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NORA'S ABDICATION OF MALE CHAUVINISTIC SERVITUDE THROUGH HER
SLAMMING THE DOOR IN A *DOLL'S HOUSE* BY HENRIK IBSEN

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ABSTRACT

This paper inquires the path through which Henrik Ibsen's Nora becomes the spokeswoman of every single woman of any society. In the play *A Doll's House* (1879), Nora's slamming the door is the refusal of the provision of history because throughout the 'his-story', a woman like Nora is the inferior one who cannot take any step against men. This paper explores the perversion of male dominated society through which a woman like Nora is just mortified as she is addressed as a 'wretched woman'. But in the very end of the play, the decision made by Nora is just metamorphosed her as a rebel who actually wants to become a human being at first and through her slamming the door she proves that she no longer remains a 'doll-child' or a 'doll-wife' rather she is an individual being.

Key Words: Gender performativity, Individualism, Male ethnocentrism, Phallogocentrism, Hegemony, Capitalism.

Introduction

The renowned Cartesian philosopher Francois Poulain de la Barre thinks that many compositions have been written about women by men and that writings should be investigated with impeachment as men play both the role of judge and party. And this paper will make an attempt to analyze all the suspicions; that is, has Ibsen been capable of giving Nora freedom through her slamming the door or will Nora come back to Torvald's door again? Throughout the 19th century the concept of 'pater families' entrenched in the society. Pater families are families where husbands are the head and moral leader of the family, whereas wives' proper role is to love, honor and obey the path of their husbands. And as Nora said that she was a doll in the hands of her father and after marriage nothing has changed. Actually patriarchy generates existential crisis for women. In *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986), Maria Mies expresses that if there exists peace in patriarchy, it can be a declaration of war against womanhood. As Mies uses the term "housewifization" to describe the position of woman in a family or in society or in larger scale, in state. As women are considered as second class citizen. Again a woman like Nora always considered as the second sex who is always inferior to her husband. It becomes a convention that a woman has to be nursed by her father in her pre-marital age, then by her husband in her marital age and then, by her sons in her senility. So Marriage becomes a master changing system for women, that is, from one owner, she is given to another one; as is the case of Nora.

Discussion

There is a Bengali movie called *Bodhon* where a mother is saying that, "Mothers can never be Mrinal" (Banerjee, 2014). She is talking about Rabi Thakur's Mrinal as it is depicted in "A Wife's Letter", and the most surprising thing is that in the landmark play of Ibsen, there is the exposure of that Mrinal, a Norwegian version of Mrinal. And Nora proves that a mother can be Mrinal, a mother can slam the door. In the 19th century, there was the historian like Barbara Welter who had created the cult of true womanhood; that was, she had identified four main virtues that a true woman must exhibit. These are: "Piety", "Purity", "Submissiveness", and "Domesticity" (Welter, 1996).

That is, it is the duty of a woman to be submissive, to be domestic. As Torvald is very concerned about Nora's duty as he says –

"This is monstrous; Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way" (Ibsen, p.167).

So what is the holiest duty of a woman, of a virtuous wife? The tasks of a housewife are more similar to the torment of Sisyphus. Day after day, she has to wash dishes, dust furniture, and mend clothes that will be dirty, dusty and torn again. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury in the book entitled *Dhrupodi Naikader Koyekjon* (2000), holds that in the play *A Doll's House*, a sound is very important, it is very symbolic. It is the sound of the door opening by Nora, the sound of Nora's slamming the door. Again George Bernard Shaw also thinks that the sound of the door is more effective than the sound of the artillery of Waterloo.

In the play, Nora explores that a woman always maintains a shackled life within the domestic sphere. As Marion Reid shows in the book *A Plea for Women* (1988), that a woman must not be confined within the homey outskirts. Again she thinks that there is no such thing as womanliness and women also possess rational thought, they also have moral instinct as men. And through leaving her husband's house Nora also repudiates that domestic obstruction.

Ibsen's Nora through her slamming the door questions the traditional concept of marriage. As in the book *The Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir puts-

"The destiny that society traditionally offers women is Marriage. Marriage is the reference by which a single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution" (Beauvoir, p. 502).

Nora's slamming the door breaks all the preconceived notion of womanhood. Nora questions the system of marriage. Again Emma Goldman's view is that the institution of marriage in which women are sexually dominated by and economically dependent on their husbands makes them unfree. It is thought that marriage is the only profession a woman can hold. Actually it is a kind of planned accident.

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels shows that the establishment of patriarchal family is the historical discomfiture of women. As Humayun Azad also puts-

"Patriarchy is invented with a bunch of social diseases" (Azad, p. 58).

In the play Torvald says-

"Oh, how lovely- how cosy our home is, Nora" (Ibsen, p.159).

But Nora questions the patriarchal family system as well as marriage. As Nora answers-

"Living here like a beggar, from hand to mouth" (Ibsen, p.164).

or

"Our house has been nothing but a playroom" (Ibsen, p. 164).

Nora's condition is like the protagonist of Adrine Rich's poem "Living in Sin". Nora all through her life has just been waiting for that miracle that one day she will fall in danger and her husband will save her.

