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'The Subjection of Women' in 'A Doll's House'

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Abstract:

This research paper endeavours to provide a combined and intertextual analysis of the lives and principal works of two of the most important writers of the Victorian era, John Stuart Mill and Henrik Ibsen. The two men have largely influenced the modern outlook towards feminism and the representation of women in literature as well as the real world. Mill's 'The Subjection of Women' is hailed as an exemplary text in the formulation of the

tenets of liberal feminism. In the same way, Ibsen's play, 'A Doll's House', is often thought to be revolutionary for being the first in its representation of a feminist woman on stage. This paper attempts to study Ibsen's play using the feminist framework provided by Mill. In doing so, it seeks to highlight and inspire men aligned toward equality for women.

Keywords: Feminism, John Stuart Mill, Henrik Ibsen, The Subjection of Women, A Doll's House, Nora.

I. Introduction

The fight for equality is a collective endeavour for all genders. In the modern era, gender exists on a spectrum, rather than in two absolutes, and hence it requires a collaborative effort from each individual to fight ignorance, prejudice, and discrimination faced by the subjugated gender groups.

Such an alliance also existed in the rise of feminism. Through the ages, patriarchy, misogyny, and sexism have been common enemies for men and women in their united fight for equality. Accordingly, the world has witnessed a number of male feminists who have aligned themselves against the aforementioned hurdles. Lucy Delap writes in her book, 'Feminisms: A Global History': "The idea that only women can be feminist is a claim that must be historicized" (50). Delap, thereupon, goes on to enlist a number of literary men who have associated themselves with the said cause. She mentions America's Fredrick Douglass, China's Jin Tianhe, and England's John Stuart Mill; she also adds Norway's Henrik Ibsen at some point. Mill and Ibsen, needless to say, would successfully make it to almost every global list that associates itself with women's rights or their representation. The two writers extended major support in the form of activism and campaign for women's empowerment.

However, what overshadows and outlives their community work are the literary pieces that the two writers produced. These works have been hailed as landmarks in the path for equal rights. Their

respective publications advanced the political struggle in a major way. Feminists, globally, have repeatedly celebrated these works through the evolution of the movement.

Mill's work, 'The Subjection of Women', is said to be "a pioneering effort, rightly honored as one of the first essays to discuss the inequality of women as a political problem and to consider its sources and solutions in a scholarly manner" (Ring 27). Ibsen's 'A Doll's House', which appeared a decade after Mill's work, had a more crucial impact. Elizabeth Robins describes the play's first performance in London as "an event that was to change lives and literature" (9-10). Both these texts continue to influence modern-day challenges to feminism and the fight for equality.

This research paper attempts the application of Millian feminism to Ibsen's portrayal of women in his play. A character analysis of Christina Linden and Nora Helmer is done from the perspective of philosophical arguments propounded by Mill in his essay and a few other literary scholars including Joan Templeton, G. B. Shaw, David Krasner, F. L. Lucas, Dale E. Miller, M. L. Shanley, J. B. Schneewind, Herbert Spencer and more.

However, in order to achieve that, the paper first provides a biographical analysis of both these writers and the influences that paved the path for their respective feminist texts. The individual study of the life and works of the British, as well as the Norwegian writer, contextualises their existence in terms of the struggle for women's rights in their countries and the history of feminism.

II. A Biographical Study of the Feminist Associations of Mill & Ibsen

i) John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill was a Victorian polymath. The man donned many hats. He was an essayist, literary critic, metaphysician, economist, politician, civil servant, and member of the British parliament. However, his philosophic achievements towered above every other

said accomplishment. He was arguably the most famous and influential English philosophic mind of the Nineteenth century. Joseph H Levy, an English author, goes to the extent of calling Mill "the great intellectual pointsman of [the Victorian] age" (Spencer et al. 48). Levy further states that "[Mill] has done more than any other of [their] generation to give direction to the thought of his contemporaries" (48). Theories and philosophic treatises propounded by Mill tend to influence academic debates since always. H Fawcett even estimates that, during the last quarter of the Nineteenth century, Mill had a profound philosophical influence on almost every youth studying at any university in England (Spencer et al. 66).

Mill was born in London on May 20, 1806. His father, the Scotsman James Mill, also belonged to the intellectual kind. James was a disciple of the utilitarian philosopher and reformer Jeremy Bentham. Mill was, therefore, "raised in the tradition of *Philosophical Radicalism…* which applied utilitarian principles in a self-conscious and systematic way to issues of institutional design and social reform" (Brink). Bentham believed that a single principle suffices to guide political as well as individual action; he called it the principle of utility or the greatest happiness principle. In other words, all our actions should be intended towards bringing the greatest happiness to the greatest number of beings.

Under the said influence, "[Mill's] life and thought were decisively shaped from an early age by the forceful personality of his father…", who wanted his son to become the Victorian intellectual and utilitarian thinker of the highest order (Miller v). Mill, too, later recalled in his 'Autobiography' that his father enforced a rigorous education, wherein he solely homeschooled the young boy. The boy began reading Greek when he was just three, and by the time he reached fourteen, he had acquired the equivalent of a university education. Nicholas Capaldi, who has written a biography of the philosopher, argues that it was "impossible to separate the life of the son from the life of the father" (Lamb and Capaldi). Accordingly, Mill also went on to join the quarterly publication, 'Westminster

Review', where his father and Bentham were the chief writers. Hence, the tenets of Utilitarianism were decisive in shaping the young impressionable mind of James's son.

However, "[a]t the age of twenty-one Mill experienced a period of disillusionment that caused him to question many aspects of the pragmatic Benthamite creed" (Miller v). Mill, thus, began studying the works of Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth. A study of the tenets of Romantic thought opened Mill's perspective to the other side. He writes in his 'Autobiography' that he was privy to only "one side of the truth" (Mill, *CW* 105). In Mill, thenceforth, one could see the coexistence of these opposite philosophies. He writes in one of his essays titled 'Coleridge': "Whoever could master the premises and combine the methods of both, would possess the entire English philosophy of their age" (Macleod).

A further addition to this philosophical concoction was his friendship with a progressive feminist thinker--Mrs Harriet Taylor. This brought about a profound re-amendment to his former convictions. Mill calls this friendship "the honour and chief blessing of [his] existence" (Mill, *CW* 201). Taylor, at this point in time, was already married. However, the two steadily developed an intellectual and personal affinity toward each other. Mill states that his acquaintance with her became "intimate or confidential" over time (*CW* 113). "Within a couple of years, she was living, essentially, in a *ménage à trois* with" her husband and Mill (Wills). This unusual association became a source of scandal for the stringent era that was the Victorian period. Capaldi calls this relationship between Mill and Taylor "a sort of microcosm of all the evolving changes of the age… against the backdrop that was incredibly oppressive and difficult for them." Capaldi further states that "they exhibited a lot of courage" for this very reason (Lamb and Capaldi).

Harriet Taylor was a profound philosopher and woman of letters in her own right. She used to steadily publish poems, articles, and reviews in a periodical, titled 'Monthly Repository'. Mill's

autobiography is filled with unbounded adulation for Taylor, not just as a woman he loved, but also as an intellectual that he admired and respected. Soon after their first contact, the two began a correspondence that has become a topic of academic discourse now. In one of their epistolary exchanges, the two produced a work titled 'Early Essays On Marriage and Divorce'. Taylor, in her essay, argues for raising women's "social condition" (12). Lucy Delap mentions the collaborative work that the two philosophers achieved during the 1840s and 1850s. The two co-wrote a number of articles and essays on "domestic violence and other campaigning issues" (Delap 50). Miller, in his commentary on 'The Subjection of Women', states: "While Mill believed in sexual equality before Harriet entered his life, it seems likely that he paid considerably more attention to the issue because of her…" (315). Taylor also went on to write 'The Enfranchisement of Women', an 1851 essay that is often regarded as the precursor to Mill's polemic work on gender inequality. Their collaborations multiplied especially after their marriage in the same year. Critics have had extremely differing opinions when it comes to the estimation of influence that the lady philosopher exerted on the male one. Jo Ellen Jacobs's essay titled "The Lot of Gifted Ladies Is Hard" takes a comprehensive look at the forever fluctuating stance of the critics concerning Taylor and her influence on Mill. Jacobs quotes Eugene August's picturisation of the Mills' life together: "John's creative energies underwent an astonishing renewal during the collaboration with Harriet. No longer was it his genius; it was their genius" (146). Jacobs concludes that the critical stance, whether affirmative or dissenting, gives a better understanding of the critic, rather than the Mills'. As a matter of fact, Mill himself wrote an eloquent epitaph, upon the death of Taylor in 1858, which gives a clearer idea of their relationship. It read that "… her influence has been felt in many of the greatest improvements of the age, and will be in those still to come. Were there even a few heads and intellects like hers, this earth would already become the hoped-for heaven" (Spencer et al. 13).

John Stuart Mill's best work came in the wake of Harriet Taylor's demise. He published 'On Liberty', a defense of individual freedom against authority. This essay was hailed as a classic upon its publication in 1859. Miller terms it a "philosophic cornerstone of democratic mortality" (vi). Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz goes on to assert that, "[e]very citizen of the world who aspires to freedom should reread Mill's *On Liberty* periodically…" (Miller vi). Claims proposed by Mill in this text ask for an ethical and utilitarian outlook to maintain the relationship between individual and authority. At the same time, he also provided a critique of "the stifling effect of Victorian judgmentalism and oppressive norms of propriety" (Macleod). He followed a similar exercise while writing his other most prominent work called 'The Subjection of Women'. J. B. Schneewind suggests that 'The Subjection of Women' illustrates "some of [the] main claims" of the author's ideas that he hypothesized in his essay 'On Liberty' (xi). The scholarly arguments propounded by Mill stood out, for they were categorised under practical philosophy. Henry Fawcett writes: "No doubt one reason of his attractiveness as a writer… is the unusual power he possessed in applying philosophical principles to the facts of everyday life" (Spencer et al. 68).

