

FALSE VALUES OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY IN HENRIK IBSEN'S A DOLL'S HOUSE

Suchitra Vashisth

Associate Professor, FMEH, MRI University, Faridabad, Haryana, India

Received: 16 Aug 2018

Accepted: 23 Aug 2018

Published: 30 Aug 2018

ABSTRACT

Creative writing in literature reflects society. The Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, portrays the difficulty of maintaining an individual personality of bourgeois culture in his play A Doll's House, published in 1879. A Doll's House is a three-act play which premiered at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Denmark on 21 December 1879. It aroused a great sensation at that time. It shaped a storm of fuming disagreement that went ahead of theatre and immersed the world of newspapers and society. Even after more than hundred years of Ibsen's death, the play is still pertinent to our society and is still being bespoke by filmmakers. It has been the most dramatic play in the year 2006, and the play has been made into a film at least eight times. The newest revision has Ben Kingsley, Julian Sands, Jena Malone and Michele Martin for the lead roles. The exceedingly actuality is that the play is still being made into movies and still being effectively staged; shows that as far as woman's fortune in society is alarmed; nothing has really altered. Woman of today, still face the same dilemmas and the same challenges that they faced in the nineteenth century.

KEYWORDS: *Nora, Henrik Ibsen, Torwald, Feminism*

INTRODUCTION

In a consumerist social order, human associations take a flipside seat, while the big tummy of Consumerism takes the front. However, because of rally round of machines in the developed life, Patriarchy is also challenged. The conventional roles of men, women, and children gradually transform. While life is so controlled instinctively that human relationships become fake, in the progression. The repression of women in a bourgeois culture makes Feminism take the lead, for women to apprehend their true potential and uncover their own space. So, in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora wishes to "find herself" and is not happy with being a "doll" to her father, husband, and children.

The play begins with the Helmer house portrayed as a picture of wedded bliss. Nora, enters her house, after Christmas shopping, "humming a tune and in high spirits" (Henrik Ibsen, 2012, 7). She is laughing to herself, as she hides the Christmas tree and gifts that are all packed. She generously tips the porter. Her husband, Torwald Helmer, promoted to the position of the bank manager, is a picture of affection. He lovingly calls after her, "my little lark twittering," "my little squirrel bustling," "my little spend thrift been wasting money again," "my little featherhead." Nora tells him, this was "the first Christmas that we have not needed to economize" (Ibid. 8). Till Torwald would get his raise in salary, Nora suggests, till then they could borrow money. Torwald badly discourages her from borrowing money and incur debts. Discouraging her, he says, what if "a slate fell on the .my head and killed me." Nora at once puts her hands on his mouth, saying, "Oh! Don't say such horrid things" (Ibid. 9). Torwald reminds Nora of last Christmas how she had to shut herself for three

weeks “every evening until long after midnight, making ornaments for the Christmas Tree.” He says finally, “...it is a good thing that our hard times are over” (Ibid. 13). He assures her, “This time I needn’t ruin your dear eyes and your pretty little hands...”

As husband and wife are busy in their happy domesticity, the maid announces a lady visitor who calls upon Nora. This stranger turns out to be Nora’s school friend, Mrs. Christine Linde, who hadn’t met her since ten years. Both friends exchange news about their respective lives since they parted. Mrs. Linde had grown “a little paler” and “a little thinner” and “much, much older.” Nora tells her that the last eight years had been a happy time for her. Nora offers her sympathies to Christine as she had read in the papers that she had been widowed. Nora learns that Mrs. Linde’s husband had not left behind any money for herself or any children and not “even any sorrow or grief to live upon.” Nora says she had three lovely children and that in the past Torwald was a barrister, which was difficult as both did not believe in undertaking any “unsavory cases,” but now as bank manager, he would have lots of money. Christine then remarks that Nora had not grown up much as even in school she was a great spendthrift. Nora says it was not always that they were contentedly off and that they both had had to work.

