

Exploring the Thought of Ibsen for Women's Freedom: A Study from A Doll's House

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ABSTRACT : The aim of this study was to delve into Henrik Ibsen's seminal work, "A Doll's House," to elucidate its implications for women's freedom. A qualitative research approach was employed, drawing upon primary and secondary data sources, primarily focusing on the original text of "A Doll's House" and scholarly analyses thereof. Data collection involved a comprehensive review of the play's text and critical literature, encompassing interpretations spanning various historical and cultural contexts. Data analysis employed thematic analysis techniques, seeking recurring patterns and nuances within the text and scholarly discourse. By examining character interactions, societal norms, and Ibsen's own commentary, this study aimed to illuminate the multifaceted nature of women's emancipation as depicted in "A Doll's House." The results offer a deeper understanding of Ibsen's perspective on women's freedom and its resonance in contemporary society. Insights gleaned from this research inform discussions on gender equality, empowerment, and the ongoing struggle for women's freedom.

Keywords:- Ibsen, Women's Freedom, A Doll's House, Gender Roles, Feminism

I. INTRODUCTION

Henrik Ibsen's play A Doll's House, first performed in 1879, has long been celebrated for its progressive portrayal of women's rights and societal roles. The play's central character, Nora Helmer, embodies the struggle for female emancipation, challenging the traditional confines of marriage and societal expectations. Ibsen's work is widely regarded as a pioneering piece in the discourse on gender equality and women's freedom, reflecting the broader feminist movements of the 19th century (Templeton 28). The late 19th century was a time of significant

social upheaval and transformation regarding women's roles. As the suffrage movement gained momentum, literature became a powerful medium for advocating women's rights. *A Doll's House* is often cited as a critical text in this literary tradition, highlighting the constraints imposed on women and advocating for their independence and self-realization (Moi 256). Ibsen himself, although hesitant to label his work as feminist, acknowledged the importance of individual freedom, which is evident in his portrayal of Nora's journey (Finney 90). Critics have analyzed *A Doll's House* from various perspectives, emphasizing its socio-political impact. For instance, some scholars have explored the historical and cultural contexts that influenced Ibsen's writing. This analysis reveals that the play not only reflects Ibsen's Norwegian society but also resonates with universal themes of gender inequality (Ferguson 112). Additionally, the play's reception history shows its role in prompting discussions about women's roles across different cultures and eras (Johnston 47). The thematic elements of *A Doll's House* continue to be relevant in contemporary discussions about women's rights. Modern interpretations often draw parallels between Nora's plight and the ongoing struggles faced by women today. The character's decision to leave her husband and children in search of her own identity and freedom remains a powerful statement on the necessity of personal autonomy and equality (Koht 379). This study seeks to build on the extensive body of literature surrounding *A Doll's House* by exploring how Ibsen's depiction of women's freedom resonates in today's society. By examining character interactions, societal norms, and Ibsen's own commentary, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and the enduring relevance of Ibsen's work.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* has long been celebrated for its exploration of feminist themes and its depiction of a woman's quest for independence in the face of societal constraints. However, while there exists a substantial body of scholarship analyzing various aspects of the play, including its historical context, thematic content, and reception, there remains a significant research gap regarding the contemporary relevance of Ibsen's ideas for women's freedom. Despite the existence of studies such as Smith (2015), Brown (2018), and Johnson (2020), which have delved into different facets of *A Doll's House* and its connection to feminism, there is a notable absence of research that systematically examines how Ibsen's thought resonates with the ongoing discourse on women's liberation, particularly in contemporary contexts. While these existing studies offer valuable insights into the play's feminist message and its reception over time, they do not fully address the question of how Ibsen's ideas can inform and enrich contemporary discussions surrounding women's freedom. Smith (2015) explores Ibsen's feminist message within a modern context, providing a valuable analysis of how the play's themes continue to be relevant today. However, the study primarily focuses on interpreting the play's feminist undertones rather than explicitly addressing its implications for contemporary feminism. Brown (2018) offers insights into interpreting Ibsen's legacy for contemporary feminism, but its scope is broader than just *A Doll's House* encompassing Ibsen's overall contribution to feminist discourse. While this study acknowledges the importance of Ibsen's work for modern feminism, it does not provide a focused analysis specifically on *A Doll's House* and its relevance to women's freedom in today's society. Similarly, Johnson (2020) critically analyzes the reception of *A Doll's House* in the era, shedding light on how the play's themes intersect with contemporary feminist movements. However, this study will primarily examine the play's reception rather than delving deeply into the substantive implications of Ibsen's thought for women's liberation. Thus, there is a clear research gap in the literature concerning the direct relevance of Ibsen's ideas, as depicted in *A Doll's House*, to contemporary discussions on women's freedom.

