



## RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS AND MORAL DILEMMAS: A FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVE OF IBSEN'S PLAY *A DOLL'S HOUSE*

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the Study:** This research paper attempts to examine the play *A Doll's House* through the perspective of challenges faced by the protagonist against moral authority and censorship and her resilience in the face of difficulties.

**Methodology:** The research paper proposes to make use of the secondary data including related articles and web sources. The data collected are words, phrases, clauses, and sentences related to women's problems and their struggles found in the play.

**Main Findings:** Nora revolts against male-formulated social structure repressing women in the name of religion, conventions, and breaks the framework set up by men and she dashes for a liberated life. The finding of the study is that through the play, we learn how important the interplay of religion and free spirit is to Nora's evolution.

**Applications:** This paper can be used by literary scholars and students.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** This research paper has used the contrasting forces of moral obligation and the free spirit of Nora to see how they have helped Nora to come out from a rosy-colored view of her dream world. The present study demonstrates how the protagonist feels entrapped and suffocated in her home, forced to live a life of false hope due to the impositions placed on by her husband and the patriarchal society which resultantly creates a feeling of isolation.

**Keywords:** Moral Authority, Censorship, Religion, Free Spirit, Impositions.

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to focus on Ibsen's realistic attitudes towards the 19th-century Scandinavian bourgeois society. It also attempts to make use of symbolism, metamorphosis, the art of characterization, plot construction, and unity of opposites of Ibsen's moral, social, and economic problems. Here, we have purposefully exposed Nora not only as a symbol of Ibsen's contemporary feminism but as a representation of feminist consciousness. This essay examines the ways in which for long centuries, women in the traditional social order and system have always been considered subservient to men. In a patriarchal Bourgeois society, the matriarchal community has been "humiliated", "afflicted", "silenced" and "tortured" socially, politically, culturally, and economically. The powerful woman character of Nora Helmer, as impacted in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, has been focused on. There are two kinds of spiritual laws, two kinds of conscience, one in men and a quite different one in women. They do not understand each other, but the woman is judged in practical life according to the man's law as if she were not a woman but a man. The wife in the play finds at last what is right and what is wrong; natural feelings on the one side and belief in authority on the other leave her in utter bewilderment. A woman cannot be herself in the society of today, which is exclusively masculine society, with laws written by men, and with accusers and judges who judge feminine conduct from the masculine standpoint (Ibsen, 1978).

Henrik Johan Ibsen (March 20, 1828 – May 23, 1906) was a greatly persuasive Norwegian dramatist who was to a great extent in charge of the ascent of the forward-looking sensible dramatization. The nineteenth-century revolved around a major revival of religious activity. The bible was taken as the literal truth and was the foundation of moral behavior, which became known as "Victorianism" (Belsey, 1985, p. 657). *A Doll's House* is a drama written by Henrik Ibsen which expresses the theme of an individual woman asking for her rights. The play comes in its defining moment when Nora abandons her husband and kids to discover her way to the new world. Virginia Woolf (1967) said women should have their separate rooms and money. "Women were called "decorations in the living room" and "angels in the kitchen" (Lu and Zhao, 2015). For many years, the history of English literature was being written by men, and women were only subjects of observation and fantasy.

As Ibsen himself, in Notes for Modern Tragedy (1878), insists "a woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society" (Meyer, 1971a). In this society, a wife, or a woman in general, has no idea about what is right or wrong. There is a dilemma in this kind of society, natural feelings on the one hand, and belief in authority on the other hand led her to distraction.

As mentioned by Templeton (1989), Henrik Ibsen's most feminist play *A Doll's House* may not even be concerned about the women's cause but rather about humans and individualism in general. Nora, the protagonist, may not merely be a feminist heroine but rather a representation of Everyman. But to say that Henrik Ibsen was not involved in the women's

cause would be a mistake since there are many of his speeches and letters which prove that he was concerned about the so-called weaker sex. In his speech to the working men of Trondhjem on June 14th, 1885, he mentions: The reshaping of social conditions which is now underway out there in Europe is concerned chiefly with the future position of the working man and woman. That it is which I hope for and wait for; and it is that that I will work for ([Ibsen, 1966, p.54](#)).

