

**POSITION OF WOMEN IN IBSEN'S DRAMA; A DOLL'S HOUSE, GHOSTS, &
HEDDA GABLER**

by

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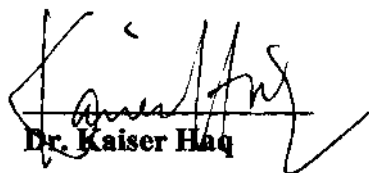
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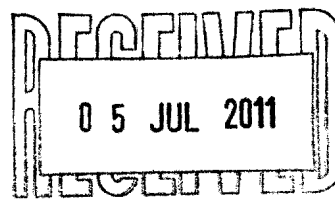
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The aim of this paper is to investigate the position of women in the 19th century literature. This paper is my humble presentation and surely has limitations. The limitations are my reading and my knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

Women in the patriarchal society are oppressed in most cases. The focus of this paper will be on the experiences of women of different social condition. Firstly, the discussion will be on Feminism and some of its branches. Feminists thought on the cause and nature of women's disadvantaged and subordinate position in the society which structure is patriarchal. After the theoretical discussion, some major female characters in three of Henrik Ibsen's books, A DOLL'S HOUSE, GHOSTS & HEDDA GABLER will be analyzed through patriarchal and psychoanalytical perspective. Through this the paper will try to depict women's position in Ibsen's drama.

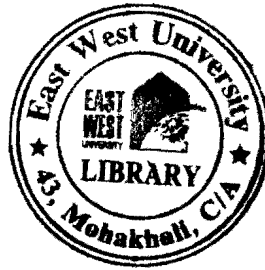


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Chapter One

Introduction



Historically human societies are male dominated. Social relations are patriarchal and within families men exploit women. Men constitute a class of exploiters while women are an exploited class. Since the beginning of time they have been considered inferior to men, which seem to proceed to affect everyday lives of all social beings in this world. Women have a disease, a disease that will prevent them for ever having the political drive to achieve political, social or economic opportunities men have. This "disease" is the need for independency and self-respect or the lack there of. Feminists thought on the cause and nature of women's ~~disadvantaged and subordinate~~ position in society, and efforts to minimize and eliminate the ~~subordination~~ (Hughes, 2002:160). Understanding that the need for independency and self-respect is ~~not a real disease~~, it is just a metaphor for how women go about trying to achieve them. "For nearly one hundred and fifty years, women have fought for equality and been ~~oppressed~~ by men, and no matter what they do, they will never be considered equals" (Hughes, 2002:161). Various theories were established to enlighten women from their subjugation. Feminism focuses on the relations between genders and how both male and female become classified as distinct groups rather than a team united as one. The feminist theory is fairly comparable to this explanation and ~~determinedly~~ claims that the basic structure of society is patriarchal, or male-dominated. European and American women in the nineteenth century lived in an age characterized by gender inequality. All the processes of modern society are dominated by capitalism and

patriarchy. So from their birth women have to suppress their own desire and feelings. Women were expected to remain subservient to their fathers and husbands. Their occupational choices were also extremely limited. Feminist social theory is one kind which worked to provoke gender consciousness and reform as the roles assigned women became increasingly at odds with social reality. Gender and sexuality are another central concept of feminism. This study will first discuss different approaches and concepts of feminism. Women face a number of phases in their lifetime. Before analyzing the characters, the paper will study different feminist views and theoretical concepts. This paper will also discuss the psychoanalytical theory to examine the women's condition in their different phases like as daughter, wife, motherhood etc. This will also bring Ibsen's women's sufferings in the plays A Doll's House, Hedda Gabler, and Ghosts. These novels exemplify a diverse group of women characters who come from different backgrounds and live very different lives. The psychoanalytical theory will also be applicable for accompanying examination of the characters.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Feminism and its history

