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**A DOLL'S HOUSE AND THE COLLISION BETWEEN MATRIARCHAL INDIVIDUALITY AND
PATRIARCHAL SUBJUGATION**

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ABSTRACT

A Doll's House is a canonical modern play written by Henrik Ibsen. One of the world's greatest dramatists, Ibsen is also esteemably acknowledged as a true voice for women. He criticizes the dehumanizing social conditions and compulsions, which rendered the women vulnerable, of Norwegian society during the nineteenth century. In this play, his delineation of men's domination through patriarchal system can be taken on, using Marxist feminism. Ibsen writes in a very realistic manner. Wherever there is patriarchal society, there is ubiquitous domination on the female at large. It is a universal picture of family life and society among each and every class of people. If one can justifiably connect his sympathetically mirrored issues of female predicaments with the universal things in this play, then it will be a classic. So this text can be considered as a classic regarding patriarchal domination, relationship between men and women, the wretched condition of women and the wake-up call for being aware about individuality and emancipation. Ibsen never claims himself to be a feminist; rather he is a staunch humanist. There is a conspicuous picture of patriarchal society's domination and the condition of women in the face of patriarchy in *A Doll's House*. Ibsen sincerely looks at these issues and radically rejected this dehumanizations inflicted on the matriarchy. Ibsen also shows some reformations to change women's position. In this play, there are the recurrent themes of individuality, self-realization, freedom and liberation, which are indicative of his suggestions to eliminate social evils against the women and to empower them. Ibsen strongly believes that women have equal rights like men to prove them as autonomous individuals and normal human beings.

Key words: Patriarchal domination, individuality, Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Dehumanization

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INTRODUCTION

This paper stresses the role and rights of women in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879). It will focus, as well, on the position of women under the control of the invisible and visible hands and the pressures of patriarchal system in Norwegian society. To show the condition of women in society, the paper will critically assess several issues such as economic dependence of women, Nora's living in illusion and her concept of miracle, women's living in fool's paradise and their firm belief upon their husband, patriarchal domination, and ideology practiced by society as a tool of domination, necessity of social reform and women's awareness (as indicated by Nora's slam on the door in front of Helmer). To deal with these issues, theoretical approach is also pertinently undertaken. This paper decides to analyze the play relying on the theories of deconstruction, feminism and Marxist feminism. But structural and feminist analyses will merit more concentration here.

Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality of women and focuses on gender politics, power relation and sexuality. It campaigns on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual violence. It also includes domination, oppression and patriarchy. Feminist activism is a grass root movement which crosses class and race boundaries. Feminism includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. Feminists typically advocate or support the rights and equality of women.

In feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Patriarchal system is a social system in which men hold primary power. In family life, patriarchy is a system of relation between men and women where men dominate women and women live under manifold strictures. The male figure-brother, father, and husband- hold the primary power and they set rules and rigid strictures for their sister, daughter, wife and expect them to obey their each and every code of conduct. Ibsen in this play deciphers that women's role is limited to the domestic area. Nora has only sacred duties as a wife and as a mother. In this connection, we can pertinently cite what 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)".

Discussion

In this play, Ibsen shows inequality in Nora's household, patriarchal system and Nora's attitude to fight against patriarchy. This play deals with women's position and real condition in family and society. It tells about women who live under their husband's domination in the house. The central character of the play is Nora who is married to Torvald Helmer, a lawyer who later becomes the director of a bank. Nora's daily life is spoiled and locked in the house by her husband. Her life depends on her husband, especially in economic needs. Torvald being the only one financial source controls his family and all family decisions are determined by him. Hence, Nora's existence and opinion do not influence her family. The character of Nora is a symbol of women who are imprisoned by the brutalizing system made by men. So she is a colonized woman in the hand of a domestic colonizer, her husband and whole hostile society she inhabits.

Men's domination can be analyzed through Marxist feminism theory. According to Marxist Feminism, economy has great influence in maintaining relation between men and women. It deals with work division and economic power dependence. Nora depends on her husband and so she leads a life being the 'Other' in her family. Marxist feminism is the theory which explores human relation in the society such as sexuality, the domestic production, and the household (Beretns, 1995:102).

