



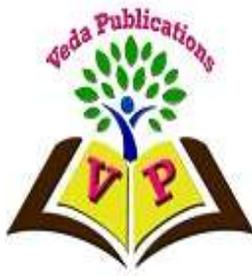
EXPLORATION OF SELF-IDENTITY IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY ARTICULATED IN HENRIK IBSEN'S *A DOLL'S HOUSE*

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ABSTRACT



The present research article is an attempt to delineate the contemporary social problems such as the position of women in the society. Ibsen has written many plays and that are connected with the situation of his life and also it deals with social issues in the society. It explores how women are wrestling for social equality and economical independence in the society. Most importantly, the play opens up the unequal power sharing of men and women. In some extent, the play appears to be a feminist play, because it discusses about the struggle of women. Nora is the protagonist of the play and she is the one who is going to search her identity in the society. It sketches the consciousness of her privilege and her aspiration to search for her part in the society. The play discusses about the struggling of managing an individual personality within the boundaries of a stereotypical social role. The play, *A Doll's House* is considered as an attempt by a woman to defend her individualism. Ibsen wants to convey that the roles which have been made by the society is only for the comfort not for pressure.

Keywords: *Equality, Individuality, Identity, Gender, Society*



In the modern times, Henrik Ibsen is one of the most dominant and significant Norwegian dramatists in the 19th century. Most of the critics and writers described Ibsen as a dramatist of ideas. Ibsen has written many plays and that are connected with the situation of his life and also it deals with social issues in the society. He mainly gave preference to the female characters and through his plays, he raised a voice for the concern of women. Especially, he deals with the equality for men and women, which he frequently portrayed in his plays. Ibsen plays a role model for many dramatists of the nineteenth century as well as twentieth century. Some of the important works of Ibsen are, *The Lady from the Sea*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Brand*, *Pillars of Society*, *Love's Comedy*, *The Wild Duck*, *Little Eyolf*, *A Doll's House* and *When We Dead Awaken*.

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was written in the nineteenth century and it explore how women are wrestling for social equality and economical independence in the society. Ibsen specifies a lot on the equality for man and woman and women's quest for identity. Here, the play talks about the contemporary social problems such as the position of women in the society. In some extent, the play appears to be a feminist play, because it discusses about the struggle of women. The most significant part of the freedom is an individual from the hold back of custom and convention. Nora is the protagonist of the play and she is the one who is going to search her identity in the society. Nora is always treated by her husband as a doll or pet. For eight years, Nora has been a passive wife in her marriage life. At the end of the play, she rejects her husband Torvald for not comprehending her sacrifice.

Then she decides to search her own identity and position.

Women were in the situation that, they had to obey and act under the patriarchal society. Because, lot of restrictions and conventions are enforced on women. In the patriarchal system, men have the notion that, women had neither self-respect nor individual identity. Most importantly, the play opens up the unequal power sharing of men and women. Torvald Helmer, even uses animal names to call Nora, such as 'singing bird, squirrel, skylark'. It shows that, Helmer does not even think that Nora as equal to him and treats her like a slave. Helmer is having all the power in their home and he has the strength to control all the money and gives to Nora as gifts. Helmer says that, '... you extravagant little person, what would you like for yourself?' [Ibsen, 2]. Through the words of Helmer it is known that how she economically dominate Nora. As Abdul Baseer states:

The society is a male dominated society where language is a tool in the hands of the dominating gender, and is utilized fully to create an impression of ruler and be ruled; possessor and possessed, supervisor and subservient [626]

Nora completely plays the role of a responsible wife and mother. Throughout the play, Nora was treated by her husband as a doll, but actually she was not a doll, but a woman with women's love, hope and fear. Long years back, Nora was in the situation to borrow money from Krogstad, by forging her father's signature in the document for Torvald's treatment. That time, she did not get advice



from Torvald. Nora decided to keep the whole thing as a secret. But one day her plans end in a very great confusion. Torvald comes to know about this debt, but he fails to understand the sacrifice of Nora behind the act of crime. And that moment only, Nora realizes the real face of Torvald and recognizes that she does not have any identity. In her father's house, Nora was in the position to accept her father's opinion and in her husband's house she has to obey her husband's thoughts.

