



**Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLILJ)**

**Vol.3/ NO.1/Spring 2013**

Ibsen's "A Doll's House": An ideal example of human relationship based on partnership and mutual responsibility

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## **ABSTRACT**

Henrik Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' is about freedom and the urge of every person to discover his or her true-self. He writes about the problems of women of the society. However, when Ibsen actually sat down to write the play he changed the direction of this plot drastically. A note about the question of women's rights during Ibsen's time is also necessary for a clear understanding of the play's theme. It is proper to say that in a large sense 'A Doll's House' is the ideal of human relationship based on mutual partnership, mutual responsibility, faith and confidence. It declares that a relationship like a marriage is false if not based on love. Thus, the play is about freedom and the urge of every person to discover his or her true self. In this paper; I tried to prove that a woman always loves her husband although she is being hated by him. Nora, the heroine of the play 'A Doll's House' is an ideal example because when the doctor advised that Nora's husband should be taken to the South for a change in climate, she was perturbed. She did not have enough money. The problem of saving her husband's life became a hard nut to crack. She thought of managing money by hook or by crook and in spite of facing many problems she saved the life of

Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLILJ) ISSN 2249-4529, Vol.3/ NO.1/Spring2013

URL of the Issue: <http://pintersociety.com/vol-3-no-1spring-2013/>

URL of the article: <http://pintersociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Radha-Madhab-Jha-14.pdf>

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her husband. It shows that women are always sentimental, emotional and religious. The values of women and the needs of women must be incorporated into the society, the sooner the better and the more the better because it is when this comes forward that balance will occur in the human society

'The miracle of miracles' could be possible in life only through a real marriage of the lives of husband and wife. "There are two kinds of moral laws, two kinds of conscience, one for men and one, quite different, for women. They don't understand each other; but in practical life woman is judged by masculine law, as though she wasn't a woman, but a man. The wife in the play ends by having no idea what is right and what is wrong; natural feelings on the one hand and belief in authority on the other lead her to utter destruction. A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively modern society, with laws made by man and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint.

Nora has committed forgery, and is proud of it; for she has done it out of love for her husband, to save his life. But this husband of hers takes his standpoint, conventionally honorable on the side of the law and sees the situation with "male eyes". Ibsen further notes that the end of his situation is that the woman, weighted down by moral conflict and bitterness, dies a life of loneliness and despair.

### **Women's Rights during Ibsen's period**

Ibsen wrote "A Doll's House" in 1879. He was at this time fifty-one years old and was living in Rome. For some years the questions of women's rights had been a subject of public debate and much controversy. Several champions of the women's cause gave public speeches and arouse public sympathy. Ibsen's wife Susannah and another friend Camilla Collett, a novelist, were

strong supporters of the women's rights. Ibsen, who habitually leaned towards new and liberal ideas, couldn't have remained unconcerned long with this subject. In Rome where he was the member of the Scandinavian Club, Ibsen made a formal proposal that membership of the club should be thrown open to women. His proposal was rejected. However, some extracts from Ibsen's speech will indicate his deep feelings on this issue:

“Is there anyone in this gathering who dares assert that our ladies are inferior to us in culture, or intelligence, or knowledge or artistic talents... Women have something in common with the true artist, just as young people have .... Youth has this instinctive genius which unconsciously hits upon the right answer. And it is precisely this instinct which women share with youth, with the true artist.

The more specifically domestic aspects of 'home' are taken up scrutinized in this play- 'A Doll's House'. Here, as in its other senses, 'home' is seen as an institution that tends to inhibit the development of the authentic self. For a child to be treated by its father as Nora was, for example, as a mere extension of the father's own life, a repository for example, as a mere extension of the father's own life, a repository for his own ideas, and perhaps as the ultimate heir to his own life's work-is to suffer a complete eclipse of personality. As Nora puts it and as the title of the play echoes, it is to endure becoming a doll for the gratification of others. A Doll's House appeared in an edition of 8,000 at the beginning of December 1879. It was produced at the theater Royal Copenhagen three weeks after its publications. To nineteenth-century Europe, the idea of a woman not only forsaking her marriage vows, but also displaying a mind of her own and renouncing her duty of unquestioning obedience to her husband, was almost indecent; she should also make him look small was scandalous. But as Ibsen had said: "I reveal in adverse criticism.....My enemies have been a great help to me – their attacks have been so vicious that people come flocking to see what all the shouting was about".

In Germany, the theme was so unpalatable that when the play was performed in March 1880. Ibsen was forced to write a different ending. He described it as "an act of barbarous violence against the play", but he preferred to write it himself rather let anyone else lay hands on his work. In it Helmer forces, Nora to look at her sleeping children; she finds herself unable to leave them, drops her travelling bag, and sinks to the ground as the curtain falls with masculine

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supremacy restored and Woman relegated to her proper sphere. Ibsen described it as a "barbaric outrage" and in the following year he refused to allow the altered ending to be used in Italy.