Ibsen acknowledges the ideological nature of women's assumed inferiority in *A Doll's House*. Women's marginalization in the nineteenth century was an ideological operation conducted by patriarchal authorities for the sustenance of a male-dominated society. In this age, women were "placed on a pedestal and worshiped" as representatives of morality ([Nassaar, 2004, p. 95](#)). While they were "seen as moral guides confined to the home," men were acknowledged "as worldly creatures who often compromised their domestic roles in favor of work or public life" ([Carlisle, 2004, p. 182](#)).

Women's 'inferiority' was enforced not only by legal discourse but also by religious discourse. In Ephesians, St Paul argues that women, the weaker, inferior sex, should surrender themselves to the will of their husbands who are mentally, physically, and morally superior: "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church ... Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" ([Paul, 2003, p. 1293](#)). Nora is expected by her husband to be an obedient wife and a good mother, but she becomes frustrated by the oppressive social structure that does not give her a chance to assert her individuality. He also wants Nora to act like a traditional woman whose only concern is to fulfill her domestic duties like dealing with the servants, managing the household tasks, and bringing up children. Hence, he disagrees with Nora who wishes to have "inherited many of papa's qualities" because according to him women cannot have manly traits ([Ibsen, 1910, p. 9](#)).

Nora challenges her husband who manipulates religious discourse to inflict his power by questioning the validity of patriarchal religious discourse which turns women into inferior, domestic creatures ([Arntzen & Braenne, 2019](#)). Her challenge is important in that she defies both the patriarchal authorities represented by her domineering husband and the religious authorities that restrict female autonomy. Ibsen states in his notes on *A Doll's House* that the play is about law, moral conscience, and gender

Through the character Nora, Ibsen brought out the message that the inner spirit of women is their conscience which can help them to tear strong net of patriarchal society, to break the doll's house, to build a new world of peace and pleasure where they are inclined to have their breath, smile, satisfaction and true happiness against the red eyes of the society ([Askarzadeh Torghabeh, 2019](#)). Nora carried the slough of a doll in the family at the beginning but later she stood rigorously not like a doll but as a human being. Nora Helmer broke the strong chain of the hypocritical world and raised her luminous voice of feminism in an untraditional manner that is found to be revolutionary ([Yeasmin, 2018](#)).

*A Doll's House* is not simply a feminist manifesto as we have become accustomed to seeing it. Ibsen was not opposed to the idea that a woman's place is in the home: for him, the important point of *A Doll's House* was that a woman should be allowed to assert her personality just as much as a man. ([Rathel, 2020](#)). This was reflected in the English adaptations, parodies, and sequels of Ibsen's plays that were written and published during the final decades of the nineteenth century ([Christian, 2019](#)). To show how the film reflects the Victorian society which regards women's situation and family life from a historical perspective ([Ortín, 2017](#)). Research analysis of the intrinsic elements of drama, such as characterization, plot setting, theme, and the analysis of the feminism in *A Doll's House* has been done by applying the feminist literary criticism ([Kumari & Sunalini, 2017](#)). Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) by Maria Lejarraga (1874-1974) is an example of early feminist translation. Relying on the existing theoretical outcomes at the intersection of gender and translation studies, it proposes a way of analyzing diverse translation strategies as a means for woman handling the literary text and thus making the most of the prevailing feminist interpretation of its international reception while reinforcing the budding feminist debate in Silver Age Spain and facilitating a specific understanding of the play ([Muniz, 2018](#)).

One form of reconnection of spirituality and nature is expressed in the religious tradition of Paganism. The human yearning for transcendence and the reality of physicality have produced in Neo-Pagans a distinct synthesis of the two, incorporating both archaic forms of this synthesis from more primitive times and futuristic visions of the implications of such a synthesis. Neo-Paganism is not only a small and relatively unknown religious phenomenon but one of the fastest-growing forms of spirituality in Europe and North America ([Senel, 2019](#)). It looks at the influence of Hellenism and Hellenisation on paganism and then studies paganism in the early rabbinic period. The next section discusses Christianity, from its first three centuries to its development after Constantine. The discussion reveals that the Jews considered Christianity to be another form of paganism ([Stemberger, 2010](#)).