Feminism is a belief in the principal that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men (Sen., 2006: 59). The Feminine period starts with the appearance of male pseudonyms in the 1840s and lasts until the death of George Eliot in 1880; the Feminist phase lasts from 1880 until 1920 and the Female phase starts in 1920 and is still continuing, though it took a new turn in the 1960s with the advent of the women's movement (Moi, 1985: 55). The feminist movement is divided into three waves-the first wave, the second wave and the third wave (Freedman, 2002: 11). The term first wave refers to a period of feminist activity throughout the 19th century and early 20th century (Freedman, 2002:17). It is about the gaining of the right of women's suffrage (*ibid*). The first wave began in Britain when the suffragettes granted (*ibid*). In the United States the women leaders campaigned for the abolition of slavery prior to championing women's right to vote (*ibid*). Freedman(2002, 18) further elaborates that the first wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, granting women the right to vote. The second wave feminism is a period of women activity which began in the early 1960s and lasted through the 1880s (Freedman, 2002:21). In second wave movement women were encouraged to understand aspects of their personal lives and the discrimination (*ibid*). While there were certainly important feminist thinkers writing in the twentieth century, such as Virginia Woolf, Charlotte

Perkins Gilman, Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, the rise of Second Wave feminism provided the impetus for a rapid growth in feminist thought (Jackson & Jones, 1998: 3).

The third wave feminism refers to the period in the early 1990s (Freedman, 2002:22). Third wave feminists often focus on “micro politics”, and challenged the second waves paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females (*ibid*).

For the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s the subject of feminism was women’s experience under patriarchy, the long tradition of male rule in society which silenced women’s voices, distorted their lives and treated their concerns as peripheral (Rivkin & Ryan, 1996:765).

The feminist theory which exists today has derived from that period but has developed and diversified through a constant process of debate, critique and reflection (Jackson & Jones, 1998: 3). Contemporary feminist literary criticism begins as much in the women’s movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s as it **does in the academy** (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998:768). Its antecedents go back much **further, of course, whether** one takes Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* or an even earlier text as a point of departure (*ibid*). The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed an upsurge of youthful left activism throughout the western world (Jackson & Jones, 1998: 4). Feminist work of this period was inspired by grass roots activism, although it was written largely by young, white, university-educated women (*ibid*). According Rivkin & Ryan (1998: 769) Feminist criticism’s self-transformations over the past several decades as it engages with both critiques from within psychoanalysis, Marxism, Post- Structuralisms, ethnic

studies, post-colonial theory and lesbian and gay studies- have produced a complex proliferation of work not easily subsumed to a single description. The title of a collection of essays- *Conflicts in Feminism*- speaks to the situation of feminist criticism at the present: equality versus difference, cultural feminism versus Post- structuralist feminism, essentialism versus social construction (*ibid*).

2.2 The Role of Theory

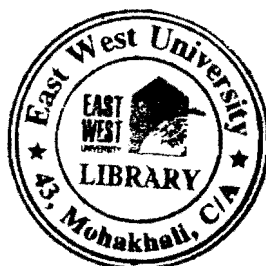
Feminist theory is not, has never been, a static phenomenon and it has proved so difficult to capture within classifications such as 'liberals', 'Marxist' or 'radical' (in Jackson & Jones, 2). As feminism has evolved, theorizing has taken many different directions and forms. Individual feminists have also changed their views over time and this is evident in the reflexive, self- critical tenor of much feminist work. Feminists are constantly reflecting on their own ideas, changing their stances in response to debates and challenges from other feminists.

Feminist theorists from diverse theoretical and disciplinary backgrounds have ~~engaged with issues~~ of gender, sexuality and the body, identity, ethnicity and race. **Feminists** also share a highly reflexive orientation to the process of theorizing and have consistently questioned its purpose and its political implications. They have been keen to question the dichotomies between theories on the one hand and activism, experience and research on the other hand and have sought, in a variety of ways, to establish connections between theory and understanding of every day life. The complex social conditions which shape women's lives cannot be grasped merely from the perspective of everyday 'lived experience' – the task of theory is

to make those conditions intelligible in terms of that lived experience. But women's lived experience is diverse; women are differently located within complex social relations and the forms of lay theorizing they employ depend on their cultural assimilation. Feminist theory, cannot therefore, be totalizing; it cannot explain the world of all women, at all times, in all places. It has moved away from universalising statements towards the local and particular. It might now be better characterized as a process of theorising rather than as a privileged body of knowledge.