Nora was enclosed to the domestic imprisonment and she thought that she it was usual for a woman. But in inner mind she always faced some kinds of psychological conflict as every housewife faces. And in the book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan shows the depression and psychological heartbreak , a woman faces. Friedan calls this kind of distress as 'problem with no name'. And at last Nora actually saves herself and gets rid of that familial imprisonment.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger says –

“Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at (Berger, p. 47).

And at the very beginning of the play , Nora was also that kind of woman and her view about Helmer was-
“Everything you do is right” (Ibsen, p.142).

As it is portrayed by Luce Iregaray in the book *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1987) that, woman doesn't possess the concept of subjectivity. She never becomes herself and she cannot create her individual oneness. And as long as Nora follows her otherness to Helmer she remains that “sweet little song bird”(Ibsen, p. 29).And Nora was also an “enchanted creature”. But when Nora protested against Helmer , She had become a monster.

Helmer makes an attempt to make Nora, an ideal housewife. As capitalism starts its crusade to make so called ideal homemaker because an ideal housewife like Nora is the best buyer. So Nora's slamming the door is the rejection of the notion of an exemplary homemaker.

Again, as it is known , in capitalistic system, there are two kinds of production system . And women are assigned to do the reproduction. Reproduction is very necessary to keep the human race in this universe. But what is its value to a woman like Nora. In the very beginning of the paper there is the discussion about Mrinal of Tagore. So the difference is that Mrinal wants to be a mother ,but Nora being a mother of three children, rejects motherhood through her slamming the door. As in *The Second_Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir portrays that pregnancy is a kind of drama which is dramatized in female body.

And there are lots of Noras in every society who can't do anything because the dramatist is the male like Torvald. And this dramatist wants that she will be the representative mother who will only reproduce Nepolean or Garibaldi.

As it is thought that woman has to follow the conception that she is produced to reproduce; that is, she has to be a mother as she is a genesis machine nothing else. And that gender role makes her enchained and creates the obstruction to be emancipated.

When Nora decides to leave Torvald's house, he wants to stop Nora by saying,“You don't understand the society in which you live in”(Ibsen,p.169).

Society is another tool to oppress women. Society always makes a kind of code of conducts to suppress women. As Friedrich Douglas thinks that society as an institution always makes some conspiracy to oppress women in every possible way.

But Nora's answer is very remarkable. As she says-

“I must make up my mind which is right....society or I” (Ibsen,p.169).

And through this utterance, Nora wants to establish her individualistic thought . That is, she wants to be a human being, an individual not only a woman . And that's why she leaves all the social code of conducts allotted for true womanhood.

Through this play Ibsen has made an example that a woman like Nora can break all the convivial sexist formation. And she questions all types of pre-ordained circumstances through which femininity is formed. As Margaret Fuller shows in the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) that, woman should not be restricted within the domestic aura to perform only domestic chores .But they should rupture the earmarked gendered behavior.

Thereafter, religion, another tool of affliction. And Torvald also wanted to convince Nora to not to leave the house by using this tool. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton's book *The Women's Bible* (1895) depicts how religion and religious scripts degrade women. As illustration, in Muslim religion there is a saying that women are made by the left chest side bone of men. Again in Christianity, it is said that Eve is made from Adam's flesh. But what Nora says is very important-

"I don't really know What religion is" (Ibsen, p. 168).

The protest Nora has made in the play is very significant. It is a matter of hope that time is changing. Women are no longer in the position of Biblical Hawa or Milton's *Paradise Lost's* (1667) Eve. Now there is Siddika, as it is depicted in Begum Rokeya's *Padmarag* (1924), who has searched freedom through slamming the door not through committing suicide like Tolstoy's heroine Anna Karenina.

In *A Doll's House* Ibsen tries to make a protest in favour of all womenkind. In 21st century, there is the celebration of Nora. But in the book *Sitayan* (1996);_Mallika Sengupta shows the reversed story of Sita's slamming the door instead of mythic story of Ram's leaving Sita. Actually, it is the time to revive women in the history and to revive the history of women. Now the time to make an intellectual commitment to banish all kinds of sexual politics.

Again, there are some hidden facts about *A Doll's House*. There is another version of this play that alternates the ending of the play in which finally, Nora doesn't leave the house. But Ibsen asserts that that version is the "barbaric act of violence" to the real play itself and he thinks that whoever wants to act the play should not use that duplicate version. Again another ridiculous thing is that when this play was first arranged to be acted in Germany; the heroin , that is, who was supposed to be acted as Nora was not agreed to act the last portion of the play. As she said that the end portion of the play should be changed.

Another important thing is that, from the publishing of the play it is the major question that will Nora come back? And if it is surmised that Nora will come back then what would be her conditions? Actually these should be no conditions. It is something like that a woman should be a human being first, not a woman. So the first and foremost condition should be the addition and alteration of relationship of husband and wife and moreover, there should be equal power play between man and woman.

