I must try to discover who is right, society or me.

Henrik Ibsen - *A Doll's House*

**The Germ of the Play**

*A Doll's House* is probably the most famous and best known of Ibsen's plays. As M. C. Bradbrook puts it, "Ibsen for many years, and to some people even today, means the author of *A Doll's House*" (1948:78). As is his usual practice, in this play too, he has ventured to deal with a very important question, that has been closely knit with the lives of ordinary men and women.

Historians and modern dramatists customarily place the status of woman as receiving the prime attention of Ibsen, among the problems put to debate. Nor is it amiss to come to such a conclusion, for his notes for the play, *A Doll's House* as quoted by Archer, in his Introduction to the *Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen*, do not speak more than what he has written:

...in practical life the woman is judged by man's law, as though she were not a woman but a man. ... A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine
conduct from a masculine point of view (1912:91).

When Ibsen made notes for his play he had a true story in his mind. Joan Templeton gives an account of Laura’s trap in life. Laura was a writer who was for Ibsen, a daughter they never had. He had an uncommon affection for her, calling her, ‘my skylark’. Laura married a Danish schoolmaster called Victor Kieler. He fell ill with tuberculosis and Laura borrowed money for his treatment. She took him to warmer climate. She decided to raise the money by sending articles for publishing. When she approached Ibsen with articles, he refused to recommend them, since they fell short of the author’s perfection. He said that he could not understand what possible circumstances there could be in her marriage that forced her to send out her material before they were finished. He wrote back to her. Kinck quotes Ibsen’s reply:

In a family where the husband is still living, it can never be necessary for the wife to spill her heart’s blood as you are doing. I do not understand, either, how he can allow you to suffer this. ... Whatever is troubling you, put everything in your husband’s hands. He must bear it (1935:507-508).

Laura was not ready to take her husband into confidence, since he suffered from debt complex. Laura had to commit forgery, which, when discovered by her husband, brought a quarrel between them and a
divorce. This story of Laura weighed greatly on Ibsen. He brooded on the harassed wife who was forced to sacrifice her heart’s blood to pay back the money, she borrowed to save her husband’s life. Laura had done all for love but was treated monstrously for it by a husband obsessed with his position in the world. It is clear that this story motivated Ibsen to put down in his notes:

> She has committed forgery, and she is proud of it, for she did it out of love for her husband, to save his life. But this husband with his commonplace principles of honour is on the side of the law and regards the question with masculine eyes (Archer 1912:91).

The initial intention of Ibsen is to plead for a proper treatment of woman. He understood the wife’s position in the family as subordinate to her husband. His formative idea of woman is that she is a creature of little intellect and moral capacity who, always wishes to keep herself under subordination to him, a true copy of Eve’s female subservience. Eve tells Adam:

> God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more
> Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise.
> (Paradise Lost. 4. 637-638).

Even, Nora started her life with such subordination, echoing the
words of Eve, “Yes, I certainly must, Torvald. But I just can’t get anywhere without your help: …” (Ibsen Plays: A Doll’s House 1985:59). Ibsen wanted to break the bond of woman by educating her to become the companion of man instead of being just a plaything or servant. Laura’s life affected him and woman’s position in the society obsessed him for long. The thought that the man uses woman as a doll and that man considers her as a plaything had been in the mind of Ibsen for a long time and he wanted to change this position of woman.

But Ibsen’s idea and the need to bring equality of women were not readily accepted by the Scandinavian club in Rome. He proposed that women be given the right to vote in the club and this matter came up for discussion. The vote was nineteen in favour and nine against Ibsen’s motion. Since a two-thirds majority was needed to have a change in the constitution, the proposal was lost. When Ibsen visited the club after weeks during the annual ball he presented with seriousness his ideas and no body welcomed it. The women who were present there, had taken the position against him and they intrigued and agitated against him. Angered by this, Ibsen vowed to make humanity greater and better. Revealing this incident, Zucker observes that Ibsen has completely shifted his opinion of woman from a doll to a dominator.

Ibsen’s change of his opinion about woman is exemplified in his play A Doll’s House. This play does not actually plead for the
cause of woman but shows the mettle of woman and the inherent power in her. If the play is a statement about women’s rights and emancipation, it is only on the deceptive surface. Ibsen does not project them as weak, under-estimable creatures living at the mercy of men, but rebellious, and daring, who are ‘capable of anything’ and through the play, admonishes men, who take women for granted. She is not what she appears to be, but much more than what she makes the man believe her to be. This change in impression has come over Ibsen, after he married Suzannah. Joan Templeton quotes the words of Suzannah Ibsen that “Ibsen had no steel in his character but I gave it to him” (2001:53).