2.3 Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalysis

According to Jackson (1998), the differences between women and men are directly explicable by reproductive biology (in Moi, 1998:71). He further elaborates; sexual conquest of women confirms masculinity. Human sexual relations are social relations and hence meaningful to participants and shaped by **the social** contexts in which they occur (*ibid*). Robin argues that gender and **sexuality should not only** be treated as analytically distinct, but that they should constitute separate areas of critical analysis (in Moi, 1998:71). She further argues that in focusing on gender relations, on women's oppression, feminists ignore the separate oppression suffered by sexual 'minorities'. Feminists have been interested in the relationship between the hierarchical division between women and men and **the institutionalization of heterosexuality** (Moi, 1998).



Guilbert & Gubber hold the hypothesis that in a given patriarchal society all women as they are biologically female will adopt certain strategies to encounter patriarchal oppression (in Moi, 1985: 64).

Cixous analysed the patriarchal binary thought where the binary oppositions are heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system (in Moi, 1985: 102). Each opposition can be analysed as hierarchy where the feminism side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance (*ibid*).

French materialist feminist Christine Delphy developed an approach to domestic labour in which theory she said that from the patriarchal social relations the peculiarities of housework arise (Jackson & Jones, 1998:16).

Guilbert and Gubber's belief in the true female authorial voice as the essence of all texts written by women masks the problems raised by their theory of patriarchal ideology (Moi, 1985: 62). If patriarchy generates its own all-pervasive ideological structures, it is difficult to see how women in the nineteenth century could manage to develop or maintain a feminist consciousness untrained by the dominant patriarchal structures (*ibid*). It has long been an established practice among most feminists to use 'feminine' to represent social constructs and to reserve female and male for the purely biological aspects of sexual difference (*ibid*). According to Simone de Beauvoir femininity is a cultural construct: one is not born a woman, one becomes one (in Moi, 1985: 64). Seen in this perspective patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order to make people believe that the chosen standards for femininity are natural (*ibid*). Thus a woman who refuses to conform

can be labeled both unfeminine and unnatural (*ibid*). According to Moi (1998: 64) it is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms- femininity and femaleness stay thoroughly confused. Feminists, on the contrary, have to disentangle this confusion, and must therefore always insist that though women undoubtedly are female, this in no gurantoes that they will be feminine (*ibid*).

According to French Christine Delphy (in Moi, 1998:16), the peculiarities of housework arise from the social relations within which it is performed. She argues that these relations are patriarchal and that within families men systematically exploit and benefit from women's labour within a domestic mode of production. She further argues that within the domestic mode of production men constitute a class of exploiters while women are an exploited class (*ibid*).

According to Moi (1998:18), an alternative to relating women's subordination in productive relations was to suggest that it was located in social relations of reproduction. He assumes that the idea that women's subordination is rooted in reproduction has a respectable history within Marxism, deriving from Engels's thesis that the world historic defeat of the female sex' occurred with the rise of private property and monopolize individual women's reproductive capacities (*ibid*).

Chodorow has argued that the division between the sexes is reproduced because women currently have total responsibility for mothering, and invariably produce distinctive, asymmetric responses in their children according to gender. She further argued that mothering by women generates in men a defensive

masculinity, 'and a compensatory psychology and ideology of masculine superiority which sustained male dominance (in Jackson & Jones, 167, 168)

The appeal of psychoanalytic theory is its effort to make femininity its central concern, directed against the perception that the symbolic order is a patriarchal monolith. Julia Kristeva and Irigaray differentiated on the grounds of 'essentialism', the doctrine that characteristics are inborn, biological, and definitional, and are not subject to historical change (in Jackson & Jackie, 1988:169). While Kristeva advocates a positional or 'nominal' conception of gender, which is not based on biological difference, Irigaray's interest in reversing traditional psychoanalytic views of the feminine has led her to be accused of precisely this biologism. However, the two estimates can be turned around. (*ibid*). Kristeva's emphasis on the maternal, and her apparent consignment of lesbianism to the realms of the psychotic, has led some critics to find in her work an advocacy of 'compulsory motherhood' and appreciation of Irigaray's reliance on metaphor, as much as on bodily reality, has become much more widespread. The particular metaphor Irigaray has adopted as the basis of her representational system is that of two lips speaking together (*ibid*). This acts both as a counter to the unified, rigid phallic metaphor of Lacanian psychoanalysis, if the lips are read as vaginal, and as a figure for women's relationship to language and utterance, if they are taken to be oral. Irigaray is pointing out the result of patriarchal social relations' not to an innately good female nature which need only be released, or given equal status with the male, for its benefits to be shared. Equality is not on Irigaray's agenda: 'women's exploitation is based upon sexual