It was 'A Doll's House' more than any other of his plays that first made Ibsen widely known outside Scandinavia. Ibsen titled his play *Et dukkehjem*-A Doll's House, without the possessive's Travald in his way is as humanly undeveloped, as much a doll, as Nora.

### ***A Doll's House***

***A Doll's House*** is a three-act play by Henrik Ibsen. It is significant for its critical attitude toward 19th century marriage norms. It aroused great controversy at the time, as it concludes with the protagonist, Nora, leaving her husband and children because she wants to discover herself. Ibsen was inspired by the belief that "a woman cannot be herself in modern society," since it is "an exclusively male society, with laws made by men. Its ideas can also be seen as having a wider application: Michael Meyer argues that the play's theme is not women's rights, but rather "the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is and to strive to become that person." In a speech given to the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights in 1898, Ibsen insisted that he "must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for the women's rights movement," since he wrote "without any conscious thought of making propaganda," his task having been "the *description of humanity*."

Today, *A Doll's House* holds the distinction of being the world's most performed play. UNESCO has inscribed Ibsen's autographed manuscripts of *A Doll's House* on the Memory of the World Register in 2001, in recognition of their historical value.

The nineteenth century was an era of male dominance. Women were expected to have limited education, stay home to take care of children and housework, and always obey their fathers and

husbands. Some women enjoyed performing these tasks, believing these were their God-given roles, while some silently resisted. This prevented these women from speaking out for their desires, and as a result, they felt trapped in their own homes. Most of them lived a sacrificial life. Everything they did was for their men and families, but not for themselves. They were dolls that were controlled and toyed with by their husbands due to their material and emotional dependencies on their men.

“A Doll’s House” by Henrik Ibsen is not only relevant these days, but A Doll's House paints a dark picture of many contemporary families today. Most of the central ideas are still prevalent in today’s society. There are still women today that feel trapped by their marriages, still run away from their marriage’s leaving children behind, and still feel that it is important to do more than get married and have children. On the other hand, there are also still men who control their wives and treat them as if they are less viewed in society. One of the reasons that I feel that A Doll’s House still exists, is that many women like Nora still feel trapped by their marriages. Some women, I’m sure this might be more common in upper class societies, felt that they are not equal to their husbands, just like Nora felt. They don’t receive all of the prestige and praise that their husbands do, and they wonder what their role is in the marriage. Many women of today still feel like they are a “doll” with nothing of importance to do. They have nannies and babysitters who can take care of their kids and maids who take care of their house. On another note, although it is a lot more common now if not even a more accepted part of today’s society, women still run away from their marriage leaving.

Ibsen was a dramatist and not philosopher. He was interested in using drama to ask questions rather than supply answers. so, he left undefined except by implication those principles he felt might happily govern our actions, either as individuals or as social beings.

For a long time, critics have regarded this play as essentially about women’s rights. It was believed that since the questions of woman’s rights and their upliftment was very much in the air, Ibsen wrote ‘A Doll’s House’ specifically to serve that cause. This view was earlier suggested by George Bernard Shaw in his book Quintessence of Ibsenism. Ibsen is dealing, with the discrimination against women. But to suggest that the play is only about women’s rights is to put a narrow meaning on it. It would not be wrong to say that in a larger sense “A Doll’s House”

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is the ideal of human relationship based on partnership, mutual responsibility, faith and confidence. Above all, it declares that a relationship like marriage is false if not based on love. And this play is about freedom and the urge of every person to discover his or her true self

### **Role of Women in Society**

The role of women in society has been greatly overseen in the last few decades but now is coming to a more perspective to people. In the early days women were seen as wives who were intended to cook, clean, and take care of the kids. They were not allowed to vote while men took care of having jobs and paying any bills that had to be paid. Soon enough it caught on that women should have a bigger role than what other people thought women should have. Women would have strikes and go on marches to prove that they should have rights just like everyone else. They faced discrimination like and other race that faced it. Women would voice their opinion in any way possible so that they could reach their goal.

### **Rights of Women in the Society**

Women do not have the same position as men, though much progress has been made in the society to bring women to a stage where they have equal rights, equal pay, and equal independence but still it is not achieved. Though it may seem that women have a great deal of freedom and independence, the overall condition of women in the world of today is not as it should be. Still the bird flies with only one wing as the other is hampered and not fully functional.

Equality requires that those women who are the most liberated from bondages come forth in the world in all spheres of life and make themselves known, make their values known, influence the

society. It is changing quickly but it must change more quickly for it is bringing up the feminine qualities and characteristics that will save the human society from annihilation.

From this feminine quality and characteristic rising to the forefront the human society will grow and thrive in the future. Without this development the human society will move to destructive actions. Those possessive and territorial qualities and characteristics that are normally associated with masculine vibration are much less with the balancing of the feminine, with her influence and leadership.