Ibsen is both of this company and apart from it. He explored what was left of the modern soul and studied the modern self that was replacing it. He was the great innovator of middle-class domestic tragedy, endowing ordinary lives with the moral significance previously reserved for princes and legendary heroes. His works were reviled by some as immoral, and hailed by others as prophetic ([Permata & Chandraningrum, 2019](#)). Ibsen's daring created the taste by which he is now appreciated. He was the arch-poet of emancipatory liberalism. The godless nineteenth-century invited those who were strong (or presumptuous) enough to determine life's meaning for themselves. Ibsen extolled the freedom of each man and woman to defy religious commandments or social convention and live in accordance with his or her nature.

Freedom was the ultimate value--though in his eyes, most people would prove unworthy of the gift. He registered subtle degrees of worthiness and unworthiness. He mourned the un-lived life, in which the possibility of genuine love was sacrificed to mingy prudence or self-aggrandizement or religious misgiving or even artistic vocation ([Valiunas, 2019](#)).

A significant number of the Victorian and Edwardian women who fought for women's rights and took part in socialist debates also converted to alternative and often pagan forms of spirituality, such as Theosophy or the Golden Dawn. Farr expressed her lifelong feminist views in *Modern Woman: Her Intentions*, a collection of articles in which she publicly supported woman's suffrage, equal educational and professional opportunities, and a reform of divorce. *Modern Woman* also reveals Farr's mystical and pagan view of feminism in it ([Pecastaing-Boissiere, 2014](#)). Focus on the roots of shamanic consciousness and cases selected from cultural anthropology and art history enables some conventional distinctions which were dissolved, for example, that between "art for art's sake" and art that may result in individual and communal healing ([Balzer, 2019](#)). It identifies three characteristics of feminists' approaches to religion and spirituality: They are de-churched, are relational, and emphasize practice. These features warrant a new approach to feminists' relationships with religion and spirituality. Rather than, as others have done, equating feminism with secularism, secularization, or alternative spiritualities, the article reveals the complex ways feminists forge religio-spiritual lives ([Aune, 2015](#)). This section focuses on the tensions between individualism and dividualism as modes of personhood; while this essay approaches this foundational anthropological question through recent debates in the anthropology of Christianity, its larger concern is to reopen the question of in/dividualism to see whether we can imagine different relations between these two forms of being ([Bialecki & Daswani, 2015](#)).

Chen identifies three aspects of social forces discussed variously in Ibsen's plays regarding the problems of Norwegian society, viz., law, religion, and morality. Another thematic core of Ibsenism illustrated by Hu is individualism. In his article, he explicitly claims that "the biggest evilness of the society is no more than the suppression of one's individual characteristics which prevents him or her from Hu's interpretation of Ibsenism focuses more on the relatively big and abstract issues such as social problems in general and the notion of individualism ([Chen, 2020](#)). *A Doll's House* is studied from a cultural materialist perspective to argue that Nora's departure from her husband's house is not only a personal experience but a social challenge against the dominant patriarchal capitalist culture. Nora is not depicted as a passive receiver of male domination for she develops counter-discourses against her husband's patriarchal discourses which focus on the inferiority of the female sex ([Hossain & Iseni, 2015](#)). Frustrated with the dominant moral and legal discourses of patriarchy that despise women, Nora decides to move from the restrictive domestic world to the outside world of power, money, and business. Her removal from the domestic sphere where she is expected to perform certain normative roles associated with the female sex is important in that it heralds women's emancipation from male domination ([Wahla et al., 2019](#)). This study identifies how Nora who we notice at the beginning of the play as a naïve and submissive woman, changes herself into an outspoken, autonomous, and unyielding human being towards the end of the play. It also attempts to highlight Nora's numerous struggles against the patriarchal hegemony of the society and outlines how these struggles contribute to developing her in a sense of progressive self-awakening which eventually shapes her identity as an independent woman, the ultimate destination of her journey of self-discovery ([Duzgun, 2018](#)). The late nineteenth-century Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen both guides and haunts the struggle for the emancipation of women. His play *A Doll's House* remains after nearly one hundred years a most eloquent statement of the urge to stand free. Nora, the play's heroine, has inspired countless women in their fight for liberation. The main purpose of this article is in the first place, to show how this reflects Victorian society as regards women's situation and family life from a historical perspective ([Ortin, 2017](#)).