Thus, gaining a first hand knowledge and experience about women, Ibsen has tilted the notes written down for the play as much to plead for the man in the end, and not for the woman. As Templeton quotes:

But in the end, it was Ibsen’s stroke of genius to create in his little husfru [sic] a rebel who throws normality to the winds. ... in A Doll [sic] House, it is the husband who pleads to be taken back and the wife who refuses (2001:137).

The awakening of Ibsen to the knowledge of the power in woman has brought an effective and unwavering decision about woman’s capabilities. She can run the home, take care of her husband and
children, do business, borrow money, work wonders within her capacity, and still, keep quiet about it. She can circumvent every circumstance to her advantage, if the man does not blame her or interfere in her affairs. In case of his meddling, she will dare make life difficult for him. Ibsen does not debate anymore about woman’s position in the world of man but ponders over man’s recklessness in taking her for granted. He cannot find her anymore passive and submissive, running errands for man, but she is a bold, daring and dominating female, who has the power to change the destiny of man. An in-depth study into the relationship of the man and wife, in A Doll’s House, will tell more of the man’s fauxpas in handling the woman, and the woman’s invincible power to vanquish the man in his own world, with his own law, if he dared to judge her actions which she feels justified about.

The Plot of the Play

The story of A Doll’s House is developed from a simple plot with a few surprises and suspense scattered here and there. Nora, the wife of Helmer borrows money in the early days of her married life to save the life of her husband in spite of knowing that her husband has debt complex. She hides the truth from him and makes him believe that her father had given her money to enjoy the warmer climate of Italy. Just as things are getting better, when the husband also has been called to undertake the manager’s job at the bank, and when prosperity is swaying their life style, an ill wind in the name of Krogstad, the money lender, storms the peace of the house and threatens to shake the foundation of
their marriage. Krogstad has managed to get the job at the bank, in spite of being a morally invalid person, but Helmer has dismissed him from the job since he has discovered dishonesty in his dealings. He had committed forgery. Krogstad protests against it and shows Nora her bond in which she too had forged her father’s signature and had done so, after her father’s death. Krogstad threatens to expose her.

Nora goes about seeking the help of her friend Kristine Linde, who promises to save her from being exposed to the society but leaves her at the mercy of her husband by encouraging Krogstad to let the matter known to Helmer. Linde feels that there should not be any secret between her and her husband and the husband should know the many ‘incredible’ things that happen in the house.

The discovery results in a crestfallen Helmer angrily pronouncing that he wishes to dissolve her from all her duties as a wife and a mother. This threat does not have the expected effect on Nora. She goes one step further to demand Helmer for ‘settling of accounts’, at the end of which she dares to walk out of the house leaving Helmer to wail for her.

The play taken into two divisions as initial and final acts, will show the characteristics of Nora and Helmer in two stages of their life; the first part comprising of their actions and the second part, the judgment, an inevitable outcome of their actions. The initial scenes show the man and woman in their relationship as husband and wife in a
casual background of family life. Being unaware of any trial that may call them to either explain or put to test their love, they remain natural in behaviour, attitudes and motions and exhibit a natural code of conduct, in such familiar matters as expectations from each other, contributions, reliance upon each other and their mutual trust. The final act of the play calls for judgment and bases its verdict on the assessment of their conduct so far. Here, an external agent is not qualified to judge them. The man is the accuser and the woman is the defender, and in this tug of war, the woman who has hitherto been careless in pulling the rope to her side, musters enough strength in the final settlement to emerge powerful and victorious. The man loses his stand. Ibsen builds up enough situations in the play to justify the man’s position as a loser, and the woman as the winner. Therefore, at the outset it is necessary to study the preliminary actions of the husband and wife in detail.

A general survey of the play shows that however man is kind, gentle and affectionate towards the woman, he is ever conscious of his superiority over her. He has exaggerated notions of his positive attitudes, powers, gifts and roles. The man is an embodiment of masculine vanity, intransigence, falsehood, untruthfulness, conceit, formality and fraudulence. The woman who at first appears to be simple, obedient and noble, later shows herself as a woman with complex mixture of fineness and cunning, honesty and dishonesty and of naivete and cleverness. She reveals in her, an inherent rebelliousness, which she
started showing in the Garden of Eden. In the fight for right and in 'settling the accounts' it is the woman who takes the lead to scratch the man's ego and vanity and tear the mask of his face to show the real nature. She does not encourage him to take her for granted but she dares to turn his life into disaster.

From an in-depth study of the play, Helmer is understood as a man who has been kept in the dark by his wife, regarding the borrowing of money. Nora is to be blamed for all the inconveniences, fluster, emotional excitement and the angry words of Helmer. It appears that he never bargains for such a betrayal of trust from his wife. But before he can be exonerated for his angry words and clumsy behaviour to Nora, on the discovery, his share of responsibility in driving Nora to acts of falsehood and defiance should be analyzed.

Helmer has been an indulgent husband. He is so, not because he wants to give her absolute freedom, but enjoys keeping her under his protective wings. His masculine vanity is satisfied to treat her like a doll and Nora in the course of her life has learnt to feed his vanity, "you see how necessary it (advice) is" (A Doll's House:61). He is lavish in his affections for her, not because she expects it, but he enjoys her absolute surrender to his love. His love is of the kind that can reverse at any point of time. All along he has been calling her in endearing terms like 'My little lark twittering out there', 'My little skylark must not droop
her wings’, ‘Is my little skylark out of temper’, ‘Sweet little spend-thrift’, ‘My secret little lark’, ‘Miss sweet Tooth’, but those are soon changed to swearing words like “…a hypocrite, a liar, worse than that, a criminal!” (77). His love is marked by a jealous possessiveness. The callers are considered nuisance and he says, “Remember I’m not at home to callers” (8). He is extremely romantic and wants everyday as fresh as the days of courtship. He depends on make-believe scenes of love to make his love real:

Of course you do, don’t you, Nora my darling? You know, whenever I’m out at a party with you... do you know why I never talk to you very much, why I always stand away from you and only steal a quick glance at you now and then... do you know why I do that? It’s because I’m pretending we are secretly in love, secretly engaged and nobody suspects there is anything between us (72).

His love is seductive and jealous but when put to proof, his love does not cover the sins. A while ago, he assures Nora of his strong chivalrous love: “You know, Nora ... many’s the time I wish you were threatened by some terrible danger so I could risk everything, body and soul, for your sake” (76). Nora’s heart leaps in joy for soon an occasion is going to rise up for Helmer to prove his words. He will soon open the letterbox and Krogstad will tell him of the bond. A ‘wonderful thing’
will happen to make Helmer’s love real. But Nora’s ears are assaulted by the words:

Now you have ruined my entire happiness, jeopardized my whole future. It’s terrible to think of. … and I daren’t even whimper. I’m done for, a miserable failure, and it’s all the fault of a feather-brained woman! (78).

Nora watches his tone changing like the moon. When the danger passes by, he is loving again. Nora says:

But you neither think nor talk like the man I would want to share my life with. When you had got over your fright – and you weren’t concerned about me but only about what might happen to you – and when all danger was past, you acted as though nothing had happened. I was your little sky-lark again, your little doll, exactly as before; except you would have to protect it twice as careful as before, now that it had shown itself to be so weak and fragile (86-87).

Helmer does not hesitate to suggest a continued farce in love and marriage, while restoring Nora to his love. He says, “things must appear to go on exactly as before. But only in the eyes of the world, of course” (78). Such deception and falsehood, is seen to rule his domestic life as
well as public affairs and he is ready to isolate the principles of integrity and honesty. When Krogstad drops his second letter to tell him that he returns the bond and he lays no more charges on Nora, Helmer does not hesitate to welcome a dishonest way of life. All along the trial, he was meditating upon ways and means of hushing up the matter and appeasing Krogstad in one way or the other. When he is ready to come to a compromise he says “No, let’s forget the whole ghastly thing. We can rejoice and say: It’s all over! It’s all over!” (79). He consoles Nora saying: “You mustn’t dwell on the harsh things I said in the first moment of horror, when I thought everything was going to come crashing down about my ears. I have forgiven you, Nora, I swear it! I have forgiven you!” (80). After the danger is past, he once again talks brave words and offers protection:

Have a good long sleep; you know you are safe and sound under my wing. ... Here I shall hold you like a hunted dove I have rescued unscathed from the cruel talons of the hawk, and calm your poor beating heart (80).

Ibsen reveals, the dark labyrinth of Helmer’s thought regarding his intention to keep Krogstad away from his office. There are so many reasons why he does not like Krogstad. He makes his wife understand that he cannot bear to live and work with people who have a bad character. He tells Nora that she should not entertain a fellow like
Krogstad because he is guilty of forgery. He says that he will not condemn a man altogether because of a single false step in his life, but if a man is not going to reform his character, if he does not confess his fault and take his punishment, then he is guilty. He does not call wrong doers sinners when they confess. According to Helmer the guilt of Krogstad is that he has lied and played the hypocrite with everyone. He condemns Krogstad:

Just think how a man with a thing like that on his conscience will always be having to lie and cheat and dissemble; he can never drop the mask, not even with his own wife and children. And the children - that's [sic] the most terrible part of it, Nora (35).

Helmer further adds "A fog of lies like that in a household, and it spreads disease and infection to every part of it. Every breath the children take in that kind of house is reeking with evil germs" (35). Such straight talk and the philosophy of evil and good seem to focus another side for Helmer. Forgetting his earlier moralisings, he shares with Nora, the only reason why he does not want to entertain Krogstad in the bank. He is afraid that he will act in a pal like way with him and call him in familiar tone. " 'Torvold this' and 'Torvald that' "(45). This is a powerful confession of Helmer as to why he hesitates to have Krogstad in the bank, but it authenticates Helmer's vanity.
Helmer, thus, arouses contempt for his vanity and it is shown throughout the play. He has a craze for being worshipped and wishes to be flattered as a demigod. In this great affair of sacrifice, Helmer does not appreciate her, but only the voice of masculine ingratitude is heard in his accusation of Nora. He keeps betraying his vain-glory and self-styled notion of generosity and forgiveness, only to prove that he is selfish to the core. Even in his love, he never abandons his selfishness. Only when such a husband denies the woman the right to be herself, and fulfil her love of individuality, the woman begins to rebel. Her rebellion is against the unjust ways of man. She ceases to be a dumb spectator and begins to see through things and measure things with her own yardstick. She knows to handle man, when he becomes unworthy of her love. She disregards popular opinion and determines to act according to her own inner light. It is then the woman begins to take the reins and dominate man.

**Nora's Revolt**

Nora at first does not show any sign of rebellion or revolt until her husband opens Krogstad's letter. She is a normal woman, so far, who has never shown an inkling of disobedience or rebellious spirit that lie deeply buried in her. She has never dreamt that an occasion will call forth to show her strength of character. She would have continued her life with no ripples, ever showing her weakness and obedience to her husband if she had not been piqued. Ibsen initially presents Nora as a gay happy woman. She knows to keep her home, entertain her children,
and celebrate Christmas in all splendor and excitement, and to love her husband with absolute surrender. She is not naïve in the rudiments of building up a complacent happy home. She is educated, and efficient in the household arts, and during the time of crisis knows how to rise to the occasion.

Nora is not a doll or doll-child as she pretends to be. Time and again, she proves that she is witty and capable of achieving greater things in life. Above everything else, she possesses a stubborn will; so far, she has been a heroic woman, self-willed, headstrong and bold. She has been adamant and tight lipped about her secret act of borrowing money. She has dared to do what a normal human being may fear to do. She shows an innate ability, sense of individuality and nobility. She plays a powerful role in the scheme of life and shows greater courage to participate in the affairs of life. She is often disappointed that no one seems to understand her real mettle. She complains of her friend Linde, that she too is like others, undermining her capacity to achieve great things in life “You’re just like the rest of them. You all think I’m useless when it comes to anything really serious” (14). Many instances can be cited to show what Nora could do and is capable of doing. Her friend Linde tells her that she has come to her for a job and that she should make her husband accommodate her in his bank. Nora says that she will do something to put him in a good mood.
Nora is a clever woman too; she is not stupid to borrow money, without knowing how to pay back. There is a forethought in her plans and has been paying money secretly in instalments. She exploits the pocket money and the money given for home expenses. She also has meditated upon a quick way to pay back, by changing her winter season meant for Christmas decoration to working time by ‘copying manuscripts’. This kind of meeting challenges in life, makes her feel elated and she tells Linde, “It was almost like being a man” (18).

Nora keeps her borrowing a secret, not so much for fear of his ‘debt Complex’ but more for keeping the home undisturbed. When Linde asks why Nora has hidden the secret from her husband, she says:

Good Heavens, how could you even imagine such a thing! When he’s so strict about such matters! Besides, Torvold is a man with a good deal of pride—it would be terribly embarrassing and humiliating for him if he thought he owed anything to me. It would spoil everything between us; this happy home of ours would never be the same again (17).

More than this reason, she wants to manipulate this secret to her advantages. She plans to let the secret out not before she is in a position to squeeze to the full advantage the act of saving her husband’s life by
borrowing money. She wants to use this act as a trump card, when necessity arises. At a time when his love towards her diminishes due to old age, she can win his love, through the revelation of such a sacrifice on her part:

Oh Yes, someday perhaps... in many years time, when I’m no longer as pretty as I am now. You mustn’t laugh! What I mean of course is when Torvold isn’t quite so much in love with me as he is now, when he’s lost interest in watching me dance, or get dressed up, or recite. Then it might be a good thing to have something in reserve (17).

Nora never feels guilty of her act as Helmer feels. Neither is she in a hurry to reveal it to him since she has reserved it for a better purpose. She is rather proud of it. She tells Linde “yes, Kristine, I too have something to be proud and happy about. I was the one who saved Torvold’s life” (15). For this reason, she is able to face Krogstad bravely, when he comes to accuse her of forgery.

When Krogstad, the money lender, appears on the scene and reminds her of her debt, she is not cowered by his power of authority, that a lender shows over a borrower. Nora looks at him defiantly and commands him. She has all along been proud of her act and does not mind his threats, until he points out to her the act of forgery.
Nora is quick to surrender to him and plead with him to let go the matter. Finding herself in a fix, she surrenders like a wounded lion by begging him to have some consideration for the children. All her bragging about using her act as a trump card becomes a distant dream and she can only think of daringly facing this situation. Krogstad and Nora seem to be rivals matching in determination, crime and stubbornness to have their own way in everything. Both stand on the same footing of despair and willing to touch the skies to win their way in the world.

Nora makes frantic attempts to keep Helmer away from knowing the secrets. Her tricks are many and artful. When she understands that no persuasion will stop Krogstad from dropping the letter in the letter box, she is compelled to reveal the name of the money lender to Linde, who promises to help her by winning the heart of her one time lover by fresh love. Nora is not in dearth of plans to keep Helmer away from the letter box till Linde coaxes him to take it back. She uses all her feminine charms and wiles.

Whenever she wants anything from her husband, she knows how to tackle him. She likes to become a child in his hands and listen to him. She is constrained to help Krogstad to keep his place in the bank and therefore thinks of a way to circumvent her husband. She requests him
to let his squirrel “have its way, and do what it wants, it’d scamper about and do all sorts of marvellous tricks” (43). This kind of entrapping people with her dancing and chirping is not confined only to her husband. She could do this to anyone, to Linde and to Dr. Rank too. She makes Linde remake the vows of marriage. She is about to pronounce to Dr. Rank her need by bewitching him with her powerful emotional words. It is easy to see how Dr. Rank becomes tipsy with love for her and promises to give his life for her.

Ibsen, thus, shows the man on one scale and the woman on the other scale, and the last act of the play has to weigh their power in justification to their acts so far. Helmer self-centered, full of egoism fed by masculine vanity and chauvinism, is forever keeping the woman in the centre of his palm, to watch her, criticise her, lest she has a great fall. The woman in the centre of his palm gives him a God-like superiority, rule and authority over her and it is not the unconditional love that rules his heart. The woman is clever, tricky and rebellious, when things do not happen in the way she wishes them to happen. The final scene is expected to bring about a compromise but it only turns out to be a domestic court where they accuse each other. Nora’s love for Helmer is based on a mistaken identity. She does not expect that he will throw away his ideal love for fear of facing a social humiliation. Nora too humiliates herself by lying and pretending to be helpless, which suppress her true feelings. Love becomes a delusion between them.
Nora understands that she cannot love a man who is only conscious of performing his social role as a husband. The last scene strips both of them of their assumed roles. Nora begins the play as someone untrue to herself but at the conclusion sheds her dishonesty. There has been a conflict between what she does and what she wants to be. Helmer shows himself as a man of honesty but in the end his mask is ripped to show his true self. Their family life has been a friction. Their home has been a ‘doll’s house’ in which they have been living a make-believe life.

The ‘doll’s house’ has turned into a domestic court, where the husband and wife blame each other. At first Helmer loses his equanimity, blames Nora and imputes her sin to heredity:

All your father’s irresponsible ways are coming out in you.
No religion, no morals, no sense of duty. ... Oh, this is my punishment for turning a blind eye to him. It was for your sake I did it, and this is what I get for it (78).

He does not live for himself but for the people around him. If they are going to call him a cheat or a criminal he is not ready to bear it. It will be better for him to come to a compromise with Krogstad and form alliance with him than expose himself to the world, and have his job taken away from him.
Nora, an Ideal Woman

Nora has been an ideal woman in spite of her dishonesty. She entered into a life of deception for the sake of her husband. She feels humiliated that she should lie, and pretend for such a noble cause of saving her husband’s life. Nora believes Helmer to be what he is in reality. Her conception of him is that he is true, honest and a man with private valour. She expects her husband to come to her rescue seeing that it is a noble cause. His words of imputation assault her ears. She expresses her disappointment:

For eight years I have been patiently waiting. Because, heavens, I knew miracles didn’t happen everyday. Then this devastating business started, and I became absolutely convinced the miracle would [sic] happen. All the time Krogstad’s letter lay there, it never so much as crossed my mind that you would ever submit to that man’s conditions. I was absolutely convinced you would say to him: Tell the whole wide world if you like (86).

Nora has been building castles in the air about Helmer’s private valour and his sense of proportion “When that was done, I was absolutely convinced you would come forward and take everything on yourself, and say: I am the guilty one” (86). But Helmer has failed Nora. This last act of Helmer exudes the courage and strength from the woman.
Nora begins to think, and acts defiantly. She throws away all the sacred feelings of love that she has borne for Helmer. He is not the man whom she loved. The man has deceived her. She is ready to face the world with the crime that she has been imputed with, but dare not live with the man who has compromised with lie and dishonesty. Nora acts quickly. She takes a bold decision. She throws away all her pretensions of a child or a doll. She confesses that her sacrificial love for her husband has made her thoughtless, giving her a false position. She cannot any more think of what most people say about life or about ideal wife. She must, if necessary, quit her position of mother and wife. She must think over things for herself and get to understand them. She feels that she has all along been living with a strange man. Nora shows no hesitation to tell him “I am no wife for you” (87). She dares to leave him, her house and her children, to go into the world and learn for herself what it is to be a woman. She throws away the relationship of being the wife of Helmer. She stamps the ego of the man, which brings complications into her quiet flowing life.

The uprising of Nora is remarkable because the world knows only a meek woman bearing the yoke submissively. Women have been sacrificing but it is considered their duty. A woman bundles herself into emotions, sacrifices and selfless love. And man thinks of such a woman as lacking moral sense. He would not sacrifice honour and self-respect
even for the one whom he professes to love abundantly, Helmer tells: “I would gladly toil day and night for you, Nora, enduring all manner of sorrow and distress. But nobody sacrifices his honour [sic] for the one he loves” (86). Nora’s gender is not so. She replies that it is a thing done by “hundreds and thousands of women” (86). Nora with a sneer tells that the law cannot justify her sacrifice. The law expects a woman to perform her role of a mother or wife and it does not give room for deviations. She says sarcastically: “Apparently a woman has no right to spare her old father on his death-bed, or to save her husband’s life, even” (85).

The womanliness in her, calls for the rebelliousness in her to manage the situation, which has thrown up a challenge to her face. She throws the challenge back to the world. “But I shall go into that too. I must try to discover who is right, society or me” (85). She ruthlessly deserts him. She declares that she is no wife for him.

Helmer is brought back to his senses. He realizes the power in her. She is audacious and takes a bold decision to leave him. She has acted in such a way that Helmer now pleads with Nora, that he would change his ways. Nora has been showing through her actions at various points of life, that a woman is responsible for the destiny of man. If she is quiet, humble, the man feels comfortable and suffers no ripples in his life. If she turns out rebellious, the man has to surrender to the woman.
Nora refuses to listen to the pleadings of Helmer. She says that all his wailing cannot bring his doll back to him because she has emerged from the state of being a doll. She is a woman. The magic of these disguises — her duty to her husband, to her children and to her religion is gone.

Woman can easily turn the tables, and blame the blamer. Though in this scene, the interrogation is initiated by Helmer, the person actually interrogated is Helmer himself. His hesitation to take Krogstad back to service because the world would think him party to such a crime, his unwillingness to listen to Nora’s pleadings to take Krogstad back to service, because the world will say that “if it ever got around that the manager had been talked over by his wife...” (44), his readiness to keep Nora at home, though their relation — as husband and wife end thereon with the discovery of Nora’s forgery, are the masks, that he has been wearing all through his life. Shaw in his essay “Ideals and Idealists” in The Quintessence of Ibsenism says:

The masks were his (man’s) ideals, as he called them; and what, he would ask, would life be without ideals? Thus he became an idealist, and remained so until he dared to begin pulling the masks off and looking the specters in the face —.

... But all men are not equally brave (1955:25).

Moreover, Shaw says, “that now every mask requires a hero to tear it
marriage. But Eva Le Gallienne says in the Introduction to *Six Plays by Henrik Ibsen*:

...to him marriage was so sacred that it must be based upon a spiritual communion; 'mere living together' was not enough. He felt that a man and a woman should, ideally, go through life together as perfect equals, in perfect honesty, free to develop-each in his own way-into a complete human entity (1957: xvi).

Ibsen's belief in the sacredness of marriage did not make him lose sight of the problems an individual faces and there are times, when couples fail to understand each other or adjust with each other. Ibsen possesses the sense of proportion which many moralists seem to lack when they insist upon a society or a community, the strict adherence to rules. Since the problem he is dealing within this is a serious one, he has refused to give the play a romantic colouring or a climactic ending. In fact, in some parts of Europe, when the play was taken for theatrical performances, the directors had to change the ending of the play according to the expectations of the viewers.

The genus of literary folk who write continuations of great works of fiction, found *A Doll's House* irresistible and by German, English and American authors, Nora was restored to her husband and children. It
is because they thought that more than the natural ending, which should be built out of the logical sequence of events, they become conscious of the moral standard which the play must maintain and advocate. The fear is that many women folk may be tempted to follow Nora’s way of life. Zucker in his biography of Ibsen says, how in the autumn of 1880, when the Ibsens were settled in Rome, a Scandinavian lady of their acquaintance suddenly appeared in the city with her lover. Having found her marriage unsatisfactory, she left her husband and her little daughter – an act that the Norwegians in Rome condemned as unnatural. Zucker mentions the volley of argument that took place between them. The lady sought Ibsen out at a public function but was not received with warmth by Ibsen. She began to convince him with some asperity, “‘well, I did the same thing your Nora did’ ” (Zucker 1929: 166). Ibsen replied significantly, “‘But my Nora went, alone’ ” (1929: 166). Thus, from the moralistic point of view, different conclusions to theatrical performances were given, lest Nora’s example may induce many to leave their husbands and children and rebelliously to walk out into freedom.

Of all the conclusions, the German fourth act has been adjudged as the best one and Zucker writes about it in his biography Ibsen: The Master Builder (1929). It takes place about one year after the third act. Mrs. Linde has married Krogstad and is supporting the family by means of her sewing machine. She comes to her friend with a newly finished
dress for a recently arrived citizen of the world, lying in Nora's lap. The scene breathes peace and happiness and only at times a shadow passes over Nora's brow. She is thoughtful. Then Helmer, who as formerly is the director of the bank and generally respected, enters the room. "Nora regards him with a timidly questioning glance and whispers: 'Have you now really forgiven me?' " (1929:167). For some moments, Helmer does not reply, but merely looks at her in a quite and friendly manner. Finally he takes out of his frock coat a huge bag, and he, who had formerly, so sternly forbidden his Nora to eat sweets, now places in her mouth with his own hand macaroon. Nora, frightened and rejoiced at once chews it and calls out aloud, "The miracle!" (1929:167). The curtain falls slowly. However, Ibsen thought that such an 'ending' to the play cannot be accepted whole-heartedly and Ibsen calls it 'barbaric violence', done to the play.

Ibsen made a reply to an Italian manager, who made a request for similar change thus. And Eva Le Gallienne describes Ibsen's reaction as quoted below:

The fact is I cannot possibly directly authorize any change whatever in the ending of the drama. I may almost say it was for the sake of the last scene that the whole play was written. ... I cannot formally authorize, or approve, such a proceeding (1957: xix).
Ibsen was very obstinate to retain his ‘unusual’ ending, because he was realistic to the core. He did not create dramatic actions, but dramas of the mind and the spirit. He did not create roles but characters. Once a great actress thanked Ibsen for creating roles for women. He replied, “‘I have never created roles. I have written of human beings and human destinies’” (1957:xiii).

As Ibsen himself has confessed, his plays deal with human destinies. In his domestic plays, he has shown the importance of interrelated dependence of human destiny especially that of the man and his wife. They cannot have separate destinies as per the marriage code but to share a common destiny. The most powerful between them will influence the destiny of the other.

A man and a woman of different circumstances, thoughts, habits, sentiments, and ambitions are expected to merge into one within the marriage framework, to lead a successful and effective life. It is also essential within it, that all the personality traits that are called masculine and feminine must find a smooth compatibility. If the masculine personality dominates, often the woman cowers and submits and if the feminine personality dominates, often the man is practical. But the mystery is, the woman, in her submission, keeps herself strong, obstinate and maintains equanimity, whereas a man loses his balance, and yields to her will power. Both of them become aware of each other
and wish to dominate each other. In his play *Pygmalion*, Bernard Shaw more authoritatively speaks on the subject through his bachelor character Higgins:

I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical. Women upset everything. When you let them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and you are driving at another (1971:33).

Such strict adherence to one's own private character and sentiment will only shake the battlements of marriage. Ibsen's characters have been closely adhering to their personality traits and therefore they had to tilt the balance. Helmer has been showing all the traits of masculine personality – pomposity, priggishness and delight in his own masculine superiority. Nora, on the other hand, has been displaying her feminine personality – her submissive attitude, her absolute surrender, her little vanities, and her great expectations of her husband. She lives in the beautiful dream of life. Helmer takes advantage of Nora's feminine personality traits and takes her for granted. He does not expect Nora to become a rebel, rather believes in her continued yielding to his authority.
Helmer perceives that the woman is illogical and all her motives have a whimsical nature in them. Hence he heeds her not, and finds fault with her action that has been propelled by strong motives of love. His high handed way of dealing with humble submissive pleadings of Nora, about her forgery, makes her rebellious and Nora, who all along has been yielding, suddenly becomes rigid and turns against him and takes him to task. She becomes disappointed in him and puts his love to test. Helmer's chivalry fails to operate at the critical moment. Nora has been waiting for a miracle to happen, but it does not happen because Helmer is not ready to sacrifice his honour. It is at this moment that Nora changes her behaviour, which reflects on her character. All of a sudden she puts on authority and power, which so long had been only the prerogative of man.

During the eight years of Nora's marriage she has been an obedient wife, hearing him, respecting him, following him in all sincerity. This, she has been doing only to satisfy the ego of Helmer. But when she is hurt, she acts. She decides to quit the house by all means. Nora's acts of quitting the house, leaving her husband and children cannot be taken as emotional or accidental. She has already been told of the sufferings of a lonely woman by her childhood friend Linde, whose husband is dead.
Ibsen has made a woman without a husband to enter the play to give Nora a first hand knowledge about life without the man. This dramatic device of Ibsen makes Nora's exit very effective. The introduction of Kristine Linde is done to draw parallels of circumstance and experience. The significant point is the emphasis and wretchedness of Linde's life after her husband's death, a sobering glimpse of the sort of existence that Nora is to anticipate if she is going to leave the house. Nora has already been told of the difficulties a woman needs to face when she stands alone without a husband. Nora could not even recognize Linde, when she enters her house "Ah, now you look a bit more like your old self again. It was just that when I first saw you. ... But you are a little paler, Kristine... and perhaps even a bit thinner!" (A Doll's House 1985: 9).

Nora hears the story of her childhood friend with all wonder, and her ejaculations show that she could understand the poignancy of suffering. She says, "Oh, you poor thing, what you must have gone through. And didn't he leave you anything?" (10). This last part of her speech shows, that Nora understands the role of a man in the life of a woman. Their further talk reveals the pathetic condition of Linde:

NORA : And no children?

LINDE : No.
NORA : Absolutely nothing?
LINDE : Nothing at all... not even a broken heart to 
grieve over.
NORA : [looks at her incredulously]. But, Kristine, 
is that possible?
LINDE : [smiles sadly and strokes Nora’s hair]. Oh, it 
sometimes happens, Nora.
NORA : So utterly alone. How terribly 
sad that must be for you (10).

In the same breath she confesses, comparing herself with Linde’s life by 
saying “I have three lovely children” (10).

Nora is going to be thrust with more information about being 
lonely in this wide world. Linde tells Nora, that, she married her 
husband only for straightening her financial condition. But he too died 
after sometime and “when he died, it went all to pieces, and there just 
wasn’t anything left” (13). She enumerates her struggle: “I had to fend 
for myself, ... These last three years have been one long relentless 
drudge” (13).

The financial position after the death of Linde’s husband is a 
warning to Nora, before quitting Helmer. Nora, unlike Linde, has the 
strength to battle with any financial crisis. This can be seen in the way 
she had already paid off her debts to Krogstad. In earning money, Nora
is much efficient than Helmer himself and she has done all odd jobs to earn money. Nora has made more money within a short time than Helmer could make in all his life-time. Joan Templeton says:

And because Nora has earned the money to save her husband’s life, it is Torvald who is really ‘the doll’ and ‘the wife in the family’ although he has regarded himself as the breadwinner... the main support of his wife and children, as any decent husband would like to regard himself (2001:116).

Nora also knows what it is to be a lover through the experience of Linde. She says that she has come all the way only because she feels that life is so empty. She says “No, Nora! Just unutterably empty. Nobody to live for anymore” (A Doll’s House 13). Nora therefore must have meditated upon this aspect too. She is aware of all the hardships that wait for her on exit – financial crisis, loneliness, shame and suffering. But these hard realities of life do not deter Nora from marching. Vociferating her grievances against the male oriented civilization, she breaks the silence of women. She spurns the instructive ways of man and resolves to be guided by the light of her own mind. Thus she resolves to stand alone, and makes her exit.

Nora’s exit is a deliberate one, to prove that women can do greater exploits than the world can dream of. In Feminist Theory and
Modern Drama: An Anthology of Recent Criticism, edited by Taisha Abraham, Katherine Hanson quotes the words of Gina Krog in her essay "Ibsen’s Women Characters", “that the play was like a harbinger of a terrible and destructive storm. But for those of us who have been waiting for these words, it was as if the miracle began to happen” (1998:77). Further she says that A Doll’s House must be “regarded and respected as a sign, a warning and judgement” (1998:78). The play is a sign that women have awakened to full consciousness of her individual worth and her eyes have truly been opened to all injustice that has been committed against her through ages. It is a warning that she will arm herself against him to whom she was given as a helper and she will break all her bonds even if that meant to leave her home and children. It is a judgement on man that his wife left him. Therefore, the man should be wary of his treatment of his wife, wherein lies his destiny. It is the woman who decides the kind of life for him, be it good or bad. The woman is his destiny.

The following chapter deals with Ibsen’s next play Ghosts focussing its attention on Mrs. Alving’s courage to face life, when all things are falling apart, and when life is totally a gruesome affair – a stark reality that she has to face. Mrs. Alving’s situation is that, she – a free and autonomous being like all creatures, finds herself compelled to assume the mettle and courage with which she can face the challenges of life. Michael Meyer in his Introduction to Ghosts says that the play
highlights on certain ethics of social life, such as, "the importance of waging war against the past, the need for each individual to find his or her own freedom, the danger of renouncing love in the name of duty — ..." (1980:22). Mrs. Alving has simply become a victim of the society by neglecting to show charity to herself but her patience and obedience to duty have well protected the name and honour of her husband. Her daring acts shape the destiny of her husband.