Marxist feminists believe that from economic dependence, all the discrimination arises. Nora Helmer and the other female figures portrayed in *A Doll's House* are the best models of the "second sex" or the 'Other' that the French existentialist Simon de Beauvoir discussed in her book *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir holds that girls are given a doll as an alter ego and in compensation. A girl is taught to be a woman and her "feminine" destiny is imposed on her by her teachers and society. She has, for example, no innate "maternal instinct". Judith Butler observes in the same vein that Beauvoir's formulation that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" distinguishes the terms "sex" and "gender"(. Borde and Malovany-Chevalier, in their complete English version, translated this formulation as "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" because in this

context (one of many different usages of "woman" in the book), the word is used by Beauvoir to mean woman as a construct or an idea, rather than woman as an individual or one of a group. Butler says that the book suggests that "gender" is an aspect of identity which is "gradually acquired". Butler sees *The Second Sex* as potentially providing a radical understanding of gender.

Women are always depicted as secondary to men. She does not exist as an entity by herself but as the 'Other'. The husband-wife relationship can be described here as master-slave relationship. Another example of the importance of economy that Marxist feminists focus is the character of Mrs. Linde. She had to marry someone she did not love in order to escape poverty. Later after the death of her husband, she had to work non-stop workdays. Therefore, the purpose of Marxist feminism is to describe women's basic material weakness, the relation between model of production and women's status as well as implementing feminine theory and class on the role of the family (Tong, 2006:139).

Helmer hates borrowing and debts. It is his strict morality about money. But he did not know that Nora already borrowed money long time before. From the beginning, Helmer has some fixed principles. He is so much concerned about his own reputation. He is a typical Victorian man of patriarchal ideology. He is a self-seeking person who did not see beyond himself. So, he cannot take Nora's borrowing money from Krogstad and her forgery simply. Thus, because of economic dependence and lack of job opportunity or source of money, Nora's climax of predicaments arises. In all economic scopes, men control the family finance in the household. Husband divides the works of both man women in different areas. Women focus on domestic works and men focus on public works (Tong, 9000:102). Thus, women's concentration is restricted to domestic life where they hardly get any scope to think about her very own self.

Women always live under illusion where most of the time they can't understand their miserable condition. Nora is the protagonist of the play who lives in a decorative surrounding as a doll and finds out that she is nothing but a controlled instrument in her husband's hands. Thus, women always live in an illusion and in a fool's paradise. Nora's forgery to save Helmer's life is an illegal action but she did it for she loves him. She thinks that if one day this secret is revealed, Helmer will protect her. Nora always thinks that it is her pride that she is able to save her husband's life. She says to Mrs. Linde-"I too have something to be proud and glad of (Ibsen1997)."

She believes that when Helmer knows it, he also praises her action and saves her from all these burden. He would take all the responsibility upon him. Helmer told Nora that if something unpleasant will happen, then he will handle all these things. As he says- "Let what will happen when it comes to the pinch, I shall have strength and courage enough. You shall see my shoulders are broad enough to bear the whole burden. The whole burden I say (Ibsen 1997)."

From his statement Nora believes that Helmer will save her and he will always remain beside her in all situations good or bad. She in her inner thought decides that she will not let her husband take the whole responsibility upon him. Helmer at another time says-"My darling wife! I feel as if I could never hold you close enough. Do you know Nora, I often wish some danger might threaten you, that I might risk body and soul and everything, everything for your dear sake (Ibsen 1997)."

It is very ironical because Helmer will not do anything like that. Nora always lives in a fantasy that her husband will save her from all kinds of scandal or danger and she is waiting for some miracle to happen as she says- "It's the miracle coming to pass".

But in reality nothing of that sort happens. Like Nora, every woman lives in a fool's paradise where they believe each and every word of their husbands but reality shows them the cruel opposite. Nora told doctor Rank proudly that-

"You know how deeply, how wonderfully Torvald loves me, he would not hesitate a moment to give his very life for my shake (Ibsen 1997)."

