

An Analysis of Individual Psychology and Responsibility in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*.

H. Annshini*, Dr. S. Florence**

**Ph. D. Scholar, Deptt. of English, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram.*

***Asstt. Prof., Deptt. of English, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram.*

Abstract

*This study aims at analyzing Henrik Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* in terms of the main character's psychology and responsibility through realistic portrayal. This study defines the process of how a character develops when the play progresses and finally reaches its climax and at last identifies the responsibility as an individual. Freud's theories of personality and psycho-sexual development are used to expose the effects of repressed wishes of the female characters' behaviour. It will be achieved through analyzing the selected characters' unconscious motives and their emotional suppression. Psycho-analysis explores the dynamics of the psychological progressions inside the human mind. Ibsen's plays depict how the bourgeois family becomes an institution full of conflicts and how they create conflicts. The play is about a woman's dilemma in choosing the one between her husband and her lover, and the freedom for making a choice. Ibsen's drama stages a neurotic woman who has a divided self-dwelling in two worlds and is clearly hindered by her entanglement to the past. Ellida is emotionally of two minds when her past lover visits unpredictably and reminds her of the promise she made with him several years earlier. Ellida's mental captivity to the Stranger is a budding force distressing her marriage to Wangel. The play deals with the rescue of the right to live one's life without being influenced by will power or sponging interests. Doctor Wangel's wise and thoughtful restraint during Ellida's crisis is an antithetical approach which results in the opportunity to separate the reality from illusion. Ellida regains a privilege of the youth, of choosing freely between two options. This event coincides to re-claim her position as a wife who is set free from the dissatisfaction and regret of a wrong choice. The play shows how the interplay between the conscious and unconscious mind influences the individual identities and their progress.*

Key Words: *Psychoanalysis, realism, social, economic, moral, abnormal, psychological, neurotic, individual psychology, biological intensities.*

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**H. Annshini*, Dr. S.
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Literature is an art that helps human beings to grow both individually and sensibly. It is the echo of human aspiration which dramatizes an enduring aspect of human conduct. It exercises emotions through interest, concern, tension, excitement, and laughter. Human beings are cultured and superior to other living beings. Henrik Ibsen, Norway's distinguished dramatist, is considered as a realist, dealing with the problems of everyday life. Ibsen was a prolific dramatist and his career as a playwright lasted from 1851 until his death in 1906. Henrik Ibsen's plays portray the individual's feelings of hostility and authentic isolation from society, the burdens by which society assures traditionally to its values and overpowers individuality.

Ibsen exposes anxieties of modern life by showing the inner burdens and conflicts that obstruct and destroy the individual. Most of Ibsen's plays were written during a period of nearly thirty years when he lived and worked in Italy and Germany. His themes are related with questions of the modern, conservative, and commercial age. Ibsen wrote in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In analyzing the plays of Henrik Ibsen, Freudian psychoanalytic theories are used to display the facets of the female characters' psyche. It imposes the psychoanalytic ideologies such as personality progress, mental conflict, emotional control, neurotic signs, etc. Freud's theories of personality and psycho-sexual development are used to expose the effects of repressed wishes of the female characters' behaviour. When the characters' passions are involved, their unconscious mind involves psycho-analysis. It is achieved through analyzing the selected characters' unconscious motives and their emotional suppression. Psychoanalysis explores the dynamics of the psychological progressions inside the human mind. Psychology of women is one of the important themes in the plays of Ibsen. The facets of psycho-analysis are combined into general psychology. According to Freud human nature is dominated by instinct, unconscious, and unreasonable forces.

The Lady from the Sea is a portrayal of marital existence. The play is about a woman's dilemma in choosing between her husband and her lover, and the freedom for making a choice. Ellida is the second wife of a district physician, Dr. Wangel and the step-mother of his two daughters, Bolette and Hilda. Ellida is also the daughter of a lighthouse keeper. She is much younger than her husband and neither happy nor successful in her role as a house wife as well as a stepmother to the two youthful daughters. She grew up in an isolated village on the Norwegian coast, where the Fjord and the open sea meet, and still feels spellbound by the sea, as if she belongs to it. Her life seems as such a false one and she feels lost out like a beached mermaid, seeking comfort in daily swimming exercises. Her separation from the sea causes a chronic sickness in her. To comfort his wife's discomfort; Wangel drugs her with

tranquilisers, while he himself develops a drinking habit.

The play is a drama of untamed and unfulfilled desires, and these are not presented as purely a psychic problem. Despite her ardent nature, Ellida finds secured economically and societal safety by marrying Wangel without loving him. Even after that she thinks about her former lover, a mysterious sailor who had left her. Ellida is very depressed and dreams about the stranger. She is much isolated, bored, and lonely and cannot find peace and happiness in Dr. Wangel's household. She also suffers from a depression after the death of her son, who died just after his birth. Ellida's obsession with the stranger is reflected in her opinion about her son's eyes. Ellida says that the child's eyes changed to the colour of the sea. If the "Fjord lay in a sunny calm, the eyes were calm and sunny. And the same way in storms". (337). Like several other Ibsen plays, it is structured as presenting Ellida Wangel as a silent sufferer.

