

HENRIK IBSEN 'S 'A DOLL'S HOUSE': FEMINISTIC APPROACH

Dr. T. Bhaskara Sudha

Head Dept. of English

St. Joseph's College for Women (Autonomous)

Visakhapatnam



Abstract:

Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright is famously known as Father of Modern Drama. He was not merely one of a wave of new writers to experiment with dramatic form, nor did he make small improvements that were built upon by successors. This play "A Doll's House" revolves around two kinds of moral laws and conscience, one for men and another for women. Women are judged by masculine law, they don't understand each other. A woman cannot be for herself in a modern society. The wife Nora in the play committed a forgery and is proud of it for she has done to save her husband's life. Her husband, Helmer, doesn't see the love in his wife's eyes rather sees it through a conventionally male eye. She is weighed down for her deed. She loses faith in her own morality and feels misfit to bring up children. The conflict of Nora as a humble wife and her self-respect brings a clear idea as to how the woman in modern society are stuck with what is wrong and what is right.

Keywords: Feminism, moral conflict, conventions, despair, woman as a doll

Introduction:

Henrik Ibsen born in 1828 in a small Norwegian family, was a major poet, and he published a collection of poems in 1871. However, the drama was the focus of his real lyrical spirit. For a period of many years, he faced bitter opposition. Looking back on their lives, they are forced to antagonize themselves. In fact, he had been writing for twenty-five years before he, in 1877, created his first contemporary drama, "*Pillars of Society*".

The Relationship of Wife with her Husband:

The play looks for a solution to the problem 'What is the position or status of a woman in her husband's home?'. The play emancipates the mere submission of a woman to her beloved husband. It concentrates more on the life of the middle-class couple with children, living in a state of struggle for existence. The wife Nora, in the play, is extremely controlled by her husband who in turn tends to be more possessive and dominant towards his wife. As the title of the play signifies, Nora's husband Helmer treats her as a doll, something very delicate, precious and too tender to handle. He keeps her in a glass house taking utmost care in handling her in a more possessive manner, so as that she doesn't break the glass of married life.

Treating Nora as a Tamed Pet:

As the play opens one can perceive that Nora is treated as a pet by her husband under the disguise of masculinity. He asks her 'why my little squirrel is frisking', or "little skylark is chirping". He rarely addresses her with her name. He always wants her to be below the level of his rank and be faithful as a pet. He checks and monitors her every movement in the house as a wife, urging her not to have any frivolous ideas about spending money.

Nora as a Loyal and Devoted Wife:

Nora was a devoted and loyal wife of Helmer. When he was seriously ill and under critical condition, on the advice of the doctor she takes him to Italy for a change of place, costing her to do a forgery of her father's signature which she never thought it would be a crime. The love of Nora towards her husband Helmer prompted her to commit such a crime. She even refrained all these years from telling her husband what sacrifice she had made to save his life. For she felt telling him would hurt his ego and self-respect. Nora at once she is alone after her husband and children go out in the morning, her brief soliloquies give expression to her fear about what might happen to her now for Krogstad's repeatedly keep threatening her about the forgery she committed. Though at one point of time she thinks not to take these threats seriously but later she realizes that she can no longer hide. She also feels that her crime is terrible and tries to avoid her children so that her influence on them will not make them corrupt. In response to Krogstad's threats, she even goes a step further to prevent her secret of forgery from coming to the notice of her husband, she speaks on Krogstad's behalf, urging him to let Krogstad retain his job in the bank, where Helmer, as manager of the bank dismisses Krogstad for his misconduct.

She feels Krogstad would not betray her and keep to the promise of not revealing the facts about her money transactions to save her husband. Her anxiety raises to such an unbearable state where she feels tense and sorry at the same time. It is not that Helmer would come to know the secret which she kept for so many years, but the thought that Helmer would take the whole blame for her action upon himself and would thus expose himself to criticism from all quarters makes her tenser. To avoid these incidences, she wants to run away from her husband and children to commit suicide. Thus, she overestimates her husband's behavior and has high expectations that her husband would take the guilt of his wife upon his shoulders and protect her from all disgrace. She readily accepts to take the help of Mrs. Linde who promises her that she would speak to Krogstad and settle the issues. But later Mrs. Linde advice Nora to reveal the secret to Helmer which he comes to know later by the letter send by Krogstad.

The Final Facet of Nora's Character:

His whole conduct in the face of the two letters of Krogstad is most repulsive to Nora. Something within her which had lain hidden is now aroused. She realizes that she was not meant to be a doll wife anymore. She reassures herself that she is a human being and not an item of property belonging to her husband. The social decorum according to which she had always behaved, now seems to be an unfair obligation upon a woman. Her newly awakened realization of self-identity overcomes and sweeps away her previous conventional qualities as a woman and a wife performing duties accordingly. She now raises her voice before her husband that her most secret duty is not to him or to his children but to herself. She puts her views clearly that both her father and her husband have treated her in the wrong way. Her father had treated her as a doll-child, and her husband treated as a doll-wife. She was compelled to follow the rules and regulations of her father and her husband. She tells Helmer that first and foremost she is an individual who can think independently and come to her own conclusions. She wants to face the world and educate herself not to be taught and spoon fed by her husband. She feels even what morality and religion would tell her is not accepted by her without her own personal scrutiny of the principles they try to teach her. She finally accuses Helmer and ceased to love him hereafter for he proved himself wrong before her. Her decision to leave Helmer and her children is a new rebirth for Nora in a quest for self-identity.

Conclusion:

Nora depicts herself as an emancipated woman who has liberated herself from the engrossments of domestic life to rediscover herself and to stand on her own feet. She doesn't give a second thought for her decision to leave her husband's house in a way breaking the conventional walls of the society and declaring independence from her husband's clutches. It was a time where the old tradition was followed that wives are the most loyal and subservient towards their husbands. For many years since her marriage to Helmer, Nora also followed the social code and conduct without violating it. In course of time, she realizes that all sacrifices

are made by her but not by her husband. She realizes that she cannot be treated like a doll for various reasons losing her natural instincts of being a woman first. Her action of leaving her husband's house is perfectly justified for the torment and insult faced by her reaches to a peak where it becomes unbearable for a woman like Nora.

References:

- Ed. Carl Rollyson. Pasadena, California: Salem Press, 2003. 1714-1715. Print.
- Essay UK, Essay: A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen. Available from: <<http://www.essay.uk.com/essays/english-literature/essay-a-dolls-house-by-henrik-ibsen/>> [17-09-17].
- Forward, Stephanie. "A new world for women? Stephanie Forward considers Nora's dramatic exit from Ibsen's A Doll's House." *The English Review* Apr. 2009: 24+. Literature Resource Center. Web. 12 Dec. 2011.
- Goonetilleke, D.C.R.A. "A Doll's House: Overview." *Reference Guide to World Literature*. Ed. Lesley Henderson. 2nd ed. New York: St. James Press, 1995. Literature Resource Center. Web. 12 Dec. 2011.
- Meyer, Michael. *The Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing*. Seventh ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2005. Print.
- Ramji Lal: Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House ' 'A Critical Study" Nineteenth Ed Educational Publications, 2006 Print.
- Rosefeldt, Paul. "Ibsen's 'A Doll's House.'(Henrik Ibsen)(Critical Essay)." *The Explicator* 61.2 (2003): 84+. Literature Resource Center. Web. 11 Dec. 2011.
- www.penguin.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/DollshouseTG.pdf by LR MAYER - 2008