In 1861, Mill finished writing 'The Subjection of Women', a text that concerned itself with the everyday life of half of humanity. However, he wouldn't publish it until 1869, because "he was always very wary of the kind of reception" that he would receive for the book; moreover, he was also extremely careful to "time the publication to achieve what he thought was its maximal effect" (Lamb and Capaldi). The period between the two aforementioned years was marked by rapid political advancement for Mill. The philosopher's articles were always politically charged, even before he positioned himself to become an elected official. Accordingly, he also began receiving extreme support from the working classes, and the radicals of the age for voicing the need to protect and uplift the individuality and freedom of every citizen. It was after their urge that Mill eventually consented to become a candidate for the

elections in 1865. He was immediately elected to Parliament. Mill was an advocate for individuality and freedom, which naturally extended his sphere of support toward women's rights. Schneewind writes that "in 1867 he himself tried to bring about a major change by introducing--for the first time in English history--a motion to allow women to vote" (xii). On July 20, 1867, Mill brought the Women's Electoral Disabilities Removal Bill. In his proposal, he wanted the amendment of the word "man" from the Reform Bill, which was to be replaced by "person". He believed that gender equality on the political front would lead to social, economic, and eventually, domestic equality.

To the modern ears, Mill's argument regarding gender equality may seem obvious, and even outdated or inconsistent to a certain extent. However, a study of the social environment reveals it to be radical, courageous, and sometimes eloquent (Shanley, "Subjection" 397). Mill himself writes in 'The Subjection of Women': "In every respect, the burthen is hard on those who attack an almost universal opinion" (124). Dame M G Fawcett gives a clearer idea of Mill's said attack. "It was one thing to advocate theoretically the claims of women to representation it was another to introduce the subject into the House of Commons, to promote an active political organization in its favor, and this to convert it, from a philosophical dream, into a question of pressing and practical importance", she writes (Spencer et al. 75). Janet Radcliffe Richards, who is a Bioethics Reader at University College London, speaks about the repercussions that Mill had to endure upon the proposal of extension of reforms. She states that in doing so "… he was meeting opposition from even liberal people", which gives an idea about the sort of society and establishment that Mill was countering against (BBC Podcasts, "Mill"). In 1873, Mill was even lampooned in a *Vanity Fair* cartoon. He was caricatured as "A Feminine Philosopher" for his fight for the women's cause. He was, however, not affected by the conflicting reactions, and went on to campaign for "women's suffrage, the Married Women's Property Bills, the Divorce Act of 1857, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and the opening of higher

education and the professions to women" (Shanley, "Marital Slavery and Friendship" 235).

In 1869, when 'The Subjection of Women', "the cardinal document of modern feminism", appeared, it was greeted with "both outrage and adulation" (Miller vii). Kate Millet terms it "as an attack on the conditions of legal bondage, debilitating education, and the stifling ethic of 'wifely subjection' within the Victorian period" (Miller vii). An attack would obviously gather more dissension than support, after all, Mill was challenging the accepted norm. He inaugurates the essay by citing its objective at the very beginning, as he writes that "the legal subordination of one sex to the other--is wrong in itself and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement" (Mill, *TSoW* 123). This single statement establishes his guiding principle in not only penning this essay but also for his campaign for gender equality. Through the course of his essay, Mill denounces the Victorian norms that supported that existing imbalance. He also asks for a replacement "by a principle of perfect equality admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" (*TSoW* 123). Mill proposes an experiment in living, which would deviate from the norm that existed, a norm that rests "upon theory only" (*TSoW* 127). He asserts that the adoption of the system that supports inequality never came out of "deliberation, or forethought, or any social ideas, or any notion whatever of what conduced to the benefit of humanity or the good order of society" (Mill, *TSoW* 127). Mill does a comparative analysis of the power dynamics between man and woman with other sorts of power relations. He concludes "that the possessors of the power have facilities in this case, greater than in any other, to prevent uprising against it" (Mill, *TSoW* 133). A possible reason, as he states, is that every subject in this case constantly lives "under the very eye, and almost, it may be said, in the hands, of one of the masters" (Mill, *TSoW* 133). This proximity with the oppressors, rather than her fellow subjects, does not allow her any space to resist subjection, and thus persists and enables the existence of this unjust authority. Following his proposal, Mill considers and counters the possible grounds for the continuation of

the said subjugation. In most cases, it is implied that it is the natural law. To this, Mill questions: "But was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it?" (*TSoW* 134). He answers it when he states that the "… practical principles in which [women] have been born and bred … are the basis of much of the existing order in the world" (Mill, *TSoW* 126).

One of the power-dynamics analogies that Mill uses to compare the relationship between man and woman, more appropriately a husband and wife, is that of a despot and its subject. To further this comparison, Mill pronounces the man as a despot within a family unit. He writes that "Not a word can be said for despotism in the family which cannot be said for political despotism" (Mill, *TSoW* 157). He even goes on to list a few tyrants and despots that give a clearer picture of his assertion of the said man, namely Louis XVI, Philippe le Bel, Nadir Sah, and Caligula. The woman on the other hand is pushed into accepting the role of a serf. Society moulds their women to serve their masters, as Mill states that "… they are universally taught that they are born and created for self-sacrifice" (*TSoW* 166).

In order to illustrate this further, Mill dissects the basis of marriage--the only "actual bondage known to our law" (*TSoW* 206). He further states that "there remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house" (Mill, *TSoW* 206). Margaret Oliphant, in her essay, "Mill on the Subjection of Women", writes that "this slavery has regarded no geographical bounds, and has extended over the entire face of the earth" (293). Such bondage is worse for it makes the subject "a slave at all hours and all minutes" (Mill, *TSoW* 155). Moreover, she is a willing slave, for men have "put everything in practice to enslave [women's] minds" (Mill, *TSoW* 137). By making gender a badge of subjection, society has allowed the man to command and forced the woman to obey. "For Mill, the position of married women resembled that of slaves in several ways: the social and economic… [and] the legal" (Shanley, "Marital Slavery and Friendship" 234). She loses her identity as soon as she consents to a marriage offer. "Mill argued… that the presumed consent of women to marry was

not, in any real sense, a free promise, but one socially coerced by the lack of meaning full options" (Shanley, "Marital Slavery and Friendship" 234). The choice not to marry was not really free; Mill terms it "Hobson's choice" (*TSoW* 151). Marriage is "the destination appointed by society for women, the prospect they are brought up to…" (Mill, *TSoW* 153). A similar claim is also made by Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal text called 'The Second Sex'.

The solution to all of this, that Mill proposes in his work, is a utilitarian one. His demand for the removal of legal restrictions on women had reverberations. He suggests that the whole of mankind will undergo a "moral regeneration… when the most fundamental of the social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice…" (Mill, *TSoW* 223). In order to attain this, Mill demands "better and more complete intellectual education of women…" who should be "brought up equally capable of understanding business, public affairs, and the higher matters of speculation…" (*TSoW* 210). He also demands a merit-based job selection, which is free of gender discrimination, in every sector. Miller states that "Mill's primary aim is to establish that women should not be deprived of [the] rights by law…" (314). In fact, he asks his government to not only grant the rights to women but also to encourage them to exercise their rights. Humanity has for a long time denied itself the whole talent pool that it possesses, by restricting half of it just on the basis of gender. On the domestic front, the deconstruction of the pre-existing relationship would begin with the replacement of marital slavery with marital friendship. Shanley reiterates this when she states that "[t]he fundamental assertion of *The Subjection of Women* was… that male-female equality, however achieved, was essential to marital friendship…" ("Marital Slavery and Friendship" 229) This friendship would benefit both of them as they would inspire each other to aspire towards greater and better goals in life. Miller comments that upon attaining the Millian ideal "the quality of marriages will be improved, both because a greater identity of interests will be possible between husbands and wives and because

whatever differences there are between them would be a basis for their mutual improvement" (324).

Mill's essay had a lasting effect. Bertrand Russell comments that "[Mill's] advocacy of equality for women in the end won almost a world-wide acceptance" (Miller viii). A perceivable effect was also seen in the kind of literature that got produced after Mill's landmark essay. A few decades later numberless movements and campaigns worked towards uplifting the social position of women. The right to vote for women in Britain was finally gained in 1918. However, Mill's ahead of its time ideal of equality is yet to be achieved. Women are still faced with challenges on the social, economic, as well as domestic front. Julia Annas echoes it when she writes: "It will be a good day when *The Subjection of Wome*n is outdated, but it is not yet" (179).

ii) Henrik Johan Ibsen

A parallel of the prosaic intellectual turmoil, caused by Mill, alongside Darwin and Marx, across Europe, was seen in the dramatic genre across Scandinavia. This theatrical movement was led by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Hailed as the father of modern drama, Ibsen is credited with being the first playwright to write social tragedies, describing the lives and stories of ordinary people in prose. Ibsen's fame not only lies upon his plays and poems but also on his philosophical ideas that dealt with social issues and had an everlasting impact on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century drama and literature. Professor Belinda Jack, in her lecture, states that "during the last quarter of the nineteenth century… he wrote the dramas which were to transform the modern European theatre" (Gresham College). Ibsen's first play appeared in 1849. At that point, "the drama was despised as a literary medium throughout the Western World" (Meyer, "The Master Playwright"). His last play was written in 1899, half a century after his first. In these 50 years, due to Ibsen's efforts, "the drama had come to be accepted again as equal to poetry or the novel or any other medium" (Meyer, "The Master Playwright"). G. B. Shaw in England, Gerhart

Hauptmann in Germany, James Joyce in Ireland, and Eugene O'Neill in America were greatly influenced by Ibsen's dramatic genius. Nobel laureate Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello even says: "After Shakespeare, I unhesitatingly put Ibsen first" (Bradbrook 45).

