CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature

Shakespeare – Othello

IBSEN, WOMAN AND DRAMA

The highly commending words of George Steiner, “with Ibsen the history of drama begins anew” (1961:290), point out that, in the hands of Henrik Ibsen, drama has undergone a significant change in form and content. His plays are vitally different from the romantic plays of Shakespeare, of the Elizabethans, the comedies of the Restoration period and the arm-chair plays of the Victorians. Therefore he has gained a prominent place as a dramatist, in the literature of the world. He has raised drama from the level of entertainment to that of intellect with the result that many subjects related with humanity have become polished and revamped in his hands to look more accommodative to human life. One of the subjects widely dealt with by Ibsen from first to last is woman.

The tributaries namely Ibsen and women find in drama an unsullied and unruffled confluence because the form spares the author any conscious effort to translate life into art. The form is a direct representation of life and Ibsen passing through many stages of experiment with the form arrives at consummation of his faculty as a dramatist in his prose plays. He deals
with the social problems of his day in these plays, keeping the question of woman in the centre. The dramatic manner he has followed is conversational play in which every character has a family and every room a furniture. Familiar situations and relationships give him sources whose spring would never dry up.

Ibsen had already been prepared to face the challenges of the theatre in difficult years between 1851-1864. He worked during these years as a dramatist, producer and stage manager in a small struggling theatre at Bergen, and then at Oslo. These were years of apprenticeship in one sense for Ibsen, because these thirteen years rendered him practical and theatrical experience. He began to produce work that was considered important only when he left the theatre. During these years, he understood drama in all its complementary aspects and learnt how to cooperate with the form. He had by then known how to work with themes and had learnt to merge theme with the form.

The problems of social life are always centred around familial relationship. While choosing drama to put across his ideas, he does not overlook an obvious situation that drama could afford him. A man who enters a theatre to watch a play, brings with him a common life experience. Everyone in a society has a role to play and he or she fits into any of these roles of husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, brother and sister. Ibsen brings the family on the stage. This situation -
roles versus audience - creates a congenial soil to sow his seeds on any subject related to family. Ibsen could become successful with his domestic plays because of the interest shown by the audience in such depictions. Arthur Miller confirms such a possibility in his article, "The Family in Modern Drama" published in Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism:

It has gradually come to appear to me over the years that the spectrum of dramatic forms, from Realism over to the Verse Drama, the Expressionistic techniques, and what we call vaguely the Poetic Play, consists of forms which express human relationships of a particular kind, each of them suited to express either primarily familial relation at one extreme, or a primarily social relation at the other (1971:219).

Therefore it is necessary that the form convincingly presents the enactment as if it is taking place independently of an audience which views it through a 'fourth wall'. This also means that everything should seem true to life. The plays should not impress the audience only as an art but as life itself. Ibsen could do it and his name has become associated with realism.

Among the many preoccupations of Ibsen, the question of superiority of one sex over the other disturbed his mind. He wanted to
restore the true dignity of woman and her mode of help to man. He felt that they could never be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not. In Sesame and Lilies, edited by Albert E Robert, John Ruskin says:

Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give (1996:71).

Ibsen knew that under this environment, the fate of man is interlocked with the fate of woman. Amaury de Riencourt in his Woman and Power in History says:

To achieve this, Ibsenism used emancipation of woman as a battering ram with which to knockdown the Victorian fortress of respectability, the Liberation of woman from the concept of duty to an ideal would also liberate the man (1989:344).

This is the reason why Ibsen has introduced woman as a major focus in his plays. The study of woman and protecting her rights were not a conscious attempt of Ibsen as he himself confesses at a banquet of the Norwegian society:
I thank you for drinking my health, but I must reject the honour of having consciously worked for the woman's cause. I am not even clear what the woman's cause really is. For me it has been an affair of humanity (Downs 1946:160).

Ibsen, though, did not deliberately work for the cause of woman, the subject was in his subconscious mind and he was unwilling to let the woman rust and be ruined. He did not want to fight for the rights of woman but to plead for her proper treatment. This he thought could be better done if he attempted to show her inherent power – even from ruling the world to ruling the man and the home. He further desired that all her capabilities must be brought out to be known to the world. His wife Suzannah Thoresen also was responsible for making him realise the power within the woman. Amaury de Riencourt says: “Suzannah Thoresen, Ibsen’s forceful wife, stiffened his weak backbone and gave him the strength of character he lacked; she probably enhanced his profeminist views” (1989:344).

**Development of Woman Power Down the Ages**

Ibsen understood what **power** is there in a woman to change the world, to change the man and to change the home around her. One should not think that Ibsen attempted to shatter myths and mythologies but he tried to draw woman out of all preconceived ideas set up by bourgeois society. He wanted to project her innate ability, her sense of
individuality and nobility, her greater role in the scheme of life and her indispensability to human cause and to arouse human conscience to the sense of injustice. Drama afforded him with all its feasible techniques a forum to project woman and show in a fictional experiment the heights of emotion to which she may climb if provoked or subdued beyond endurance. Woman as known by Ibsen is an inheritor of all the positive and negative traits and capabilities of her ancestors from mythology to modern period, and which she is ready to manifest when situations warrant. She has the capacity and capability to convert adversity into sweet and profitable use.

Prominent among all ideals of man is his ideal of womanliness. It is a long story of woman who has been helping man to form ideas about woman. It is not an ideal wrought from one incident or from one period. From the time of legends to the present day man has been forming and deforming his opinions of woman and today she has become a question. It is commonly talked of as woman problem or woman question but a similar talk is not done of man. The world is not certain about many aspects of woman, namely her natural dignity, role, capacity and her nature. Woman has been manifesting herself from the time immemorial in an infinite variety of ways that she stands as a puzzle to be solved. She is paradoxical too. Through the ages the world has witnessed woman in a variety of roles and in varied moods – passive and active, docile and bold, retreating and enterprising, dominating and submissive,
crooked and straight, heroic and villainous. Therefore she becomes a subject for profound study and deep scrutiny.