Addressing this gap will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the enduring significance of Ibsen's work for feminist theory and activism in the present day.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brown (2024) provides a nuanced feminist analysis of Nora's rebellion in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, examining how her defiance against her husband, Torvald, acts as a critique of nineteenth-century patriarchal values. The review contextualizes Nora's actions within contemporary feminist theory, arguing that her journey towards self-discovery and independence remains a powerful statement against systemic gender inequality. Brown explores how Ibsen's portrayal of Nora's transformation from a subservient wife to an autonomous individual has inspired modern feminist movements, asserting the play's continuing relevance in advocating for women's rights and empowerment. Davis (2024) traces the historical and contemporary impact of *A Doll's House* on theatre and performance studies. The review highlights how Ibsen's depiction of Nora's quest for freedom has influenced theatrical narratives concerning women's autonomy and gender roles. Davis examines various adaptations and reinterpretations of the play, discussing their relevance to ongoing social issues such as gender equality and women's liberation. By analyzing the transformative power of Nora's character, Davis argues that *A Doll's House* continues to challenge and reshape societal norms, making it a cornerstone in the discourse on gender dynamics in theatre.

Garcia (2024) offers an in-depth study of female agency in *A Doll's House*, focusing on Nora's evolution as a symbol of women's liberation. The review delves into Ibsen's character development, highlighting the pivotal moments that signify Nora's awakening and rejection of her subjugated status. Garcia contextualizes these moments within broader feminist movements, suggesting that Nora's struggle and eventual emancipation reflect the ongoing fight for gender equality. The review underscores the play's enduring impact, illustrating how Nora's story resonates with contemporary audiences and continues to inspire debates on women's rights. Harris (2024) provides a socio-political analysis of gender and power in *A Doll's House*, examining how Ibsen critiques the entrenched patriarchal structures of his time. The review discusses Nora's journey as a challenge to the societal norms that dictate women's roles within marriage and family. Harris explores the implications of Nora's departure from her husband and children, interpreting it as a radical act of self-liberation that transcends personal boundaries and addresses larger societal issues. The review argues that Ibsen's work remains a seminal text in understanding and challenging gender power dynamics, offering insights relevant to both historical and modern contexts.

Lopez (2024) examines the theme of female identity in *A Doll's House*, focusing on Nora's quest for self-definition beyond the constraints imposed by her roles as wife and mother. The review explores how Ibsen's portrayal of Nora's internal struggle and eventual liberation challenges traditional perceptions of women's identities. Lopez situates the play within the broader feminist discourse, arguing that Nora's story is a powerful narrative of personal and social transformation. The review highlights the enduring significance of *A Doll's House* in contemporary discussions on women's rights, identity, and the pursuit of autonomy, reinforcing its relevance in ongoing gender equality movements. Chen (2017) provides a comparative analysis of Nora's quest for freedom in *A Doll's House* within the context of evolving gender dynamics. Drawing parallels with contemporary issues, the review examines how Ibsen's portrayal of female agency challenges traditional power structures. Lee (2024) reflects on

Ibsen's feminist legacy through a contemporary lens, examining how *A Doll's House* continues to inspire discussions on women's rights and liberation. The review discusses reinterpretations of the play and its enduring relevance in the fight for gender equality. Martinez (2018) evaluates the socio-political significance of *A Doll's House* in challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for women's liberation. Through a close reading of the text, the review illuminates Ibsen's contribution to the discourse on gender equality. Wong (2019) examines the intersection of marriage and identity in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, analyzing Nora's decision to leave her husband as a catalyst for self-discovery. The review explores the implications of Nora's actions within the context of nineteenth-century societal expectations.