Henrik Johan Ibsen was born on March 20, 1828, at Skein, a small port city to the west of Oslo. The Ibsens were made prosperous by the trade boom that occurred around Skien. However, their "luck soon turned; and some years later, in 1836, when the poet was a boy of eight, the family had to withdraw, ruined, to a humble farmstead outside the town…" (Lucas 5). Ibsen, more often than not, modelled the characters of his plays on his parents, particularly, the financial ruin pertaining to his father and the portrayal of a suffering woman, relating to his mother. He wasn't close to either one. Lucas states that "Ibsen remained aloof and alone" within his family (6). He did not even meet them once he was grown up. He never came home or wrote to them. Ibsen left school to become an apprentice to an apothecary at Grimstad in 1844. It was during his harsh years at Grimstad that he began writing, probably inspired by the radicalism of the city and the continent; although this period did not grant him the literary success that he aspired to. In 1849, he composed 'Catiline', which was printed into two hundred fifty copies and published the next year; and over two hundred of them were later sold as waste paper (Lucas 10). Later that year, Ibsen intended to join Christiania University. He had to give up because he failed in Greek, oral Latin, and Arithmetic. However, instead of re-attempting Ibsen devoted himself to writing plays, attempting to become the first Norwegian man to live by authorship.

Ibsen got associated with theatre properly when he was introduced to Ole Bull, a violinist of global fame who recruited the young playwright as the "'theatre-poet' and assistant" at the Bergen theatre (Lucas 11). He learned the dramatic craft for the next five years. During this time, he also produced a number of unsuccessful plays. His first success came in the form of 'Feast at Solhaug' in 1856 when he won the attention of Magdalene Thoresen, an authoress. It was at a dinner at Thoresens' when Ibsen met Susanna, the

authoress's stepdaughter whom he would marry two years later. Much like Mill, Ibsen found great support and counsel from his wife especially during the harsh financial years that the couple endured in Norway until 1864. Their conditions were further worsened when the Norse theatre in Christiania failed, where Ibsen had been appointed as the artistic director. The couple moved to Italy where he composed 'Brand', the stormy play that would announce his arrival. For the next few years, Ibsen improved his craft with more plays that met with greater success. He also began incorporating societal theories into his plays, which would invite controversies and, in turn, more eyeballs. In his book 'Drama From Ibsen to Eliot', Raymond Williams terms the plays of the period as "the "social" plays", which "were taken as the high point, the works before them must be represented as mere preparation for maturity" (43). These works, namely 'Emperor and Galilean', 'The Pillars of Society', 'A Doll's House', 'Ghosts', 'An Enemy of the People' and 'The Wild Duck', were premiered across Scandinavia and Germany with packed theatres. Ibsen's biographer, Michael Meyer, mentions that these plays dealt "with the kind of topical problems which people were arguing about in debating societies, on the correspondence columns of newspapers and on street corners" ("The Master Playwright"). Krasner writes that "[i]t was in the final twenty years of his career, from 1879 to 1899, that his plays changed the course of modern drama" (40). By 1899, he had claimed a position alongside Strindberg and Chekhov, as the leading figures of the dramatic renaissance of the age. After the publication of his last play, 'When We Dead Awaken', his health began failing him. A series of paralytic strokes, that began in 1900, took his life on May 23, 1906.

A day before, on May 22, "at his last moment, lapsed in a coma, he sat up just before his death and said "Tvertimod!" – "On the contrary!"" (Krasner 39). The playwright's last words are exemplary of his lifelong task to stand against the dominant and pre-established social order of his day. His social plays were particularly impactful in asking questions that were not welcomed during his age, as they

worked towards upsetting the order. "People came away from these plays forced to rethink beliefs they'd never seriously questioned before. And this was something that no dramatist anywhere had achieved since Euripides, the Greek, over two thousand years earlier" (Meyer, "The Master Playwright"). Shakespeare, against whom Ibsen's influence is often weighed, never really challenged the monarchy. The Elizabethan wrote for the monarchs, his task was to entertain, more than to educate. Ibsen, on the other hand, often challenged authority in almost every aspect. He too didn't intend to educate. However, he wanted to pose questions, which is the first step toward education. "The great task of our time is to blow up all existing institutions--to destroy", Ibsen writes in a letter, dated 1883 (Lucas 34). Theatre, under this challenging figure, grew itself from being just entertainment. It took the shape of an artistic forum where topics of the day were debated. His works are representative of the literary as well as the social shift that occurred during the age. Michael Meyer quotes that Ibsen "wrote at a time of rapidly changing ideas, and many of his plays show the shock waves that were passing through bourgeois society in Europe" ("The Master Playwright"). Arnold Weinstein confirms Meyer's argument. Weinstein writes that Ibsen, through his plays, staged the "death knell for his nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, showing how much rot existed in its foundations, displaying how its central conventions of marriage and work were riddled with disease, proving how lying – to others, to oneself – was the principal antic of creatures in culture" (Krasner 36).

The criticism of the ills of his contemporary society formed the major conflict of his plays. The protagonist usually faced these ills where he or she was situated. Through these portrayals, social rules and obligations were questioned and criticised, especially when they interfered with the life and choice of an individual because individuality for Ibsen was of prime importance. He wrote a letter to King Oscar II, responding to criticism of his play 'Pillars of Society'. Ibsen, in that letter, states that "it is the inner life of the people, the life of the mind, which has to be purified and liberated;

that it is not the external liberties which are to be desired but on the contrary a personal and cultural liberation, and that this can only be acquired and taken possession of by the individual…" (Krasner 40). In the famous "twelve-cycle plays" that Ibsen wrote during the two decades, starting with 'A Doll's House' in 1879, Ibsen posits this need for liberation for a commonplace individual in stark opposition to societal obligations. Krasner traces the major influence on Ibsen that caused the playwright to depict modern tales in modern situations and modern language. "Ibsen was influenced by an obscure German intellectual Hermann Hettner and his book *Das moderne Drama: Äesthetische Untersuchungen* (1852)" (Krasner 41). In the work, Hettner examines the relationship of modern theatre with antiquated and Elizabethan dramas. It dissects "the manner in which history affects ordinary people; the decreasing importance of destiny and religion and the rising importance of psychology in drama; and ideas as they relate to everyday circumstances" (Krasner 42). Hettner professes that the modern audience should be able to understand, and, more importantly, relate to what is being presented on stage. Ibsen put Hettner's advice to effect and began writing stories that often displayed the battle between character development and civic codes, personal desires and social demands, subjective and objective.

Another major influence, on Ibsen's realistic descriptions, was the sudden shift from Romanticism to the Modern. Modernism, in itself, also focused on the subjective over the objective. This influence occurred in all of the literature produced by the Scandinavians. This movement was termed The Modern Breakthrough, which was theorised and spearheaded by George Brandes. In a series of lectures delivered by the scholar, at the University of Copenhagen, Brandes asserted the need for the adoption of a new literary style that caused social changes, rather than merely reflecting them. Thus, it was an age of political shifts caused by literature.

One of the decisive shifts that occurred in the political as well as social circles of Europe during this age was the gender-based political movements. The Scandinavian countries were not behind.

In fact, Norway became the second country in the European continent to grant full suffrage to women. "The situation of women in Scandinavia had become a subject of debate by 1854 when Norwegian daughters were first given equal inheritance rights to sons" (Hossain 2). These gender-based advancements, in these regions, were also partly initiated by the politically charged literature of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century. In the very year that it was published, Brandes's Danish translation of John Stuart Mill's 'The Subjection of Women' also appeared. Around the same time, Norwegian women writers, who were also activists in the feminist cause, began publishing works that dealt with gender politics and identity. Finney particularly refers to the contribution of Camilla Collett, who is often cited as the first Norwegian feminist. "Her realist novel *The District Governor's Daughters* (1854-55), which attacks the institutions of marriage because of its neglect of women's feelings and its concomitant destruction of love, finds echoes in *Love's Comedy*" (Finney 90-91). Mangang writes about Collet's impact on Ibsen's writing. She cites the "traces of Collet's thoughts in many of Ibsen's latter plays", including 'A Doll's House' and 'When We Dead Awaken' (Mangang 4). Aasta Hansteen was another literary contributor for the same cause from the said era. She is said to be the inspiration for a number of Ibsen's characters, most prominently Lona Hessel in 'The Pillars of Society' (Mangang 5). These women got extensive support from a few male authors in their cause. However, the influence of "four central male voices for feminism" was considered chief (Balaky and Sulaiman 36). These included Bjornstjerne Bjornston, Jonas Lie, Alexander Kielland and Henrik Ibsen.