The physical and emotional nature and habit of woman, which are different from man have provoked the early man both to adore her and be filled with awe about her. Woman is the author and source of all life. Though different religions tell of different stories of creation and the beginning of life on the earth, the woman consciousness does not begin with the records of history but it has been present even before the beginning of history, in the myths and legends. Man as a worshipper has female forms as deities of prosperity and production.

The early man of myths and legends stood in awe of the mysteries of gestation and childbirth because they were natural manifestations of creative power. The male stood in awe of all natural phenomena - storms, lightnings, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. He could understand social organisations and customs since he was a hunting male. He was the originator of such customs. But all these natural phenomena bore magic significance to him. They were mysteries to him. In the same way the woman was a mystery to him. The weird menstrual cycle, the flow of blood, the magical birth of new life made woman part of those forces of nature that he did not understand but feared. He began to think of woman as a natural force but within his reach. He considered her intermediary, not only between man and man, but also between man and nature. He
held high regard for this productivity in her, not associating passion or
lust or desire with it. He worshipped her as his deity. The archaeology of
every country had discovered female forms. It is obvious from the
mythical and legendary stories that man was awed by the female power of
creation of new life. He called the Earth his Mother. This again shows the
awe and reverence that the early man had towards the woman for he
looked at the earth as a woman.

But soon man began to study his surroundings. His rationality
helped him to gain control over nature and in a similar way his awe
towards the female became reduced. On the other hand the considerable
role and influence incited man's jealousy and resentment and he had a
desire to gain control over this mysterious female power. He became
active in creative work in every field due to a competitive spirit.
Amaury de Riencourt quotes the words of Horney:

Is not the tremendous strength in men of the impulse to
creative work in every field precisely due to the feeling of
playing a relatively small part in the creation of new living
beings, which constantly impels them to an over-

This awakening in man to control the female power can be seen in his
rejection of the Mother Earth as a mysterious power. One of the most
significant symbols of this metamorphosis in mental outlook was a complete change in burial customs. Man no longer wanted his body to be buried but cremated:

This signified a typically male urge to escape from the timeless bondage to the earth an attempt to get away from the mother Earth's clutches so that the soul could soar toward the wide open spaces of the firmament rather than descend to her bowels (1989:33-34).

Cremation was a male revolt and a decisive symbol of Masculine Emancipation from the bondage of the Mother Earth.

Man slowly began to break his bondage with the female species by applying his rational thinking to every day events of his life and in turn began to rule over her. It was here that the woman exhibited her courage and power when she experienced the fall from a deity to a common woman. The reason is that, biologically accustomed to such sharp and dramatic cleavages in her life course, sharp transition between defloration, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause, woman got used to abrupt thresholds, its various stages shading imperceptibility into one another from childhood to old age. Thus she sustained any change and began to muster more mental power than physical strength.

This is the story of the woman in the myths, but all is not lost for
woman. The mythological awe towards female persisted even with the beginning of history and thereafter. In some capital cities like Egypt, the lady of the house stood higher in her sphere than the husband who was known merely as the male. There was an increasing social differentiation and inequality and this resulted in vast numerical expansion of societies. As the woman was considered the head of the family, she became the head of the small social groups, tribes and societies and she began to be invested with political power too. The women were lording over great numbers of men, especially as rulers of considerable kingdoms and even of great empires. James H. Breasted in *A History of Egypt* talks about the great female pharaoh Hatshepsut. She is the ancestress of all Queens and Empresses and she snatched her throne from her husband Thutmase III in the sixteenth century B.C. and "thus became king [sic], an enormity with which the stale fiction of the pharaoh's origin could not be harmonized" (Breasted 1954:269).

When Riencourt refers to her, he says:

She must have been a formidable character in as much as the husband, she eclipsed during her life time became, after her death, the greatest pharaoh in history. She ruled with extreme competence a vast Egyptian Empire stretching from the Niles Third Cataract to the Euphrates and like any good house wife, she developed the economic
resources of the empire as few male rulers ever did. Being female, however, she contradicted all the sacred religious lore concerning the essentially divine maleness of all pharaohs, and this sacrilegious contradiction itself is a measure of her remarkable achievement (1989:74).

In like manner, the world can enlist a number of women political powers that were more formidable than the men, who directly ruled men or ruled the men who ruled the world. Women occupied powerful positions wherever they could find favourable situations. Religions also accepted her supremacy. Christianity found satisfactory role for the feminine impulse to play. Many Romans of the first century got converted to Christianity under feminine influence. High ranking women and female members of the imperial households were often converts to Christianity who invariably attempted to induce their husbands, fathers and brothers to join them in this new faith and not always with success. But Christianity recognised woman as the mother of the church. In 313 A.D Constantius Chlorus put an end to persecution and under his mother’s influence made Christianity the official religion of the empire. It was feminine influence under Christian leadership that changed marital laws and all the way from Constantine to Emperor Theodosius, these laws, which became in general more restrictive and binding gave increasing power and dignity to women as mothers.
As much as Christianity had its share in boosting the image of the woman to reinstate her to the mythological state of mother, it had equally been the adverse agent in checking the rising power of woman and assigning her a subordinate position. The part played by Eve in the Garden of Eden was well remembered from time to time and therefore she is called the weaker sex. Apostle Paul writes to Timothy to subject the women under authority:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression (I.Tim. 2:11-14).

