

HENRIK IBSEN'S *A DOLL'S HOUSE*: A SOCIAL DRAMA

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Abstract:

This article probes deeply Henrik Ibsen's drama A Doll's House as a social drama. When a playwright handles the widely prevalent beliefs and practices of society as themes of his dramas it becomes a social drama. In the selected drama by Ibsen, how women were treated only as dolls and not as human beings equal to men is portrayed very powerfully. The female protagonist Nora, for all her sincerity, genuineness and love and affection for her husband and her responsible nature is treated only somewhat inferior by her husband. This paper sheds light on the key characters' words and deeds and portrays how the then social practice of considering women as subordinate beings and treating them accordingly.

Key words: *Borrowing, Dismissal, Reinstatement, Persuasion, Departure, Morality, Social laws and Hypocrisy.*

Henrik Ibsen is one of the men-influential dramatists of modern times. He is described as a playwright of ideas. His plays are known as social drama which lay emphasis on prevalent social beliefs and practices and handle them as themes. Henrik Ibsen, born on 20th March, 1828 in a small shopping town, skien in Norway, was from a poor family. His father who was an unsuccessful business man was unable to provide standard school education for him. He was forced to eke out a living for himself. Before that, he managed to hire a private tutor for his matriculation pass. His first play *catiline* proved unsuccessful. His second play *The Warrior's Barrow* met with some success but not to a great extent.

In 1852, his movement to the capital city also provided him with the opportunity of becoming familiar with the then popular Berger National Theatre company which employed him for the writing of plays. It sanctioned financial assistance for him to travel to Germany and Italy and study the drama writing techniques which stood him in good stead. His other important plays are *The Wild Duck*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf* and so on. His drama brings to the **fore** the various facets of society. They offer enlightenment also. One can see the adoption of three unities in his plays. His characters and themes are from real world and they reveal the average humanity and its concerns. This realistic setting greatly impacted his contemporaries like G.B.Shaw. A critic by name R. Ellios points out, "we live in not look at, a play of Ibsen."

Some technical factors also contribute to the realism of his plays. Ibsen presents detailed stage and focuses on visual correctness of his settings and characters. His employment of discussion as the chief weapon to convey his ideas is to be noted besides his rhetoric, irony argument, paradox, epigram, parable and so on. Ibsen's plays are more a triumph of dramatic art than of ideas. His selection of effective dramatic method to drive home his views is also worthy of mention. When he goes for the use of "the retrospective method", the story on stage is presented rather than narrated or told. The close study of his plays will bring to the surface the fact that the drama starts just before the catastrophe. The knot of the play is supplied by the arrival of some family friend, or well-wisher who did not frequent the household for a long time. The people of the household when they hold discussion or interaction with the guest some problems break out. Whenever the past is revealed, it brings out some change in the characters. P.F.D. Tennant, a famous critic of Ibsen describes how Ibsen applies this method in his plays. The presentation of a perfect household and its shattering, the speech of a guest who has come home after a long gap can be seen much in the Ibsen's

dramas.

A Doll's House is a drama of social criticism. The story is portrayed as taking place in 19th century Norway. It is a classic example of the treatment of the women by the society, their plight and predicament. This is a social drama because through the character of Nora the status of women is described. She symbolizes the women of her period. And the character of Torvald Helmer depicts the ego centrism and malechauvinism of men of that period and also their tendency to look down upon women as inferior beings. The character of Krogstad appears as a symbol of hypocrisy and danger. The character of Dr. Rank shows the opportunistic nature of people. And the Mrs. Linde's portrayal exemplifies how certain people are not ready to help their friends at the expense of their safety and security. The play has only limited characters, but it brings before eyes the Norwegian social life of 19th century.

A day before the Christmas, the play opens. Nora is portrayed to be busy with making last minute Christmas purchases. Her husband Torvald has just become the manager of a bank and she hopes in the coming year the family would not face financial crisis. She is seen purchasing plenty of toys for her children and macaroons sweets for her. Her appearance and behaviour is such that she looks only as a grown up child with mental maturity of women of her age. Her husband does not like her to eat macaroons like children. He loves his wife so much that he calls her "squirrel", "little bird" and so on. She is treated in her husband's house as a toy as she was treated at her father's house.

When Torvald falls ill and needs medical treatment, Nora is forced to borrow money for it. This took place seven years before now, just after the birth of her first child. The doctors told her that if he was taken to Italy for further treatment, his condition would improve and he could recover. In that situation, she did not like to get her husband's advice for he being puritan and strict disciplinarian was against borrowing money. To make matters worse for Nora, her father is also in death bed. Caught in this difficult circumstance, Nora was compelled to borrow money from Krogstad forging her father's signature. Krogstad, the money lender has traits corresponding to his profession. With the borrowed money from him, Nora arranges his treatment and tour in Italy.