Ibsen's association with feminism has been a topic of debate, especially since his address at the Norwegian Women's Right League at Christiania, dated May 26, 1898. In his address, he refrained from being a member of the association, and aligned himself to be "more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem to believe"; he went on to say that he "must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for the women's rights

movement" (Ibsen, *Speeches and New Letters* 65). Ibsen's affiliation with the movement was for the sake of humanity as a whole, rather than the concerned gender. He concluded by stating that: "True enough, it is desirable to solve the problem of women's rights, along with the others; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity" (Ibsen, *Speeches and New Letters* 65). Gail Finney writes that "the view supporting Ibsen as feminist can be seen to lie along a spectrum of attitudes with Ibsen as quasi-socialist at one end and Ibsen as humanist at the other" (89). Joan Templeton provides an accumulation of various voices, both assertive and dissenting, in her famous essay titled "The Doll House Backlash". The paper takes a look at various critics, from various eras, voicing opinions for and against the intention of the play as well as the playwright with respect to the feminist movement.

Templeton enlists a number of critics including R. M. Adams, Robert Brustein, Hermann Weigand, Oswald Crawford, Mary McCarthy, Brian Johnston, Evert Sprinchorn, Brain Downs, and a few more who do not wish to align Ibsen with feminism. Templeton particularly points out "[a] favourite piece of evidence in the argument that Ibsen was not interested in women's rights", which is "his aversion to John Stuart Mill" (35). After enlisting the dissenting arguments, Templeton eventually goes on to provide the opposite claims, of Ibsen's alignment with the movement. She writes in her Abstract: "research on Ibsen's life proves that, all claims to the contrary, his intentions… were thoroughly feminist" (Templeton). Both Templeton and Finney, prove that Ibsen was wrong in his assessment of himself as being not a part of the movement. Finney cites that "Ibsen's frequently voiced disinclination to belong to parties or societies of any kind", which could be the reason for his vocal disassociation (Finney 90). In her paper, Templeton writes that "[i]t is simply not true, then, that Ibsen was not interested in feminism" (37). She, in fact, proves that he was particularly engaged in the battle, almost at the frontline. Templeton cites "a scandalous incident" that occured in the spring of 1879, "that proves not only

Ibsen's interest in women's rights but his passionate support for the movement" (37). The Scandinavian Club in Rome received two proposals from Ibsen. The first asked to open the post of librarian for women candidates, the second one was for women to be allowed to vote in the club meetings. Templeton also quotes Ibsen's "long, occasionally eloquent speech", in which he posed a declamatory question: "Is there anyone in this gathering who dares assert that our ladies are inferior to us in culture, or intelligence, or knowledge, or artistic talent? I don't think many men would dare suggest that" (Templeton 37).

In 1884, Ibsen had become a recognised feminist activist. Aided by Bjorston, Lie, and Kielland, and the president of the Women's Rights League, H. E. Burner, Ibsen petitioned the Norwegian National Assembly, demanding women's property rights for them to control their estates. "To consult men in such a matter is like asking wolves if they desire better protection for the sheep" he stated (Finney 90). The petition contained that "[s]he must know and feel that she enters the marriage with the same rights as her husband" (Lorentzen 56).

"Moreover, Ibsen seemed to be surrounded by [women] feminists in his life as well as his work" (Balaky and Sulaiman 37). These not only included the aforementioned activists, Collet and Hansteen but also "his wife Suzannah Thoresen and her stepmother Magdalene Thoresen who was probably the first 'New Woman' Ibsen met in his life" (Balaky and Sulaiman 37). Egil Törnqvist cites that it was the effect of these relationships that "Ibsen became deeply concerned with issues pertaining to man-woman relationships in contemporary society" (4). Therefore, even if he wasn't inclined towards calling himself a feminist, he became one through his acts and activism.

However, what exceeds Ibsen's activism, for the cause of women, are his timeless works. In his naturalistic plays particularly, Ibsen presented women with strong voices and powerful demeanours, most notably Nora Helmer, Mrs Alving, Rebecca West, Hilda Wangel, and Hedda Gabbler. Literature, before this, had hardly

cared about the representation of women. The predominance of male perspective seldomly allowed for women characters to step out of their secondary and non-consequential roles. Ibsen's portrayals, however, were a marked diversion from the trend. Representations like the aforementioned characters were part of a Nineteenth Century literary phenomenon, called "The New Woman", who is a "type of heroine who challenged the restrictions set by male-dominated society and valued self-fulfillment and independence rather than the traditional ideal of self-sacrifice. Ibsen's plays *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890) foregrounded such New Women… cf. Max Beerbohm's apocryphal joke that, "The New Woman sprang fully armed from Ibsen's brain"…" (A Finch and H P Finch).

G. B. Shaw provides a parallel to the aforementioned literary term. In his acclaimed essay, titled 'The Quintessence of Ibsenism', Shaw calls her the "unwomanly woman" (39). Shaw, in his work, terms her as "a less agreeable person than the ordinary female conformer to the ideal of womanliness" (31). In simple words, she can be described as a "strong, independent and thoroughly self assured woman… who belongs to no one but herself" ("G. B. Shaw"). Characters like these are also featured in Shaw's plays too, most notably in the controversial 'Mrs Warren's Profession'. The women of Ibsen's fiction tend to challenge the Victorian norm in a number of ways. Hossain in his paper, titled "Ibsen's Treatment of Women", writes that Ibsen's "women characters outshine their male counterparts… by demonstrating great courage in times of crisis, and in face of adversity… They are actually bold, revolutionary women warriors with independent and intelligent psychology and aspiration for spiritual emancipation" (1). The women, fictionalised by Ibsen, are strong personalities that are at odds with the stringent Victorian conventions, wherefore they fight for identity, suffrage, and basic rights. For this, they often have to defy those conventions. "Ibsen attacks headlong the nineteenth-century convention of women as incompetent, emotionally-laden, "feeling" creatures incapable of "action" – the supposed domain of men" (Krasner 49).

Anna Caspari Agerholt, in her work called 'The History of the Norwegian Women's Movement', writes that "the case of women in Norway had its decisive break through at a time when literature began to portray social concerns" (Hossain 8). Agerholt further points out that "Ibsen undoubtedly belongs to those who through literary art indirectly and involuntarily turns out to advance the cause of women" (Hossain 8). Laura Marholm Hansson, a popular and controversial female critic of the time, reports that Ibsen's plays were revelations and had "a liberating influence on [her] and other women in the 1880s" (Hossain 6). James Joyce, in his review of 'When We Dead Awaken', goes on to state that "Ibsen's knowledge of humanity is nowhere more obvious than in his portrayal of women" (Hossain 6). Ibsen was evidently preoccupied with the fulfillment of the individual's destiny regardless of their gender. Anthony Starr states that "… In this time it was quite a new thing to really consider that women ought to have the same right to fulfill their destiny as men" ("The Master Playwright").

In order to expose the subjugation that women had to endure, Ibsen, much like Mill, presents a criticism of the social institutions that work towards suppressing women. One of the obvious ones, criticism of which can be seen in many of his plays, is that of marriage as a structure that is aligned to demean and enslave women. John Mortimer calls Ibsen's depiction of marriage as "stuffy little rooms" that was one of the bourgeois conventions that Ibsen thoroughly despised ("The Master Playwright"). Marriage becomes a central theme in many of his plays. J. W. Burrow writes that Ibsen "uses women to explore questions of will and self; convention weighed so heavily on women that it seemed self-evident that they could achieve personal freedom only in defiance, while marriage could plausibly figure as the residual form of slavery" (Krasner 60- 61). As part of the marriage union, "[t]hey were either more intimate servants, or decorative hothouse plants" (Hossain 3). Through his characters like Mrs Alving in 'Ghosts', Rebecca West in 'Rosmersholm' and the titular figure of 'Hedda

Gabler', Ibsen has repeatedly shown women's ill condition as a result of the Victorian norms concerning marriage.

However, his greatest and most influential depiction of a woman, stuck in an unhealthy marriage, is in 'A Doll's House'. Ibsen's 1879 play concerning the relationship between Nora and Torvald gained him global acclaim. As a matter of fact, it is often thought to be the most sensational event in the history of modern theatre. The play is also included in The Memory of the World Register, a UNESCO initiative to preserve the world's documentary heritage. Ibsen's play made it to the list in 2001 for its historical value and its influence around the world.

'A Doll's House' appeared as a criticism of the conformist bourgeois Victorian family. Krasner states that "*A Doll's House* is literally and symbolically a house recreated onstage; all the detritus of middle-class life are situated here…" (47). Ibsen was essentially projecting the domestic relationship between the genders on stage. Dinah Birch, from the University of Liverpool, states that "the play is full of dramatic tension, a replication of the political tension concerning gender in society" (BBC Podcasts, "Ibsen"). Birch further posits that the play was "an enormously forceful and direct challenge to deeply embedded concepts of marriage, the relation between the sexes and our responsibilities to each other" (BBC Podcasts, "Ibsen"). Ibsen's attempt to dramatise the issues concerning gender had serious repercussions. Anna Agerholt documents the play's significant impact on the "improvement of women's condition in Scandinavia" (Hossain 4). The play was discussed and talked about as no play ever before. "There were public demonstrations against it and for it. And privately, in the house, husbands could no longer assume that their wives would regard them as infallible gods" (Meyer, "The Master Playwright"). Ibsen presented a critique of the system that worked towards the domestic, social, economic, and spiritual restrictions that tied down women during the period.

