

# HENRIK IBSEN'S PLAY, "A DOLL'S HOUSE" AS A FEMINIST MOVEMENT OF 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

*Mishra Suman  
Applied Science & Humanities Dept.  
Swami Vivekanand Subharti University,  
Meerut.*

Henrik Ibsen; (20 March 1828-23 May 1906) was a major 19<sup>th</sup> Century Norwegian playwright, theatre director & a poet. He is often referred to as 'The father of modern theatre. His plays were considered scandalous to many of his era, when European theatre was required to model strict mores of family life and propriety. Ibsen's works examined the realities that lay behind many facades, revealing much that was disquieting to many contemporaries. He was from well to do merchant family in the small port town at Norway. His themes often deal with issues of financial difficulty as well as moral conflicts stemming from dark secrets hidden from society. Ibsen displays masterful use of irony, despite his dogmatic insistence on truth. Ibsen has completely rewritten the rules of drama with a realism which was adopted by 'Chekhov and James Joyce'.

On 23 May 1906, Ibsen died at Arbins gade 1 in Christiania after a series of strokes and was buried in Var Frelsers graveland ("The Graveyard of Our Saviour") In Central Oslo.

A Doll's House is an 1897 play of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. The play was the first of Ibsen's creation to create a sensation & was very controversial when first published as it is sharply critical of 19<sup>th</sup> Century marriage norms. It is further called as the first true feminist play & a play praised by the feminist movement for its portrayal of the independence of a woman and prescribed societal values of what a woman should be; and their role in a patriarchal society. The feminist feeling and the feminisation of "A Doll's House" leaves it open to attack on the institution of marriage is mere about women's rights. The influence of the play was recognised by UNESCO in 2001 when Henrik Ibsen's autographed manuscripts of "A Doll's House".

The play is a scathing criticism of the marital roles accepted by men & women which characterized Ibsen's society. One primary message of the play is that the individual who stands alone are more often 'right' than the mass of people who are portrayed as ignorant and sheep. His attack was not against society mores but against overages reforms and their idealism. It is a story of bold self assertion. A Doll's House is inscribed on the memory of the World register in recognition of their historical values.

Ibsen makes several impressions about the perceptions of society and how women role are defined at that time. This is a play where one can observe how the gender status was at the time of Ibsen's, "A Doll House". No Doubt, Ibsen paints a bleak picture of the sacrificial role held by women of different economic standards in his society. It reflects typical 19<sup>th</sup> Century Norwegian gender roles where men worked and generated income while the women stayed at home caring for the children. Nora, the female protagonist dances and dresses to please and entertain her husband and is expected to act as Torvald's spiritual advisor and support him. An Underlying role of women at the time that is often disregarded which affected all women in Norwegian society no matter they came from different social background. This image of women in Ibsen's "A Doll's House" seems as a uniformly accepted ideology of this community. The women place is at home to pursue the role of obeying the husband and doing other duties. No doubt, this is a model of a patriarchal society where men rule the women. We find how hard it is for the women in Doll's house to get out of this dilemma or even express their case. Women basically act in roles they do not have the chance for themselves. They were valued very little by 19<sup>th</sup> century society. The treatment of these women was also extremely negative; they were stereotypical housewives. Ibsen's, "A Doll's House" embodies and mirrors social issues of women in society. Henri Ibsen uses Nora in "A Doll's House" to portray the negative treatment of all women throughout society during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this play we find Nora being as fragile, nieve creature and progress to an individual independent woman.

"A Doll's House" introduced woman as having her own purpose and goals. The Heroine; Nora Helmer progresses during the course of the play eventually to realize that she must discontinue the role of a doll and seek out her individuality. It depicted the role of women as the comfort, helper and supporter of man. "A Doll's House "places a spot light on the 'Institute of marriage'.

"A Doll's House" traces the awakening of Nora Helmer from her previously unexamined life of domestic, wifely comfort. Having been ruled her whole life by either her father ore her husband Torvald, Nora finally comes to question the foundation of everything she has believed in once her marriage is put to the list. Ibsen's play "A Doll's House" reflects typical 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian gender roles where men worked and generated income while the women stayed at home caring for the children. Nora, the female is married as is expected to be the ideal wife to her husband and a very good mother to her children and acts like a living doll in her own life & family. However an underlying role of women at the time that is often disregarded & that applied to and affected all women in Norwegian society no matter what their social background.