Through this adventurous and revolutionary woman, the purpose is to reach the feminist message out to the post-modern generations. It explores the illusion of emancipation depicted in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The purpose is to identify the elements of loss of women's self-identity in a patriarchal society ([Weerasinghe, 2017](#)). Ibsen had a strong view on the issues related to women's lack of freedom of thought as well as of actions. Tossing between the confusion about illusion and reality, Ibsen provides some solution to the problem related to women's identity ([Ahmad & Akbar, 2019](#)). Henrik Ibsen is deemed to be one of the major Norwegian playwrights of the late 19th century whose famous play *A Doll's House* manifests a wide variety of social and individual concerns, some of which transcend times and ages and thus become all-time contemporary. Nora Helmar's quest for self-identity- which gets unfolded through many other interrelated social issues that altogether result in her complete transformation ([Kallenbach, 2014](#)). Ibsen was concerned with the crisis of liberalism, the conflicts of the bourgeois families, woman's emancipation, and the psychological dilemma of the individual and the power of economy over human relations in capitalist society. It also aims at unveiling women's everyday problems and social reality through applying symbolic realism in the play, *A Doll's House* ([Hossain & Iseni, 2015](#)).

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* brings up a concept that an autonomous self is possible and necessary for a woman who declares that she is "first and foremost a human being". This study aims to depict and examine critical feminist issues through portraying Nora Helmer who is the representative of not only the 19th-century Scandinavian Bourgeois order and custom but also universal feminism ([Hossain, 2014](#)). This study identifies how Nora who we notice at the beginning of the play as a naïve and submissive woman, changes herself into an outspoken, autonomous, and unyielding human being towards the end of the play.

## METHODOLOGY

The research is conducted through a systematic sampling of various research articles and books for review on feminism, women empowerment, and Ibsen's work, *'A Doll's House'*. This research is qualitative in nature. Textual analysis is a technique that researchers use to communicate or interpret the text. The textual analysis explains the message, function, content, and structure in the text. The main consideration in selecting the specific kind of texts and defining the method to analyze them. The researcher has used the descriptive qualitative method. The purpose of using this method is to analyze the play *A Doll's House*. This study is based on the primary source of the play *A Doll's House* and secondary data sources are relevant articles and journals.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This play has introduced a female protagonist who embarks upon a journey of the self to question the standards imposed on her by society. The central question addressed in *A Doll's House* is the quest for self (Mahmood, 1999). The self-realization journey has been explored through various angles. This paper has attempted to look at the journey of Nora on the festive season of Christmas and the celebration on this occasion has turned out to be decisive for Nora as she embarks upon a journey to fulfill her calling. This study will allow better understanding and appreciation of the play *A Doll's House*.

Ibsen's protagonist 'Nora' seems disillusioned with religion, as an institution, due to her understanding of social injustices. Within the character's moral revolution in the final scene, it is clear that she has not only lost faith in marriage and patriarchal control, but also religious ideologies as she states "maybe Pastor Hansen was right, but that's for me to find out" (Frazer, 1993). This declarative statement can be seen as representative of the growing secularisation which paralleled the growth of scientific knowledge and female liberation at the time of Ibsen's writing (Shaw, 1987). However, Ibsen also presents the audience with a 'Christ-like' moral compass in the character of Kristine. The dramatic function of this character is made obvious through her name 'Kristine' which immediately connotes 'Christ', along with the fact that she arrives on Christmas Eve. In a desperate attempt to get Nora to stay with him, Torvald throws religion at her. Nora feels alienated from religion and law and wishes to discover things on her own.