Nora says further that in the past when they were hard-up, Torwald had to overwork, which left him “dreadfully ill.” The doctors then had advised her that they should go south to Italy, to save his life. Living in Italy for a year had restored Torwald’s health but had cost a lot of money, which Nora had had to borrow from her ailing father. Nora was expecting a child to be born any day, besides with Torwald who was so ill, she could not nurse her dying father, which was the saddest time in her life since she had married.

Nora then enquires of Christine as to why had she married someone she had not loved. Christine says that she had to care for a “bedridden and helpless mother” and provide for her two young brothers, so she had no choice. Her husband had been rich then, but his business was “a precarious one” and so with his death “all went to pieces and there was nothing left” (Ibid. 18). The boys had now gone their own ways and her mother had died, so Christine had to take up several jobs. She says, “I only feel my life unspeakably empty. No one to live for anymore”.

Christine tells Nora she was happy that Torwald was now a bank manager so he would be able to help her with getting a job at the bank. Nora promises to broach the subject to her husband “very cleverly” and was happy that she could be of some help to her childhood friend.

She was thankful to Nora for being so anxious to help her, as Nora had herself known “so little of the burdens and troubles of life.” Nora protests saying that everybody thought that she was “incapable of anything really serious-.” She also tells Christine that she must have been so proud “of having worked so hard and so long” (Ibid. 19) for her mother and brothers. Now, as Christine had experience of book-keeping, Torwald later assures her of a job in his bank.

Nora lowers her voice so as not to be within the hearing range of Torwald and confides in her friend, saying that she too had something to feel proud of herself. She says that she had acquired the two hundred and fifty pounds for her family to be living in Italy for a year, not from her father but from elsewhere. This secret had caused her a lot of worries, but it was absolutely necessary to save Torwald’s life. Christine sympathizes with Nora when she comes to know that to repay that huge sum of two hundred and fifty pounds, Nora saved from the everyday expenses that Torwald gave her and also from the work of copying that she did many evenings and nights.

Krogstad- a subordinate in Torwald Helmer's bank, requests Nora to use her influence on her husband and help him retain his position in the bank, though he had made mistakes in his job. He reminds Nora that it was she who had borrowed money from him when Torwald was ill. She had brought her father's money as surety against the borrowed money but had put 2nd October as the date on the bond while her father had expired already on the 29th of September. She had also forged her father's signature. If Krogstad had to lose his job at the bank, Nora's secret about this borrowed money would also be out before Torwald, threatens Krogstad.

Despite Nora's anxiety about her secret being out before Torwald, Act II opens to the happy festive time of Christmas Eve. Christine helps Nora with her dress in which she is to dance for the party. Torwald helps Nora practice the dance. Act III opens with dance music being heard from upstairs, while Krogstad meets Christine Linde in the Helmer household. Krogstad is now a widower with many children and Christine is also a widow. The audience is for the first time made to understand that Christine and Krogstad had been in a relationship earlier. Christine tells Krogstad that the Helmer household was the only place they could meet as there was no privacy in the place Christine lived presently. She tells Krogstad that they had lots to talk about, as the audience learn Christine telling Krogstad that he had never understood her properly. Krogstad protests that Christine had married someone else just because he did not have money then. Christine explains that she had a helpless ailing mother and two young brothers to look after. Krogstad says, "When I lost you, it was as if all the solid ground went from under my feet. Look at me now- I am a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage" (Ibid. 74). Christine responds by saying, "Well, I am like a shipwrecked woman clinging to some wreckage- no one to mourn for, no one to care for" (Ibid.). She further elaborates, saying it would be better if "two shipwrecked people could join forces" (Ibid.75). She also says that there was no pleasure working only for one's own self. Krogstad's children did not have a mother while she had wanted "to be a mother to someone." Krogstad wouldn't have been a bad person if Christine would have been with him. He was now "like a man driven by despair" (Ibid.76). Both are very happy to find each other and see their alliance as "an amazing piece of good fortune" (Ibid. 77).