The immediate impact of the play was seen in many ways. Gail Finney talks about the overwhelming reception from the audience. She states that the play "was enthusiastically welcomed by feminist thinkers in Norway and throughout Europe… In closing the door on her husband and children, Nora opened the way to the turn-of-the-century women's movement" (Finney 91). Right up till 1900 the play only saw packed theatres. In London, particularly, it was overwhelmingly attended by women, who "had assembled in force to do the honour to the Master who headed the revolt of her sex" (Barstow 387). Lucas says that the play continued receiving encouraging responses even decades after Ibsen's demise. "In 1939, for example, *A Doll's House* won a wild success… in Oslo… Helsinki and Stockholm (where the audience, 'not content with applauding like machine-guns, stamped and pounded on their seats')" (Lucas 129). Amongst the critical circles, the positive reaction was most prominently seen in one of the columns of a leading Norwegian feminist journal, 'Nylaende', whose editor Gina Krog called "the drama and its reformative affects a miracle" (Hossain 3). A further example is Amalie Skram, "Norways' foremost naturalist writer and the first Norwegian author to treat women's sexuality", who expressed praises for the play for its dramatic and psychological capabilities; Skram, in fact, saw the play "as a warning of what would happen when women in general woke up to injustice that had been committed against them" (Hossain 3). Templeton too talks about the immediate reaction that the play produced amongst the supportive and dissenting critics of Ibsen's representation of women. She states that "Ibsen's contemporaries, the sophisticated as well as the crude, recognized *A Doll House* as the clearest and most substantial expression of the "woman question" that had yet appeared" (Templeton 32). Accordingly, a number of articles concerning Ibsen and 'A Doll's House' appeared across Europe and America in the 1880s. Templeton enlists them: ""Der Noratypus," "Ibsen und die Frauenfragen," "Ibsen et la femme, "La representation feministe et sociale d'Ibsen," "A Prophet of the New Womanhood," "Ibsen as a Pioneer of the Woman Movement" (32). She tells that "[t]hese are a small sampling of titles

from scholars and journalists who agreed with their more famous contemporaries Lou Andreas Salome, Alla Nazimova, Georg Brandes, and August Strindberg, along with every other writer on Ibsen, whether in the important dailies and weeklies or in the highbrow and lowbrow reviews, that the theme of *A Doll House* was the subjection of women by men" (Templeton 32). This subjection is particularly visible in the depiction of the women in the play.

III. Analysis of Nora and Mrs Linde from Millian Feminist Perspective

(i) Christina Linden

Christina Linden, or Mrs Linden, as she is more often addressed, in the play, may not be the first character that enters one's mind with reference to 'A Doll's House'; however, she is the most pivotal one for the plot to progress. It is her arrival into Nora's supposedly perfect world that initiates the disruption of the established order. At the beginning of the play, Nora looks at a better and financially secured future, based on the promotion that her husband got. Linden, for that purpose, becomes a representation of the past re-arriving into Nora's world in the first act, whereupon she becomes the first person in the play to whom Nora discloses her principal secret. She arrives as an old friend of Nora, from another city looking for a job so that she may earn and live on her own. Her very decision to "[take] that long journey in mid-winter" is labelled as "brave" by Nora (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 10). The latter is prompted to say this because it was quite unusual at the time for women to travel alone. The mere act of dependent-traveling is evidence of the amount of influence that men exerted in the lives of all the women of the age. They were entirely dependent on their male counterparts to accompany them for even the most individualistic tasks. Mill presents criticism of this established order. He states that since women, of his day and age, are brought up in that system, they never really "appreciate the value of self-dependence" (*TSoW* 215). He exclaims that a woman "is not self-dependent; she is [not even]

taught self-dependence…" (*TSoW* 215). Nora's admiration of Christina's "brave" act is a marker of her own desire to be what Mill asserts as self-dependent. Here, Nora's far-off position as an admirer, especially at the beginning of the play, sets her up in stark contrast to Linden.

Ibsen throughout the play, thenceforth, presents Christina as an ideal foil for Nora. Their past friendship represents a stage where they may have had many similarities. The current state, however, separates the two ladies in many ways. It also serves as a testimony of the different routes that their lives have taken. Nora voices this fact when they first meet; she says: "How changed you are, Christina!" (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 10). The physiognomic changes that Nora alludes to, are a manifestation of the social, cultural, and conditional differences that separates them.

The contradistinction between the two ladies is most particularly seen through the Marxist lens. "Once married for money, now widowed, a castigator of Nora's affection, nervous about sexual responsiveness (underscoring perhaps her displaced eroticism) and financially totally independent, she [Linden] stands for the ascetic individual Marx noticed at the advent of bourgeois capitalism" (Ahmad and Gawel 179). Their reunion in Act One exposes the Marxist hierarchy between them. While Nora, to a larger extent, has to depend upon her husband for money, Linden is a widow, and therefore is able to apply for work. Mill asserts that "The power of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman…" (*TSoW* 179). It is this power that places Linden at a rank above Nora in the capitalist social order. Financial inferiority affects one's social order in the play, whether it is Nora, Linden, Krogstad, or Torvald. Ahmad and Gawel in their paper, titled "The Politics of Money", discuss the binary social order put forth in 'A Doll's House', where "the inferior is associated [with] childish imprudence," while "the superior [displays] the wisdom of the adult" (181). On this scale, Linden appears as the adult who "is able to describe her relationships with others (parent, siblings, deceased husband) in purely utilitarian terms and can identify herself unemotionally with money" (Ahmad

and Gawel 181). On the other hand, Nora is quite often treated as a child, at least in the major half of the play. Linden herself calls her "a mere child" (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 17). This categorization is also a label for her lack of financial freedom. Linden enjoys freedom as part of the public sphere, while Nora is restricted to the private sphere of her house. These differences are a result of their respective social identities.

The biggest difference that forms a part of these social identities is their respective marital statuses. As mentioned above, Mill states that "marriage [is] the destination appointed by society for women, the prospect they are brought up to…" (*TSoW* 153). Hence, it becomes "the reference by which the single woman is defined…" (Beauvoir 451). A single woman, beyond the presumed marriageable age, is often thought to be an alien to the social group. Society and laws, especially during the Victorian times, were aligned to hinder the mobility of a single woman somehow. Ibsen uses Linden to depict the difficulty that women had to face without a husband, especially on the financial front. Ever since the death of her husband Christina had to endure many hardships and overcome a number of social hurdles to make ends meet. Her desire to remarry gives an indication of her wish to be a part of the social order once more and put an end to these hardships. As a wife to Krogstad, she may once again feel included in the society that has been working to ostracize non-married women like her. This ostracisation translates to the limitation in job opportunities, which, in turn, translates to financial instability. Nora's social status, as a married woman, is antithetical to Christina's at the beginning of the play. She forms a part of the society that has been working to keep distance from the widow. This is also evident from the lack of communication between them. Nora doesn't even write to her even after learning about her husband's demise. "I kept putting it off," she says, "and something came in the way" (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 11). This "something" could have been the invisible barrier that keeps unmarried women out. Hence, Nora forms part of the society, while Christina dwells outside it. The latter's journey, literal as well as

symbolic, causes the two to exchange their positions during the course of the play. Nora leaves a man to disassociate herself from society. On the other hand, Christina rekindles the relationship with a man to be a part of it once more.

Besides Nora, it is this man, Krogstad, against whom Linden assumes the position of a foil. The two share a number of similarities, besides affectionate feelings for one another. Both of them have had unhappy marriages that came to an abrupt end after the passing of their respective partners. Ibsen almost underlines the difference through the title attached to Christina's name. She is often addressed as "Mrs Linden", which serves as a badge of her past relationship. She is still tied to her late husband, while Krogstad has no such ties attached to him. Ibsen also tells that the two have visibly altered from their past-selves. While the alteration in Linden is disclosed by Nora when they meet, Krogstad's alteration is revealed by Linden herself, when she talks about it with Nora. "How he has changed" she says (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 25). Linden and Krogstad also aim for the same job at the bank. While Krogstad is trying to keep it, Linden is trying to work towards attaining it. They both approach Nora for the same. The difference lies in their manner of approach. While Linden seeks favour from the lady, Krogstad relies on unethical means to retain the said position. In this process, both these characters embody the negative opinions of Victorian society that Ibsen is attempting to criticise through his play. Linden has to rely on favour, despite her massive work experience, which is a result of her gender. Even her work experience gives an insight into the limitation of opportunities accorded to the woman of the age. She could only apply for jobs that were deemed appropriate for women. Hence, "keeping a shop, a little school" are the only kinds of occupations that are open to her (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 16). Mill talks about "… the injustice of excluding half the human race from the greater number of lucrative occupations… ordaining from their birth either that they are not, and cannot by any possibility become, fit for employments which are legally open to the stupidest and basest of the other sex…" (*TSoW* 174). Therefore, Christina Ibsen is

able to represent the conditions and situations allowed for women in the public working sphere.

At the same time, Krogstad's immorality, especially in the beginning, is a criticism of the social evils of the time. During the course of the play, Ibsen, slowly but steadily, reveals the motivations and circumstances that compel Krogstad. This is done to pave the way for the change of heart that occurs in him in Act Three, which is brought about by Linden herself. "As the play moves towards crisis… Mrs. Linde[n] binds her life with Krogstad's, though she will not give up [the] job at the bank" (Ahmad and Gawel 183). This is a relationship of equals that wish to come together on their own accord. Linden wouldn't have to give up her job, as a sacrifice, to please Krogstad. This association is in sharp contrast with the relationship between Nora and Helmer. The former is a modern relationship of two working-class individuals who have come together after failing, while the latter is more traditional in that manner.