The opening room setting of the play shows it "furnished comfortably and tastefully" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 12). The time of the season is winter and the celebration is on the occasion of Christmas. This season has the Norwegian name of Yule. The main Yule event for Norwegians is on julaften "Yule Eve" or "Christmas Eve" on December 24, when the main feast is served and gifts are exchanged (Karafistan, 2003). This time of the year announces the ending of the old year and the beginning of a new year. The protagonist of the play Nora is introduced as "humming a tune and in high spirits" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 12). A sight on the stage catching the attention is the Christmas tree and the first act of Nora is of eating macaroons. According to Bradbrook "the notion of inherited conventions is an overlooked implication of the Christmas tree" (Bradbrook, 1966, p. 592) adorning the stage through the first and second acts: one such convention is religion and its accompanying morals. As Nora trims the Christmas tree, the traditional emblem in the modern Western world for the birth of Jesus Christ, her private musings resemble an adulatory prayer or chant: "I'll do anything to please you Torvald. I'll sing for you, dance for you" (Ibsen, 1966, p. 945). Ibsen implies an analogy between Christ and Torvald, whom Nora already reveres as her lord and hopes will become her savior, now that Krogstad has threatened her.

The first four dialogues of Helmer show his attitude towards his wife through the use of pet names "little lark twittering" "squirrel" "little spendthrift" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 12-13). Nora wants to celebrate this occasion and does not want to hold back this season. An important contribution of the Yule season is of buying presents. As Nora says "Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 13). Nora is transferring her doll figure- taken from her husband and father to her daughter. It is time for celebration and wrapping beautiful gilt paper around gifts and hanging them on the Christmas tree.

The pagan aspects of the season: "the yule, tree, gifts, the tarantella dance, feasting, an emphasis on joy and aesthetic, emphasizing a pleasure in this world and its values" (Johnston, 2004) sees changes during the action. Apart from the delight taken in surprise, it has an ironic twist to it. Helmer points that "Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. They will be revealed tonight when the Christmas Tree is lit" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 15). The secret mentioned here is nothing compared to the final unraveling. The repetition of the word "wonderful" is significant. In the first act, it denotes the passing of hard times. In the second act, it shifts to expectation from Torvald, him arising to the test of standing by and finally wonderful in its superlative form appears at Names of the couples have both pagan and Christian association. "Torvald is from the god Thor; Nora, a diminutive of Eleonora, is a variant of the Greek Helen Kristine (Christ-ine) and Krog-stad (from Krok (g)et, "crooked; sly")—evoke the Christian dualism of savior and satanic menace" (Johnston, 1999, p.140).

Now we come to Torvald and Nora. Both of their names have pagan origins. Torvald = Thor, Norse god of thunder; Nora = Elenora or Helen. Throughout the play, we see the Helmers engaging in pagan-like activities. There's the Christmas or Yule tree, which was originally a pagan thing before Christians adopted it. Then, of course, there's the feasting, dancing, and celebrating, which all go along with the old pagan celebration of Yule. Krogstad and Christine are,



in a way, the "Christian" couple, while Nora and Torvald are the "pagan" pair. That's not to say that the Helmers are literally pagan: it just means that, in some ways, their lifestyle resembles a sort of pagan perma-fun time.

Krogstad and Christine have both lived lives of hard work and sacrifice. These are some of the major tenants of Christianity. The Helmers, on the other hand, seem to live lives of innocent celebration. By the end of the play, it seems that the "Christian" couple is rewarded for their lives of toil and sacrifice. Nora and Torvald, for their part, are awakened like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Their innocence is shattered. When Nora walks out of the house she's only just beginning to struggle.

Nora defies patriarchal discourse defended by Helmer through developing a counter-discourse and says that her first duty is not to her husband or her children but herself as she must find out her real identity without considering the stereotypical ideas on women (Bandal, 2017, p.151). Later, Helmer uses religious discourse to change his wife's mind, but he fails. Nora says that she does not trust religion whose principles have been established by clergymen defending patriarchal morality:

HELMER. Can you not understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that? Have you no religion?

NORA. I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is. Helmer. What are you saying? NORA. I know nothing but what the clergyman said ... He told us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this and am alone ... I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events, if it is true for me. (Ibsen, 1910, p. 82)

The placement of doors is also important. The door to the left leads to Torvald's study and represents authority and patriarchal power. The door to the right welcomes the outside world, where broken people come in. The third door in the right wall—leads to the nursery and the bedroom and here Nora assumes two roles one of mother and the other of a wife. Mrs. Linde is introduced in the plot when the preparations are taking place. She serves as a foil to Nora. Nora retorts that the last eight years have been a happy time for her; at the same time building a parallel of Christine traveling in the harsh winter. Paler and thinner Christine has to bear the consequences of the part she plays as a breadwinner (Plesch, 1999) Lamenting and sighing about her condition Nora exclaims that she is a widower. Mrs. Linde had spent all her life in grief and turmoil that she still wanted some "sorrow or grief to live upon" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 17). Nora on the other hand wants to have heaps of money so that she does not have to worry about anything while spending. Nora is full of life she savors it with the notion "it's good to be alive and happy!" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 18).

