

'A Doll's House' is the Backlash of Feminism

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Abstract—The flow of feminism touches each corner of the society in the twentieth century. Nora Helmer is the fiery representative of women against the patriarchal society in the drama 'A Doll's House'. Blind love, worship, social attitude and economic crisis snatches life from the body of a female easily, and it is also true that these things forced them to play like a doll in family, religion and society from cradle to grave. The research is conducted through systematic sampling of various research articles and books for review on feminism, women empowerment and Ibsen's work, 'A Doll's House'. Through the character Nora, Ibsen brought out the message that the inner spirit of women is their conscience which can help them to tear strong net of patriarchal society, to break the doll's house, to build new world of peace and pleasure where they are inclined to have their breathe, smile, satisfaction and true happiness against the red eyes of the society. Nora carried the slough of a doll in the family at the beginning but later she stood rigorously not like a doll but as a human being. Nora Helmer broke the strong chain of the hypocritical world and raised her luminous voice of feminism in an untraditional manner that is found to be revolutionary.

Keywords— *feminism, patriarchy, emancipation, society, spirit.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Henrik Ibsen, a pioneer playwright of 20th Century, became a remarkable feminist as his play 'A Doll's House' is widely celebrated in his age. Ibsen's masterpiece 'A Doll's House' is a great work on women development and emancipation of women in the patriarchal society. Nora Helmer, the protagonist of the play is special because of her spirit, urge and yearning for the ultimate freedom which a woman like her needs in life. Nora Helmer is a nice lady of beauty who was busy to arrange the Christmas party at the beginning. Torvald Helmer called his wife as Sweet love, Little lark, Doll, Treasure, Capri etc and Nora got pleasure to think that she achieved that strong shield of love which is able to fight against everything and can protect her in every situation. "A Doll's House is a tragedy in which Nora leaves her house by slamming of a door to the world of new possibilities. She is going off to know her own responsibilities towards herself. This kind of self-realization, which usually leads to a new

beginning, is one of Ibsen's main ideologies posed in his play. Nora opens her eyes and observes that her individuality and freedom have been taken in living with Torvald Helmer" (Arif Rashid Shah, 2016, p346). She is a soft minded, kind-hearted lady; felt happy to see her friend Mrs. Linden who was all alone and was struggling each and every second for living in the world on that time. Nora with her sympathetic heart wanted to render friendly hand to Mrs. Linden by giving a job after taking help from her husband. During conversation she revealed the secret with extreme joy to her friend that she saved the life of Torvald Helmer. To her it is a matter of joy and pride although she didn't expose it to her husband. Nora says:

"Good heaven ! How painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly self-respect, to know that he owed anything to me." (Act I)

Through these lines the obstinacy of male dominated society is reflected who love to reign upon every single object of the world and are not ready at all to take any help from women whom they regard as their subservient. To men taking anything from women is like reproach upon their stubborn personality. Women uphold the prestige of their husband against everything and for saving their life, they can do any wrong, can even sacrifice their own life but true to heart they can't tolerate the disgrace of their husband. When Krogstad, the lawyer (who helped Nora to forge the signature of her father and to have money from the bank when her husband was at the gate of Death) rebuked Torvald severely in the conversation with Nora, on that time she says:

"If you talk disrespectfully of my husband, I must request you to leave the house" (Act I)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Handicapped gender. 'A Doll's House', a 19th century play by Henrik Ibsen where the flame of heartfelt expostulation is reflected. Ibsen play's, feminist discussions of autonomy, freedom and consolation still now like hot cake to everyone. His play provoked furious reactions in 1879–80, when audiences were not yet ready to admit the entrance of women into public life, let alone their autonomy! My inaugural contiguity is with the depiction of a gendered conception of autonomy and the condition of women's powerlessness found in Ibsen's 1879 play (Ibsen, 1981: 1–88). As 'A Doll's

House' opens, Torvald Helmer and his wife, Nora, are at the point in their marriage of financial success after years of hard work. The conditions have been achieved by the effort of both husband and wife. In fact, in the early years of their marriage Torvald was not in a sound position. During that time, Nora had to receive money for paying the medical treatment not only for the sake of love but also for the sake of humanity. For saving the life of her husband, she forged her father's signature because women were not allowed to borrow money. Nora did all this out of her true love and imagined that, if Torvald ever found out he would be proud of her. But it becomes brutally clear that she did not know him. Furthermore, she neither understood the criminal nature of her act of forgery nor anticipated the inevitably harsh response of her husband to this act. The revelation of the mutual failure of husband and wife to know each other comes just after Torvald learns that his wife is not an innocent doll, but a liar, a traitor – even a common criminal. His initial reaction is panic, then incomprehension:

“ . . . people might even suspect me of being an accomplice in these criminal acts of yours. They might even think I was the one behind it all . . . I just can't understand it, it's so incredible”. (Ibsen, 1981: 76)(Anderson, 2016, p151)

