Chapter V
SUMMING UP

Self-affirmation is to protect an image of self-integrity, morality and adequacy. As a result “self-affirmation” enables people to deal with threatening events and information without resorting to defensive biases, by fulfilling the need to protect self-integrity in the face of threat. In fact, this self-affirmation allows people to respond to threatening information in a more open and even-handed manner.

According to Kierkegaard the pre-requisite to live a complete life is to develop one’s capacity for making choices without any external influence. Simon de Beauvoir in The Ethics of Ambiguity argues:

When an individual fights to assert his own freedom, he ultimately struggles for the freedom of all humanity. This is the essence of existentialism. It insists that everyman is responsible for his destiny and ultimately he becomes responsible for humanity. The ‘self’ represents the whole humanity” (41-42).

This chapter focuses on the affirmation of self which is consummated in fulfilment. The protagonists assert the self through their choice of pattern of life. They never try to change themselves and they are forced towards realization which
ends in self-discovery. It is to be redefined that getting away from the world, from others and the loneliness of high mountains are not the final solutions. Every move towards relationship ends in guilt for them and they have internal conflict.

The characters explore their self when they experience a lot of ordeals, never deviate from their strong will and oblige their mental inclinations. The readers may find certain conclusions of the plays unsatisfying but Ibsen leaves it to the choice of the readers or spectators. As a modern realist, he focuses on contemporary social maladies as the main content of his problem plays. His plays endure criticism because of their technical excellence, power of characterization, and universal concentration on contemporary man, a socio-intellectual spiritual being. Throughout his career, Ibsen dramatizes the plight of the individual within a restrictive society.

Each of the plays presents the protagonist as profoundly affected by his relationships with others. Earlier Ibsen's plays had been structured to focus on the individuals' road to self-realization. To find herself, Nora frees herself of the patriarchal institution of marriage, as wife and mother. Solness in The Master Builder climbs the tower heroically, but it is to affirm Hilda's image of him. Rita in Little Eyolf presumably clasps Allmers's hands to acknowledge his realization of life. Each play places the protagonists' quest for self in a different version of the
two—women pattern and this is the familiar form in the earliest Ibsen drama. In all the aforementioned plays, the theme is tightly woven around a hero who oscillates between two women.

Emphatically, Ibsen’s plays focus on an individual’s quest for self. Ibsen creates a powerful sense of confinement. There is no world elsewhere for someone like Rita who could never thrive anywhere else but has no longer a God to turn to. When little Eyolf dies, there are no sympathetic condolence from outside.

According to Ibsen, the essential prerequisite to a new intellectual topography of the absolute finiteness of the human condition was human self-responsibility. Generally, the pessimistic tone of his plays is due to his realization that men are still mired in the habits of the past, unable to break away from social and intellectual conventions as a set of arbitrary principles. His plays are object lessons to attain self-realization.

Ibsen’s speech to a Worker’s Procession in Trondheim on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1885 says, “I am not thinking of nobility of birth, nor of money, nor a nobility of learning, nor even of ability or talent, what I am thinking of is a nobility of character, of mind and of will” (Raymond 108).

The much travelled Ibsen, who spent a great deal of his life in self-imposed exile, was primarily concerned with the little world of provincial Norwegian society in his realistic plays. He presents the readers, at the beginning of each play,
with a minutely observed, comfortably furnished, contentedly middle-class world whose values are painfully tested, found wanting and rejected by the conclusion of each play. Like the character of Nora, who slams the door on her doll-home existence, all of Ibsen’s protagonists are destined to shed their comforting beliefs, even the very security of their identities, as these dead awaken to larger but more alarming spiritual possibilities. The individual, by bravely confronting the traumas of the past, discovers a potentially more liberating identity. But Ibsen believes that, “The individual must go through the evolutionary process of the race” (Brain Johnston, *The Cycle Returns* 668-669). Johnston adds, Ibsen’s cycle “involves a phase-by-phase journey to truth and freedom through error and guilt” (667).