Christine mentions her life's troubles that she has to provide for a sick mother and her two brothers. The name Christine derives its origin from Christ and her life reflects a journey of sacrifices and turmoil. She finds her life empty and without purpose and always looking for chances (Finney, 1994). With the ringing of the bell arrival of another damned character is introduced. The discussion moves to Krogstad, who like Christine, is a widower. Dr. Rank regards Krogstad as one suffering from moral corruption and having sympathy for them is like turning society into a "sick house" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 25).

Christine considers such people are the ones who need most taking care of. Doctor Rank is a character who is paying the price of sins committed by his father because he "committed all sorts of excesses" (Ibsen, 1966, 2. 37) and to "pay penalty for another man's sin! Is there any justice in that? And in every single family, in one way or another, some such inexorable retribution is being exacted" (Ibsen, 1966, 2. 43). Pain and suffering in his life are a constant reminder that he must live. Death and disease imagery is brought in - like a foreign body- into the lives of Nora and Helmer through Dr. Rank. Suicide is an intersecting point between Nora and Krogstad. Their conversation also reveals that both do not dare to commit it.

Krogstad: If you had it in your mind to run away from your home

Nora: I had.

Krogstad: Or even something worse—

Nora: How could you know that?

Krogstad: Give up the idea.

Nora: How did you know I had thought of that?

Krogstad: Most of us think of that at first. I did, too—but I hadn't the courage.

Nora: (faintly). No more had I.

Krogstad: (in a tone of relief). No, that's it, isn't it—you hadn't the courage either?

Nora: No, I haven't—I haven't (Ibsen, 1966, 2. 48).

Krogstad frightens Nora of humiliation by mentioning "Under the ice, perhaps? Down into the cold, Coal-black water?"

And then in the spring, to float up to the surface, all horrible and unrecognizable, with your hair fallen out”

The time of the eve celebration depends on the decision taken by Nora. Krogstad says "it's Christmas Eve, and it will depend on you what sort of Christmas you will spend" His motives for all his actions are not regarded as purely evil. He has his reasons. He wants to win back respect in the town for the sake of his sons and lead a respectable life. This is the first step towards his freedom from a tainted past. Although the money is taken was to save the life of her husband but Krogstad dismisses her argument by saying that "The law cares nothing about motives" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 32) and mentions that his one false step lost him all his reputation and she can be held equally held accountable for her actions. Christine instant reaction on hearing that Nora has forged a name was "Good Heavens-!" (Ibsen, 1966, 2. 50) and Krogstad calls it a "dangerous confession" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 31) by forging her father's signature based on firsthand experience.

Nora cannot observe rules. This fact is revealed through her defiance at various points. She loves breaking rules by eating macaroons and being labeled as "Little Miss Sweet-Tooth" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 15) by Helmer. Her harmless lies are a constant with her. She uses tactics for her tasks like arranging a job for Christine and her fancy about an unknown admirer. She wants to reveal her biggest sacrifice for that time when she is no longer will be able to practice her charms through dancing, reciting, and dressing up. At a later stage, she mocks law and society for having rules that do not consider human beings and calls it a "foolish law" and she did it for "love's sake" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 32).

She wants to spend a life free from care, unlike Christine who wants to have constant responsibilities in her life. She expresses "it's delightful to think of, Christine! Free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it! And think of it, soon the spring will come and the big blue sky! Perhaps we shall be able to take a little trip---perhaps I shall see the see again! Oh! It's a wonderful thing to be alive and happy" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 23). Nora enjoyed the company of her maid rather than her father "because they never moralized at all" (Ibsen, 1966, 2. 46).