In *The Lady from the Sea*, Ellida is emotionally wavering when her former lover visits unpredictably and retells her of the assurance she made with him several years earlier. Choosing to stay with her older husband Wangel and her two step-daughters, Ellida finds peace by freely accepting her circumstances. The sea as such seems to be a beckon for Ellida, and she experiences a basic attraction between herself and oceanic nature. The voice of the sea is personified by the Stranger. Ellida acknowledges Wangel that, before their marriage, she had been in love with a mysterious sailor. They even engaged, but secretly and informally, through an unarranged ritual. After stabbing a sea captain for a fairness reason the sailor disappeared, but he sincerely promised that, one day, he would return to claim Ellida as his legal wife. Ellida tells him that they spent most of their time talking to one another. Wangel asks her:

WANGEL. What did you talk of?

ELLIDA. Mainly about the sea.

WANGEL. Ah! About the sea.

ELLIDA. About the storms and the calms. The dark nights at sea. And the sea in the sparkling sunlight, that too. But mostly we talked of the whales and dolphins, and of the seals that would lie out there. And then we spoke of the gulls and the eagles and every kind of sea birds you can imagine. You know – it's strange, but when we talked

birds were one with him ... I almost felt that I belonged among them, too. (331)

Although the sea seems to have disappeared completely from Ellida's life, the Stranger's memorable image endlessly reminds her of what she has given up. When the Stranger unexpectedly comes up to fulfil his promise, Ellida is torn between two men, or rather two worlds. The Stranger accepts Ellida's refusal entirely and goes on board which symbolizes eternal freedom. When Wangel closes the marriage undeniably, he regains his life's desires, Ellida chooses him in free will.

Ibsen's drama stages a neurotic woman who has a divided self-dwelling in two worlds and is clearly hindered by her entanglement to the past. In Act I Ellida is tormented by a guilty conscience, by the idea that, one day, the mysterious sailor of her youth will return to take vengeance on his unfaithful fiancée. Thus she lives in a lifeless world of her own: an isolated, private life. In Act II, Ellida describes what is wrong with her, with Wangel acting a double role: as her husband, and as her curer. Ellida admits that she feels unhappy in their relationship. Act III reveals the belief of Ellida that, long ago, humans were sea creatures, and that life would have been much better if the same way existed.

ELLIDA. I believe that, if only mankind had adapted itself from the start to a life on the sea – or perhaps in the sea – then we would have become something much different and more advanced than we are now. Both better – and happier ... And I think people have some sense of it, too. They bear it about inside them like a secret sorrow. And I can tell you – there, in that feeling, is the deepest source of all the melancholy in man. Yes – I'm sure of it. (345)

In Act IV at times Ellida seems quite calm, but her mood changes suddenly due to something enigmatic that Wangel cannot measure. He finds her erratic, indefinable and unpredictable, like the sea itself. (372).

In Act V, Wangel has apparently changed his mind again. He determines for hostility, requesting Ellida to resist the tempting and hypnotic powers, but for her, the present circumstance seems really unsustainable. Wangel at first tries to force her to stay, to bind her to their life together but when he senses her slipping away from him, he decides to formally dissolve their "agreement" (395), so that Ellida can choose her own path, can decide for herself, with full freedom, picking up her own true existence again. After a dramatic scene, full of wavering and doubts, she eventually decides to remain loyal to Wangel, and to become his faithful wife. Ellida decides to stay. *The Lady from the Sea* stages a series of curing sessions. Ellida's mission is to overcome her unreasonable affection to the distant past and her longing for the past events.

According to Carl Jung, the sea interprets the human depression, craziness, neurosis, hysteria, psychosis, and schizophrenia and suicidal thoughts with safety and precision. In psycho-analysis water represents the feminine aspect of one's personality. It often symbolizes the unconscious or the soul. The image of water is the best visionary and symbolic reflection or the description of the humanist and evocative. In the psychological point of view, Freud considers the sea and the incoming tide to be symbols of sexual union. The symbol of water in the play witnesses the gulf between the human and the wild and between the human and the divine. In *The Lady from the Sea*, in Act III, 23 allusions are related with sea. They are fjord, damp, marshy, stagnant pond, fishing rods, horizon, fish, carp, bathhouse, water, the shore, swim, sail, steam, sea, on board, sea voyage, clouds, ship, undertow, lighthouse, captain, drowned. In Act IV, there are 13 locations to the symbol of water and its associated images. They are cool, swim, the sea people, the sea, surge of the waves, the ebb and flow, voyage, water, the pond, steam, dissolve, fjord, drink, lady from the sea. There are no visual references to water in this act. In Act V, there are 21 references to the element of water. They are carp pond, boat, ashore, bathhouse, steamer, ship, sailing, voyage, mermaid, sea, ice, ebbs and flow, fjord, deep plunged, pond, gliding, ship's bell, tears, board ship, dissolved, and ship wreck.