At present, there is a considerable amount of writing (Much of it influenced by French philosophers) by men who want to become women, or to become feminine than feminine, and to argue at the same time that 'woman' does not exist. But to want to become the 'other' is always just as much as impossible dream as wanting to deny the Other's existence. A way to rethink this is to pose the question more politically, to identify common problems, objectives, allies, enemies. In this way there can be alliances against sexism, racism and other oppressions, without trying to reduce and eliminate differences, within the progressive aligned groups or movements. From this perspective, men have the choice to define themselves as anti- or pro-feminist; and, rather than tell women what to do, to identify and work against common enemies. A 'standpoint' does not mean adherence to a doctrine defined in the space of an imaginary subject-feminists once tried to do. It means working towards a common alignment to a problem to be solved. It very quickly becomes clear in 'reading feminism' that is not a single entity with a single voice. As feminisms become more effective, so men are confronted with many different images of themselves in a complex, contradictory context of patriarchal and anti-patriarchal strategies. (Wilkinson & Celia Kitzinger, 1996, p160)

While many academics uncritically adopt feminism, the established theoretical concept based on the notion that gender is initial in women's struggle in the patriarchal

system, most Africana women in general do not identify with the concept in its entirety and through this flow cannot see themselves as the fiery representative of feminism. The female empowerment and gender issues may be justifiable for those women who have not been plagued by powerlessness based on ethnic differences; however, that is certainly not the case for those who have-Africana women. For those Africana women who do adopt some form of feminism, they do so because of feminism's theoretical and methodological legitimacy in the academy and their desire to be a legitimate part of the academic community. Moreover, they adopt feminism because of the absence of a suitable framework for their individual needs as Africana women. But while some have accepted the label, more and more Africana women today in the academy and in the community are reassessing the historical realities and the agenda for the modern feminist movement. These women are concluding that feminist terminology does not accurately reflect their reality or their struggle.¹ Hence, feminism, and more specifically, Black feminism, which relates to African-American women in particular, is extremely problematic as labels for the true Africana woman and invites much debate and controversy among today's scholars and women in general. It should be noted as a matter of priority that there is another form of feminism which is closely identified with Africana women around the world. While African feminism is a bit less problematic for Af-ricana women than feminism in general, it is more closely akin to Africana Womanism. According to African literary critic Rose Acholonu in a paper she presented in July 1992 at the International Conference on Africana women in Nigeria:

“ The negative hues of the American and European radical feminism have succeeded in alienating even the fairminded Africans from the concept. The sad result is that today [the] majority of Africans (including successful female writers), tend to disassociate themselves from it.” (Clenora Hudson-Weems, 1993, p17)

III. NORA'S LOYALTY AS AN ORDINARY WOMAN

Nora who had firm faith and profound love for her husband wanted to stay with her husband by all means. During the sickness of Torvald, Nora was pregnant and was waiting for the birth of Ivar. Her physical and mental restlessness was at the peak because of the extreme economic crisis on that time. Although she was in crisis, she wanted to arrange better treatment for Torvald. She gave priority to her love, wanted to take risk even on that time when she was pregnant. She was ready to receive punishment for the sake of saving the life of her husband as she believed from heart that to protect the life of her love would be the best religion in life. But, it is

a matter of great regret that Torvald didn't show any gratitude to Nora for whom he is now alive, let alone the matter of giving love, respect or protection to her. *"Ibsen paints a bleak picture of the sacrificial role held by women of all economic classes in his society. Ibsen believed that women had a right to develop their own individuality, but in reality, their role was often self-sacrificial. Male superiority caused women to make many sacrifices by not being able to pursue their own ambitions, careers and identity. In the play —A Doll's House, the marriage of Torvald and Nora was unstable because of the gender inequality. Being controlled by her father and handed over to the husband's authority Nora was not able to pursue her desires".* (P. Kalaivani, 2009, p25) Nora was astonished to see that and asked to her heart for whom she did all things against rules and regulations of the society. For whom Nora took risk against everything, now ready to handle her with dagger words after receiving the letter from Krogstad (the letter which was inscribed with the truth of Nora's forgery of her father's signature for drawing money from the bank). Torvald goes to say:

"Wretched women-what have you done! She who was my pride and my joy —a hypocrite, a liar-worse, worse-a criminal...You and your father want of principle...You've inherited-no religion, nor morality, no sense of duty...destroyed my whole happiness. You've ruined my future." (Act III)

IV. ATTITUDE OF NORA'S HUSBAND TOWARDS HER

Nora's heart was into pieces when she found the hollowness and selfishness of her husband. She was extremely shocked to have all painful speeches from her husband who said also to keep away her shadow at home even from her children. There was no ground under her feet, felt stunned to think for whom she stood above everything. Is it the true love or stranger? Women who are entitled as doll, weak, subservient, helpless in the society can take risk in every situation but men who declare themselves as bold, benevolent, protector are not ready to save them!! *"Nora insists on her husband in particular and society in general for considering her existence, the existence of woman, as a human being. Though, she knows to get the support from society is difficult, she is strong in her assertion."* (Jotiram Janardan Gaikwad, 2016, p113)

Meanwhile, Torvald received another letter from Krogstad which was inscribed with the message of not doing any harm to them. On that time, he shouted with joy and called Nora again with soft soap but this time she thought with cold mind as time gave Nora the scope of viewing reality closely. Now,

Nora is rigid. She is neither the plaything nor the doll rather a luminous body with strong zeal.