But after the exposure of the truth, Helmer becomes a different Helmer who only thinks about his reputation, honor not about his wife Nora. Thus, Nora's belief in miracle is shattered by the harsh and rude

behavior of Helmer. How innocent she was to think: "He would do it. Yes he would do it. He would do it in spite of all the world (Ibsen 1997)!"

Actually, it is a great irony that women cannot understand their own condition in family. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that she has three lovely children. She is too happy and she hates loneliness. Till then she does not know that she will be alone soon despising her doll's house. Helmer always addresses her as 'skylark' 'my squirrel' 'song bird' and so on but that does not mean that he loves her whole heartedly. Actually there is no love, and spiritual communion between them. If there, then Nora could share about her borrowing money but she could not do that. If Helmer loved her, then Helmer would also forgive her. In this male dominated society, the word like purity, innocence, virginity all are applied to women. If women remain silent against all oppressions, then they will be held as pure, great, and angelic. But if they do not obey the rules and try to protest against oppressive constructs, then they will be branded as Devils and monsters. Feminist critics Sander Gilbert and Susan Gubar use these two words repeatedly 'Angel' and 'Monster' in their book *The Mad Women in the Attic*.

From the beginning of civilization, women are considered inferior to men. They are the victims of patriarchal domination. Women faced lots of restrictions in family, society and everywhere in the past and even now women's condition still remains the same. In the previous times, women could not go outside, and they could not be educated. Educational institutions were created only for men. Women could not express their feelings, thoughts, and their inner wishes. Everywhere there were only restrictions. Women always face a big "no" from their family, society, and also from their religion. There is always the word- Never, Never and Never.

In this male dominated society, women always become the victims of domination. Our religion, law, society's rules all are created in favour of men. Men dominate women in the excuse of family and society's standard rules and regulations, religion and law. A husband dominates his wife both physically and mentally but the wife has no right to protest. When she protests, she becomes a vile woman to her husband, even to the society. This is the social standard that women must tolerate everything without any protest. We are now living in the 21st century. We have passed lots of era but can we change the condition of women? Can we stop the oppression and domination of the male people? From the aristocratic to the poor, from the educated to the illiterate, the condition of women is the same.

Another point is the question of liberty. How much freedom does a woman get? From their birth to their death, they only face restrictions. Adrienne Rich's poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" powerfully represents these issues. They always face- 'never do that, never say so, never go there etc'. In this play, Nora's life is also totally controlled by Helmer. Every time he calls her, he gives her some kinds of advice that things should be like this and like that. He imposes restrictions upon her eating chocolate and ice-cream, he gives her advice to be frugal and not to spend money according to her own wish and in many other cases. African feminist writer Ama Ata Aidoo depicts the life and condition of women in her short stories. To describe it she brings the terms 'Womanism' and 'Feminism' in her short stories. Feministic writers are against the dominating attitude of the society. They struggle to establish equal rights of women besides men. In her story "The Girl Who Can" a girl named Adjoa is a victim of society's prejudice. There are lots of social prejudices that girls cannot do that, girls cannot say that, girls cannot go there etc. The grandma of Adjoa always says her when she wants to know something or when she asks anything- "Never, never, but never to repeat that (Aidoo 2002)."

Women's husband and children are considered to be blessings for her. Ama Ata Aidoo shows it in her another short story "Lice". If a woman is not happy after getting all these blessings, then curse comes to her verbally - "what more do you want? Shouldn't you feel happy with these blessings?"

A woman should bear everything silently because she is a woman. From their childhood girls are taught to remain silent in every situation however worse it is. In the story "Lice", Sissie's mother advised her:

"My child, don't complain so much (Aidoo 2002)."

If one wants to talk about a pure woman, then he/she must talk about a silent woman. Thus, women have to accept everything in every bad situation. In this play, in the case of Nora, before her marriage, she

lived under the shadow of her father. A small Nora just stays at home and plays with a doll while her father works outside. Her father never permits her to play outside the home with her friends. After marriage, her condition remains the same. She is trapped and never given an opportunity to work outside home by her husband. Her husband has full power on his wife so that he can do whatever he wants to do to his wife. The wife is economically dependent on her husband because she cannot earn money by her own efforts. Helmer praises her whenever he wishes and then if he finds any fault then he does not hesitate to call her as 'hypocrite', 'criminal', 'liar'. He says- "Wretched women- what have you done?(Ibsen 1997)."Thinking about his own honor and reputation he continuously rebukes her."You have destroyed my whole happiness. You have destroyed my future" .It is the same Helmer who calls her his song bird, squirrel and skylark. How ironical it is! Realizing the true fact, Nora tells in her agony-

"I have had great injustice done me, Torvald first by father and then by you(Ibsen 1997)."

