

PATRIARCHY AND SUPPRESSION OF WOMEN IN IBSEN'S PLAY "A DOLL'S HOUSE": A FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Zainab Rahim^{*1}, Mashal Ayub², Kashmala Aziz³, Marwa Afzal⁴

^{*1,2,3,4}MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

¹zaibagulla55@gmail.com, ²mashalayub980@gmail.com, ³kashmalaaziz30@gmail.com

⁴marwafzal2020@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Zainab Rahim

Abstract

The paper explores the subordination of women present in the patriarchal society by tracing the play A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen through the feminist lens, the third-wave feminism. The study interrogates the ways in which the female roles, identities and life choices are dictated by the patriarchal inherited practices by paying special attention to the socio-cultural construction of passivity and submission of the female gender. The method of research is qualitative and descriptive research design to study the words of Nora, the main character, and other women characters, who are carriers of the experience of women being in the oppressive hand of men. The textual analysis is used. The play by Ibsen is the main data; secondary information can be found in the articles, books, and theories of feminism as well, specifically in the works of Gerda Lerner The Creation of Patriarchy. The results indicate that women in A Dolls House are portrayed as deprived with a sense of autonomy, and partaking in no decision making processes and appreciated mainly due to the ornamental and household aspects. The story of Nora, who changes herself, overcoming being a mere doll of her husband and understanding herself as a woman with her own rights, shows not only how grave the patriarchal oppression is based, but also the self-realization of a woman is possible. The given research explains the topicality of Ibsen in concerning the gender issues of today, proving that the confrontation with the patriarchic norms is one of the main feminist concerns of nowadays.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study:

Societal inequality and gap between men and women is the keystone of unjustness women comes face-to-face in the world. Women all over the world face a great deal of brutality and ill-treatment because of men domination and societal structures. This maltreatment occurs with shocking regularity in SouthAsia, Middle East, African societies and Europe. Every section of the society is affected by it.

Feminism is a belief that Women should not be disadvantaged by their sex ; they should recognize as having a human dignity equal to men and that should

have opportunity to live as fulfilling as freely chosen live as men (Okin,1999).

The history of Feminism involves the story of Feminist movements and of Feminist thinkers.

Depending on time, culture and country, feminist around the world have sometimes had different goals and causes. The history of modern west feminist movements is divided into three waves. Each is described as dealing with different aspects of the same Feminist issues. The First Wave refers to the movement of 19th century through early 20th centuries, which dealt mainly with suffrage, working

conditions and educational rights for women. The Second Wave (1960s-1980s) dealt mainly with inequality of laws, as well as culture inequalities and the role of the women in society. The Third Wave of Feminism (the late 1980s- early 1990s) is seen as both continuation of the second wave which was a battle against Sexism, Racism, and Patriarchy which leads women to suffer a lot in a society.

Feminism is the belief that men and women are equal in every manner. The researchers have used feminism as a research framework to highlight gender inequality and deprivation of women in Ibsen's *The Doll House*. The researchers have used the feminist critical discussions of Gerda Lerner's in the book "The Creation of Patriarchy" as the framework of this study. The researchers have written about women's sacrifices and oppression. Henrik Ibsen was a famous playwright mostly known for his work on feminism but he did not mention himself as a feminist but a true humanist. His drama is based on the theme of patriarchy. Patriarchy refers to the socially constructed dominance of men in which women are considered as weak, fragile, irrational. Women have expected to obey the male members of their family as heads (Ibsen, 1879).

The researchers have applied third wave of feminism which is against sexism and patriarchy. The third wave of feminism depicts that patriarchy is the social evil and a big obstacle in the way of women's success and it also leads to violence on women. Its main aim is to highlight patriarchal society and suppression of women and also create awareness in the women to fight against patriarchy. This wave of feminism stated the general liberation for the women and to transfer the perception about women to weak, fragile and irrational to strong, powerful and rational human being. The wave main aim was to give freedom to every individual. This wave gave rise to powerful women and a series of women liberation which depicted the smart and independent women. It also gave rise to Disney heroine such as Mulan and Helen Parr. It was a rise of women in leading role in television characters such as Dora the explorer, Carly and Sam.