Ibsen offers a key to Ellida's character in the conversation between Wangel and his friend Arnholm. Wangel says that Ellida is ill, but is not an ordinary illness that can be cured with any ordinary medicine. Her uncertainty, her change of mood, and her lack of interaction with others vary like the ebb and flow of the waves. Unconsciously, Ellida cannot exist without contact with the water; she swims in it daily. Ellida has no access to the sea, having years previous evaded on her 'betrothal' to the mysterious and fascinating sailor. The result is a complete emotional suppression, while she withdraws into a world of her own making. She is unconsciously forced to do this to protect her subtle self against the world she sees as hostile.

Ellida is emotionally of two minds when her past lover visits unpredictably and reminds her of the promise she made with him several years earlier. Choosing to stay with her older husband Wangel and her two step-daughters, Ellida finds peace by freely accepting her circumstances.

According to Wangel's interpretation, Ellida lived like Freud's neurotics, in a dream world where illusion and truth blend, and the central principle is the conflict between the conscious, well-focused ego and the treacherous unconscious instincts. In *The Lady from the Sea*, there is a life-like evolving and maturing of Ellida and her husband toward a real marriage. Here, Ibsen over-emphasizes Ellida's discovery of

the possibilities of a marriage in which freedom, responsibilities, and mutual growth merge. Sketching the progress of the play, it detects the increasing facts of uncertainty and intensity as Ellida, the wife in conflict, gradually develops a new intuitions that are expressed through variations on a refrain: “Wangel, save me” ... “Save me from that man” (the Stranger...) “Oh, Wangel! Save me from myself!”(353)

Wangel and Ellida accomplish in their great dialogue a ‘reworking’ of the past – the thing that parallels to the scenes of ‘unburdening’ in many of Ibsen’s plays and at the same time explains Ellida’s unconscious desires. Ellida is imprisoned to her own mental illusions and is filled with mental fantasies concerning the Stranger. Ellida also becomes preoccupied with the world of the Stranger- the sea. This obsession to the sea is an illusory to family and friends and the character Arnholm states: “Mrs. Wangel [it seems]. . . you have a particular tie to the sea and everything connected with it” (307).

The title of the play, *The Lady from the Sea*, also links the character to the sea. Ellida is often called “the lady from the sea” and the “mermaid”(306). Ellida takes a daily swim and is enchanted with stories about “the spell of the sea”(315). Ellida’s mental confinement to the Stranger is revealed in her fascination with the sea and a life of fantasy.

Ellida’s mental captivity to the Stranger is a budding force distressing her marriage to Wangel. In reference to the Stranger, Wangel comments on the man’s unearthly survival. Ellida’s mental captivity to the Stranger threatens her marriage and family. It also forces her to resent her marriage to Wangel since it comes after a symbolic marriage to the Stranger. Ellida’s mental imaginations cause her to assess her marriage to Wangel as an unintentional captivity. Ellida is inspired by the captivity of mind and scorns her marriage to Wangel:”the plain, simple truth is that you came out there and bought me...I see that this life we’re living with each other-is really no marriage at all” (349).

The theme of captivity reaches a climax in Ellida’s decision between the Stranger and Wangel. Ellida longs to end out the bonds of captivity and make an independent choice. Ellida fruitfully removes her mental captivity related with the Stranger and sees with fresh eyes, the beauty of Wangel’s love. A Freudian interpretation of *The Lady from the Sea* was given by Garton as she considers it a study of Ellida’s crisis and neurosis which is cured at the end of the play. Concerning Freudian interpretation, that the Stranger is identified with the sea, with the unknown, with the destructive passion and sexuality, Ellida realises that she does not dream about the unknown but about the freedom of choice.

The play deals with the rescue of the right to live one’s life without being

restraint during Ellida's crisis is an antithetical approach which results in the opportunity to separate the reality from the illusion. In this way, Ellida regains a privilege of the youth, of choosing freely between at least two options. This event coincides with reclaiming her position as a wife who is set free from the dissatisfaction and regret of a wrong choice. The play shows how the interplay between the conscious and unconscious mind influences the individual identity and progress. Ibsen portrays women characters in situations almost corresponding to those taking place in his real life.

The core of Ibsen's moral ideals exist in the principle that honesty in facing reality is the first necessity of a decent life. The dark depth of human nature must be discovered and examined to be finally illumined. Life is full of drawbacks, non-senses, duplicities, and unclear syndromes which must be renowned to be evaded and then to be healed. For Ibsen, this must be the moral responsibility of the intellectuals in any society. Man should depend on himself to assert himself from the old social and political boundaries through patient survival and nobler ideals.

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