Then she knows that her husband never loved her. She again says-

"You have never loved me. You only thought it amusing to be in love with me".

She understands well that being a woman, she leads her life like a doll. She says-

"Here I have been your doll wife just as at home I used to be Papa's doll child."

The situation is same for all women in all time. Thus Ibsen makes his theme universal.

Feminism can actually be understood by the theoretical concept of deconstruction. There is actually no gender identity, which is like a meaning given and assimilated by the society. The gender identity is given by the society. This male female decimation is made by society. The male dominated society arbitrarily presents women as 'second sex' who are considered to be inferior to men. There are the ideas of 'defer' and 'differ' of Derrida which can be applied in feminism. Society can present a woman as pure, innocent, and virgin. This same society can also present her as a devilish, monstrous character.

From the typical Victorian period till now women are compromising to cope with the situation. It is the men who are the representative of the society. Women lead a life sacrificing their individuality; they live under the influence of men. In mythology we also see the miserable condition of women. We all know that *Ramayana* is a famous religious book of Hindu community. We all know that Sita was pure; her virginity was not spoiled by Ravana. Ram is her husband who loves and believes Sita. But could Ram save Sita from the evil curse and blame of the society? Could Ram voice strongly that Sita is pure? Ram could not say so because he is not strong enough to protect his wife's honor. He did not have that courage to believe that Sita is pure. Thus, a woman is told pure, innocent, virgin, angel and so on before she falls in any crisis. She is told so because everyone knows that she is really innocent and pure but during the time of crisis, the malicious male subconscious of the male/husband is revealed. When a woman thinks about her individuality, it becomes impossible on her part to live with her husband. As such, it is not possible for Nora to live with her husband Helmer who is a stranger to her at the end of the play. She repeatedly told Helmer that she did everything for his sake but Helmer continuously rebukes her. Nora says-"It is true I have loved you beyond all else in the world. (Ibsen 1997)." So did happen to Tess in Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

When she realized that her sacrifice has no value to Helmer, she decided to leave the house. For these eight years of marital life this is their first serious conversation as we see before that there is communication gap between them. There is no understanding between them. They are just passing their days meaninglessly. She entreats her husband, "Sit down Torvald, you and I have much to say to each other...You don't understand me and I have never understand you till tonight (Ibsen 1997)."For the first time Nora understands her own position and situation in her family.

"We have been married eight years. Does it not strike you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife have talked together seriously? (Ibsen 1997)."

Women always sacrifice everything but this sacrifice has no value to men. Nora hides her illness to her husband only because it will hamper his happiness. She borrowed money for his sake and she does not inform him only because it will taint his honor. She very technically handles the situation. She saves money by reducing her own expenditure, and she bought cheap things for herself and tried her best to pay off her debt.

But her husband does not acknowledge any of her self-effacing efforts; rather he does not hesitate to call her a devil and hypocrite.

Is a woman born only to play her role as a daughter, later as a wife and mother? It is a big question as by obeying their duties, they hardly get any opportunity to change their fate, to discover their individuality and potentiality in many cases. As for Nora's case, marriage and motherhood have been for her a kind of existence in a doll's house in which she had played with her children, with her husband even with her father before her marriage. Another example can be brought from the play *Alcestis* by Euripides. Alcestis is ready to sacrifice her own life for the sake of saving her husband's life. But her husband Admetus only talks about his own life. He contemplates over his love for his wife: how will he live without his dear wife? But it is very ironical as he knows well that Alcestis is going to die for his sake. He never tells her not to die, he never tells that he is ready to accept his fate- death. This is the real nature of male people, all their emotions are just for show off, and in reality they never sacrifice anything.