difference; its solution will come only through sexual difference', she argued (in Jackson & Jones, 1988:170). Kristeva is also concerned with the nature of the feminine, and has become somewhat notorious for polemical statements such as the following, from a 1974 interview: 'a woman cannot "be" (*ibid*). This is because 'woman' is a social rather than a natural construct, and the fight to dissolve the bourgeois humanist conception of identities must include sexual identities (*ibid*). Kristeva argues that 'the women's struggle cannot be divorced from revolutionary struggle, class struggle, or anti-imperialism, which is a long-debated question among social feminists.

2.4 Literature about Women's Emancipation

This sort of writing about women's emancipation and other social reforms can also be found in other languages too (Sen., 2006: 97). Sophocles in Greek, Kalidasa in Sanskrit, Moliere in French and Tagore and Sarat Chandra in Bengali also ~~wrote~~ wrote about women's bondage and other social problems (*ibid*). The sentiment ~~expressed~~ expressed in their writings also represents the perspective from which the question of women's liberation may come (*ibid*). According to Sen (2006: 100), the position of women both in ancient Greek and in ancient India as well as their understanding of basic rights is best reflected both in Antigone of Sophocles and in Kalidasa's Sakuntala (*ibid*). He further elaborates; both the drama will serve as excellent foils to the picture of women that Ibsen painted.

2.5 Influence of Shakespeare and Greek playwrights on Ibsen's writing

Ibsen developed and deepened the psychology he found in Shakespeare's dramas. He never placed before audiences a complete self-confessed villain such as audiences can meet with in Shakespeare- men who from the start proclaim themselves as false and treacherous knaves by nature, like Richard III, or Edmund in King Lear, or Iago in Othello (in Fjelde, 1965: 50). Shakespeare attempted to explain his villains, at least partly, Ibsen never allowed his persons to be mere villains; they are always thoroughly human, complex aspirations and qualities. In particular, he never introduced completely villainous women; even evil-doers or criminals like Hjordis or Rebecca West were excused and explained as acting out of love.

Much more than Shakespeare, Ibsen used the method of illustrating different characters by opposing them to each other in rivalry or conflict. Shakespeare, too, knew the art of dramatic and psychological effect won by contrast of character. **But he used** it only in a few cases to bring out more clearly the psychology of the ~~protagonists~~ of his dramas, such as Antonio contra Shylock, Othello contra Iago, Macbeth contra Malcolm, and then only very rarely are both characters treated and pictured with the same care and completeness. As early as in *Catiline* Ibsen showed a predilection for bringing together pairs of opposite characters who might throw one another into strong relief and in that way make themselves more markedly individualized. In all such ways Ibsen endeavored to enlarge and to enrich the psychological drama which he received as the heritage from

Shakespeare. There lay the natural field of his own genius and Shakespeare helped him find it.

Another feature of Ibsen's plays, towards which Bernard Shaw has drawn readers attention, is their realism or 'commonness'; his subjects, characters, situations, and setting- all are familiar to his audience (in Kushwaha, 1989: 22). This was also the practice of the Greek playwrights who invariably drew on familiar myths and legends. Ibsen departs from them in so far as he chooses his subjects from the world around him (*ibid*). Here, too, he abstains from employing those characters and situations which are exceptional or uncommon. Instead of dwelling on the fortunes of a Hamlet or a King Lear, he prefers to deal with the problems of a Nora or a Mrs. Alving. His plays represent average humanity and its concerns. This is one of the reasons why they have got such a hold on their audiences; the latter read in them the stories of their own lives. As R. Ellis Roberts points out, Ibsen 'brought us all back....to the right view of dramatic life; he made his audiences part of his plays (in Kushwaha, 1989: 22).