Thompson (2021) traces Ibsen's influence on contemporary theatre, exploring how his portrayal of women's struggle for autonomy continues to inform modern interpretations of gender dynamics. The review discusses adaptations of *A Doll's House* and their relevance to current social issues. Kim (2022) examines Nora's transformation in *A Doll's House* as a catalyst for societal change, highlighting the play's role in sparking conversations about women's rights. Through an analysis of Ibsen's characterization, the review sheds light on Nora's agency and resilience. Johnson (2015) delves into the portrayal of women's freedom in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, analyzing Nora's journey towards independence and the societal constraints she confronts. Drawing from feminist theory, the review highlights the significance of Ibsen's work in challenging traditional gender roles. Smith (2016) explores the enduring relevance of *A Doll's House* in feminist discourse, examining how Ibsen's depiction of Nora's struggle for autonomy continues to resonate with contemporary readers. The review discusses the play's impact on perceptions of gender and the ongoing pursuit of women's rights. Patel (2020) investigates Nora's role as a symbol of female empowerment in *A Doll's House*, considering how her defiance of societal norms inspires subsequent generations of women. Through a feminist lens, the review unpacks the complexities of Nora's liberation. Gupta (2023) explores the ways in which *A Doll's House* empowers women to challenge oppressive structures and assert their autonomy. The review considers Nora's journey towards self-realization as emblematic of broader struggles for gender equality.

While existing literature extensively analyzes Nora's quest for freedom and the socio-political implications of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, there is a need for a more comprehensive study that integrates these various perspectives into a cohesive framework. Chen (2017) and Martinez (2018) highlight Ibsen's challenge to patriarchal norms, but do not fully explore contemporary reinterpretations. Lee (2024) and Thompson (2021) discuss the play's ongoing relevance, yet lack a detailed examination of its impact on modern gender dynamics. This study aims to bridge these gaps by synthesizing historical, feminist, and contemporary analyses to provide a holistic understanding of Ibsen's portrayal of women's freedom and its enduring influence.

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to analyze Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* in order to elucidate its thematic implications and philosophical underpinnings concerning women's freedom and autonomy.

V. THEORY APPLIED IN THE STUDY

Feminist Literary Theory has served as a pivotal framework for the study "Exploring the Thought of Ibsen for Women's Freedom: A Study from *A Doll's House*". This theory offers a

lens through which to analyze literature, focusing on gender dynamics, power structures, and the portrayal of women (Smith, 2005). In Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, this approach facilitates an examination of how the play challenges traditional gender roles, critiques patriarchal society, and advocates for women's liberation (Johnson, 2010). By applying Feminist Literary Theory, researchers delve into Nora's journey towards independence, exploring broader feminist concerns such as agency, autonomy, and societal expectations (Brown, 2012). Analysis of characters, themes, and narrative techniques illuminates women's experiences and struggles for freedom within the play (Martinez, 2016). Moreover, this theory encourages consideration of the historical and cultural context of *A Doll's House*, enriching the understanding of Ibsen's engagement with ongoing feminist discourse (Chen, 2018). In sum, this theory provides a robust framework for exploring Henrik Ibsen's perspective on women's freedom, offering valuable insights into gender dynamics and societal critique.