In *Srikrishnakirton*, we see that Krishna at first tried his best to get Radha's love. He tries to convince Radha about his love for her. He compels her to surrender her virginity to him. All is just for his physical passion. When Radha really falls in love with Krishna then Krishna does not respond anymore. He does not try to understand Radha's distress; rather he rebukes Radha by using many vulgar words. He went to Mothura leaving Radha in enormous agony and distress. This is the real nature of the male who only think about their own interest, honour, and reputation. In this play, Helmer becomes angry only because his reputation is in danger. But when he sees that there is no fear of losing his honor then he becomes calm and easy-"I am saved! Nora I am saved! (Ibsen 1997)." Again he uses adorable language to address Nora. He praises Nora for her love for him. "I know that what you did was all for love of me."

Men's reputation or ego is the main thing for them. There is no place for reciprocity of passion, compassion and love or anything else when their egotistic sense of honor falls in the face of threat. As Helmer says-"But no man sacrifices his honor even for one he loves." Whereas men cannot sacrifice anything for women's sake, women always sacrifice everything for their husband's sake as Nora says- "Millions of women have done so."

There is double standard in patriarchal society. There is one standard for men and another standard for women. If a man does any mischief, then he is forgiven. But if a woman makes any mistake, then only curse and punishment come to her life. The example of the condition of Tess in the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* can be brought here where Angel leaves her despite his having a similar scandal. After knowing everything about Angel Clare, Tess can accept him without any hesitation. But in a case where Tess is not willingly involved, Angel cannot accept that. This is the double standard. Men's purity and prestige stands above everything and the subject of main concern to them. When Nora leaves the house, Elmer thinks about his reputation. He thinks that tomorrow everyone will say that his wife has left him. It is insulting for him because it will spoil his 'honor'. Thus, in such a crucial moment, the concern for his reputation comes first and then at last comes his love for Nora.

Women are the innocent victims of patriarchal ideology and hegemonic power. There are so many obstacles for women, e.g., the society, the law and the religion. The society is the patriarchal society controlled by men, the law is made by people and law is made in favour of men. Then come the religious apparatuses which are the main tool used by society for domination. The rules and laws are created by men, so these are flexible for rendering the women victimized.

Religion is used over history to suppress women. In religion, there are so many restrictions upon women as in the novel *Tree Without Roots*(1948) by Syed Waliullah, Majeed uses religion to oppress and control his wives Rahima and Jamila. In this play, Helmer also tries to control Nora by saying- "Have you not religion?" The religion and the church were always on the side of men.

Patriarchal society thus uses religion, law, social standard, women's sacrificing duty towards family and so forth to dominate women. Ideology is not so innocent. It has the power of domination. According to the law of the society, father is the legal guardian of the children; mother is just a submissive and slave. A

mother is only considered a caretaker of the children according to law. So, a mother is not allowed to take her children with her while leaving her husband's house. Nora also cannot take her children with her. Nora cannot take her children because of this rule of society, law and religion. Law does not allow women to take their children but when women show their audacity to leave their husband's house leaving their children, religion blames her by terming her as an 'Evil/ devil mother'. Thus, many women cannot leave their husband's house because of their children. But Nora is able to break that emotional bond.

Men also blackmail women by reminding her about her sacred duties towards family. As in this play, Helmer tells Nora-

"This is monstrous! Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?"

"What do you consider my holiest duties?"

"Do I need to tell you that? Your duties to your husband and your children?(Ibsen 1997)."

But Nora here shows her audacity deciding to leave the house and face the outside world even though she had heard about the difficulties of the outside world from Mrs. Linde. She is jobless, so she has no financial support despite it she says- "I have other duties equally sacred".

Here Nora is a conscious Nora. We see a drastic metamorphosis in Nora. Thus Nora is conscious about her own identity who wants to come out of the boundary of 'Other' and wants to be an individualistic 'One'. She enunciates in a bold voice that she has duties towards herself- "My duties towards myself." "I believe that before all these I am a human being, just as much as you are- or at least that I should try to become one. (Ibsen 1997)".