In the period of Roman Christianity, women were admitted to the congregations and often played important roles. But they were enjoined to lead quiet submissive lives. They were looked upon as enticers and seducers in a holy congregation.

Therefore Paul instructed them to avoid all artifices, cosmetics, and jewelry and to come to worship veiled because of the potential seductiveness of their hair. In spite of such commands, due credit must be given to Church for reinstating woman in her dignity.

Whatever changes came almost in the political, religious and social
scenario of women, due to a new way of understanding and reformative thinking, it is clear through historical records that women representatives have been keeping up the inherent power motif in them to rule, to dominate, to mesmerize man by her unexpected turns and thrusts from age to age from mythological times to the modern times. They are women of peculiar strength and Amaury de Riencourt calls such women "viragos" (1989: 235). He says:

Etymologically the epithet implies a strong masculine component in the make up of such women and an autonomous strength of character not usually associated with what is presumed to be the weaker sex. At its best it implies highly mature women who find themselves in unusual positions of power and authority. The term is a praiseworthy one and can be applied to women who show forcefulness and boldness and who would dare wage battle against their male counterpart equally matched (1989: 235-236).

**The Modern Woman and her Power**

The position of women suffered a sea change while society changed from culture to civilization. When man began to occupy official positions with their degrees earned from the universities and colleges, and when there emerged a more salaried people working in factories and Industries, the problem of women arose. The idea that the woman
should stay at home, a toy and a doll-like creature destined to amuse the male, is one of the greatest fallacies of the modern age. Time and again throughout history and in all societies, woman proved herself to be a born ruler and complete administrator and organizer. What she performed naturally in her own household was what the ruler was supposed to perform for the benefit of the state as a whole. This rule of the household has invested woman with more power. The man of the modern age feels triumphant to have kept the woman confined to her household duties. But he indirectly strengthens her by giving her the home rule and entrusting himself in her hands. Ruskin says, in his *Sesame and Lilies*:

> You cannot think that the buckling on of the knight’s armour by his lady’s hand was a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth — that the soul’s armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman’s hand has braced it; and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood fails (1996:70).

Only with the home rule, Cleopatra kept Antony to her bondage. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony says: “These strong Egyptian fetters I must break” (1.2.111).

The power of Cleopatra is seen on Antony, who was one of the
triple pillars of the Roman world. It was very hard for Antony to leave Egypt to Rome to attend his wife Fulvia's funeral.

On the other hand, the man, just counting the difference between him and the woman, submits himself to her power all the more and increases her power and prowess. A woman's structure is called a figure where as a man's is called physique. When a man throws anything, he flings, but a woman tosses, a father roars in anger but a mother shrieks in anger, when the female bosses boss, it is supervision, and the male alone bosses; in the same way, the lads gulp, the maids sip, Jacks plunge, Jills dip, guys bark but dames snap, boys punch but girls slap. All these euphemistic words seem to make her powerless. But the external action does not matter. She has power within. Man's power is for battle but woman's power is only to rule, a sweet ordering of things, arrangement and decision. Man's intellect is for speculation and invention but woman's intellect is for planning. The man has the world in his hand, but the woman keeps the man who has got the world in his hand. He spends his energy for war, for adventure and for conquest. The woman enters into no contest, but is able to adjudge the crown of contest. The man is always in the open world encountering peril and trial. He faces failure, offence and becomes wounded, subdued, misled and becomes hardened.

A woman is protected from all dangers because man wants to keep her at home. The very position assigned to her by man makes her
more powerful. The man always has to return home, to the woman. She becomes the guardian of the man, his children and all that belongs to him. This guardianship makes her powerful. Wherever she is, there is home. The mythological man understood it as 'creative power' and worshipped her. The modern man has understood it as domination and realised it as a potential force not to be challenged by him. He does not even know that he has to be liberated. The destiny of man and woman is so positioned within one another that either they stand together or fall together. The woman rules the home, extends her rule over to the work of her man and she thereby gradually slips into ruling the social organisations. Her power starts with the home rule and she can make the home or mar the home, and as such she can break the nation or mar the nation. In the name of duty, she is endowed with power. It is generally believed that she has a duty to her husband, to her children, to society and to everyone but herself.

Woman has acquired power, remaining in her own sphere. It is immaterial to compare and contrast the nature of man and woman. Both man and woman can acquire power if opportunities like education and apprenticeship are offered. They are competitive and complementary. One can talk of good kings and bad kings, good queens and bad queens. They have been from the first a power both for good and evil. The women too range over as wide a spectrum of temper and talent as the men and are almost in every way comparable to them.
All the contours of woman that have gone into the records of mythology and history find a lively image in the pages of the poets, novelists and dramatists. They have delineated the woman in an infinite variety of character and position through fictitious narratives, keeping the mythological and historical records as their infallible sources.

Their different roles of wives, queens, seducers, plotters and deceivers have all been described in hundred different delectable ways, by these literary men. They are all heroines who effaced their heroes and overpowered them either by their good or bad character or influence. They made their life or marred their life. The gallery of women can be set up, starting with Homer. He has made a pageant not of ships but of women endowed with the power of any of the woman’s homilies. To number a few, the patient loyal Penelope, the playful charming Nausicca, the faithful Nurse Euricleia; the great goddess Athena who in her goodness is a contrast to Circe, the sorceress, and Calypso who with gentler wiles kept Odysseus captive for nine years. In Greek Tragedies there are studies of women who are replicas of the women of the real world. Helen of Troy with a “face that launched a thousand ships” (Doctor Faustus. 5.1.96), Andromache, the loving wife, Hecuba, the much enduring wife and mother, Cassandra, the prophetic captive, Clytemnestra and her daughter, Electra, Jocasta, Medea, Iphigenie, and Phaedra. The list cannot be complete without the inclusion of Lysistrata
who fought in her extraordinary way for peace or Diotima, the woman from whom Socrates learned about love.