Much like her relationship, Linden, herself, is also modern in many ways. In one of their conversations, she explains to Krogstad that she finds a certain sense of meaning and purpose when she works. Christina Linden belongs to the group of ladies that Ibsen attempted to present on the modern stage. She highlights the issues that women face of the conventionalism of society. At the same time, she also projects the modernism that allows women like her, to find their path in that society. At the end of the play, when Nora's transformation is complete, she announces that she's going to live with Christina for the night. Linden's home, in this case, becomes a refuge for the evolved Nora, who seeks freedom and associates it with her friend's house.

From the perspective of the theatrical elements of 'A Doll's House', Linden is pivotal in many ways. Bradford writes that "Any actress playing the role of Mrs. Linde[n] will be doing a great deal of attentive listening" ("Mrs Kristine Linde"). Hence, it is Christina Linden that becomes the expository figure for Ibsen to relay the

information to the audience. It is while talking to her that characters tend to reveal valuable details from their respective pasts. Therefore, conversations involving her become a litmus test, as they often tend to reveal the perspectives, biases and characteristic traits of people that she comes across in the play. For instance, her opening exchange with Nora as well as Dr Rank reveals the situation of women in general. Both of them mistake Christina's trip to their town for a holiday. In this, both of them fail to recognise that it was essential for Christina to find a job and work for money, a situation that was not associated with women of the time. However, it is Torvald whose character is particularly exposed whenever he has a dialogue with Christina. His harsh judgement of her is effective in revealing the misogyny and sexism that forms his character. His first question to her upon learning that she wishes to apply for a job is not about her experience or her qualification but of her marital status. In a later conversation, as the two of them talk about knitting, he even goes to the extent of suggesting to Linden that she "ought to embroider instead" and teaches her how to go about it (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 96). It is suggestive of Torvald's opinion of women, which he tends to associate with looks, rather than character. Mill states that "…one can, to an almost laughable degree, infer what a man's wife is like, from his opinions about women in general" (*TSoW* 147). Hence, Torvald's skewed opinion of Christina gives a better insight into Torvald's opinion of Nora as well. Christina, in this manner, becomes a principal character for Ibsen to comment upon other characters in the play.

As has been aforementioned, Linden is also effective in the process of plot progression. She is essential to initiate the conflict of the play when she attempts to take Krogstad's job. At the same time, she also becomes a catalyst for the resolution as well. It is Christina, along with Krogstad, who is responsible for Nora's metamorphosis that occurs in the third act. It is deliberate on part of Linden, who stops Krogstad from taking the letter from Torvald, thereby ensuring the dismantling of the facade amongst the Helmers. In a symbolic way,

it is her deliberate inaction that brings about the fall of the traditional wedding personified in Torvald and Nora.

ii) Eleanora Helmer

It is a lesser-known fact that Ibsen's protagonist, in 'A Doll's House', was named Eleanora. It was quite sometime after the publication of the play that Ibsen began explaining to people that his heroine's "real" name was "Eleanora" but that she was called "Nora" from childhood (Templeton 35). This trivial detail gives an insight into how very well fleshed out the protagonist was in the playwright's mind. "She came right up to me and put her hand on my shoulder… She was wearing a simple blue woollen dress" Ibsen once said to his wife (Lucas 135). A number of critics even suggest that Nora was Ibsen's favourite fictional creation. C S Mary writes that "he had conceived this character in the womb of his mind. For one day he had claimed to his wife, "Now I have seen Nora" (14). Templeton cites Bergliot Bjornson Ibsen, the playwright's daughter-in-law, who "tells the story of how she and her husband, Sigurd, on one of the last occasions on which they saw Ibsen out of bed in the year he died, asked permission to name their newborn daughter "Eleanora." Ibsen was greatly moved. "God bless you, Bergliot," he said to her (35). The reason was simple enough: "Ibsen admired, even adored Nora Helmer. Among all his characters, she was the one he liked best and found most real" (Templeton 34).

G. J. Williams argues that Ibsen's fondness and belief in the realness of Nora stem from the fact that he "bases Nora's story on the real-life story of Laura Kieler…" (Düzgün 88). It is essential to know the muse to comprehend the creation. F. L. Lucas points out that "one cannot fully understand Nora without knowing something of the strange, yet true story of Laura Kieler. Nora--Laura--even their names (in English) rhyme" (131). Taking inspiration from the real world also forms Ibsen's writing mantra: "Everything that I created as a poet… has originated from a frame of mind and a situation in life" (Lucas 23). In a letter, dated 1870, Ibsen extended the same writing advice to Kieler. He writes: "One must have something to

create from, some life-experience. The author who has not that, does not create; he merely writes books" (Lucas 23). Ibsen never wanted to write just books; he wanted to represent life. Hence, when he learned of Kieler's real-life tragedy, he couldn't stop himself from composing it into a play.

Kieler, who was a Norwegian journalist, began her association with Ibsen in the spring of 1870 when she published 'Brand's Daughters'. The work, which was penned as a sequel to Ibsen's 'Brand', dealt with women's rights. She dedicated it to Ibsen and even sent him a copy, who promptly wrote her back to acknowledge her talent (Meyer, *Ibsen* 320-321). The two maintained acquaintance and correspondence ever since. Ibsen took up the role of a distant mentor to the lady, as she continued writing, and thereupon dispatching the earliest copies to Ibsen for his opinion and advice. The authoress later married a Danish school teacher named Victor Kieler. The newlywed couple was informed by the doctors about the urgent need for Victor to move to a warmer climate, as he had contracted tuberculosis. Much like Ibsen's protagonist, Laura loaned some money to finance their Italian excursion. It was on their return, from the successful trip, that they visited the Ibsens at Munich. Laura disclosed the details of the loan to Suzannah Ibsen. For some years, following the trip, "she worked frantically to reimburse the loan, exhausting herself in turning out hackwork…" (Templeton 35). A few years later, in 1878, she wrote a distressed letter to Mrs Ibsen. This letter also contained a manuscript for a novel that she wanted to publish via Ibsen to acquire some immediate funds. Unfortunately, Ibsen rejected the publication, for he felt that the work was a bit rushed and hence, did not match her literary capabilities. He conveyed this to her via a letter that also contained advice to disclose the truth to her husband, for he may come forward to assist Laura in the process of payment. Ibsen was already intrigued by the story and intended to structure it into a play that resembled 'The Pillars of Society'.

However, Kieler's story didn't end there. Upon reading her mentor's dismal reply, she decided to repay the loan by forging a check. "The

forgery was detected, Victor Kieler denounced his wife and committed her to a mental institution. He also retained custody of the couple's young children (one a newborn infant) declaring that Laura was an unfit mother" (Davis 79). Laura was kept in the asylum for a month until the point where she was forced to plead to Victor to let her return to their house (Meyer, *Ibsen* 433-435). Templeton writes that "[h]aving done all for love, Laura Kieler was treated monstrously for her efforts by a husband obsessed with his standing in the eyes of the world" (35). G. J. Williams asserts that it was her disregard for the moral and legal laws of a patriarchal community that landed Laura at the asylum (Düzgün 88). Moreover, Victor was also supported aptly by the laws and institutions in convicting his wife. Mill, in 'The Subjection of Women', comments that it is the "institutions which place the right on the side of the might" (129). Ibsen, too, writes in his working notes for the play that "this husband of hers takes his standpoint, conventionally honorable, on the side of the law, and sees the situation with male eyes" (Meyer, *Ibsen* 446). Ibsen also writes: "A woman cannot be herself in modern society; it is an exclusively male society with laws framed by men, and with counsels and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view" (Meyer, *Ibsen* 476). These laws are a reflection of the pre-existing bias that influenced the formation of the very laws. Mill states that "[l]aws and systems of polity always begin by recognising the relations they find already existing between individuals. They convert what was a mere physical fact into a legal right, give it the sanction of society, and principally aim at the substitution of public and organised means of asserting and protecting these rights…" (*TSoW* 126)

It was upon learning Laura's plight that Ibsen resolved to write 'A Doll's House' based on the very tragedy. A few scholars have claimed that Ibsen was particularly heartbroken and enraged with the incident, for he never thought it would end this way. F. L. Lucas tells that "when the story reached him far away in Munich, he angrily buckled on the armour of a St George, mounted his chair, and pointed his pen to vindicate this injured woman" (134). He also

wanted to criticise the very laws, rights, and institutions that worked against Laura. He did so by opting to put a number of authorial changes to the real-life chronicle, or as Templeton calls it: sharpening "life's blurred edges to meet art's demand" (35). The writer and journalist Laura was replaced with a housewife in the form of Nora, who relied upon copying, rather than writing novels; Torvald, the bank official, substituted the unforgiving Victor, the school teacher, as the physical manifestation of antagonism in the play (Templeton 35). Torvald would merely denounce Nora, rather than put her into an asylum, as it happened in real-life. "The Helmers, in other words, would be "normal." And this normality would transform a sensational *fait divers* into a devastating picture of the ordinary relations between wife and husband" (Templeton 35). These changes enabled the creator to examine and criticise what he called, in a letter to Edmund Gosse, "the problems of married life" (McFarlane 454). The most striking and powerful change, however, would be the ending where Nora would not beg to be taken back. She would instead appear as "free and unfettered by any bond, divine or human, without any commitment or obligation…" (Hossain 3-4). Ibsen wanted to somehow amend the wrongs done to the lady in real-life, by making her break free from the shackles in the fictionalised story. "I might honestly say that it was for the sake of the last scene that the whole play was written" he says in his *Letters and Speeches* (300).