What is the traditional role of a woman in every society? A woman has to get married and give birth to children and Nora also does that. But it is pathetic that the children she gave birth, cannot be her because Torvald thinks that she is not that ideal mothertype woman. So what would be the solution? There should be the situation like *Herland* (1915) of Charlotte Perkins as she thinks of an isolated society of women who are able to have children without any male assistance. Alike Mary Astell's proposal is relevant; that is, ladies should retire from the society of men.

From the very beginning of the play, it is found that Torvald always gives some funny names of Nora. All the names suggest her existence as a weaker sex. As in the book *Language and Sex :Different and Dominance* (1975), Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley shows that the language used to address women is very much degraded.

Again Aristotle's view is that women are mutilated men, like the biblical account of Eve and that contributed to nurture an authoritative legacy to represent women as weak, irrational, ineducable , inconstant, unable, immoral domestic creature. And these kind of notions are also hold by the person like Torvald. And that's why he has created that ground to control his wife, Nora and excludes her form all kinds of public realm.

But what step Nora makes in the end of the play can be the best illustration to deny all the construct of society to protest against the epistemic violences, that are created against womanhood. Actually Nora has broken the hegemonic system of world patriarchy by which women are just castrated.

Nora is an obedient wife. She is the squirrel of Torvald. When Torvald's that "Poor Nora" makes a protest ,she becomes irrational, nonsense as Torvald puts-

“You are ill; you are feverish”(Ibsen, p.169).

That is, she becomes “an unprincipled women”. and Torvald also says that she is “a hypocrite, a liar – worse,worse- a criminal” (Ibsen, p.154). When a woman do protest she becomes a criminal; that is, the temple of patriarchy declares her ‘Taslima Nasrin’ as in Bengali Society, as Horace Walpole also declared Mary wollestoncraft as “a hyena wearing gown” or “a serpent with philosophical insight”, when she wrote her groundbreaking book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

In *Ibsen : A Biography*(1971), Michal Levenson discusses the view of Ibsen; that is ,as Ibsen points out that at present society is extremely masculine and living in that kind of society a woman can never find her own way of living. And in the play *A Doll’s House*, Ibsen has made that attempt to make a clamor against that masculine society.

From the beginning, Nora represents the traditional role of a woman which is really stereotypical. As Judith Butler uses the notion of gender performativity to denote that stereotypical situation of womenfolk. Again Butler puts-

“Identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results” (Butler, pp. 24-25).

As in the essay “The Straight Mind”, Monique Wittig puts-“the concept of difference between the sexes ontologically constitutes women into different /others” (Wittig, 1992). Nora as a woman is alive not as a human being. And she remains out of any public domain. As the psychologist Erik Erikson creates the cult of “inner space” to subdue women’s creativity into the four walls of the house.

It is noticed that throughout the history women are degraded in every possible way. And that preconceptions pave the way to see woman as a weaker sex. And the man like Torvald has just got some courage from that preconceptions as it is found that, Otto Weininger, a German writer ,wrote a book named *Sex and Character* (1903), and he wanted to show that what kind of third rated body and character women possess. And another great psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud was inspired by him and he has also given a pseudo-scientific interpretation of women’s body and psychology. As his paper “The Psychological Consequences of the Anatomic Distinction between the Sexes”, shows that women don’t have that kind of capability to deny any kind of change and they receive everything with a passive mind .

And by writing the play *A Doll’s House* Ibsen has just paved the way to establish not only women emancipation but also human emancipation as well. As J. Templeton’s book *The Doll House_Blacklash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen* (1989), reflects that the protest Nora makes in the play should be the protest of a human being, not of a woman.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michael Foucault states-

“Where there is power, there is resistance ,”(Foucault,p.95)

So to establish a society based on equality, the dichotomy of power should be broken and Nora has made that resistance in the play. So Nora’s decision of slamming the door is a step to break that power dichotomy. In *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Shulamith Firestone puts-

“.....the sexual class system predates and runs deeper than any other form of oppression and that eradication of sexism will require a radical reordering of society”(Firestone,1970).

And Nora’s resistance, her slamming the door is an attempt to leave that biased society which has created distinction between sex and gender but but doesn’t perceive it itself and gives emphasize on gendered phenomena. But the thing is that sex and gender are separate categories as popularized by the sexologists Jhon Money and Anke Ehrhardt in 1972.As they showed that sex “refers to physical attributes and is anatomically and physiologically determined. Gender, they saw as a psychological transformation of the self-

the internal conviction that one is either male or female (gender identity) and the behavioral expressions of that conviction”(Sterling, p. 3).

Conclusion

Actually Nora through her slamming the door rejects all the male ethnocentric views. She actually makes the urgency of a pre-patriarchal state of culture to erase all the phallogocentric ideology to demolish the idea of mansplaining. So in the play, one can find two separate Noras and before climax who was the woman as described by Andrea Dworkin; that is , she is not born rather she is shaped and in that process of shaping she as well as her humanity is demolished. And in the long run, she can never be herself. But after the climax, there is the appearance of the ultimate human Nora who has destroyed and questioned the master-slave dichotomy of man-woman relationship through her slamming the door.

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