In the same way, one can list the women of the Bible both good and evil. Sarah, the wife of Abraham who called him ‘Lord’, Rebecca, the scheming woman, Esther, the Queen who was dare enough to upset the evil plots of Haman, Ruth who loved her mother-in-law and gave her a home and a name, the evil woman Jezebel and the cunning strumpet Delilah.

Chaucer’s women are wonderfully various: the inimitable wife of Bath, who gives at some length emphatically her version or rather her solution of the woman question. But the most attractive list of women can be taken from Shakespeare’s plays. The tragic heroines demand our attention first. Juliet, Ophelia, Desdemona and Cordelia, Lady Macbeth, Regan, Goneril, and Cleopatra. The heroines of the Romantic comedies are more charming, more perfect and more womanly. Rosalind, Viola, Portia, the women of the next comedies and romances, Beatrice, Hero, Jessica, Isabella, Imogen, Perditia, Miranda and Catherine who is a shrew and no shrew. The list of women will not be complete without Tolstoy’s heroines, the cold and beautiful Helene. The compassionate princess Mary, the impulsive, and ever-loving Natasha, Richardson’s Sophia in Tom Jones, Faust’s Gretchen and Dostoevsky’s Maria. There is no end for listing and such is the variety presented by the poets and if
they are asked to define what is a woman, the answer may be there is nothing that she is not. She is everybody and everything in her character.

What is to be keenly observed is that a woman is never behind a man in her power both for good and evil. Lady Macbeth is more ambitious and manly than Macbeth that he gives a compliment to her:

Bringforth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males (Macbeth. 1.7.73-75).

There could not be anyone more passionate in revenge than Medea or as patient as Penelope, as loving as Juliet, as frank and forward as the wife of Bath. Shakespeare's Beatrice is as witty as Benedick and Cassandra is as insistent as Cato. The treachery of women has no limit but when Milton seeks an exemplar of charity, he pictures a woman, and that the lady is Comus. Women are often accused of having a weak sense of justice, yet Shakespeare makes Portia triumphant as a judge. Perhaps no woman is a match for Iago in villainy or for Odysseus in cleverness and wanderlust. Yet in every aspect there is a woman to match the achievement of each hero, just as there is always a goddess to equal any god. As many as her variety of character is, so is her power exhibited in different moods that she puzzles even a poet like Shakespeare, who finds it difficult to calculate her mood. Iago declares:
... You are pictures out of doors,
Bells in your parlours, wild-cats in your kitchens,
Saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
Players in your housewifery, and housewives in your beds

(Othello. 2.1.109–112).

Shakespeare marvels at her power over Time, the tyrant:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety:

(Antony and Cleopatra. 2.2.235–236).

It was a hard reality for the mythological man that the woman whom he worshipped as deity is the woman that made his home. The woman fulfilled her duties -- caring for children, gathering seeds, roots and fruits; planting and harvesting crops; making household utensils and furnishings; buildings and dwelling, preserving and preparing food. The woman then remained the same for many centuries with the passion for perfection, discipline not only as homemakers, but being the very backbone of the survival of societies. She has been sharing more than half the responsibility in constructing the society. Wherever there was a favourable situation to show her might, she never failed to do so. There are records that tell of women who have braved men. The chronicles of England narrate the war front of a woman called Boudicca, the Queen of the Iceni, and a tribe from what is known as East Anglia. She put down
the Roman forces at Colchester. Patricia Levy in her *Women in Society: Britain* quotes her speech:

> I am fighting as an ordinary person for my lost freedom, my bruised body and my outraged daughters. The enemy will never face even the din and near of all our thousands, much less the shock of the onslaught. Consider how many of you are fighting and why? Then you will win the battle or perish. That is what I, a woman plan to do. Let the men live in slavery if they will (1993:12).

This determination to live or perish is the power behind the thought of woman – in all her walks of life. It is amiss to say that every woman is invested with this unconquerable will and power. As few men have excelled, women too have excelled. Men have an unbounded area for achievements but women have been shut up everywhere by bounds and limits. Yet women have an inherent power that breaks forth like a bursting sea more because they have been confined within the “thrice threefold the gates” (*Paradise Lost*,2.645)–social, political and religious. The real story of women in the world has been distorted in the culture and left out of history books. But it is there in the diaries, letters, court records, books and oral histories. It is the story of the determined, creative, courageous women overcoming obstacles, changing laws, and redeeming cultural altitudes. It is the story of the mothers, teachers,
wives, reformers, labourers and scientists moving forward in ordinary and extraordinary ways to meet the challenges of everyday life and to create the future.

The discussion on woman so far shows that the subject of woman is a heroic theme and it is not amazing that a dramatist of Ibsen's stature began to keep her in the center of any theme in any form of his writings. Woman has been a question from time immemorial. She seems to be an entity that cannot be understood in all dimensions at once. Her power lies in her character that she is either more than a man or less than him and not like him in any way. That may be the reason why the woman was a deity to the mythological man, a queen to the man in history, a problem to the philosopher, a seductive spirit to the churchman, a puzzle to the psychologist, an abstract to the poet, a heroine and a threat to the novelist and dramatist. Woman in all her complexities thus became a theme, worthy enough, and more quizzical.