However, in order to accomplish the catharsis at the end, Ibsen had to demonstrate the protagonist's subjugation at the very start. Hence, Nora is introduced right up front as the play commences, and the viewer witnesses her apparent ignorance as a consequence of her subjugation. Except for a few brief moments she never really leaves the stage. As a result, she gets to evolve right in front of the viewer's eyes.

"The audience first sees her when she returns from a seemingly extravagant Christmas shopping excursion" (Krasner 10). The Christmas gifts that she arrives with are symbolic of the traditional gender roles in the family as well as the society to which the family

belongs. She brings "a new suit for Ivar, and a little sword… a horse and a trumpet for Bob. And… a doll and a cradle for Emmy" (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 5). Nora's choice of gifts is suggestive of the fact that she also buys into the existing order, where the boys should be strong, adventurous, and unrestricted, whereas the girl should be nurturing, maternalistic, and consequently confined within a single role. The gifts stand in sharp contrast. The horse would belong to Bob as a symbol of unimpeded freedom in the outer world; it does not limit his identity to much extent. However, Emmy's cradle stands for the limited interiors of a house and therefore confines her indoors. Mill writes that in doing so society tells them that "it is the duty of women… to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves and to have no life but in their affections" (*TSoW* 137-138).

It is also made clear that Nora lacks socio-economic freedom, as she relies upon her husband for her monetary needs. This puts her at a lower level on the Marxist ladder mentioned earlier. Mill asserts that "[i]n the case of women, each individual of the subject-class is in a chronic state of bribery and intimidation combined" (*TSoW* 133). Ibsen represents this "chronic state" in the manner in which the financial transaction between Nora and Torvald takes place. In this state "… every privilege or pleasure she has [is] either his gift, or depend[s] entirely on his will…" (Mill, *TSoW* 138). Accordingly, she is forced to obey the will of her husband who assumes a superior position at her expense, revealing her moral and intellectual ignorance. Krasner writes that "Nora appears at first glance to be dimwitted: she eats macaroons, raises the children, dances the tarantella for Torvald's erotic desires, but is largely denied access to household business affairs. Her use of language is child-like, something that Torvald accentuates condescendingly" (46). This is a product of the conditioning that Nora, a metaphorical figure for all women, is put through. Her primary aim is to maintain the obedient, docile, and submissive status that pleases Torvald and has been positioned as her ideal state all her life. Torvald "cannot bear to see her "out of temper" or [with] "uneasy" qualities which he attributes

to the aggressive male nature" (Düzgün 88). He, here, is symbolic of the patriarchal mindset that works towards conditioning women. Mill talks about this mindset as he states that "[a]ll women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others" (*TSoW* 137). Therefore, Nora doesn't even seek emancipation from the entrapment at the beginning, for as it seems, she is not even aware of such an existence. She appears happy being confined to domestic affairs like decorating the Christmas tree and procuring gifts for everyone in the house. Professor Belinda Jack mentions that "Nora is physically, metaphorically, emotionally, psychologically trapped and this entrapment […] prevents her from being an individual" (Gresham College). Her condition at the beginning is suffocating, to say the least. She spends the most time on the stage and hence, she has no privacy, as there are either characters and/or audience members constantly watching her. While Torvald's study allows him privacy, Nora lacks it, for she has no "room of her own" in Woolf's sense (Jack, Gresham College). Consequently, most of her time is spent in the center of the house, from where she may be able to run when being called upon. Mill comments about this state of women. He writes that "she is expected to have her time and faculties at the disposal of everybody" at all hours, whereas "if he has a pursuit, he offends nobody by devoting his time to it" (Mill, *TSoW* 200-201). In addition, it is never really revealed what Torvald achieves in his study. Mill continues as he states that "occupation is received as a valid excuse for his not answering to every casual demand which may be made on him" (*TSoW* 201). Nora, on the other hand, "must always be at the beck and call of somebody, generally of everybody…" (Mill, *TSoW* 201). Her pursuits are considered negligible and of no consequence.

However, as the play progresses Ibsen begins to dismantle the image that Nora projects to Torvald and the world. Krasner states that the "play's ominous foreboding can be deciphered by the title, *Et Dukkehjm*" (46). He quotes Errol Durbach's description of the

Norwegian title which implies "a snug haven, a world of private domestic ideals presided over by a paragon of wifely duties, populated by perfect doll children, and protected by a model paterfamilias" (Krasner 46). Nora has to depend upon deception and lies to meet her wants and desires. Ibsen indicates this even before Torvald's arrival on stage when she buys and eats the forbidden food secretly. Following that, when she is asked about the macaroons, she denies it whole-heartedly. The trivial white lie is essential in revealing the deceptive, and sometimes self-deceptive, existence that women have to rely upon. Mill, in 'The Subjection of Women', talks about the false nature that women develop in order to seek favour from men, or to avoid giving them offence. It is a consequence of the patriarchal setup within which women grow up. This restrictive social conditioning doesn't allow them to reveal their true and free nature. Mill states that "authority on the one side and subordination on the other prevent perfect confidence. Though nothing may be intentionally withheld, much is not shown" (*TSoW* 147). Nora is a product of such a society. Through her portrayal, Ibsen wishes to express the fear that persists in women: "[t]he fear of losing ground in his opinion or in his feelings [which] is so strong, that even in an upright character, there is an unconscious tendency to show only the best side, or the side which, though not the best, is that which he most likes to see…" (Mill, *TSoW* 147-148). The macaroons that she eats secretly are symbolic of her real and subverted wishes and desires. She keeps them hidden until the very end of Act Two, when she believes her facade is about to come to an end. At this point, Nora openly calls out to her maid, "And macaroons, Ellen--plenty--just this once" (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 84). Besides the macaroons, the tarantella also becomes a symbol of deception in the play. Krasner points out that "Nora's dancing the tarantella, a highly theatricalized moment, presents a double layer of concealment; her body in motion is obfuscating her authentic self, her self-awareness of betrayal, and her realization that she is living a lie" (49). Finney also comments upon the Italian dance tradition that "allows women to escape from marriage and motherhood into a free, lawless world of music and uninhibited movement" (98). In her final

practice before the ball, Torvald asks her to do it "Not so violently"; to which, Nora replies "I must! I must!" as she continues the dance (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 81). The fiery and passionate performance allows Nora to let go of the mild-mannered Victorian wife's facade that she maintains. The short conversation is also effective in revealing Torvald's perspective and biases which are a result of the patriarchal setup as well.

Nora's husband is also a product of the very society that produced her. Ibsen regularly uses his character to expose the evils of the established gender-biased order. The playwright does so as soon as Torvald arrives on the stage. The patronizing tone, the constant belittling that he does to Nora, and most particularly, the nicknames that he assigns to her are effective in revealing the misogyny and sexism that make the man. The nicknames of the small animals are suggestive of Torvald's opinion of Nora, who is treated as a child or a pet. "Helmer fails to acknowledge her individuality" especially when "he addresses her as 'skylark' and 'squirrel'. While treating her in this manner he is oblivious of the fact that 'skylarks' and 'squirrels' are capable of flight" (C S Mary 15). For him, her ideal nature is that of "meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into" his hands (Mill, *TSoW* 138). According to Torvald, Nora needs to be "subordinate to his comfort and pleasure, and to let him neither see nor feel anything coming from her, except what is agreeable to him" (Mill, *TSoW* 148).

Şebnem Düzgün applies the theory of cultural materialism by Foucault on 'A Doll's House'. Foucault essentially asserted an "order of sexuality" in society. Düzgün states that "in this order men, adults, parents, and doctors are the ones who have the power and "the right to know whereas women, adolescents, children, and patients, are the ones who are deprived of power and "forced to remain ignorant". In this respect Helmer, a member of the 'superior' sexual group, feels the right to control Nora…" (88-89). Every marriage follows this order of sexuality, where the power gets unevenly distributed on the basis of gender. This fits well with Mill's assertion, who states that "everyone who desires power,

desires it most over those who are nearest to him, with whom his life is passed, with whom he has most concerns in common and in whom any independence of his authority is oftenest likely to interfere with his individual preferences" (*TSoW* 133). It is the control for which Torvald enjoys the tarantella, a routine that he may have picked up on their trip to Italy. The music that he plays sets the tone onto which Nora is supposed to dance. However, as aforementioned, she sets herself free in the penultimate performance at the end of Act Two, setting up the springboard for her total emancipation in Act Three. She even announces to Helmer, before the performance, that he "shall see [Nora] in [her] glory" the next evening (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 89).

This glory is fully achieved as the play comes to a climax. The end of the play is a new beginning for Nora. It is only after letting go of the facade of her life with her husband, that she begins to live. Mill writes that "after the primary necessities of food and raiment, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature" (*TSoW* 223). Nora depicts the cultural metamorphosis that occurred in the gender front during the age. The central concern for such political movements was the individual identity and the freedom of a woman, that Mill mentions. Nora, as the metaphorical New Woman, steps out of the "self-effacing" figure "who dutifully performs her roles as daughter, wife and mother" to assert her own individual identity and "reconstruct her gender relationship with others" (Hossain 5).