Of course there are many variations among men and women so that a generalization will not apply to all. But it is true that, in the main, the masculine has certain qualities that are stronger than those of feminine nature. Those of feminine nature have certain qualities that are stronger in the main will be stronger. It can be said that those in female form have more capacity for emotional bonding and attachment. This is the result of the nurturing role of women with children. It is a biological factor.

### **Women's Desire**

What mother wants a war? What mother with sons wants a war? The mother's desire is always that her children be safe and have the best life possible. So; a woman is bound to bring peace to the world. As those of feminine quality become more influential in human society, they bring care for the aged, care for the ill, care for the young and strong desire not to allow harm to their sons and daughters.

These are the qualities of the feminine. These qualities are in dire need in the human political arena, in the development of the society. The qualities of the feminine personality are needed and the sooner they come forward the better.

So the women's liberation movement sought to give equal employment to women. But then the women had to be like men, to forsake their time with their children, forsake their strong desire to be with the family and children in order to achieve financial success and status. Then, when their menses comes, they must pretend they have no pain and no need. When they go into menopause,

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they are not to show signs or symptoms. This is seen as a weakness, both to have pain with the period and to have signs and symptoms of menopause.

By whose values are these weaknesses? Who has said this is weakness? This arose in the world based upon the work of men. When women enter that world, their needs are seen as weaknesses. So women are the weaker sex and they get emotional before their period, another feminine weakness. By whose standard is this weakness? By whose standard are women the weaker sex?

We see women leaving the captivity at home where they are dependent upon the working men for bread and butter. They leave to earn their own living in the male-dominated work force where they are expected to be like men. Then what happens to the children? What are those children with their mothers gone? What happens when the mothers have a hard-hearted boss who thinks it is a weakness if the mother must take time to be with her child?

This is not liberation. The women in this society are not as liberated as we may think. The true liberation of women requires the values and standards of women, the sweetness, the softness, the association of care and nurturance. Why is it a crime to need a day, a week, and a month off the work? Perhaps it should be the standard. The values of women and the needs of women must be incorporated into the society, the sooner the better and the more the better because it is when this comes forward that balance will occur in the human society. It is not for women to become men ignoring all of their own needs, trying to suppress them so that they don't show any weakness. It is for women to come forward and all these things that are natural to stop being defined as weaknesses. These are natural to the feminine body and to the feminine mind. They are to be seen as a natural flow, respected as such, and given due time and accordance.



When this occurs, change in human society will occur of a great magnitude. War will become a black mark in human history. Human services and the care for living beings will become more prominent as women come to the front. There are women who are charging ahead of the crowd to take a post that requires them to adopt the standards, methods and values of men but this has a great cost to them. It is not inherent to their nature. It is not natural or happy. It is true as we have said that this may vary from individual to individual. But we will find when we analyze many women who have gone far in their careers or in their political position having to adopt many masculine traits and practices, that they are feeling some pain, longing for something, missing or fearing they missed. This is because they have been oppressed even though they may be very successful, they have been oppressed as women and they have not been taught to value their sweet and softer side. They have been taught to suppress their feminine cyclical nature, their emotional variations to be successful in the world of man. Perhaps they have had to sacrifice having children or nurturing and knowing their children. Perhaps they have had no time for them and they feel a great loss.

These are hardships of women in society today where the women appear to make a better stand for themselves in the working world. But to truly make a better stand, it is not only to be in the working world, but to be proudly a woman, carrying forward the values and standards with pride, respecting the cycles of a woman's life, of your life, your changes, the ups and downs, ebbs and flows, days when we must rest, days when we should go out into the world, days when we feel slightly irritable. The cycles of menopause, the cycles of a woman's life are like the rhythms of nature. They are a part of the rhythm of the earth and the moon. They are great. They are not weaknesses. They are the tides of nature.

Be women in the working force, in the world! There must be made a place for women so that success in the world will be on our terms in the tides and rhythms of our body, our mind, our feelings, and our relationships. None of this should be forsaken, sacrificed. No, it is time for this to end because the greatness that women have to offer is not to be another man in the man's workforce but to bring the feminine heart to change that masculine force, to soften it, modify it, dance with it in a rhythm that will soothe it and shape it and put an end to the strains that now rest upon the world.

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To conclude; we come to the point that the role of a woman is very important for the all-round development of the nation. The growth and development of the family or society is not possible without the contribution of women. In the play "A Doll's House", Nora frankly tells Helmer that her first duty is her duty to herself, as an individual, to think things out for herself. She admits that she is still confused in so many things and does not know what is right or wrong. These are typical Ibsenite ideas, the rational, independent person who wins our respect. There is a built-in irony behind Nora's decision. She abandons her husband because she has failed to be romantically heroic. If he were so, Nora would still be playing the role of a puppet House-wife. So; the irony is that Nora's motives have been based on idealistic and romantically exaggerated expectations. The values of women and the needs of women must be incorporated into the society, the sooner the better and the more the better because it is when this comes forward that balance will occur in the human society

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