happiness and harmony, it is imperative that a man does not treat the members of his family like a piece of furniture. John Builder, although basically a good man, suffers and has his family caught in turmoil because of his being too much of "a family man"; a man exercising his authority to an excessive degree. John Builder is a fossil of authoritarianism in family life and his daughters are the harbingers of women's liberation movement.

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4. Ibid, P. 587
5. Ibid, P.590
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7. Ibid, P.590
8. Ibid, P.590
9. "Mother's fortyone, and twenty three years of that she's been your wie. It's a long time, father. Don't you even look at her face?" Ibid, p. 591.
10. Ibid, P. 591
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16. The Plays of John Galsworthy 'a Family Man', London, Duckworth, 1929, P. 605
17. Ibid, P. 605
18. Ibid, P. 605
19. Ibid, P. 606
20. Ibid, P. 606
21. Ibid, P. 606
22. Ibid, P. 606
23. Ibid, P. 606
24. Ibid, P. 607
25. Ibid, P. 608
26. Ibid, P.608
27. John Builder says to Camille, "I've paid a pretty price for you. But you'll make up for it; you and other..... come along! (he is just within reach and he seizes her arm) All my married life I've put a curb on myself for the sake of respectability. I've been a man of principle, my girl, as you saw yesterday. Well, they don't want that! (he draws her close) you can sit on my knees now."
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