Nora goes to say:

"I have had great injustice done me, Torvald; first by father, and then by you...when I was at home my father used to tell all his opinions, and I held the same opinions. If I had others I said nothing...He used to call me his doll-child, and played with me as I played with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house...passed from father's hands into yours." (Act III)

V. DISCOVERY OF INDIVIDUALISM IN NORA

The first realization of Nora is that in spite of being an independent human being, she played the role of a doll at the hand of male in her past years. For the first time, her desire for leading life with self-respect was firm, she wanted to break the doll's house and wanted to get relief from the clutches of cruel, hollow, selfish mentality of her husband. She wanted to leave her husband because her husband regarded her as subservient, an amusing source of physical pleasure. *"A Doll's House is a spotlight on the society when people are under the pressure of public opinion about masculine society. This play discusses social problems in general, and individuals' in particular, women are considered as victims and society as a victimizer. Nora, as a new woman, experiences victory, her journey to self-realization happened as a miracle, unexpected, uncertain, but on time. She is the protagonist of this play who lives in decorative surroundings as a doll, and finds out that she is nothing but a precious instrument in her husband's hand. This knowledge helps her to strive in order to find her lost or neglected values in a conventional society. Therefore, she leaves her home and children in opposition to the conventional and majority's rule, society's oppressive authority and convention. He never thought to give any respect to her as a human being rather loved to have her as a plaything in life."* (Fateme Ghafourinia1 & Leila Baradaran Jamili, 2014, p426) Nora's clear apprehension for having a free life is also the reflection of feminism with liberal zeal. She says:

"Play time is over; now comes the time for education...I must try to educate myself. You're not the man to help me in that. I must set about it alone...there must be perfect freedom on both sides." (Act III)

VI. REALIZATION OF NORA IN A DIFFERENT DIMENSION

Here the rebellious notes of Nora against her husband's possessive mentality break the passive, acquiescent, subservient nature of a doll strongly. It also declares soundly

regarding the female independence upon male-dominated society.

“The laws are different from what I thought; but I can’t believe that they can be right. It appears that a woman has no right to spare her dying father, or to save her husband’s life...I shall try to learn. I must make up my mind which is right- society or I.” (Act III)

Through the courage of Nora, the raising voice of women against male-dominated, hollow society is firmly found. Here, as the representative of women, Nora brought independently, the desire for establishing own identity in the society. True to say, women have also the economic, social, cultural & legal right like men. They are not the source of pleasure only rather they’ve the strength to bring the flow of equality. To be exact, alleviating and weakening the efficacy of the problematized notion of feminism made by people’s altered way of thinking and obliterating a great deal of this fallacy made in this mostly male-dominated world by women’s interminable endeavors toward shackling these impediments during the past few centuries, have paved the path for creating a more balanced and equitable conditions for an alive and conscious living for both genders. *“Apart from this general view about feminism, this fallacy is debatable in literature as well. For instance, Ibsen himself is a playwright who mostly inquests into people’s freedom in the world and how they can vindicate their individual right specially, through women’s point of view. Nora Helmer and Mrs. Alving, main character of Hedda Gabler, are instances of this feature in Ibsen’s works.”* (Noorbakhsh Hooti and Pouria Torkamaneh, 2011, p1103)

VII. CONCLUSION

The voice of Nora brought the notes of individual liberation against the shackles and restraints of male-dominated society and through these the fragrance of truth, the reflection of conscience, the embankment of female dignity, the breaking image of a doll and the glorious usher of new life are found profoundly. *“Many years before the appearance of the feminist movement led by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva and others, Ibsen protested against the position of women, their rights and their being neglected in society. In the early decades of the twentieth century Virginia Woolf, in her work A Room of One’s Own, asserts that Men have treated women as inferiors for many years. It is the men who define everything in the society”* (28). *In the Norwegian Women’s Rights League on 26 May 1898, Ibsen made the infamous statement: “I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe [...] I am not even quite clear as to just what this women’s rights movement really is. To me it has seemed a*

problem of mankind in general [...] my task has been the description of humanity.” (Innes, 26) *It seems unproductive to regard the socialist cause, the women’s cause, and the human cause as mutually exclusive for Ibsen. His concern with the state of the human soul cuts across class and gender lines. Ibsen himself often linked the women’s cause in need of reform, arguing for example that all (including women) should form a strong progressive party to fight for the improvement of women’s position and of education. Ibsen is observed as a humanist, he calls himself a humanist not a feminist and rejects any dependence to special group or class or gender”.* (Arif Rashid Shah, 2016, p348)

At the ending portion, the fiery spirit of Nora springs from her voice

“My duties towards myself. I believe that before all else I am a human being, just as much as you are.” (Act III)

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