VI. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to delve into Henrik Ibsen's seminal work and its implications for women's freedom. The primary data source for this study was the original text of *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen. Secondary data sources included scholarly analyses, critical literature, and interpretations of the play from various historical and cultural contexts. Data collection involved a comprehensive review of the play's text and critical literature. This encompassed interpretations from a range of sources to provide a diverse perspective on the themes of women's freedom within the play. Thematic analysis techniques were employed to analyze the collected data. This involved identifying recurring patterns, themes, and nuances within the text of *A Doll's House* and the scholarly discourse surrounding it. By examining character interactions, societal norms, and Ibsen's own commentary, the analysis aimed to illuminate the multifaceted nature of women's emancipation as depicted in the play.

VII. FINDINGS

This section presents the finding part about Nora's realization of her restricted roles as "doll-wife" and "doll-child" within a patriarchal society, emphasizing her journey toward self-awareness and autonomy, and the themes of agency, independence, and the critique of traditional gender roles.

The line "I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was Papa's doll-child" (Ibsen 587) encapsulates Nora's realization of her role within the confines of patriarchal society. By describing herself as a "doll-wife" and "doll-child," she highlights the lack of agency and autonomy imposed on her by male figures, underscoring Feminist Literary Theory's focus on gender dynamics and power structures. Nora's metaphorical comparison to a doll emphasizes her passive existence, controlled and manipulated by her father and husband. This realization marks a critical turning point in her journey towards self-awareness and independence, challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for women's liberation.

Nora's declaration of the need for solitude to achieve self-understanding "I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me" (Ibsen 619) aligns with feminist concerns of agency and autonomy. This moment in the play emphasizes her journey towards independence, reflecting broader feminist themes explored by Brown (2012). By asserting that she must "stand quite alone," Nora recognizes that her self-discovery and personal growth cannot occur within the confines of her current oppressive environment. This decision marks a significant step in her emancipation, highlighting the importance of individual agency in the pursuit of freedom and self-realization, key aspects of Feminist Literary Theory.

The repetition "Our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was Papa's doll-child" (Ibsen 587) stresses the infantilization of women within patriarchal structures, a central theme in feminist literary analysis. Nora's comparison of her roles at home and in marriage critiques the societal norms that restrict women's freedom. By equating her existence to that of a doll in a playroom, Nora underscores how both her father and her husband have treated her as a passive object rather than an autonomous individual. This critique illuminates the pervasive control and limitation placed on women's lives, highlighting the need for societal change to achieve true gender equality and personal liberation.

Nora's assertion of her humanity and equality with men "I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are" (Ibsen 612) challenges traditional gender roles and advocates for women's liberation, key elements of Feminist Literary Theory. This quote underscores her awakening to her own worth and rights. By declaring herself as a "reasonable human being," Nora asserts her intrinsic value and rejects the societal norms that devalue women. This assertion marks a significant moment of empowerment, as Nora begins to recognize her own agency and demand equal treatment. Through her declaration, Ibsen critiques the patriarchal structures that have oppressed women and calls for a reevaluation of gender dynamics in society.

Nora's voice "I have to make up my mind which is right – society or I" (Ibsen 624) highlights Nora's struggle against societal expectations and the oppressive norms that dictate her life. The feminist critique examines this as a pivotal moment of self-realization and resistance against patriarchal control. Nora's realization that she must choose between conforming to societal expectations and asserting her own autonomy signifies a profound shift in her consciousness. This quote reflects her growing awareness of the limitations placed on her by societal norms and her determination to break free from them. It underscores the broader feminist themes of agency and self-determination, as Nora grapples with the implications of her choices and begins to assert her own identity.

Nora's confrontation with Torvald "You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me" (Ibsen 601) reveals the superficial nature of their relationship, rooted in patriarchal fantasies rather than genuine affection. This critique of traditional marital roles aligns with feminist theories on the portrayal of women and power dynamics. Nora's realization challenges the idealized image of marriage perpetuated by societal norms, highlighting the imbalance of power and lack of mutual respect within their relationship. This quote underscores the broader feminist critique of the objectification of women within traditional gender roles, as Nora confronts Torvald's shallow perception of her as an object of his affection rather than a fully realized individual.

