

people in those days were accustomed to plays with happy ending just as Indian audiences today are very keen about a happy ending to every film which they see, no matter how serious and sad entire preceding action of the story of the film may have been.

An ending should be a logical outcome of the events which have taken place in the course of a play. It is not just a question of sentiment. It is a question of artistic propriety. Just because a sad ending displeases an audience, it does not mean that the dramatist should follow the prevailing taste of the masses of people. An artist's function is as much to form and mould public taste as to gratify it. Ibsen certainly departed from the prevailing practice of the times. The "well-made" play initiated by the French dramatist Eugene Scribe always had a happy ending Ibsen violated the accepted vogue.

Deliberating The Rights of Women, Their Liberation and Emancipation WSR to Henerik Ibsen's A Doll's House

Dr. Amritanshu Kumar
Ph.D(Patna University, 2010)English
Address:S/o Devendra Kumar Sinha
Abulas Lane, Machhuatoli
Patna-800004, Bihar
Mob.No. 09801068969
Email.ID-amritanshukr@yahoo.com

In the portrayal of women, in tragic depth and technical mastery, *A Doll's House* goes far beyond most of the tragedies of Ibsen's time on the continent. There are many strong and well-integrated women in Ibsen's plays, and the majority of them have the instinctive ability to make the right choices. However, it is only in the great dramas of ideas and in historical settings that they are able to express themselves fully. In a bourgeois society, as portrayed in *The League of Youth* and *The pillars of Society*, they are pushed to one side, declared incompetent, and restricted by customs and conventions. Rebellion smoulders in several of them, but it is not until *A Doll's House* that it develops into an irremediable conflict between the women and existing society. Incidentally, the play is based on a contemporary marital story.

Of Helmer, we are to assume that he is a competent man of affairs; otherwise he would not have received the appointment on which he is about to enter, nor would he wield the new broom with such ruthless vigour. Outside business hours, there is nothing to distinguish him from the run of ordinary professional men, if it were not for a touch of perversity in his amatory constitution; he likes to indulge in fantasies of his wife in fictitious circumstances which enhance her erotic appeal; he even likes his corporeal eyes to see her in such circumstances, as is shown by his purchase of the Capri fisher-girl's costume and his insistence on her dancing the Tarantella in public.

The situations, in which the minor characters in *A Doll's House* find themselves, illustrate in some way the central predicament of Nora. The first

Ibsen had become interested in women's independence, and already in his play *The Pillars of Society* he had drawn two women, Lona and Dina, both of whom had minds of their own. He had also felt much impressed by a book written by his friend, Camilla Collett on the status of women. Furthermore, at the Scandinavian Club in Rome he had put forward a proposal that the women members of the Club should be allowed to vote at its meetings. When his proposal was defeated, he had walked out of the Club in a mood of fury. Thus there was a definite background against which Ibsen wrote *A Doll's House*. When the play was staged, it had the effect of a bomb-shell. Today, of course, it is difficult for us to appreciate the sensation that the play caused. To the 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. Of course, it is only at the end of the play that the refusal comes. Nora in the play not only defies her husband at the end but makes him look small. The very subject of the play was one which was bound to give rise to endless discussion. The play had a message for society: it sought to awaken a sense of individual responsibility among women. Whether Nora acted rightly or wrongly, naturally or unnaturally, in leaving her husband, her home, and her children in order to develop her own individuality- this was hotly debated by people after witnessing the play on the stage. It may seem to some that Ibsen in this play thinks too much of a woman's right and too little of her duties, but Ibsen was not dealing with the status of women in all its implications and in every context. His purpose in the play was limited. He wanted to show that, if a woman was not allowed to establish her own identity and develop her own individuality, she could not be really happy. If Nora had continued to live with Helmer for ever under the conditions in which we find her living with him at the beginning of the play, she would have felt wretched and miserable, and even the normal duties of her life would have seemed irksome to her under those inhibiting conditions. The method which Nora adopts at the end to get out of her intolerable situation may appear to be destructive and may seem to be a threat to the stability of all homes and families, but Ibsen's aim was to point out a particular weakness and flaw in the social fabric, and to leave constructive philosophy to others. He diagnosed the malady, and left the cure to others.