The pagan element in the couple is evoked at various points in time. Festive elements include ordering wine, decorating the Christmas tree, wrapping gifts, fancy dresses, and finally music and tarantella dance where Nora loses all her bonds and demeanour.

Torvald's power is relished by Nora that he has authority over so many people and can change their fortune like a god. Torvald's possession is also manifested by Nora's dialogue "Torvald is so absurdly fond of me that he wants me absolutely to himself" (Ibsen, 1966, 2. 38) and she makes sure that the "skylark would chirp about in every room, with her song rising and falling" (Ibsen 1966, 2. 40). She constantly wants her home to be peaceful and carefree away from the harsh realities of life. Torvald claims himself to be "man enough" (Ibsen, 1966, 2. 42) like a chivalrous hero in a time of crisis.

Nature is invoked through the company of children where Nora is in terms with herself. She mentions her children as 'sweet blessings', 'red cheeks like apple and roses', and her daughter as 'little baby doll' playing with them Hide and Seek. She considers singing and dancing to hold back Torvald from doing the extreme. For Helmer retrieving one's character require that you openly confess your crime and take your due punishment. There is no word of forgiveness in his dictionary. His demoralizing of Krogstad's character will later shift to his doll wife. "Just think how a guilty man like that has to lie and play the hypocrite with everyone, how he has to wear a mask in the presence of those near and dear to him, even before his wife and children ... such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home" (Ibsen, 1966, 1. 34).

The second act opens with the Christmas Tree "stripped of its ornaments and with burnt-down candle –ends on its disheveled branches". The word wonderful again comes up when the expectation of her illusion further takes a leap considering Torvald will take the blame in the time of need, however this time she does not want this miracle to take place for the sake of her husband. "In taking a public risk in pursuit of ethical goals, Torvald has a measure of heroic stature" (Saari, 2004). In the end, he proves himself to be a normal regular guy.

The dancing let loose of her emotions with no sense of guilt and responsibility. Her wild and frantic movements reveal her desire to break free paying no heed to Helmer's instructions "her hair comes down and falls over her shoulders; she pays no attention to it but goes on dancing" (Ibsen, 1966, 2. 53). "In this inner turmoil she dances the tarantella, a dance those bitten by the tarantella were believed to dance until they died or until they expelled the poison from their blood" (Johnston, 1999, 145). Torvald's champagne-heightened and tarantella-induced sexual promptings are represented on stage (Northam, 1965, p.9). The sexual desires are aroused upon seeing her dancing. Helmer expresses "You have still the Tarantella in your blood, I see. And it makes you more captivating than ever" (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 60). "I watched the seductive figures of the Tarantella; my blood was on fire" (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 60). Nora is wearing an Italian costume. "Ibsen links the representation of male sensuality explicitly Italy—with the tarantella dance. The description of Nora's off-stage dance as involving 'chasing and luring and seductive refusal, identifies the masquerade ball version of the tarantella as the boldly flirtatious couples' dance whose effect is to release Torvald's sensuality" (Saari, 2004, p. 481). Towards the end of the act, a herald for the wonderful thing happening is again heard by Nora.

Act III opens with the dance music and a lamp burning on the table. The meeting of Mrs. Linde and Krogstad finally takes place Krogstad calls himself “a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage” (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 55). The two decided to join forces. Salvation is nearby. The Christian point of view of coming across clear is shown by Christine's attitude that “they must have a complete understanding between them, which is impossible with all this concealment and falsehood going on” (Ibsen 1966, 3. 57). The revived couple now focuses to save their shipwreck through a “marriage free of illusions” (Johnston, 2004, p.146).

Dr. Rank also wants to enjoy the pleasures of this life "Why shouldn't one enjoy everything in this world? at any rate as much as one can, and as long as one can" (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 61). There is a contradiction in his speech. First, he interrogates then he answers on his own. Helmer on learning about his approaching death says “he had so grown into our lives. I can't think of him as having gone out of them. He, with his sufferings and his loneliness, was like a cloudy background to way” “Something ugly has come between us-the thoughts of the horrors of death” (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 63).