Her husband recuperated from his ill health owing to the timely financial arrangement of Nora. But she has not told her husband about the loan. When her spouse offers her money for household expenses, she spends it for the purpose but saves a sizable portion of it for the settlement of Krogstad's loan. In addition, during winter she does some copying work as well. But Torvald is under the impression that the required money for his treatment came from Nora's father.

The circumstances change and Krogstad joined the bank where Torvald serves as superior officer. Krogstad and Torvald used to be childhood friends. By taking advantage of their childhood friendship, Krogstad calls his boss in singular in the presence of others which irritated him very much. Torvald awaits an opportunity to terminate Krogstad from his position in the bank and appoint somebody else deserving for the post. When Krogstad makes a mistake in his transaction, it leads Torvald to take steps towards the termination of Krogstad. Meantime, an old friend of Nora, Christine Linde who was proposed to by Krogstad before also approaches Torvald through Nora for a position in the bank. Torvald thinks of her as Krogstad's replacement.

Krogstad on hearing the news of his possible termination from the bank meets Nora and threatens her that in case he is terminated from the bank he will disclose her forgery signature matter to her husband who is known as a puritan and who earnestly follows social laws pertaining to the behaviour of men and women. Sensing that her life is in crisis, Nora unsuccessfully pleads with her spouse not to terminate Krogstad from his job. But Torvald is deaf to the entreaties of Nora and issues termination order to Krogstad who in turn writes a detailed letter about the dishonest act of Nora in forging signature of her father for the loan. Then he dropped the letter in the mail box of Nora's house. Nora with the knowledge of Krogstad's letter in the mail box tries heaven and earth to distract her husband's attention from it. At this point, when they are to attend a fancy dress ball, Nora goes as a neapolitan fisher girl and performs the

tarantella dance. With a view to diverting his attention from the mailbox, Nora dances so long. Torvald and Dr. Rank, close friends spend time together at the ball recollecting old memories. Nora considers the idea of confiding in Dr. Rank the entire issue but his proposal of love to her forces her to withdraw from that stand. Mrs. Linde on sensing the plight of Nora offers her help to Nora. Mrs. Linde received proposal from Krogstad which she was to turn down on account of her aged parents. Now, she talks to Nora She would give consent to Krogstad to marry him and also to look after his children.

Nora's nobility is known at this juncture when she thinks that her husband's tranquility and composure will be ruined if he gets to know what she did seven years ago when he was hospitalized. Nora with so much of innocence thinks her husband will accept all the blame and feel for herself. He will remain thankful to her for what she did for his recuperation. Mrs. Linde in the meantime endeavours to convince Krogstad not to go ahead with his plan of revenging innocent Nora. In turn, she tells him she would marry him and take care of his children. But she at this point, realizes that the crisis reaches a stage where Torvald has to know what enabled his recovery. Mrs. Linde states to Nora there is no point in hiding matters from her husband.

Before Krogstad who has been convinced by Mrs. Linde sends his second conciliatory letter to Nora's household, Torvald happens to read the first letter which explains how Nora put her father's fake signature and arranged documents for availing herself of the loan of two hundred and fifty pounds. The reading of the letter makes him so furious that he comes down hard on the innocent Nora. He calls her a hypocrite and woman without morality and religion. She is unfit to live as his wife. He thunders by saying henceforth he will be only his brother. He is also afraid of the possible legal action that is likely to be initiated against Nora when this issue is raised with law enforcing authorities. His words and actions shatter the heart of innocent and plain hearted Nora so much that she takes her hardest decision of leaving the household and her children. The second letter from Krogstad which was written after Mrs. Linde's acceptance of her marriage with him tells Nora Helmer and Torvald Helmer he will not take any legal action against Nora and so the possibility of the ruinage of Helmer family's repute is no longer likely. This news delights Torvald so much that he begins to fondle and caress his spouse like before. But Nora now fully understands the hypocritical, unaffectionate, unreal and ingenuine nature of her husband. She knows how much Torvald is self-centered. Nora drops the idea of leading her life with him in the same household. She goes out of home in pursuit of her livelihood leaving behind her children whom she loves so much. The woman who was portrayed as very simple, innocent, plain in the beginning of the drama turns out to be mentally tough. The crisis she faced in her life has transferred her so. She is a representative of women of middle class in 19th century Norway who were all accorded only this sort of treatment at home both by father and husband, who looked at them only as dolls and toys and not as human beings with emotions and feelings, passions and sentiments.

Work Cited:

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