Ibsen attempted to delineate the character of woman to show her power and prowess. The woman has been pushed to an abject position because she is not like a man. She is despised and rejected because she does not think like a man, and act like a man. The woman is not to guide, not to think for herself. The man is always to be the wisest. He is to be the thinker, the ruler, the superior in knowledge and discretion. But for a man of Ibsen's capacity for observation and thinking that
difference makes all the difference. He deems her powerful because she assesses situations differently and reacts differently. The fact that she is different makes her productive and competent in the world of men. Ibsen is not fighting the battle alone to establish the power of woman both for evil and for good. All the poets, novelists and dramatists have done it. They have indulged in writing about women because they too have seen and felt the power of women in their life. Ruskin says: "Is it not somewhat important to make up our minds on this matter? Are all these great men mistaken, or are we? Are Shakespeare and Aeschylus, Dante and Homer merely dressing dolls for us; or, worse than dolls, ..." (1996:68).

Amaury de Riencourt pays the greatest tribute to woman when he says:

While men make history, Women are history

While men try to control destiny, Women are destiny


Ibsen’s approach to woman is, neither to treat her like a doll nor to present her as a problem like rotten ship-bottoms, syphilis, pollution, or to debate women’s role in society, but to define the power of the ‘New Woman’ through his dramatic works and make man realize that his treatment of woman matters much, since she is the destiny of man. His domestic plays seem to be exclusively a show-stage for the woman, who could affect the destiny of man.
The Position of the Scandinavian Women and Feminism

However universal Ibsen’s works may be, they still have germinated from the Scandinavian soil and therefore a brief look at the position of women at the time of Ibsen’s career as a dramatist and his reaction to feminists need to be given a very brief attention. In 1879, in an impassioned speech to the members of the Scandinavian society in Rome, he demanded that the women in the society be given the right to vote. Later, authors like Bjornstjerne, Bjornson, Henrik Ibsen, Jonas-Lie and Alexander Kielland wrote in support of a petition demanding that married women be given the right to own property.

Ibsen learnt from the pioneers of the feminist movement in his native Norway, Camilla Collett and Aasta Hansteen that the liberation of women is the liberation of all human beings. Along with them he understood the importance of rewriting laws to the greater freedom and protection of women, but they firmly believed that the legal rights alone would not free the individual male or female to pursue self realization. In their writings, they advocated a spiritual emancipation; they demanded greater respect for women as women, for feminine abilities and feminine emotions – in a word for a feminine personality. Ibsen too became interested in creating and promoting a Norwegian Literature that may improve the status of women in society. Thus Ibsen and the subject of woman get merged with drama.
Ibsen and the Women in His Life

Ibsen's assertions about women may serve as apothegm owing to the fact that he had a horde of women as living influence on him, to inspire him to draw fictional portraits of them. He has stuffed his women characters with flesh and blood, by acquiring a first hand knowledge and experience through his living through them. Templeton remarks in her Preface to Ibsen's Women that “Ibsen was fond of saying that a writer needs models as much as a sculptor and he drew on both women he knew and on fictional women” (2001:xvii). He needed women of real life only as starting points, to fix his fictional women characters but afterwards “there is a big difference between the model and the portrait” (2001:xvii). This part of the thesis aims at bringing into limelight the influence of women in his life, which at some point of Ibsen's life touched his mind, nerve, and thoughts and revealed a part of their character, in relation to the entire womanhood.

From his childhood Ibsen's contact with women as mother, aunts, sisters and friends, affected his life, both positively and negatively and he used the different characteristics and behaviour he observed in them, as material to portray women in his plays. The artist in him and the poetic sensibilities in him propelled him to respond to the noble and stimulating sentiments expressed by some of the women. The man in him, forced him to look at her as woman with many redeemable faults,
which he voiced in his plays. As a husband he is convinced of the stupendous, untamable power and passion in woman, to which he bowed with admiration. Therefore, he presents a variety of women in his plays.

The first woman who had worked to develop the positive image in him was from his family circle. His sister Hedvig promoted the latent goodwill in him and helped him grow with lovable nature. Ibsen felt a great affection for this one member of his family, with whom he had something in common. Zucker quotes the words of Ibsen, in his biography *Ibsen – The Master Builder*, “I think we too have always been close to each other and thus it will remain between us” (1929:12).

His sister encouraged him to continue his dream of becoming an immortal man. Equally formative for Ibsen was his mother’s oppression. Constant financial worries coupled with her husband’s domination made Marichen Ibsen, “so weighed down with sorrow and so cowed that she almost dared not speak to people, but rather hid herself away to be as unnoticeable as possible” (Templeton 2001:7-8). But in spite of her suffering she was never bitter or reproachful. Indeed, she silently encouraged him to sharpen the humanism in him. “His mother was all love, kindness, and devotion to her somewhat difficult son” (Zucker 1929:12). She served as a model, when he wrote the character of Aase the mother of Peer Gynt. Evert Sprinchorn quotes what Ibsen wrote in his letter to Danish critic Peter Hansen “For Aase (of Peer Gynt) my
own mother - with necessary exaggerations - served as model" (1964:102).

Next, his first lady love, Clara Ebbel was a great inspiration to him. The poet in Ibsen, the musician in him, woke up, and found an assurance in her company. Ebbel’s enthusiasm for poetry, her reputation as an interpreter of Beethoven and as an orbit on all that was elegant and still, awed Ibsen. She was to him a guiding star who could lead him to higher achievements. He looked to her for sympathy and inspiration. But she had to submit herself to her father’s wish and married her uncle. It was a great disappointment, because Ebbel did not lead a happy life. The lives of women in Ibsen’s plays show what has been missed by the first two women whom Ibsen loved.