Krogstad asks Christine if he should withdraw the letter he had written to Torwald telling him about Nora's secret about the two hundred and fifty pounds that she had borrowed from him, Christine says "no." "Helmer must know all about it; they must have a complete understanding between them, which is impossible with all this concealment and falsehood going on" (Ibid.). After the dance, Torwald is again his loving, romantic self to Nora. He wishes her a good-night and goes in to read the letters in his letter-box. Nora does know that one of the letters is from Krogstad. Shortly Torwald is out with an open letter in his hand and he tells Nora angrily, "What a horrible awakening! All these eight years...she who was my joy and pride.. a hypocrite, a liar—worse—a criminal! The unutterable ugliness of it all!—For shame! For shame! ...No religion, no morality, no sense of duty-" (87-88). He bitterly tells Nora that he would keep their relationship going "only in the eyes of the world" and that he would not trust her with their children's upbringing. Just then a letter for Nora arrives and Torwald reads it.

Torwald is overjoyed as he reads this letter. He happily says that they are both saved. Krogstad had sent Nora's bond back. It was obvious that Krogstad had done this as a favor to Nora because he was happy that his life had found a support in Christine. Torwald tears up both the letters and the bond and throws it in the fire. Torwald also realizes that Nora had done all this during his illness only out of love for him to save her ailing husband from death. He says, "I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a double attractiveness in my eyes" (Ibid. 90). In the course of their conversation, Nora says bitterly, "You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with

me” (Ibid. 92). She then says “... But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa’s doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls...” (Ibid. 93). She says religion, the clergy, and books all of it did not help her, that she did not love him anymore. Torwald tells her that he would work day and night for her, that he would “bear sorrow and want” for her sake. “But no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves” (Ibid. 97). She says Torwald did not fear what threatened *her* but what would happen to *his own self*. She says these eight years she had lived with a stranger. She also says that she would have to educate herself and find herself, as these were duties more sacred to herself than Torwald, her husband, or their children.

In the picture-perfect family, there is spiteful undergrowth in Nora Helmer’s life. It is indeed ironical that two aground people- Krogstad and Christine come together because they had seen the acrimony of life, while the Helmer household which apparently had everything, was breaking up. Torwald was not even willing to reinstate Krogstad whom he had dismissed because he would fall in the eyes of his bank employees. In this world of Law, Business and manly honor, Nora’s feminist stand is made clear, as she bitterly states, “I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it, a woman has no right to spare her old dying father or to save her husband’s life. I can’t believe that” (Ibid. 96). Nora’s helpless femininity as she forged the signature and put a wrong date in the bond, is wrong in the eyes of business and the law, while her good and pure motives to her dying father and ailing husband is turned to the nullity and is seen as a crime. Nora is so hurt that she refuses to keep the wedding ring, money and even refuses correspondence with Torwald. When he begs her if they could come together someday in the future perhaps. For that, she says, they will have to change and be in real wedlock, but she doesn’t believe that such wonderful things could ever happen.

As “meaning is culture-specific and not universal;” for non-Western readers, the idea of love as desire, and Feminism with a capital “F”, is too knotted and self-centered a view. Marriage is seen as a social and religious bond, so non-Westerners are horrified at the Western concept of love and feminism, which to them appears artificial and too radical. Tradition and continuity, constancy and sacrifice are favored to radical Feminism, which projects a breakdown of family, love, character and seem irreligious. The West is true to its tradition of intellect, as, being a younger society compared to the non-West it does not have the ancient civilization values of tolerance or forbearance that older societies possess. They were young and new have nothing left but the primacy of intellect, in sharp contrast to older souls, who would have sacrificed their individuality for the health and happiness of family, society, tradition, and religion.

REFERENCES

1. Ibsen, Henrik. *Henrik Ibsen: The Man, the Plays, the Criticism*. First Prism Key Press Edition, New York, 2012.
2. Zainab Abdulaziz Al Suhaibani, *The Archetypal Image of Women in Ibsen’s A Doll’s House and Pinter’s the Homecoming*, *International Journal of Linguistics and Literature (IJLL)*, Volume 5, Issue 2, February-March 2016, pp. 15-20