Chapter Three

Representations and conditions of women in 19th century

The role of women in literature has typically been influenced by their role in society. In the 18th and 19th centuries their role in society began to change. Women began their transformation from anonymous objects of their father's and husband's possession into animate, productive members of society. This change was reflected in the literature of the time, regardless of the author, and in a variety of genres and styles. Whether a light hearted novel, a commentary on industrialization, or a play, women were ever present in literary pieces. They appeared more educated, more intelligent, and more independent than ever before. They went against conventions and formed their own opinions. This movement towards the liberation of literary representation of women is portrayed in such well known and widely regarded literary works as Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. European and American women in the century lived in an age characterized by gender inequality. At the beginning of the century, women enjoyed few of the legal, social or political rights that are now taken for granted in western countries; they could not vote, could not sue or be sued, could not testify in the court, had extremely limited control over personal property after marriage, were rarely granted legal custody of their children in cases of divorce, and were barred from institutions of higher education. Women were expected to remain subservient to their fathers and husbands. Their occupational choices were also extremely limited. Middle and upper class women generally remained home, caring for their

children and running the household. Lower class women often did work outside the home, but usually as poorly paid domestic servants or laborers in factories and mills. The onset of industrialization, urbanization, as well as the growth of the market economy, the middle class and life expectancies transformed European and American societies and family life. In most instances, men were the primary “breadwinners” and women were expected to stay at home to raise children, to clean, to cook and to provide a haven for returning husband. Most scholars agree that the Victorian Age was a time of escalating gender polarization as women were expected to adhere to a rigidity defined sphere of domestic and moral duties, restrictions that women increasingly resisted in the last two thirds of the century.

3.1 Ibsen’s Ideology and Women

This conventional role of women and their status in society make Ibsen thinking and his new ideas about women are consistent throughout his dramas. The standards for a life superior to the existing state are set by women in Ibsen’s plays (Fjelde, 1965:152). Ibsen occasionally links the situation of women in his time to that of the workers. He insists on the nobility of character as superior to the privileges which come with property (*ibid*). Ibsen says,



This nobility will come to us from two sources.....
our women and from our workingman. The reshaping
of social conditions which is now under way out there
Europe is concerned chiefly with the future position of
workingmen and women. That is which I hope for and
wait for; and it is that I will work for, and shall work for
my whole life as far as I am noble.

(in Fjelde, 1965: 152)

Among all the dramas of Ibsen the focus will be on *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler* in this chapter. In these dramas Nora Helmer, Helen Alving, Hedda Gabler, Mrs. Linde, Regina are the representation of the lives of women of different social positions. *A Doll's House* exposes the unsoundness of conventional marriage and expounds women's need for emancipation whereas in *Ghosts* Ibsen reversed the situation (Sen, 2006: 83). Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House* leaves her home after discovering that she is the most unwanted and useless possession of her husband and was reared in ignorance of the world outside her household but Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* was guilty of an act far more unnatural than anything in heeding Pastor Mandors and not leaving her husband (Templeton, 1997: 47). Ibsen has presented an exhaustive position of Nora's rebellion against marriage and Mrs. Alving's protest against the family ideal (Sen, 2006: 84). He also exposes the hollowness of ideal marriage and family life in *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* (*ibid*). Comparing to *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler* is an example of perverted femininity through her situation

illuminates what Ibsen considers to be an immoral society (Sturman, 1992). Hedda Gabler's problem illuminates the problem of women in a society built by men. Ibsen probably felt that like Nora in *A Doll's House* and Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts*, Hedda in *Hedda Gabler* should have made an independent decision about her life (*ibid*). According to Templeton, women in all but the participating in the world outside their households and are not equipped for independence outside the families (in Sen, 2006). Fjelda (1965:58) says, Ibsen by depicting the pathology of a frustrated woman in *Hedda Gabler*, declares his most powerful protest against the double standard society. As a matter of fact, Hedda Gabler remains a romantic woman to the last and thinks that courage consists in acting upon the deepest impulse of the heart (Sen, 2006: 87). Thea has had the courage to live her own life and Hedda discovers that Thea's life has been not only bold but also beautiful, for she has inspired genius Eilert, while she herself has only heard dirty stories from him (*ibid*). The discussion of a social problem concerning women occupies the most prominent place in *A Doll's House* though it is also important in such dramas as *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler* but the discussion is subordinate to dramatic action in these plays (*ibid*).