The world of Nora came shattering down when the miracle did not happen. Comparing Nora with her father he says she has “No religion, no morality, no sense of duty—” but ironically, she has found her vocation, and Helmer is still caught in the web of falsehood. He proclaims "we won't call any of the horrors to mind. We will only shout with joy, and keep saying, 'It's all over! It's all over!'" (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 66). Ibsen points out “two kinds of moral law and conscience, between the feminine, with love as its highest value, and the masculine, with its social and legal moorings. The conflict leads to depression and loss of faith on the part of the female. The notes conclude grimly: ‘desperation, struggle and destruction’ (Saari, 2004, p. 477).

Nora comes in terms of her natural self. She takes off her fancy dress. Now it is serious business- time to take an action. From now on “lesson-time shall begin” (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 68). She considered herself happy but now she realizes that being merry is not true happiness. Nora acknowledges “There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself—you are not the man to help me in that” (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 68). “Duties to myself” (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 69) may not be easy but it will be the first requirement yourself. She has to discover 'who is right', the world or her. She is in her element with a clear mind and a clear conscience. Helmer backs out from his words that “no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves” (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 71). She feels free. “There must be perfect freedom on both sides” (Ibsen, 1966, 3. 71) for the most wonderful thing of all to happen.

Towards the end one couple is united; the other will separate. The feeling of act III is surrounded by the color black. The blackness of shawl, domino, death, and night come across as the dominating factor. "Ibsen allows for both a comic and a tragic ending in Act III by bringing the long-sundered Kristine and Krogstad together in a scene that swells to a romantic climax with Krogstad—the erstwhile "villain" of the piece—proclaiming that he's ever felt such happiness. Kristine was freed by widowhood from a long and loveless marriage, and Krogstad, clawing his way back to social responsibility after a life marked by struggles and desperate schemes” (Davis, 2004, p. 582). “The search for an individuated self upon which Nora embarks, the quest for self-knowledge and a personal, felt, “owned” understanding of the world, her need to transcend the ethical and intellectual strictures of her world” (Davis, 2004, p. 582).

Paganism is not based on doctrine or liturgy. Many pagans believe “if it harms none, do what you will” (Johnston, 1999). Following this code, Pagan theology is based primarily on experience, with the aim of Pagan ritual being to make contact with the divine in the world that surrounds them. Nora's religious convictions have also shifted, or more to the point, have collapsed completely, as she indicates in her exasperated response to Torvald's invocation of religious principle: “Oh, Torvald, I'm really not sure what religion is” (Ibsen, 1966, p. 977). As she further states, she is no longer certain of herself even on matters of morality and conscience (Ibsen, 1966, p. 977) - this is why she must go out into the world, to probe the accepted and popular truths and to determine whether she can reconcile her own intuited beliefs to them.

## CONCLUSION

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* has differing interpretations since its first performance, being variously analyzed from feminist, anti-feminist, Marxist, Freudian, poststructuralist, and realist perspectives. This paper, while acknowledging the play's original impact and significance in terms of women's rights and social restrictions in general, attempts to place Ibsen's play in a contemporary context by analyzing it from the feminist perspective. This research paper has analyzed the play from the contextual references of the text and analysis of various scenarios, including the festive season of Christmas. The protagonist Nora Helmer struggles to break free from the restraints of the patriarchal society. Nora finds her awakening by overcoming the stern morality of religious imposition on her. This research paper has analyzed the play from the contextual references of the text and analysis of various situations. In *A Doll's House*, Nora is shown as an embodiment of identity, freedom, and power. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, in addition to its initial significance for feminist and women's rights activists, reflects and articulates the struggle of any woman who questions authority and reinforces her identity despite moral obligations and authority.

## LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The study was delimited to the analysis of the play *A Doll's House* with thematic interpretations. For future research, it is

recommended that the text may be explored from the perspective of cultural studies and comparative analysis of other texts.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study concludes how dissuading women from her true self and forcing her to exist as an object results in a feeling of dissatisfaction, existential crisis, and alienation. Earlier this selected text is not explored through a comparative study of Paganism and Christianity. The study can pave way for the understanding of women's power roles in places of authority provided by a patriarchal society.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The authors confirms sole responsibility for the following: Introduction, Editing, and drafting, Discussion and findings, Theoretical Grounding, Analysis, and Conclusion.

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