Ibsen’s life once again became refreshed by the acquaintance of Rikke Holst, but that was a love affair – hastily entered into and violently broken off. Much about Rikke Holst is known from his play Lady Inger of Oestraat. It speaks of a vivacious charming girl. As a young girl of sixteen, she found herself fascinated by the enigmatic poet. In her youth and energy, she was to him an incarnation of the figures from the medieval national ballads that at the time, filled his mind.

The high ideal, he had set before him, made him choose his partner at the age of twenty-eight. He found his life-companion in Suzannah
Thoresen, the daughter of Dean Thoresen, of the Cross Church in Bergen. Their long marital life illustrates that Ibsen reached the heights of fame while living with her. This fact accounts for the perennial rejuvenating support that his wife had extended to his literary accomplishments.

Mrs. Ibsen’s influence on Ibsen’s concept of Woman

A literary genius is born, but should be nurtured in a proper atmosphere. The climate should be conducive for the germination of the literary seeds sown by him. Such was the environment created by Mrs. Ibsen. He came under the influence of Suzannah Thoresen, through her stepmother Magdaline Thoresen. She was her confidant and with her assistance he began to seriously work on the tragedy of The Vikings at Helgeland. Ibsen through one of the Valkyries, voices his opinion about the ideal partner in his life:

I will follow thee and fire thee to strife and manly deeds,
so that thy name shall be heard over every land. In the sword-game will I stand by thy side; I will fare forth among thy warriors in the storm and on the viking-raid;
and when thy death-song is sung it shall tell of Sigurd and Hjoerdis in one! (Zucker 1929:73).

These lines echo Ibsen’s commendation of his wife who had been instilling in him the moral courage and sustenance to him. Man
constantly looks for such sustained, endearing assistance from woman. She is expected to build up the moral and mental stamina in him, so that he comes out with the best. His admiration for Suzannah Thoresen can be well understood, if one reads his play *The Vikings at Helgeland*. As he was creating his indomitable heroine Hjoerdis, a woman who resembled her entered his life. Out of this play one can conclude that they both miraculously merge as work and love. Through all their hardships, not one complaint escaped Mrs. Ibsen’s lips and she bore her difficulties with dignity. It was due to her influence that he gave up dilettante painting and concentrated on drama. She evinced absolute faith in his ability and followed his bent of mind, for she believed in the essential goodness in him. At the same time, she never came to compromise, when she had to be critical. Ibsen’s poetic ideals were not appreciated by his friends. The only one to understand the first work after his marriage was his wife.

When Ibsen’s play *Love’s Comedy* was exposed to much criticism, it was Suzannah who appreciated and approved it. The critics attributed such a satire from Ibsen to the disappointment they presumed in his marriage. But Suzannah’s approval brought home the truth that it was not so and they understood that they enjoyed perfect union and exhibited the fruit of real marriage. Ibsen was more than satisfied with her love that often he expressed his love, admiration and indebtedness to her in a heartfelt manner. Though he regarded
with gratitude such positive influence that his wife cast upon him, he was also equally attracted by the manly qualities he found in her. The boldness, the stubbornness, the steadfastness, the grit and determination with which she pursued her public and private interests were some of the rare qualities he admired in his wife. In brief, Ibsen, who was a lover of humanity, who believed in the nobility of the soul, was in admiration of both the negative and positive images of women in general.

His wife Suzannah was a distinct personality who never failed to defend her opinions in heated arguments with her headstrong husband:

If Ibsen insisted excitedly what he called his academic training, gave him better judgement in political or literary questions, then Mrs.Ibsen playing quietly with her fan, replied that a woman’s instinct was a much surer guide in such matters than all the acquired knowledge of a man (Zucker 1929:115).

The kinds of quarrels between them would make people come to conclusions that their marriage is a failure but in truth he was fortunate in having the corrective guide in his wife.

Ibsen’s religious environment, the Lutheran environment that held
St. Paul’s version as the divinely inspired ethics about woman, “Let woman be silent” (1 Tim. 12:11) did not cast its influence on him. In this context Zucker observes:

In his earlier works, and in his own life, he had cherished the ideal of the Romanticists; woman was to be her hero’s companion, devoting her energies to his work and firing him to strife and manly deeds (1929:156).

Ibsen once described his wife thus, “She is illogical, but has a strong poetic instinct, a broad and liberal mind, and an almost violent antipathy to all petty considerations” (1929:157). Ibsen has always approved of a woman’s critical abilities, which he felt would always have an inspiring and purifying effect on his whole course of conduct.

Another significant influence that Ibsen has allowed in the course of his life was from Camilla Collett, the sister of the poet Wergeland and the wife of a professor of aesthetics. She devoted herself to the cause of women’s rights. She wrote novels and used them as a medium to bring out her sarcastic thrusts at the ‘superior’ men who were a constant source of annoyance and irritability to women. “Her mocking attitude on the subjects of love, marriage and the conventions was of great influence on Ibsen’s work, as he frankly acknowledged to her; ...” (1929:158).
Model Women for His Domestic Plays

The most potent and powerful influence came from George Brandes, who inspired Ibsen to write on the position of woman, which ultimately enabled him to form the central theme of *A Doll's House*. However, the real inspiration came from Laura Peterson, who received encouragement from Ibsen and that was the reason for her success as a novelist. The incidents that happened in the life of Laura gave him the impetus to write *A Doll's House*.