3.2 Women and Marriage

A Doll's House focuses on the way that women are perceived, especially in the framework of domesticity. The play tells the story of the married life of Nora and Helmer, and the circumstances leading to Nora's leaving her husband and her

children in order to go out into the world at large to gain first hand experience of life and to find out for herself what is right and what is wrong.

Nora and Helmer have been married for nine years but she has been keeping a secret from him all these years. Nora thinks that, on learning her secret, her husband would come forward to take the blame for her criminal act of forgery on his own shoulders. But when Helmer learns the secret, he begins to scold her in very harsh terms for having acted dishonestly. As Samuel Tannenbaum who says in his essay,

The leading male character Helmer, in particular, has a very clear and narrow definition of women's role. He believes that it is the sacred duty of a woman to be a good wife and mother. Moreover, he tells his wife that women are responsible for the morality of their children. In essence, he sees women as both child like, helpless creatures detached from reality and influential moral forces responsible for the purity of the world through their influence at home.

Nora has now discovers the true character of her husband. She has found that he is incapable of living up to his moral principles and that is incapable of making any sacrifices for her sake. Nora finds it difficult to cope with the pressure of trying to be a functioning wife and mother anymore. That is the reason she moves out of the house and abandons her crumbling marriage.

“A Doll’s House” analyses the problem related to woman’s position vis a vis her husband and her home. The play deals with the condition of a married woman under excessive control of a husband. Nora realizes numbly that her life has been an elaborate make belief.

I have had great injustice done me, Torvald,
first by father, and then by you.

(Ibsen, 1992: 122)

Nora’s father and husband both treated her as a doll. The events of the play prove that Nora is her husband’s doll. Formerly she was her father’s baby doll. She remains dependent on the males. Even when she becomes an adult, she has to seek advice from her husband what clothes she should wear, what she should eat and how she should behave. Nora cannot exercise her independent judgment. She admits before her husband that she cannot move a step without his guidance in the matter. She is a puppet wife and a model of wifely devotion. Nora loves her husband sincerely, and it is to save his life that she does not mind forging her father’s signature, and thus committing an illegal act that may lead her to jail. It is the men who run society who have condemned Nora to a stultifying life. That is the real crime, the real corruption, as she clearly sees, not her forgery or her little lies, but the male conspiracy to debase the female; and she now recognize that she had began to bring up her own children as if they too were dolls. It is the Doll’s House attitude that is the corruption which must not be transmitted. She must go into a hostile world and educate herself. She does not say much about how she expects to enjoy her new life but Ibsen has already prepared the audience from the

point for point contrast with Mrs. Linde, the audiences realize that Nora leaves the play as Mrs. Linde entered it- lonely, unhappy, with no one to love or live for, and much older; and form the parallel with Rank we get the impression that her going out into the alien world beyond the Doll's House is like Rank's departure out of life altogether: the culmination of a long, painful and fatal illness. Her life in outer world will be a life in death.

Failure manifests itself right in the very centre of private life, in marriage. In almost every case, the characters or interests of partners are at variance and bring marriage to defeat or frustration. Weak husbands such as Tesman, Alving, Helmer fail their wives and drive them to distraction. According to Ibsen himself, Nora's conflict represents something more than just that of woman's. The feminist answer to this would be a quote perhaps less widely publicized. This was said by Ibsen when sketching the play;

“A woman cannot be herself in the society today, which is exclusively a masculine society, with laws written by men, and with accusers and judges who judge feminine conduct from the masculine standpoint.”

(in Fjelde, 1965:153)

In the play, Ibsen is essentially confronting the issues of women's right and gender equality in nineteenth century Norway. Ibsen can perhaps be looked on as bit of a pioneer, in equal rights for women was a platform he used to compose one of his most well known and celebrated works. To nineteenth century Europe the

idea of a woman violating her marriage vows and exhibiting a mind of her own by refusing to render unquestioning obedience to her husband was something entirely alien. Nora not only defies her husband but also she makes him look small. *A Doll's House* throws light on marriage which does not give a woman to a man as a commodity but as a human being to be respected and treated affectionately by her husband. Ibsen is definitely on the side of Nora in this play. Certainly, at the time the play was written, Ibsen had strong opinions on the subject of women's rights.