important parallel is between Nora and Mrs. Linde. These two women move on parallel lines but in opposite directions. Ibsen draws them in sharp contrast on their first appearance. "Nora enters, humming gaily." Nora is clearly happy; she is a contented wife and a contented mother. When Mrs. Linde appears first, she is in a travelling costume. She is, in other words, a stranger out of her normal environment. In contrast to Nora's gay humming, Mrs. Linde is embarrassed and hesitating. Soon afterwards we learn that she is paler, thinner, and much older than Nora. We also learn that she is a widow with no property and no children, "not even any sorrow or grief to live upon." Her life is absolutely empty, with no one to live for any more. And she has been earning her livelihood in the business world of which Nora knows nothing. Existence outside a doll's house can be most unhappy.

A Doll's House is a problem play or a thesis play. It does not, of course, offer any ready-made solution to the problem with which it deals, but a dramatist is not bound to offer solutions. Ibsen presents the problem and leaves the solution to the readers. The problem is: What is the position or status of a woman vis-à-vis her home? The play does not deal with the right of women in general; nor does it advocate the emancipation of women in the sense in which we understand the word "emancipation". It merely shows us the sad consequences of the subordination of a married woman to the control of her husband. The play focuses our attention on the conjugal life of a middle-class couple and shows us the relationship existing between the husband and the wife and the possible consequences of that particular kind of relationship. The play deals with the predicament in which a married woman finds herself on account of the excessive control which her husband exercises upon her; and it shows the method which the woman employs in order to get out of that predicament. Marriage is thus very much the theme of the play, and Ibsen therefore appears here as a dramatist of social realities. The particular social reality which engages Ibsen's attention in this play is marriage and the position which a married woman occupied in her home at the time when this play was written. Ibsen is definitely on the side of Nora in this play; and she wins our sympathies also. Thus it would not be wrong to say that A Doll's House is a feminist play, even though Ibsen himself refused to accept this description of the play.

There is no doubt in our minds, then, that *A Doll's House* is a feminist play. It advocates the rights of the women, and especially of wives in relation to their husbands. Ibsen himself denied that he had written this play in order to put forward the claims of women. Nineteen years after having written this play, he was invited to address the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights. In his address to the gathering, he declared that he had never written any play to promote a social purpose, that he was more of a poet than a social philosopher, that he had never actively worked for the movement for the rights of women, and that he was not even very sure what the rights of women were. *A Doll's House*, in other words, was not about female emancipation. What Ibsen meant was that the theme of this play was the need of every individual, whether man or woman, to find out the kind of person he or she really is, and to strive to become that person. But Ibsen's contention in his address does not change the emotional and psychological effect of the play on the audiences and the readers. It is a woman's predicament with which the play deals; it is the disillusionment of a wife that is the subject of the play; it is the drastic step taken by a wife with which the play ends; it is the woman in the play who wins our maximum sympathy. Whatever may have been Ibsen's intentions, the effect of the play is to arouse in us a great deal of sympathy for the cause of women. *A Doll's House* is a problem play or a thesis play, because it gives rise to a problem in our minds and it even suggests a solution though it does not emphasize and does not suggest it as the only solution.

A Doll's House ends with the heroine leaving her home, her husband, and even her children to go and face an uncertain future in a world about which she knows next to nothing. At the end of the play, we find Helmer desolate, while Nora steps out of the house into the street, slamming the door behind her. This ending came as a bomb-shell to the audiences of the time. The question was hotly debated and discussed by critics, by reviewers, and by newspapers as to the correctness or otherwise of the drastic step which Nora had taken. The opinion of the majority of critics and spectators was, of course, that the ending was most inappropriate and indecent. But subsequently, as time passed, the ending was recognized as quite appropriate. Nor is there any doubt that the ending is really appropriate. Most