Literature and Feminism

The Feminist Movement talks about women's issues and rights and want to bring them to the front page

whose voices are silenced. In Today modern world though women are enjoying equality, moving forward but even there are still hindrances created by the patriarchal system in her way. Most importantly women from the upper class or urban women are enjoying luxurious life, have more personal freedom and advantages. They have access to education, job opportunities but the lower class and rural women are facing traditional and cultural restraints. A feminist theorist aim is to let the reader figure out about the position of women in society, the cultural values and tradition that shapes her and how they are described with reference to men. Their effort is to make the women conscious of their victimization at the hands of men.

The researchers have used critical discussion of Gerda Lerner's book "The Creation of Patriarchy" as their theoretical framework which stated that women have a big role in creation of patriarchy. She also said that there is no physical or psychological difference between male and female but the difference is only in our perception through histories. She further stated that women are responsible for their subjugation. As patriarchy has its history so it can be ended through historical process. She wrote in her book that men have learnt to subjugate women and another people by practicing dominance over women. According to some ancient codes women or enslave because of economic dependency and stability on men, men keep them because they fulfill their biological needs and give them offspring. She stated that patriarchal men hold primary control and privileges; women were excluded from all decisions and property. The men were the only owners of the property.

Third wave of emerged the mid-1990s, it was led by so called generation Xers who, born in the 1960,s and 170,s in the developed world arrive of age in a media _Saturated and culturally and financially different milieu.

The third wave was proceeded possible by the good increase scope of economic and occupation and powerfulness and position achieved by women of the second wave, the huge expansion in opportunities for the dissemination of ideas created by the information uprising of the late 20th century, and the approaching of age of generation scholars and activities quickest action corporation became in 1997 the third wave foundation dedicated to supporting

"Groups and individuals working toward gender, racial, economic and social justice " both were founded by Rebecca walker, the daughter of the novelist and second wavers Alice walker.

Third wavers began both sabotaging and reconstructed the machine itself. Influenced by the postmodernist movement in the academy, third wave feminists sought to question, reclaim, and redefine the ideas words and media that have transmitted ideas about adulthood, gender, beauty, sexuality, femininity and masculinity among other things from this perspective each person is seen as possessing, and surprising the full range of traits that has previously been associated with one gender or other.

In creation and position to stereotypical images of women as passive, weak Virginal, and faithful or, alternatively as browbeat slutty and emasculating the third wave redefined women and girls as forceful powerful and their own sexuality. Unsurprising , third wavers faced critic, Even as the third wave found its voice , some writer were declaring themselves postfeminist and maintain that the movement had lived beyond it usefulness .

Research Problem

The socio-cultural norms tend to render male dominance in the patriarchal systems, silencing women, withholding their basic rights and limiting their freedoms in personal and society-related aspects. *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen is a spectacle of such mechanics as Nora is a person whose life choices are governed by her father and subsequently by her husband. This makes her be regarded as a decorative property as opposed to a person of free will despite her personal ambitions and abilities. Herein lies the issue of connecting the process of comprehension of those patriarchal customs, ascribed to us by the play as someone inheriting them, with what are the major trends in the society concerning female oppression, inaction, and subordination as seen in the context of third-wave feminism.

Research Questions

1. How does *A Doll's House* depict the suppression of women through patriarchal inherited practices?

2. In what ways does Nora's passivity reflect the socio-cultural construction of gender roles in a patriarchal society?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the portrayal of patriarchal inherited practices in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and their role in suppressing women's autonomy.
2. To examine how Nora's passivity serves as a reflection of the socio-cultural norms and gender expectations in male-dominated societies.