3.3 Women as helpless creatures

Hedda is presented in the first instance as a manly woman, and if we analyze other features in the play, the occurrence of masculine symbols confirms Hedda's personality: the most obvious one being the pistols and another one being the reference to "the only cock in the yard". She is a sophisticated woman who has been neglected and never been understood in her youth and who takes revenge for her frustrated emotional life by stimulating the emotions of a man like Lovberg to an orgiastic pitch and the dismissing him in favor of the most philistine pedant for whom she cannot feel anything but contempt. A sophisticated lady who admits to herself that she has no talent for anything but boredom, she hates all norms as hypocritical while at the same time she poisons the lives of everyone, including herself, by her absolute disregard of the truth in all her personal relations. She is not content with her husband Tesman. Hedda, who has managed for a while to assert her integrity in spite of a banal environment, tells a friend about the

disappointments of her honeymoon, which have become the leitmotif of her marriage. She says:

Tesman is a specialist...and specialists are not at all
amusing to travel with. Not in the long run, at any
rate.

(in Chowdhury 1994: 92)

When the friend asks, “not even the specialist one happens to love?” she makes a bitter reply. The episode is particularly significant because Tesman is not unattractive to women and his profession is hardly repelling.

Hedda has become pregnant but she does not want the child. She hates everything that is ugly and this for her includes sex. She has romantic ideas about males but cannot tolerate being touched by them. When Ejlert, a former admirer and writer, reappears in her life, Hedda becomes jealous of Thea who is helping him to start writing again. Hedda makes Ejlert drunk and as a consequence, he loses his manuscript of his new book. Hedda without telling Ejlert that the manuscript has been found gives him a pistol to kill himself and Ejlert does that. Here, Judge Brack, another admirer of Hedda recognizes the pistol as Hedda's. He blackmails Hedda in order to force her to become his mistress, threatening to reveal the ownership of the pistol and thus cause a scandal which Hedda is terribly afraid of. So she shoots herself.

Hedda has no source of richness in her and she therefore seeks it in others, so that her life becomes a pursuit of sensation and experiment. Her hatred of bearing a child is the ultimate expression of her egotism, a sickness which brings death.

Hedda gains no insight; her death affirms nothing of importance. She never understands why, at her touch, everything becomes “ludicrous and mean”. She dies to escape a sordid situation that is largely of her own making; she will not face reality nor assume responsibility for the consequences of her acts. Thus Hedda Gabler is a magnificent, richly endowed woman and a tragic character.

Another helpless character by Ibsen is Mrs. Alving from *Ghosts*. She belongs to the nineteenth-century Enlightenment. But audience can find out that she achieves enlightenment in general while keeping herself ignorant in particular of precisely those two or three things which it would do her most good to know: above all, of her complicity in the tragedy of Captain Alving. When she tells Oswald- at the end- that she shared the blame, because, in her prudishness, her fear of sexuality, she had not welcomed Alving’s joy of life, she is also telling herself. Catastrophe, in this story plays, as it were, the role of psychoanalysis, bringing to consciousness the guilty facts which Mrs. Alving has so zealously kept under. Mrs. Alving, reader of books, has come to know many things; she has not come to know herself. All of her life has passed in trying to keep her husband’s debauchery hiding from her son Oswald and others. Mrs. Alving has built an orphanage with her dead husband’s money as a memorial to him also in order to remove from the minds of people the memory of her husband’s sinful life. But the orphanage is destroyed by an accidental fire. Oswald, who’s state of mental distress troubles his mother, reveals to her that he is suffering from a fatal disease which he has inherited from his dissolute father. Oswald gives his mother

morpheme tablets and implores her to administer these to him in order to put an end to his life in case he goes mad. At the end of the play, Mrs. Alving finds herself in the most desperate of all conflicts that whether she should give her son the helping hand which she has just promised him, and whether she can take the life of one whom she has loved more than anybody else. The action is not allowed to resolve itself into a satisfactory solution. But whatever Mrs. Alving does, she is feeling crushed. She becomes helpless before the cruelty of her fate. The tragedy of her unresolved dilemma is doubly gripping because she has openly acknowledged her own guilt and is thus faithful to that search for knowledge and truth which is the mark of her nobility.

