

**Discuss A Doll's House as a feminist play.**

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is beyond doubt a major 19th century playwright. A Doll's House is a representative feminist play. It deals primarily with the desire of a woman to establish her dignity and identity in a patriarchal society governed by men.

Feminism is a movement which tries to define and establish cultural, legal and social equality of women and their freedom. Jessica Valenti aptly defines feminism thus. She says that feminism is not about simply being a woman in a position of power. It is battling systemic inequities. It is a social justice movement that believes that class differences and racism, sexism exist and interconnect: and they should be challenged consistently. A Doll's House is a representative feminist play. The title of the play on one hand symbolises the curtailment of women's rights and freedom: and on the other, it suggests that women are treated as dolls in the patriarchal society. A Doll's House concerns a woman's rights to individual freedom and the ways in which marriage in a patriarchal society obstructs the individuality of a woman who has all the potentials that her husband has, to flourish.

A Doll's House is a play about the conjugal relationship between Nora and Torvald Helmer. Until the end of the play, Nora is presented as a dutiful wife, who caters to every need of her husband and performs all the wifely duties assigned to her by the patriarchal society. She sincerely loves her husband, and does everything to please him. The following statement of Nora addressed to Mrs Linde at once shows her love for her husband and the narrow range of her life: 'I am free from care now. ... to be able to play and romp with the children; ...to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it!'(p.25, Act 1) This ebullition comes when Torvald gets the bank job and Nora believes that she is free from her past, that is, before she meets Krogstad again. Nora's love and respect for her husband, Torvald, becomes evident when she warns Krogstad not to say anything against him: 'If you speak slightly of my husband, I shall turn you out of the house.'(p. 36, Act 2) This is when she does not know that Krogstad holds the power of blackmail against her. And little does she know how Torvald will turn away from her when he learns about her: in this light her admonition of Krogstad becomes ironical.

Ibsen's feminist slant finds expression through the character of Nora. Ibsen artistically portrays Nora's total dependence on her husband. When she thinks she is free from her past, she tells her friend Christine Linde: 'And, think of it, soon the spring will come and the big blue sky! Perhaps we shall be able to take a little trip... Oh, it's a wonderful thing to be alive and be happy.'(p.25, Act 1)

In this play, Ibsen also shows how women have been made devoid of freedom and thus made dependent on their male family members. It can be seen when Nora talks with Torvald about a dress that she will wear in a fancy-dress ball: 'Torvald, I can't get along a bit without your help.'(p. 44, Act 1) Another concern of feminism is the economic independence of women on the dominated male members of the society. When Torvald was sick, and the family needed money, Nora made some small income from crochet-work, embroidery, needlework (p. 17); and this fact gave her tremendous emotional satisfaction; '...then I have found other ways of earning money.... It was like being a man.'(p.24, Act 1) This implies the longing of a woman for freedom from the bonds of domesticity.

Nora, who had thought that in case Torvald came to know of her forgery, he would take the entire guilt on his shoulder; is astounded by her husband's indifferent attitude and even tremendous rage at her. She had thought that he was capable of making any sort of sacrifice for her sake, he proves to be a complacent, self-centered man solely concerned about his reputation. He scolds her and accuses her of a complete want of the sense of morality and responsibility; 'All your father's...want of principle has come out in you. No religion, no morality, no sense of duty'. (p. 97, Act 3)

Thus, Nora is completely disillusioned with her husband. In a typical authoritative and feminist voice she says; 'No, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either...you mustn't interrupt me.'(p.101-2, Chapter 3) Nora is no longer prepared to be Torvald's 'doll-wife' (p.104, Chapter 3). As a feminist, she complains that she had been treated as a doll both by her father and her husband; 'I have been greatly wronged, Torvald---first by papa and then by you.' (p.102, Chapter 3)

This shows how women are treated in a male-dominated society. They are treated like dolls, as if they do not have any choice, identity, life, will of their own. When the forged document has been destroyed, Torvald tries very much hard to reconcile with his wife. He says; 'But for the future it shall be different. Playtime shall be over, and lesson-time shall begin.'(p.104, Act 3) Nora's response is essentially feminist; '...you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you.'(p. 104, Act3) She also says; 'I must try and educate myself.... And that is why I am going to leave you now.'(p.104, Act 3) Nora's response when Torvald tries to be as authoritative as he has been throughout his life, reveals her feminist bias. When Torvald says; 'You are out of your mind! I won't allow it! I forbid you!' (p.105, Act 3) Nora replies; 'It is no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will take with me what belongs to myself. I will take nothing from you, either now or later.'(p.105, Act 3)

She is no longer prepared to blindly submit to the social conventions. She finally discovers that her most sacred duty is not to her children or to her husband; but to herself. Torvald repeatedly tries to win her over, but to no avail. When he says; 'Before all else, you are a wife and mother.'(p. 106, Act 3) Nora replies; 'I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are' (p. 106, Act 3) She goes on to manifest her feminist tendency by revolting against patriarchal society. She even condemns the patriarchal bias found in books and revolts against the arbitrary (whimsical) patriarchal divisions where creative and mental faculties are associated exclusively with the "masculine"; 'I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer contain myself with what most people say, or with books.'(p. 106, Act 3)

All through her married life, Nora has been nothing but a sex-object for Torvald. As Nora is completely disillusioned, her love for Torvald drops dead, and she leaves him and her children: 'Never to see him again.... Never to see my children again either---- never again.... Good-bye, Torvald and my children!'(p.95-96, Act 3) As Torvald tries to persuade her not to desert him, she pays no heed to his entreaties. She walks out of the doll's house, slamming the door behind her. The slamming of the door bears tremendous significance for the feminist interpretation of the play. It

symbolises Nora's revolt against patriarchal dictates. It also symbolises turning a deaf ear to the call of domesticity and Nora's decision to rise above the temptation of impulses like feelings and thus open a new door to identity and individuality.

In any discussion of A Doll's House as a feminist play, or simply as a play about women, it is necessary to rethink. Is it only about women? When asked about his intention in the play A Doll's House, Ibsen claimed that the play was not a "feminist" play, but rather a "humanist" play. What Ibsen meant was that the theme of this play was the need of every individual, whether male or female, to find out the kind of person he/she really is; and to strive to become that person. Ibsen meant that it was not about women only. His suggestion was that it was about justice to humanity in general. He saw that injustice was done to women and he wrote about it. And this is to say that the play is about injustice first and then about women. In any discussion of A Doll's House as a feminist play, or simply as a play about women, it is necessary to rethink. Is it only about women? When asked about his intention in the play A Doll's House, Ibsen claimed that the play was not a "feminist" play, but rather a "humanist" play. What Ibsen meant was that the theme of this play was the need of every individual, whether male or female, to find out the kind of person he/she really is; and to strive to become that person. Ibsen meant that it was not about women only. His suggestion was that it was about justice to humanity in general. He saw that injustice was done to women and he wrote about it. And this is to say that the play is about injustice first and then about women.