Literature

A Doll's House is one of the famous plays of Henrik Ibsen. The play has been discussed from different point of views. Critics and reviewers have discussed it from different angles, in this chapter I will review the literature related to patriarchy and gender inequality. Fatima Ghafourinia (2014) in her work *The Women's Right in Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House* stated that social restrictions which are imposed on women to behave like a doll is the root cause of all the problems . She further stated that women are bounded with invisible forces of patriarchal society which leads women to suffer and bear all suppressions (Ghafourinia, 2014).

Abida Sultana (2012) in her work concluded that patriarchal institutions and social systems are the obstacles in the way of women success. In modern world where female go ahead by merit in every field, patriarchal institutions appear as a major source disturbance like an obstacle in their ways. Patriarchal society gives primary importance to men and secondary and inferior status to women (Sultana, 2012). Patriarchy refers to men domination over female in both public and private area.

Ishfaq Hussain Bhatt (2017) in his work on feminism criticized patriarchy; as women been dominated by men and destroyed their identities and dignities and their basic rights is violated by men in the name of love. In social criteria of patriarchy there is no love and respect for women despite the fact that they work like a machine. Women take care of their father and brothers first and after marriage they obey their husbands and work day and night for their children. It is very difficult to live in patriarchal system for

women (Bhatt, 2017).

Godiya Allanana Makama (2013) in her work a patriarchal society condemn the rules made for women that they are just the object of entertainment and her place is only in kitchen and bed. She further said that women become the victim of forced marriage, prostitution, trafficking and misfit in a society. Women are just used for domestic intentions and they are kept away from any other works (Bhatt, 2017).

Nirmala Kumara in her literary work tried to explain the representation of women in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. The research has been described the stereotyping, discrimination, externalization, persecution and patriarchy in the play. Nora in the play struggles against the inhuman and mistreatment of women which leads her to liberation. Critics of that time criticized the play and questioned Nora's motherhood but writer justifies her liberation because she has suffered a lot due to which she went from her home permanently.

Research Methodology

The researchers have used both primary and secondary data for this research. The primary source of the research is the play *A Doll's House* and the secondary sources of the research are works of other writers, different journals, articles, websites etc. These collected is more relevant and related to the research problem. In primary source the researchers have taken appropriate and related lines, dialogues, and characters which are the subject matter of the research.

The secondary data is the introduction of the writer, and introduction to research's theory, articles in which work has done and which are closely relevant to the researcher's topic.

This present research is qualitative in nature. The researchers have collected only appropriate data from the text *A Doll's House*. This research has highlighted women's suppression in the patriarchal society. The researchers have explained the collected data through qualitative and descriptive method. This research will base on patriarchy in the play *A Doll's House*. The Researchers have explored women suppression, oppression, and exploitation in the play through absolute, authentic and detailed analysis. The researchers have explored through different acts that

in what way Nora suffers in patriarchal society and how she is exploited. In that time women were considered weak and fragile.

The researchers have used different contents to fulfill their needs for the project. The researchers have used the theme of the play to fulfill the needs related to the topic. The researchers have used dictionaries to find the meaning of difficult words. The researchers have read the play thoroughly to depict researcher's main topic through different characters. In order to find out compare and contrast between the previous work and present work researchers have analyzed through secondary sources.

Analysis and Discussion

This chapter discusses the analysis of "women's" attainments of their due rights in their concerned society. This chapter discusses the analysis of "patriarchal inherited practices" in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. The researcher focuses on the socio-cultural practices in the construction of patriarchal practices. As Patriarchal society is male dominant society so the women are considered submissive and inferior. Men have absolute power. In the name of set pattern and rules of society women are being exploited. The study attempts to analyze the difficult and unfortunate situation of women.

Nora's Passivity is clearly seen in the opening of the play. The play opens up with Nora asking the maid to hide the Christmas tree. "*Hide the tree well, Helene*". Just something as simple as hiding a Christmas tree shows us that Nora is a type of wife that is willing to hide secret from the family even if it's something as small and meaningless as a tree. Though a small incident it can cause, Nora rather hide it just to please her husband. This event shows her willingness to subject to her husband's ruling and shows her passivity in her own household. Having to think before she acts and not having the assertion in the things she wants further shows her passivity to her husband and in her life.