In the Scandanavian club in Rome, Ibsen found a splendid opportunity to make a practical test of the idea of the equality of women. He found out to his dismay that it was neither properly received by men nor favoured by women. "They had intrigued and agitated against him!" (Zucker 1929:162). Ibsen got angry and left the hall. With the same mood he proceeded to write *A Doll’s House*. This play opens with a biting satire, on woman’s place in the world. Ibsen, in his previous play, *The Pillars of Society*, presents the directives for a new woman. Lona is the new woman in this play, with a vengeance. She values independent thinking, she earns her own living and she is progressive in politics. She is outspoken about many of her private dreams. Ibsen also shows, the man’s effort to decry their wives. Bernick, a character in *The Pillars of Society* explains that at first Betty his wife, “used to have a lot of over-romantic ideas about love; she couldn’t accept that as the years pass it must shrink into the calm candle-flame of friendship” (Meyer 1986:425). Betty has allowed herself to be schooled by her proud husband, Bernick, and has
gradually learned to realize the correct view of connubiality. Bernick proudly says that “her daily association with me hasn’t been without a maturing influence on her” (1986:425). Thus Bernick reduces his wife to an obedient cipher. He also does the same to his sister Martha, whom he has reduced to a servant. Bernick says that “people have to learn to reduce their demands on each other” (1986:425).

The development of thoughts of women, and their powerful force on society originate vigorously, in his drama The Pillars of Society and is given a conducive climate to grow in his play A Doll’s House. From this play onwards, Ibsen seems to warn the men of their attitude towards the women who are going to emerge with their powers, to make a definite force in men’s lives. The women are slowly waking into their realisation that they can be forceful as women and have independent thinking and life. Nora declares that she has to learn some lessons regarding herself and she is quitting the home only to learn how to manage her husband, who keeps her in thraldom.

His next play Ghosts was written as sequel to A Doll’s House. The woman who influenced him to write it was no real woman, but the fictitious Nora herself. Ibsen wrote to his champion the Swedish feminist Sophie Adlesparre: “After Nora, Mrs.Alving had to come” (Templeton 2001:146). If Nora Helmer is a woman who managed her husband, Mrs. Alving had to be a woman who failed as a wife. Ghosts is
a play about marriage and a woman, who failing to develop her own ideas, did not know how to love a man. She had different instructions or somehow developed other ideas on her own but should have known better how to love a man whom she had married for her convenience. This play is a tragedy and in the words of Templeton:

The tragic action of Ghosts is not the quest of a woman who discovers that she should have been more loving to a man she did not love, but rather the revelation of the pollution caused by her surrender to that man – not once, but twice. (2001:149).

At the same time Ibsen shows, how stiff her back was to suffer everything in the name of a wife.

In Rosmersholm, Ibsen's model for Rebecca West was indeed a new woman. Countess Ebba Piper was a liberal minded member of Stockholm society, who caused a scandal when she fled Sweden, with the husband of one of her relatives. The husband was the great Swedish poet Carl Snoilsky, whom Ibsen had met in 1864, when both of them were living in Rome. When Snoilsky returned to Sweden, he married a rich woman whose family disapproved of Snoilsky who wrote poetry, which they believed tarnished the memory of male Snoilskys who had served Sweden as soldiers and statesmen for over two hundred years.
The whole Scandinavia criticised Snoilsky when he deserted his wife and left for Italy with Ebba Piper.

Snoilsky’s defiant liaison with Ebba Piper temporarily transformed him into a revolutionary. In the summer of 1885, Ibsen received the Snoilskys for a four-day visit. Ibsen, the creator of Catiline, Earl Sikule, and Brand was deeply interested in Snoilsky’s conflict between what he willed and what he could. Ibsen the creator of women characters like Hjordis, Lona Hessel and Nora Helmer was much impressed by the courageous, free spirited Ebba Piper who had been instrumental in Snoilsky’s decision to abandon a life he despised. When Ibsen later wrote to thank Snoilsky, for a book of poems, he mentioned, “Your splendid, great minded wife” (Templeton 2001:182). Ibsen could not have given Ebba Piper worthier praise, for “great minded” (2001:182) was the term he gave to the quality he admired most in Suzannah.

On the publication of Rosmersholm in 1886, it was clear that Ibsen had drawn on the Snoilskys for his two main characters. Templeton quotes the words of Bull that “in creating Rosmer, Ibsen rarely based one of his protagonists so closely on a single living model” (2001:182). There can be little doubt that one of Ibsen’s earliest notes for Rebecca West is a description of Ebba Piper, “emancipated, passionate, somewhat ruthless, but under a refined exterior” (2001:182). Joan Templeton adds:
In John Rosmer, Ibsen made Carl Snoilsky’s unsuitability for the committed life into a governing character trait, an over riding incapacity for struggle. But in Rebecca West, Ibsen did not deepen, but rather transformed, the experience of his model. Like Ebba Piper, Rebecca West helps the man she loves to liberate himself from conventional morality and an unwanted wife, but afterwards, she is enshackled by the very chains, she sought to break (2001:182).

Ibsen has well studied the character and behaviour of women around him during his lifetime. Michael Meyer in his introduction to *Rosmersholm* says, “Ibsen like George Eliot, knew well the predicament of the woman of intellect whose passions can find no outlet” (1980:23).

The plot of *The Lady from the Sea* is based on the experience of Ibsen’s own mother-in-law Magdalene Thoresen, who had fled from her native Denmark, to escape from a love affair with an Icelandic poet, and had married a widowed clergyman seventeen years her senior. While she was studying at Copenhagen, she met a young man, a wild, strange elemental creature. They studied together and she surrendered to his monstrous and demonic will. She believed that with him she could have found passion and fulfillment. But finally he let her go and this lady
was free to marry Thoresen. Of her husband she said: “Thoresen was my friend, my father and my brother, and I was his friend, his child….

He was a man to whom I could openly and unhesitatingly say anything and be understood” (Meyer. The Lady from the Sea 1980:115).