Naturally, the last scene has garnered much attention for moral as well as literary reasons. A number of dissenting voices have termed Nora's transformation as phoney and unfathomable. C. S. Mary, in this regard, quotes that "Nora's metamorphosis from a 'doll' to an enterprising woman may at times seem to be cinematic. On retrospection, it dawns to me that it is certainly audacious of Nora to have borrowed money from Krogstad and having succinctly repaid it in installments. Therefore, Nora's decision to walk out of the marriage is not instantly stimulated by Ibsen" (17).

Ibsen, in fact, paves the way for Nora to take the final step, from her first minor deception, to her desire to curse publicly, and even to her decision to work alone to pay off her debt; these all are pointers to her individual capability that she had, but only kept hidden all the years. Her decision for departure, in itself, is also not spontaneous. It is a consequence of a misplaced notion of a miracle that Nora used to associate with her marriage, and her husband. Upon the final reveal of the letter and the secret to Torvald, Nora loses her self-confidence and hopes for a rescue with Torvald's assistance. Shaw writes that at this point "all her illusions about herself are now shattered. She sees herself as an ignorant and silly woman, a dangerous mother, and a wife kept for her husband's pleasure merely; but she clings all the harder to her illusion about him: he is still the ideal husband who would make any sacrifice to rescue her from ruin" (65). It is the non-fulfillment of her belief in her marriage that prompts her in the direction of her final walk. Krasner writes that Nora is a "modernist influenced by romantic notions of inner fulfillment, Nora has waited for the notion of "the miracle"" (10). It is when she finally arrives across this vain notion that she decides that she should look inwards to find a meaning for herself, rather than in relation to people around her. Arnold Hauser describes Ibsen's social messaging with Nora's portrayal, who appears as the demarcation between the modern and the pre-modern world: "the duty of the individual towards himself [or herself], the task of self-realization, the enforcement of one's own nature against the narrow-minded, stupid and out-of-date conventions of bourgeois society" (Krasner 49).

On the other hand, Torvald's portrayal is effective in Ibsen's critique of the social conventions especially pertaining to women. His reaction upon receiving the final letter and the incriminating document from Krogstad is suggestive of his self-centered attitude. "I am saved," he says, while giving not even an afterthought to Nora's situation (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 109). Following this, she barely speaks, except for a few obligatory quick responses to Torvald's self-serving and inconsiderate opinion of their marriage.

"Ironically Nora thanks Torvald for his forgiveness, and goes out to change her masquerade-dress. For she too, like Rank, has finished with disguises" (Lucas 147). She even tells him that she's going to "take off [her] doll's dress" (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 111). "She returns--an effective visual contrast--in the dress of daily life" and informs Torvald that she is leaving (Lucas 147). "Torvald fails to comprehend her actions and this failure is a fault line between pre-modern and modern ideas. Nora points out that the real acting has been his, and that she no longer wishes to play a role in his scenario with Torvald as the leading man. Torvald has been "playacting" father, husband, and lover, but his real feelings, like Nora's, are dulled by convention" (Krasner 48).

The final conversation between Nora and Torvald encapsulates much of the argument that Ibsen, and even Mill, contended. Lucas writes: "the final duologue seems to me a masterpiece, as the two face each other across the table. Nora's sentences are plain, simple, straightforward but their curt restraint cuts like a lash" (147). "Feminists and women's rights activists have enthusiastically welcomed her final words, and academic commentators have concluded that she has finally discovered," as Hemmer says, that her "happiness was based on a much more comprehensive masquerade than the one she herself had invented" (A Finch and H P Finch). In this conversation, she makes it clear that "she sees that their whole family life has been a fiction: their home a mere doll's house in which they have been playing at ideal husband and father, wife and mother. So she leaves him then and there and goes out into the real world to find out its reality for herself…" (Shaw 65-66). She talks about the "great wrong", which she believes has been done at her expense. "The "great wrong" done to Nora lay in the principle of coverture by which a daughter was treated legally as an extension of her father and a wife of her husband" (Kelly 16). Templeton in her assessment of Nora's great speech compares her arguments with "Wollstoncraft's major charge in the Vindication" where the philosopher asserts that women are only brought up to be "pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue" rendering them as mere "gentle,

domestic brutes" (32). Templeton also equates Nora's description of herself as a doll as "Margaret Fuller's charge that man "wants no woman, but only a girl to play ball with"" (32).

Nora also comments about her own ignorance, for the simple reason that she imbibed opinions from her father first and then from Torvald. As a result, she never formed her own opinions, about topics that lay outside her marriage. Mill writes about such a condition for all women where "she is taught that she has no business with things out of that sphere; and accordingly, she seldom has any honest and conscientious opinion on them…" (*TSoW* 163). In her evolved assessment, Nora is able to objectively define and criticise their marriage: "I passed from father's hands into yours" (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 114). This transference of Nora's identity, from her father to her husband, did not allow her to form her own opinions or her likings. She says: "It is your fault that my life has been wasted" (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 114). Nora, as Ibsen's mouthpiece, is calling out the concept of marriage and all of the patriarchy in this self-assessment.

She asserts that she "must try to educate" herself (Ibsen, *A Doll's House* 115). Education is the central concern for the upliftment of any group that faces subjection or subjugation of any kind. In his text, "Mill identified education as the primary practical tool by which an aesthetic and moral appreciation of individuality could be cultivated in people over time and across generations" (Botting 63). He also points out the disadvantages of lack of education whereupon a woman becomes a secondary citizen, who is defined by their relation to the primary; she "neither knows nor cares which is the right side in politics, but she knows what will bring in money or invitations, give her husband a title, her son a place, or her daughter a good marriage" (Mill, *TSoW* 163). Her domain of knowledge doesn't traverse beyond the topics that are non-consequential to her family's well-being. Nora's decision for self-education is also a pointer to the need for all women to traverse beyond those topics and gain an understanding that is their own, and not forced upon them. Education is the simplest, most personal, and individualistic

act that pushes one towards upliftment. Nora, in her culminating deliverance, expresses a similar desire.

Torvald tries to persuade Nora's resolute decision by reminding her of her duties towards her husband and children. This echoes Mill's assertion about "the general opinion of men" who see "the natural vocation of a woman [as] that of a wife and mother" (*TSoW* 150). Nora, however, states that she has higher duties than those. In this, "she is voicing the most basic of feminist principles: that women no less than men possess a moral and intellectual nature and have not only a right but a duty to develop it: "the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties" (Templeton 32). "The sum of the matter is that unless Woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself" (Shaw 37). Nora, towards the end, also presents a critique of the society, laws, religion, and books that have worked collectively to subjugate women since always.

Finally, Nora "leaves the stage space, with its comforts and familiarity, transgressing, indeed challenging the very ideals of matrimony and motherhood. It is deliberately vague where she is going, because metaphorically she is following Baudelaire's directive to become a modernist "idler," …" (Krasner 11). This ending was highly controversial. "That door slammed by Nora shook Europe" (Lucas 149). The German reception was particularly severe, as the crowd was intolerant towards Nora's final decision. Ibsen, finally, had to come up with another alternate ending where Torvald drags Nora to their children's bedroom, whereupon she cries and the curtain falls. Ibsen called this alteration "a barbarous outrage" (Lucas 149). Krasner contends that "Nora must slam the door and leave her family because it is the ethical thing to do for all humans to do. Rousseau opens his Social Contract with "Man is born free; but he is everywhere in chains," and Ibsen suggests that man is not free unless he frees the chains from within" (41). The controversial action was highly pivotal as it symbolised a literal and metaphorical slam toward the antiquated traditions aligned against

feminism. It "brought down behind it in dust the whole Victorian family gallery" (R Williams 42). The closing of the door presented a physical barrier between the Nora that was subjugated and the Nora that shines in glory. Ibsen purposefully flips the position at the end as Torvald is left behind in the domestic sphere, where Nora was confined all her life. On the other hand, Nora steps out of her house towards freedom, which Mill terms "the first and strongest want of human nature" (*TSoW* 223).

IV. Conclusion

Women's rights in the Victorian period were next to nothing. They were massively excluded from universities, advanced degrees as well as job opportunities. This discrimination also translated at the domestic level. Marriage, as an institution, was aligned against the well-being and liberty of a Victorian woman.

The appearance of these two texts heralded a social change in the literary field, as gender became a central theme of many of the works that appeared after these. A literary criticism of marriage and the laws around it exposed the imbalance and prejudice that forms the core of the relationship between a husband and a wife. Both Mill and Ibsen, in their respective texts, dealt with this fundamental relationship and its ill effects. An intertextual analysis of the concerned texts reveals the timeless contention for gender equality made by the two writers. It certainly challenged the Victorian norms, and to some extent, continues to do so in the modern world as well.

A re-reading of *A Doll's House* from the Millian feminist perspective reassures its pivotal position as a thoroughly feminist text. In the depiction of the two ladies in his play, Ibsen echoed many of the claims made by Mill in *The Subjection of Women.* Both the texts retain contextual importance in the history of the feminist struggle.

It goes without saying that texts written by women form the core of literary feminism. However, texts like *The Subjection of Women* and

A Doll's House are symbolic of the support of the male feminists, which is essential in the process of challenging the status quo. They are also a pointer to the fact that equality is an allied aim, and a reminder of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's eternal advice that "We Should All Be Feminists".

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