Henrik Ibsen in his play *A Doll's House* depicted the patriarchal society and the suppression of women. Women have no rights to decide their own life. There is male domination and they are deciding the fate of their women. Even in the marriage which is the most important part of the life and the future of an individual. Like in the play Nora's father treats her like a doll and after that her husband does the same.

shows the exploitation of women in patriarchal society. There are some lines taken from the play which shows how women have been treated in patriarchal society.

“Nora. I mean that I was simply transferred from papa’s hand into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you else’s I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other it reminds me if I had been living here like a poor woman.”

In this play, it has been observed about the suppression of women in patriarchal society under the framework of third wave of Feminism which shows the treatment of a woman throughout the history. In the above passage it is quite clear that Nora’s father treated her like a doll means he did whatever he want. He also did not ask Nora about the proposal whether she is happy with it or not and he transferred her to another man who also treated her like a puppet. She passed her childhood in such situation where no one is ready to hear from her about her like and dislike. Sometime she is not happy about the going action but she does not have confident to speak herself. Nora was not happy with him but she just pretends to be happy and considers herself a poor woman who has no value in her house. She considers herself as fragile as other people think about her so she doesn’t speak for her due rights.

“Nora. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvalds. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

Helmer; how unreasonable and how ungrateful you are, Nora! Have you not been happy here?

Nora. No, I have not been happy, I thought I was , but it has never really been so.”

In the above passage the suppression of woman can be seen as that Nora tried hard for her home and performed like a doll. Both men in her life had destroyed her life. She wanted to do something in her life but her father and husband restricted her to her home only. And when she said this to her husband he scolded her by saying her ungrateful that if he has given her the best life which she deserves. He also replied but saying that I have performed my duty but you are not thankful to me.

She is made that she would not speak for herself because she was driven to behave like this, although she may opportunity to speak freely for her concerned rights in her husband’s home.

“Nora. Tell me; is it really true that you did not love your husband? Why did you marry him?

Mrs. Linde. My mother was alive then, and was bedridden and helpless, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justifying in refusing his offer”

In the above passage it is quite clear from the character of Mrs. Linde (Nora’s friend) that woman was so dependent on man that she married a man whom she did not love but by getting financial stability she married her. She did not consider herself able to take the responsibilities of her brothers. That’s why she got married to whom she did not love.

In the above paragraph, it has been observed clearly that Nora is asking about the proposal from Mrs. Linda and she replays that time I was not willing to act upon their proposal but I was not allowed and even my mother had not confident and she was helpless in such circumstances. This scene shows that women in that society even are not considered to speak for her marriage to whom they should marry or not and even it is one of the basic right of women. No religion is against in such situation that a girl should present her consent in such situation but in this scenario women are ignored and demolarized.

Conclusion

From this research, the writer concludes that Nora, a silly girl, decisive and obstinate woman. As the main character in this story; she can prove that she can be as equal as other people do. She is able to have a good education and job to earn her own money, so that she can manage hers life independently but in the whole discussion she plays a role of a passive , weak and unwilling to speak her thoughts and view to her husband.

At the beginning of *A Doll’s House*, Nora seems completely happy. She responds affectionately to Torvald’s teasing, speaks with excitement about the extra money his new job will provide, and takes pleasure in the company of her children and friends. She does not seem to mind her doll-like existence, in which she is coddled, pampered, and patronized.

As the play progresses, Nora reveals that she is not just a “silly girl,” as Torvald calls her. That she understands the business details related to the debt she incurred taking out a loan to preserve Torvald’s health indicates that she is intelligent and possesses capacities beyond mere wifehood. Her description of her years of secret labor undertaken to pay off her debt shows her fierce determination and ambition. Additionally, the fact that she was willing to break the law in order to ensure Torvald’s health shows her courage.

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