3.4 Women as torchbearer of the society

Nora and Mrs. Alving's sacrifice for their family can be further understood by some feminist views which praise pre-existent virtue of feminine nature: Irigaray in her book *je, tu, nous* states that-

Women's choices tend more toward maintaining
peace, a clean environment, goods we really
need in life, humanitarian options.

(in Jackson & Jackie 1988:170)

Most of the endeavors and doings of Nora and Mrs. Alving are to protect their family from other evil things and to maintain peace in life. Nora and Mrs. Alving both hide secret past from others. Nora hides her borrowing money from Krogstad

and Mrs. Alving hides her husband's debauchery from her son Oswald. Mrs. Alving and her basic concern are to save her son from the sin of his father. Both the establishment of the Orphanage and the act of keeping Oswald away from the home are intended to protect him from pernicious effects of his father's profligacy. On the other hand, in *A Doll's House* Nora does not tell her husband about his dangerous disease he is suffering from. Nor does she tell him anything about the source of the money. She hides the act of forgery only because of his love for her. Nora could have borrowed the money from her father too. But she does not do so as she does not want to give her father an impression that her husband was poor and had no money.

3.6 Manipulation and pseudo-relationship

In two of Henrik Ibsen's characters: Nora, in *A Doll's House*, and Hedda, in *Hedda Gabler*, manipulation is a prominent theme, and revolves around these characters. Pseudo-relationship is another prominent theme, which also revolves around Nora and Hedda. At first, Nora and Hedda appear to be complete polar opposites. Nora always wants to please everyone, especially her husband, Torvald. She will change around her whole personality depending on who she is with and/or trying to please. The mask she assigns to her time with Torvald is that of a child or an ornament. Her friend, Christine, sees the mask of a strong independent woman who saved her husband's life of her own initiative. The constant change of face causes both personal and interpersonal conflict. Her

Marriage is ended because of it. She is a doll, and is a different character depending on who is “playing” with her. In this sense, she is constantly being manipulated by her husband. On the other hand, However, Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler is extremely modern in presenting us a woman who refuses her social role as a wife and a mother and who wishes to take on a man's role in insisting on wanting to control other people's lives.



Chapter Four

Conclusion

In Ibsen's drama, the clash between the self-seeking world of men, and love and humanity, represented by women, is crucial. Ibsen's women are not judged by specific 'good' actions as opposed to 'bad' ones, but rather, by the good faith they bring to their acts. His works give the glimpse of different struggling women's lives which are suppressed in some way or other. Nora, in *A Doll's House* discovers the true character of her husband when learning her secret; he begins to scold her in very harsh terms. She has found that he is incapable of living up to his moral principles that is incapable of making any sacrifices for her sake. Nora leaves her husband and her children in order to gain a first hand experience. She rejects her marriage and husband and thus breaks the shackles and restraints of society. Mrs. Alving, on the other hand, accepts the role of a traditional wife. All of her life, she struggles against the heritage from the past – spiritual as well as physical. She tries as much to save her son from the evil effects of her husband's dissolute life as to free herself from the conventional beliefs and ideas in which she was brought up. But she does not succeed in her efforts and is unable to reject the traditional values. There is thus an air of insincerity about her which prevents her from attaining to a heroic stature. Again, Hedda in *Hedda Gabler* is completely different from Nora and Mrs. Alving's character. Hedda, tied down by mediocre marriage, exults in the suicide of her friend as an expression of freedom and the beauty of life, and she confesses that she feels alive for the first time just before she shoots herself. She goes to her death without giving up her

faith in beauty as the only worthy aim of life. Hedda dies to escape a sordid situation that is largely of her own making; she will not face reality nor assume responsibility for the consequence of her acts.

In Ibsen's plays, all the female characters like Nora, Mrs. Alving and Hedda are helpless, faltering and perverse. Some of them try to break the traditional shackles male dominated society and find their own place in the patriarchal world. Others suffer their whole life and deceive themselves. Henrik Ibsen has written only of what he had lived through and has drawn the real picture of the experiences of women in 19th century in his works.

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