Torvald is always quite content with his married life and he often admires his beautiful wife, Nora. From the beginning itself, the character of Helmer depicted as a representative of a male-dominated society of the period of Henrik Ibsen. Torvald's expectations are, that he has to maintain his reputation of being an honest and skilful lawyer. When he comes to know about the action of Nora, he gets fear. He is very strict and hard on those who fails to follow the moral and social laws of society. He is considered as a man, one who does not have the feelings and sensitiveness and he is very selfish too. Then Torvald scolds Nora through the following words: What a horrible awakening! All these eight years- she who was my pride and joy – a hypocrite, a liar – worse, worse – a criminal. The unutterable ugliness of it all 1 – what disgraceful behaviour ... [Ibsen, 70].

Nora is a loving and affectionate mother at the beginning and she will be happy in playing with her children. Then occurs a great surprise to everyone, finally she leaves her children. The character of Nora exposes the weaknesses side and also her likelihood to utter lies. Here, the protagonist Nora portrays in two aspects. One aspect is that she

is explored in her traditional role as a wife and mother and another aspect is that she made her decision to leave the house. Nora comes to aware of her feminine rights as an individual in the society. In Nora's father's house, she was in the situation to accept her father's opinion and in her husband's house she follows his words. She expresses her pain to Torvald in the following way:

... I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was father's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought in great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been Torvald. [Ibsen, 76].

In this play, Mrs. Christine Linde is another prominent women character. She is Nora's very close friend with whom Nora always shares her secret about her life. Here, the character, Linde is portrayed as a contrast to the character of Nora. The male dominated society does not give any freedom to the women to explore who they are and what they want to be. At first, both Nora and Helmer are loyally upholding to their social roles. Nora is totally a suppressed woman and it is known from the conversation between Dr.Rank and Mrs. Linde. Even Nora does not have the freedom to use the word 'Damn' before Torvald. Because according to Torvald, the word, 'Damn' considered as an ill-mannered and abusive term in the society during that period.

Nora and Linde are the role models of womanhood created by Ibsen in this play. On one side, Nora is an uneducated, money-oriented and



emotional woman and on the other side, Linde is completely an independent and strong woman. Because Linde is supposed to work to save her family and her husband also died earlier. Nora never faces such problems or struggle in her life until the debt problem. But Linde had faced lot of misfortunes in her life. After the death of Linde's mother, she felt alone in the world. Her brothers had grown up and she realizes that there is no happiness in working for one's self. She is longing for a family to lead a happy life and she wishes to be a mother for some one in her life. Linde's character of selflessness is proved, when decides to marry a wealthy man only for the sack of her ill mother and two young brothers.

In critical time, Nora expects her husband Torvald to accept the blame for her crime. But he makes his opinion clear that his fame and reputation are the prominent one rather than his love for Nora. That time Nora tries to make Torvald to understand the reason behind her crime and she states, "I have loved you above everything else in the world ... you have never loved me. You have only thought in pleasant to be in love with me' [Ibsen, 70-75]. Torvald always makes his wife to feel as an inferior creature. Many times, he remarks or even he mocks at Nora, that she is ignorant of law. He insists that she could not understand the condition of the world in which she leads her life. As Fatemeh Gha fourinia and Leila bharadaran jimili states that,

Nora resists and rejects the domestic role and acts in opposition to the social conventions and morals. The problem portrayed in the play is about women's rights, as human's

rights. It is about the need for every woman to find out herself and stand on her feet in order to recognize the truth about herself, her life and her society. Moreover, it is about the need of every woman for self-discovery and acting based on the truth even though that truth is opposed to the social and acceptance and for fighting against social conventions in search of the truth. [428]

Another prominent thing is that women does not have the economic dependency. Even if they wanted to work, they were not allowed by their father and husband. Throughout their life they are supposed to depend upon their father, husband and their son for money. The play discusses about the struggling of managing an individual personality within the boundaries of a stereotypical social role. Ibsen wants to convey that the roles which have been made by the society is only for the comfort not for pressure. So, it is understood that, both men and women were cornered by their gender roles. As Razieh Eslamie states, 'Nora attempts to show the journey of such a woman as she gradually comes to the conclusion that her life and identity are a lie, and her real needs and aspirations go beyond the bounds of her marriage' [100].

In those time, there was a time and need to fight against the conventions and moral issues in the society. They demand justice and independence for each and every human being. Ibsen insists everyone should inspire the society by their individualism and they have to overcome suppression and oppression.



Thus, the play investigates, how the protagonist Nora, change herself from a doll to an individual woman. Because at the beginning, Nora's main motive is to take care of her husband and children. And also, it sketches the consciousness of their privilege and their aspiration to search for their part in the society. The play, *A Doll's House* is considered as an attempt by a woman to defend her individualism.

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