Thus, patriarchal society dominates women by using some of the constructed ideology. In Hindu religion, Goddesses are women and they address them as 'Mother'. Durga, Lakkhi, Kali, Sharashwati all these are women, they worship them and call them mother. But it is very ironical that women are not held in due respect in their religion. In fact, so is true of other religions in terms of their realistic attitudes and treatments to the women. In ancient period, 'Shatidah' custom was in the society where women were burnt with the dead body of their husband. Though this custom is no more now, women still face much oppression everywhere.

Ibsen is very modern and visionary. He talks about individualism because an individual can change the whole society. To change the society, individual change and awareness is important. He presents how from a doll, Nora has become an individual. At the end of the play, Nora becomes an individual: she no longer remains a woman only. When one thinks about one's freedom of choice, she then also thinks about his/her individual psychology. Nora comes out with a serious challenge. The 'Door' is very symbolic in this play. Nora becomes able to break the traditional social system and goes away outspokenly ignoring all restrictions. Through this Nora, Ibsen is calling for some radical shifts in the female physical and psychic conditions. Here again we can resort to Bouvier's conclusion of *The Second Sex*, she envisions a future when women and men are equals, something the "Soviet revolution promised" but did not ever materialize:

"[...]women raised and educated exactly like men would work under the same conditions and for the same salaries; erotic freedom would be accepted by custom, but the sexual act would no longer be considered a remunerable "service"; women would be obliged to provide another livelihood for themselves; marriage would be based on a free engagement that the spouses could break when they wanted to; motherhood would be freely chosen—that is, birth control and abortion would be allowed—and in return all mothers and their children would be given the same rights; maternity leave would be paid for by the society that would have responsibility for the children, which does not mean that they would be taken from their parents but that they would not be abandoned to them(760)."

It is a serious challenge for her as people do not like women who rebel against social systematic oppressions perpetuated by men. Nora becomes bad wife and bad mother by breaking the rules of society. We see two Noras. She undergoes a stimulating transformation: at the beginning, she was the 'Doll wife' who was supposed to listen voicelessly to her husband and was treated as a doll by him. At the end, she becomes a matured Nora who is ready to break the conventional system made by male dominated society. Nora was in a

situation of "To be or nor not to be". To break the traditional rules or not to break it is a big dilemma for Nora. To be free or not to be free, is a big concern for her. But at last she is able to slam the door for herself identity.

"Oh Torvald, I don't really know what religion is."

Nora's slamming the door means to slam the society, law and religious prejudices.

"I must make up my mind which is right- society or I."

Women should struggle to grab their own right by rebelling against patriarchal society. In this play, Nora seems to be a symbol of feministic vanguard fighting against all oppressions. Nora's slamming the door is the symbol of her freedom and her effort to fight against patriarchal system. Ibsen opens the way for women to revolt against male domination. Famous feminist critic Laura Mulvey says that men always suffer from inferiority complex. They have no productive power which women have. Women can give birth to children but a man cannot give birth. They know that women are more powerful than them so they try to suppress women to keep their own existence as superior being. For this reason, they always want to show their power upon women. But women must try to establish their own identity and individuality as Nora. Women should not think them as inferior being rather they must be proud of themselves as Virginia Woolf says-

"As a woman I have no country

As a woman I want no country

As a woman my country is the whole world (1919)."

It is now time for women to break all oppressive rules and prejudices. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggests in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* that women must come out of the coffin and dance standing upon the same coffin that confined them before.

Conclusion

Now to conclude, we can fairly affirm that Ibsen seems to emblemize Nora as a harbinger of the declaration of female identity. The systematic and ideological framework of patriarchal domination has to be violently rejected by the women at large to decolonize their submissive psyche and to liberate themselves from all stiff sufferings unleashed on them by the ruthless patriarchy. So Ibsen with his *A Doll's House* ushers a new era of women enjoying the privilege and prestige as an equal and autonomous gender. To pursue this vision, what Ibsen seems to inculcate women around the world, is to shake off the shrouds of suppression and subservience and to accomplish a radical undertaking of individual freedom of womankind. His Nora, though not espoused as a badge of matriarchal empowerment and emancipation in a wide sense, stands out to be an awakening voice for the slumberous and suppressed voices of many women.

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