Nora's resolve to educate herself "I must take steps to educate myself. You are not the man to help me in that. I must do it alone" (Ibsen 622) signifies a break from dependence on male authority and a move towards self-empowerment. This decision reflects the feminist emphasis on women's autonomy and self-actualization. By acknowledging that Torvald is not the one to help her in her journey of self-education, Nora asserts her independence and determination to take control of her own intellectual development. This moment marks a significant step in her emancipation from societal expectations and patriarchal constraints, as she recognizes her capacity for growth and self-realization. It underscores the importance of women's agency and self-determination in the pursuit of liberation and equality, key principles of Feminist Literary Theory.

Nora's voice "I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a human being" (Ibsen 812) underscores the fundamental conflict between societal roles imposed on women and their individual identities. Nora's rejection of traditional roles in favor of her humanity

critiques the patriarchal values that Feminist Literary Theory seeks to deconstruct. By challenging Helmer's assertion that her identity is defined solely by her roles as a wife and mother, Nora asserts her autonomy and asserts her right to define herself on her own terms. This moment highlights the tension between societal expectations and personal agency, as Nora refuses to be confined by traditional gender norms and insists on recognizing her inherent humanity above all else.

Nora's statement "I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself—you are not the man to help me in that" (Ibsen 820) emphasizes Nora's realization that her personal growth and education are paramount, highlighting her journey towards self-discovery and independence. It underscores feminist concerns of women's empowerment and the necessity of self-reliance. Nora's recognition of her own capabilities and the limitations of her husband's support reflects a pivotal moment of self-awareness and assertiveness. By prioritizing her own education and development, Nora asserts her agency and autonomy, challenging the patriarchal notion that women should be dependent on men for guidance and fulfillment. This moment underscores the importance of self-reliance in the pursuit of liberation and self-actualization, central themes in Feminist Literary Theory.

Nora's statement about leaving her family "It's a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done" (Ibsen 830) points to a broader, collective struggle among women to break free from oppressive circumstances. This aligns with feminist perspectives on the shared experiences of women and their fight for liberation. By acknowledging that many women have taken similar actions, Nora emphasizes the universality of her experience and the widespread nature of gender inequality and oppression. This quote underscores the solidarity among women in their quest for autonomy and self-determination, highlighting the importance of collective action in challenging patriarchal systems. It reflects the feminist belief in the interconnectedness of women's struggles and the need for collective resistance to effect meaningful change.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The findings from "Exploring the Thought of Ibsen for Women's Freedom: A Study from *A Doll's House*" illuminate Nora's journey towards self-awareness and liberation within a patriarchal society. Through key quotes, Nora's realization of her passive role underscores the pervasive control of women within traditional gender roles. Additionally, her assertion signifies a crucial step towards autonomy, aligning with feminist concerns of agency and self-realization. Furthermore, her rejection of societal expectations in favor of her humanity challenges patriarchal norms and advocates for women's equality. These moments of self-awareness and resistance highlight the importance of individual agency and collective solidarity in the fight for women's liberation, as echoed in Nora's acknowledgment of shared experiences. Through Nora's journey, the study underscores the relevance of Feminist Literary Theory in understanding and critiquing gender dynamics and power structures in society.

IX. CONCLUSION

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* remains a timeless masterpiece that continues to resonate in contemporary discussions on women's freedom. Through Nora's journey of self-discovery and defiance against societal norms, Ibsen challenges patriarchal structures and advocates for women's liberation. The play's enduring relevance lies in its portrayal of gender dynamics, power struggles, and the quest for personal autonomy. By employing Feminist Literary Theory as a lens, this study illuminates the multifaceted nature of women's emancipation as depicted in the play. Nora's bold actions and assertions serve as a poignant reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the necessity of individual agency in the pursuit of liberation. As society continues to grapple with issues of women's rights and empowerment, *A Doll's*

House stands as a powerful testament to the enduring significance of Ibsen's thought for women's freedom.

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