To better analyze the sacrificial role of Norwegian women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a comparison can be observed between the three female characters in the play. Nora, Christine and Anne-Marie that despite belonging to different social classes, all had to sacrifice some aspect of their lives in order to fulfil the expected gender roles & survive. The famous female

characters like Nora, Mrs. Linde and the Nurse all have sacrificed themselves to be welcomed and expected as well as appreciated by the society. Nora not only suffered in borrowing money to save Torvald and even she had to lose her children who were very dear to her as she decided to move out of her troublesome marriage and to prove her own identity in the outer world. Mrs. Linde sacrifices her love Kroonstad and marries a man with whom she was not in love, in order to support her needy family. The Nurse has to give up her own child to look after others people children to face financial problems. During Ibsen's time, it was a taboo to have illegitimate babies and women who had illegitimate babies were stigmatized while the men moved on with life without any prejudice. Nords abandoned of her children can also be interpreted as an act of self- sacrifice.

Nora is the kind of women that does and says what she is instructed saying that she did not know who she was. She was taught to obey the wishes of the men in her life as with many women throughout the society. Torvald always used pet names like "Little Skylark" and "feather brain" to call Nora, signifies that for him Nora is not a person to be respected but to be treated a lower person than himself. Here not only mind of Torvald speaks but it is the mind of society as far as the role of women is concerned. To Torvald Nora is not a very intelligent person. He treats like a child to make her feel comfortable in her role as a helpless woman who needs a man to lean on.

"A Doll's House" introduced women as having her own purpose and goals. The heroine, Nora Helmer progresses during the course of the play eventually to realize that she must discontinue the role of a doll and seek out her individuality.

Nora is the protagonist of the play. She comes to see her position in her marriage with increasing clarity and finds the strength to free herself from her oppressive situation. As the play progresses, Nora reveals that she is not just a 'Silly girl ' as Torvald call her but she is intelligent and possesses capacities beyond mere wifehood.

Nora's understanding of the meaning of 'freedom' evolves over the course of the play. Later on she reconsiders her conception of freedom and questions whether she is happy in Torvald's house, subjected to his orders and edicts. By the end of the play, Nora seeks a new kind of freedom. She wished to be relieved of her own familial obligations in order to pursue her own ambitions beliefs and identity. Further, we see that Nora is intelligent, motivated any by the play's conclusion a strong-willed, independent thinker and no doubt, a very strong woman. She has realized that she has spent her entire life being loved not for who she is but for the role she plays. Nora now wants to teach herself and therefore she insists upon leaving Torvald. She tells him that she has decided to cut off all dependence upon him so she has an equally important duty to herself. She feels alienated from both religion and the law and wishes to discover on her own by going out into the world and learning how to live life for herself whether or not her feeling of alienation are justified.

Nora makes it clear to Torvald that she cannot live with him as his wife. As Nora's childish innocence and faith in Torvald shatter, so do all her illusions about her married life. No doubt, "A Doll's House" is a portrayal of the independence of women. The two leading female characters, Nora and Mrs. Linde have suffered because of their fathers. One has been treated like a doll, the other having to replace the father. Mrs. Linde was forced to take on the patriarchal role in her immediate family. On her father's death she took responsibility for looking after her mother and brothers.

Mrs. Linde is Nora's childhood friend. She accounts of her life of poverty under-scores the privileged nature of the life that Nora leads. She has been a father to her brothers and a mother to her own mother. She has achieved equality and more importantly the freedom acquired and not ascribed to the female through life experience. She does not want independence in the strict sense of the word that being, stand-alone, she sees her purpose through the assistance of others. She is not as young as Nora but she is resilient, driven, knows who she is and more significantly, what she is. She is perhaps the most mature of the characters in Ibsen's "A Doll's House" and by far the most astute of all characters in the play. She has her independence and she is self-sufficient. The real liberated woman is Mrs. Linde, is not because she is considered self-sacrificing but because she is inclusive.

In summation, the play is sad tale of female characters, struggling with-in their own dome are for the air of freedom to breathe. It's the story of their existence from darkness towards light of self awareness & independence of thoughts. Later on, the women are found self-sufficient & worth in the men world with open mind and open hands inhaling the air they really wished. "A Doll's House" of Ibsen reflects a message of self respect. A person can't be happy when falling into the mold of someone else. To be happy, one must be oneself and know oneself completely.

## WORK CITED

1. *A Doll's House – Henrik Ibsen – the Typists pen: Typistspen.com/1-dolls-house-henrik-Ibsen-*
2. *"A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen / The Hullon Inquiry. Dan Hullon wordpress.com/2-12/07/11/a-dolls-house-by-Henrik-Ibsen/*
3. *"Were Men equals to Women in Victorian Times?" Learning Curve. 9 October 2006. </http://www.learning curve.gov.uk/victorianbritain/divided/default/htm>*
4. *"Women in the Victorian Age. "Lady GERAL dines courtship. 19 April.2002.10 October 2006 <http://caxton.stockton.edu/*
5. *"A Doll's House from Books Regs Book Notes. Copyright 2000-2009 by book Regs.*
6. *A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen, www2hn.psv.e dulfaculty manish/h-Ibsen/dolls-House.*