Magdalene Thoresen, in fact, was powerfully affected by the sea and could hardly live away from it. Ibsen could understand this power of sea over her and once Ibsen said to a German friend, while he was writing The Lady from the Sea, “‘People in Norway are spiritually under the domination of the sea. I do not believe other people can fully understand it’” (1980:116). This close study of his mother-in-law’s life and the passions that dominated her life, helped Ibsen to construct a play, with incidents founded on real life.

While Ibsen was working on Hedda Gabler, he heard of the wife of the composer Johan Swendson who in a fit of jealousy burned the manuscript of a symphony her husband had just finished. This gave him the idea to make Hedda burn the manuscript of Loevborg. Ibsen came across a lady who was gifted with talents but failed to use it. This problem of female psychology went in abundance to make the portrait of Hedda Gabler.

Ibsen had never drawn characters, especially women characters, out of nothing. As a keen observer of humanity, as a sympathiser, his
portraits are life sketches drawn from the associates he has come across in his life. Ibsen has understood the power of woman in a man’s life. A. E. Zucker quotes from Ibsen’s *Lady Inger of Oestraat*: “A woman is the mightiest power in the world and in her hand it lies to guide a man whither God Almighty would have him go” (1929:67).

Ibsen, in his own experience has understood that, man’s tryst with destiny lies only in the hands of a woman. The creative spirit, the artistic instinct and the fine sensibilities in her create a lasting impression on the minds of men. She helps to harness the potentialities in him and purges him of the unwanted elements. Ibsen, a positivist himself, nurtures the positive image of the capacity of woman and the enormous good that she can do for the man, through her association. This does not restrict him to see the other side of the coin, the seamy, ugly, negative image of the woman, and portray it as he has done in *Hedda Gabler*.

In the following chapters, the researcher has dealt with Ibsen’s women, taking into consideration only the domestic plays. In the domestic plays the heroines are already married and they are positioned as wives in the family. The woman, before her marriage does not have to live upto a theory or pattern. The real trouble about women is that they must always go on trying to adapt themselves to men’s theories or ideals about women. This adaptability, whether economically, socially or in any other environment, makes the life of the woman complicated,
since she certainly fails to live up to the expectations of either the husband or the son or the society. Therefore she has to enter into a battle. This battle varies from couple to couple though, still there is universality in such issues. Ibsen through his domestic plays brings these issues to the platform for a debate because Ibsen was abreast with the main currents of the nineteenth century literature. Brandes wrote the now famous passage: “What keeps a literature alive in our days is that it submits problems to debate” (Templeton 2001:325). Therefore Ibsen has brought the woman question to debate, and in doing so, he has probed into the source of the matter and has presented his impressions of them, formed out of his acquaintance with them in real life.

Ibsen in his domestic plays has focussed his attention only on the women, who are already married, or already on the path of marriage, or returning from their honeymoons. Such position of women, in the married status helps Ibsen to bring the problems faced by women in real life and propound the women’s heroic strength with which she resists the adverse situation and manages the crisis. A woman before marriage has easy ways of escape, if her partner turns out to be unsuitable to her expectations. But once married she is bound to him with unseverable cords and she has to face life. If she flees away from him, she will be violating the laws of marriage. So, it seemed, quite an interesting preoccupation for Ibsen to deal with women, who are already married.
That is the reason the plays are categorically called domestic plays.

Ibsen, to make the plays look more realistic has used prose as the form. The domestic problem namely, the wife's / woman's question cannot acquire a natural tone, in any other form than the everyday use of language, which is prose. In fact, Ibsen earned the status of the founder of Modern Drama by inventing the realistic prose play and making the theatre a forum for debate.

The researcher has taken only five of the domestic plays, starting with A Doll's House (1879) and ending with Hedda Gabler (1890) in a chronological order excepting The Enemy of the People (1882) and The Wild Duck (1884) which do not keep the woman question in the focus, though they deal with family life. In all his domestic plays the heroine has distinguished herself by some kind of domestic feat that warrants not only a discussion, but strikes one as a peculiar story revealing a special dimension of the woman. In A Doll's House, Nora Helmer makes her husband surrender to her and wail for her, because he fails to extend his love and care which is deemed by a woman as a miracle. In Ghosts Mrs. Alving shows a stiff back and strong heart to surrender herself to a man, who shatters her dreams of womanhood, by leading a debauched life, and spoils her dreams of a motherhood, by living a life of sin, which visited upon his child. Rosmersholm is the story of a woman, who liberates her husband
from the conventional morals, and an unwanted wife. She establishes that the woman is the destiny of man. The play The Lady from the Sea, is about the necessity of allowing the woman the freedom of choice, to make her life happy. It is the story of the woman, who wakes upto her power. Hedda Gabler deals with woman who destroys the man whom she cannot inspire to great achievements in life.

In all these five plays, the under current theory is that the woman controls the destiny of man. What the woman is, so the man becomes, or in clearer terms, the woman decides the fate of the man. Therefore in all these domestic plays women characters dominate. Ruskin in his Sesame and Lilies says, in reference to Shakespeare’s romantic comedies, “Shakespeare has no heroes; – has only heroines” (1996:61) and the same can be said of Ibsen about his domestic plays. Ibsen has attempted a special study of woman in these plays and has presented a clear and harmonious idea of what womanly mind and virtue are in power and office, with respect to man’s and how their relations rightly accepted aid and increase the vigour and honour and authority of both. If not then ‘man has to suffer’ is the ultimate conclusion of Ibsen.

The following chapter is on A Doll’s House, a play that made Ibsen famous more for the way he made Nora rebellious and walk out of the house, slamming the door behind her. This decisive act of Nora leaves her husband wailing for her, a destiny he couldn’t escape from.