

Henrik Ibsen's Nora in "A Doll's House"-from 'Doll Wife' to 'New Woman'

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Abstract

Since bygone ages Literature has been considered as a true mirror of society that portrays honestly the social, political, religious, or any other issues prevailed in contemporary society. Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House raises the women question prevailed globally in every era.

This paper explores the plight of Nora Helmer, a woman who represents a typical Norwegian household in the Victorian era. It exposes the real condition of women who lose their identity in patriarchal society. Nora Helmer who was unknowingly enjoying her status considering it as a family bliss suddenly finds her real status as mere a 'Doll' in the hands of her man, and this realization though painful helps her to turn from a Doll to a NEW WOMAN.

Key-words: Women question, patriarchal society, new woman

Henrik Ibsen (20 March 1828 – 23 May 1906) was a Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet known as father of realism. He was one of the most influential playwrights and was considered as one of the founders of modernism in theatre.

The blame of being subjective by many authors in their particular works can't be altogether denied but still we have to understand and accept that every human is a creation of his own experiences that he confronts since his first cry to his last silence, which are of no match to any mortal in this world. Ibsen's play 'A Doll's House' portrays a suffering woman, modeling his mother about whom his sister Hedvig writes: "She was a quiet, lovable woman, the soul of the house, everything to her husband and children. She sacrificed herself time and time again. There was no bitterness or reproach in her." Ibsen's themes mostly deal with the issues faced by him since his childhood such as financial difficulty, portrayal of suffering women, question on women identity, moral conflicts etc.

Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' raises a voice of contemporary underprivileged women who were living their lives under the shadows of their men and were not aware of their basic rights as a sister, wife and mother; and unfortunately keep compromising with various situation considering it as a necessity to maintain

harmony without realizing their deplorable condition since a fetal blow shakes their conscience and bring awareness in them.

The protagonist Nora in 'A Doll's House' is addressed by her husband Torvald such as "my sweet little skylark", "my little squirrel", "sweet tooth", "little featherhead" and an "obstinate little person" etc. Torvald's use of such words and language; and the way he behaves with Nora even after eight years of their marriage indicates as if his love for Nora is boundless and he always wants to cheer Nora, but as Michael Meyer opines that by addressing Nora with such sweet pet names, Torvald degrades her into feeling as though she has no important purpose in life but to please him. (Meyer).

After reading few pages of the play, it becomes clear that Nora's character is delineated by the author as a typical average housewife who doesn't have many responsibilities except looking after her house and raising the children. She is a woman who lives carelessly and remains cheerful in every situation. She is portrayed as if she doesn't have any concern related to the financial matter of the household or we can say that her husband Torvald refrains her from all financial matter thinking her as an immature person to understand and handle such matters. We find Torvald teasing Nora when she spends extra money on Christmas. It seems that this gives Torvald an opportunity to chide and sermonize Nora about her "frivolous ideas" regarding money. Very often it is

found that Torvald's behavior matches to Nora's father. Though, this domination was enjoyed by Nora unknowingly till she realizes her real position in the house was just as a 'doll'.

She states "I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as your, else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which--I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other" (Ibsen).

Nora to Torvald is just a doll who is financially dependent on him and doesn't have any right to take any decision. If she was financially independent, she would not have to borrow money from anyone for Torvald's treatment. But her dependency and her love and concern for Torvald forced her to borrow money so that she could save her husband's life. Her concern becomes so blind that she didn't care for anything and adopted wrong measures to arrange money. But, it was to her dismay when she sees the reaction of Torvald after revelation of her forgery.

Torvald didn't think for a while that she took such action to save his life and opines:

"Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home. Each breath the children take in such air full of the germs of evil" (Ibsen).

This revelation of Torvald was astonishing and shocking for Nora to whom her husband's health and ability to live is obviously more significant than a few lies. Furthermore, she had to pay off her loan secretly as she knew that Torvald be the marriage's dominant partner would never accept that it is because of his wife that he is saved.

Throughout the play, we learn that Nora is treated like a doll who doesn't have any right to take any decision. Her life that seems happy is actually full of problems, struggles, self-deceptions and many ups and downs that she tries to handle to save her married life. Torvald treats her like a child that gives a false notion to the reader and to Nora herself at some extent that he is a very loving and caring husband but the unexpected turning point with unexpected behavior of Torvald clears everything and shows the real character of Torvald. Torvald's behavior after revelation of forgery proves him a self-centered man who only cares for himself and the society.

Nora herself is taken aback on Torvald's unexpected reaction and leaves her in a state where she is not able to understand her position. But later she recollects herself and realizes her true position in a new light. This incident turns as a lesson and suddenly changes Nora's world. When Torvald cries out: "I'm saved!" She understands Torvald completely as a person who thinks of himself

only. Nora gets startled when instead of saying "We're saved!" or even "You're saved," Torvald just exclaimed "I'm saved."

Nora's realizes that she was living her life with a person who doesn't have any emotional attachment with her. At the moment, she finds her as a stranger who is an opportunist and changes his opinions and behavior according to the situation.

Therefore when Helmer wants Nora to withdraw her decision of leaving the house and says : "Before all else you are a wife and a mother."

Nora replies : "That I no longer believe. I think that before all else I am a human being, just as much as you are--or, at least, I will try to become one. I know that most people agree with you, Torvald, and that they say so in books. But henceforth I can't be satisfied with what most people say, and what is in books. I must think things out for myself and try to get clear about them.... I had been living here these eight years with a strange man, and had borne him three children--Oh! I can't bear to think of it--I could tear myself to pieces!... I can't spend the night in a strange man's house." (Ibsen).

Though, the incident is painful but it gives Nora a life-lesson and it seems that she is awakened from a dream. She stands tall with the stature of a woman who is independent, able to take her decision, and can face the world alone without

the help of her man. This is the transformation of Nora from ‘Doll Wife’ to ‘New Woman’.

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