Ibsen’s efforts at the emancipation of modern society inevitably take the form of life struggles. These increase psychological depth and richness which becomes the forte of his plays. Superficial incidents of the extension of life are sublimated into vitally revealing incidents of the inner life. Every play is individual and distinctive which results in artistic compression and selection; and yet all are linked together with invisible, hidden motives. All rest upon the indestructible foundation of permanent, enduring art. Undoubtedly, the individual is treated as a subject in literature and theorists and philosophers build dogmas on the individual.
An individual is a complete person with feelings and choices. Gregers in *The Wild Duck* is a person who is obsessed with his own ideals. The Ekdal family lives in an atmosphere of disgusting hypocrisy, Gregers seeks truth above all else. Lies and duplicity must be banished. In Gregers’s opinion, life would be easier for everybody once the fog of deceitfulness is lifted. But the play is written so that Gregers emerges not as a crusader for truth but as its Don Quixote. His dedication to the cause of truth only brings him more unnecessary suffering, to him and his friend’s family as well. The heavy price for his truth is the life of Hedvig. Hedvig shoots herself, instead of shooting the wild duck. Dr. Relling is a realist who favours illusion and lies in life which insulate a patient to escape from his hard reality. Relling calls it a “life-lie—that’s the animating principle of life” (*WD* 476).

He also adds, “So much the worse for aim. Deprive the average man of his life-lie and you’ve robbed him of happiness as well” (*WD* 477). The average man’s happiness gets spoiled if lies in life is removed from him. Hjalmar’s marriage with Gina is based on deceit whereas Mr. Werle’s forthcoming marriage with Mrs. Sorby would be based upon complete mutual confidence and upon a full frankness on both sides. Hjalmar shares with Gregers:

But it’s true. Your father and Mrs. Sorby are entering a marriage based on complete trust, one that’s whole hearted and open on
both sides. They haven’t bottled up any secrets from each other; 
there isn’t any reticence between them; they’ve declared – if 
you’ll permit me– a mutual forgiveness of sins. (*WD 465*)

Mrs. Sorby’s life is an answer to Hjalmar and Gina and even to Gregers. Being free from lies always makes life happy. Mrs. Sorby proves that, whereas
Gina’s case is completely different, she hides everything about her past from
Hjalmar to make him happy; exactly what Nora does in *A Doll’s House*. Gregers’s 
mission gets accomplished with the loss of a little child in the family. Indirectly he 
hints the killing of her to Hedvig herself and the intelligent child senses it and 
performs the act. Gina realizes her guilt; Hjalmar regrets indignant attitude to the
innocent child. Here Gregers achieves his goal with unhappiness. Hedvig asserts 
her identity as a lovable child to the family, especially to her father.

Gregers is placed in an embarrassing situation, feeling of losing his identity
in society. Gina and Hjalmar continue their life with the bereavement. Mr. Werle
wipes all his sins by entering into a true marriage with Mrs. Sorby. By the death of
Hedvig, the guilt is erased from the family and it gives a hope that the couple will
live a guilt-free life thereafter. Hedvig also chooses her end out of free will,
surrenders herself to the fate without regret.

Ibsen’s protagonists follow Nietzsche’s philosophy of ‘free-will’. Aspiring
to joy, they have all made ‘will’ a law into itself. They all must face the avenging
justice of their newly invented conscience to discover if they ought to escape from the yoke of worldly duty.

Rebecca’s and Rosmer’s suicide, Hedvig’s shot, Hedda’s shot, Solness’s fall credit autonomous willing. The final outcome defines the quality of autonomous willing by rewarding its strength or punishing its weakness. The protagonists of these plays have to escape their yokes because they all know the difference between duty and joy and they have taken steps to move their lives from self-imposed confinement to liberation. In some cases liberation means severing the cord from the earth. The question of them is whether they could escape.

Death attends each one when they aspire to live a meaningful life. Rebecca West manoeuvres Beata’s death while she is advancing in free thought, and she consummates that project by atoning for that death with her own. Rosmer has a vision of creating an aristocracy of mind but he could not achieve it because of his past. He has served as a priest formerly and a pillar of the conservative society but personally he is a coward. With the help of Rebecca, he wants to establish his vision but it is not accomplished even after she has voiced his opinion. The personal becomes entangled with the political and they are locked in mutual guilt. The past crimes begin to haunt the present life of both. Beata’s suicide in the mill-race has left both with guilt. He regrets, he might not have done enough to help his wife in her neurosis and Rebecca directly hurts the feelings of his wife. Rebecca has a double guilt; one is driving Beata to commit suicide and the other is her
incestuous relationship with her own father. Ibsen’s notes on the play around the
time of his first drafting state:

She is an intriguer and she loves him. She wants to become
his wife and she pursues that aim unswervingly. Then he
becomes aware of this, and she openly admits it. Now there is
no more joy in life for him. The demonic in him is roused by
pain and bitterness. He determines to die, and she is to die
with him. This she does. (Carton 112)

Ibsen has picked this from the ballad of ‘Rosmer haumand’ a troll who
lures a young maiden away from home and family, away from this world to his
other-world kingdom. Rosmer has lured Rebecca and lures her most dramatically
at the end, away from a world in which their love cannot be realized. Brendel is
actually a caricatured alter ego of Rosmer; he goes out into the world attired in
Rosmer’s cast-off clothes, to bring a message of redemption to the people, a
message which turns out to be as hollow as Rosmer’s impractical notions of
nobility. And it is Brendel who makes it clear to Rebecca that she has to sacrifice
herself to preserve his belief. After Brendel’s demand, Rebecca understands the
noble sacrifice of Beata and she too follows the same to keep up Rosmer’s ideals.
The power balance swings over and at last Rebecca relaxes the hold on Rosmer.

She comes from the North. In Scandinavian folklore, North is the home of
magic and trolls. The mystery of the North is a common feature in nineteenth
century Norwegian literature. She has a fascinating power which she has used not only to capture Rosmer but also to ensnare Beata, who became totally dependent on her. Brendel calls her “My seductive mermaid” (RS 579).

The enchanting Rebecca embraces death out of her own free will and also instigates Rosmer to follow her path. In Sartre’s vision, man is born into a kind of “Ie heant [void]” and leads a passive existence. But when the individual becomes aware of and experiences anguish, he may come out of his passive existence. He would then feel the absurdity of his existence and despair. This awareness gives him the energy to take decisions, which would assist him in existing and by exercising his volition; he is able to render meaning to existence and to the universe.

But Rebecca and Rosmer would like to avoid existence. As far as Rebecca is concerned, existence does not give meaning to her life. Rebecca confirms, “I have to go over board, or perhaps I should waste out my days up here, dragging a crippled life after me? Or brooding on the happiness my past has cost me? No I’m leaving the game, John” (RS 583).

Both walk towards the water mill. She affirms, “Yes. Now we’re one. Come! We’ll go then—gladly” (RS 584). With happiness, they invite death. Rosmer and Rebecca prove their identities by negating life on earth. Rebecca completely purges her old ‘self’ and the guilt is nullified in her life. By idealizing Rosmer’s vision, her soul gets ennobled and she repents for her past deed. She chooses the path of Beata willingly.
This philosophy of retribution is commented on by Hjalmar in The Wild Duck, when he observes that old Werle, who has ‘blinded’ many a trusting fellow human being, is now going blind himself. Similarly poetic justice is dealt out to many of Ibsen’s characters. Consul Bernick nearly loses his son in one of the very ships he is ruthlessly sending to sea in an unseaworthy condition. The ‘lie’, represented by Mrs. Alving’s orphanage burns down, just as her son ‘burns down’: the affliction of Oswald seems at least to be directly related to her hypocrisy. Hedda Gabler, having failed to induce Lovborg to shoot himself in the temple, shoots herself in just that place. But for a lover, as Rosmer appears to be, to demand such a sacrifice not as a retribution but in order to reassure himself proves to be a point that human beings could be strong enough to kill themselves to prove their repentance.

Rosmer and Rebecca die like other romantic lovers. As the two leap to their deaths off-stage, they are seen by Mrs. Helseth, the housekeeper, who fancies and sees in the foam of the torrent the white horses of Rosmersholm. These have been referred to, from time to time as the traditional harbingers of doom; even the emancipated Rebecca has thought of them with a shudder. But the reference to them is purely superstitious and nothing in the play suggests that they influence the events. Mrs. Helseth screams, “No. No help now — the dead wife — she’s taken them” (RS 585). The final remark of Helseth is more relevant that it suggests it is
Beata who does the deliberate plotting rather than Rebecca or Rosmer. But even
Beata would not have foreseen or intended that Rebecca and Rosmer should both
do away with themselves, least of all in the way that they choose.

They both could have revised their decisions and redefined their life. They
could have lived a life of ