ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to throw light on the power in woman, as delineated by Henrik Ibsen (1828 – 1906) through his domestic plays. The study focuses Ibsen’s projection of woman as a protagonist in man’s life, bringing out her innate ability, her sense of individuality and her greater role in the pattern of life. It also shows in a fictional experiment the extent to which she may commit her actions if provoked or subdued beyond endurance. The woman as known by Ibsen is an inheritor of the traits and capabilities of her ancestors and she is ready to manifest them when situations warrant.

In Ibsen’s domestic plays, the heroines are already married and they are positioned as wives in the family. The age-old concept that woman must be a hanger-on, a satellite of the male has made her, through the times, meekly adapt, or more correctly, submit herself to her husband’s pre-conceived notions, theories and beliefs about an ideal woman. This adaptability in economic or social conditions or in any other environment makes the life of a woman complicated, since she mostly fails to live up to the expectations of her husband. Eventually she enters into a conflict and the nature and reason of this conflict may vary from couple to couple though there is universality in such issues.

Ibsen, through his domestic plays, brings these issues to the platform for a debate, and Drama has offered the suitable forum. In all
the five plays chosen for study, the under current theory is that woman controls the destiny of man. The researcher through this study expounds Ibsen’s assessment of women’s position in the modern families. In dealing with family affairs, he seems to believe that woman is responsible for the fate of man. What the woman is, so the man becomes. She makes an impact on his life. The researcher, to establish his findings, highlights the situations in the domestic plays of Ibsen, in which man is shown desperately yielding to the dictates of woman and helplessly depending on her goodwill to keep his home from crumbling down. The womanpower is the driving force behind all his activities, and whether the woman lives or dies, it is the man who becomes affected by her actions. The researcher’s conclusion that woman is man’s destiny, is based on the declaration of Ibsen himself through the words of Hedda Gabler: “For once in my life I want to have the power to shape a man’s destiny” and this statement has formed the core of this study.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, with an introduction and a conclusion. The plays taken for analytical study are five of Ibsen’s domestic plays, which fall between the years 1879 and 1890. These plays are chosen for the special reason that women affect the lives of their men by playing a significant role in shaping their destinies.

Chapter I – Introduction discusses Ibsen’s choice of drama as a
suitable genre to deal with the subject of womanly power. This chapter traces the general views about women, highlighting the concept that a woman is endowed with power to rule, which she uses when the need arises. Woman with all her variety and complexity has always been a theme worthy enough and more quizzical to debate about. Hence it is no surprise that Ibsen has chosen her as the subject matter. The researcher justifies Ibsen’s assessment of woman’s dominance within the boundaries of her small world and consequently establishes the playwright’s reflection that a woman plays an important role in a man’s life and affects his destiny.

Chapter II deals with A Doll’s House bringing into focus the character of Nora, a gay and happy woman, who expects a ‘miracle of love’ from her husband for her sacrifice. The man, egoistic and self-centered, fails to understand the love of his wife and counts her sacrifice as an act of crime. Nora, disappointed, yet defiant, walks out of his home, throwing the challenge to the world, “I must try to discover who is right, society or me.”

In chapter III Ghosts the researcher highlights the other side of marriage through Mrs. Alving. If A Doll’s House shows Nora as a woman of courage and determination to walk out on her husband, in order to prove that a woman has a moral right to dissolve marriage the moment it does not satisfy her, Ghosts shows Mrs. Alving equipped with the same courage to
stay back and hold on to the marriage structure even when it is in danger of disintegrating.

Chapter IV Rosmersholm presents Rosmer, who is torn between the love of two women, his wife Beata — docile, naive and innocent, and Rebecca, an intruder — vivacious, intelligent, and well-read. This chapter discusses the power of woman on man as ‘a controlled power, a quiet determination’. This power is not a force, but a torment, an attraction. Rebecca loves Rosmer, who prefers her when he wants to thrust himself to the public and misses Beata when his charm of public life fades. This chapter attempts to prove that Rebecca has been the destiny of Rosmer, taking him in and out of ideals. It is Rosmer who absorbs courage, boldness and force of life from woman.

Chapter V is a study on Ibsen’s play, The Lady from the Sea wherein the woman wakes up to realise her innate power. This chapter examines a woman’s position between two men who devoutly love her. Ellida loves her husband Wangel, who has given her shelter and a good home, making her forget her sordid pecuniary life. But she is obsessed with the memory of a sailor, she once briefly knew. When Dr. Wangel is willing to give her the choice of freedom, she experiences the ‘miracle of love’ for which Nora in A Doll’s House longs for. Ellida represents women who do not like to be just an ornament for a man or to be an appendage to a man’s existence. She does not believe in a ‘Daring Exit’
or 'Dramatic Death' but loves a life of action, causing a great impact on the life of man.

The next chapter discusses Ibsen's play, *Hedda Gabler*. The primary attention falls on the character of Hedda Gabler. She has two pistols left as a legacy by her father. She decides to destroy both the men – the one who married her and made her life ridiculous, and the other who loved her earlier and attempted a sexual assault on her. When she fails to destroy her husband Tesman, she destroys his child in her womb by shooting herself with the pistol. This chapter shows that a woman like Hedda is unfeminine and undoubtedly plays a fatal role in the life of a man who crosses her path.

The study of the selected plays of Ibsen shows that woman has a potent role to play in the life of her man. The fact that woman – both in the past and today – has consciously or unconsciously ruled the home, has been an undisputed fact. Woman has been branded as the weaker sex but essentially she is the pivot around which the husband and children rotate. A home is no home without a woman. Yet she has been said to either make or mar her man. This has been vividly depicted through Ibsen’s female characters. By means of an intense analytical study, the researcher has arrived at the conclusion that Ibsen’s domestic plays reveal that woman is man’s destiny.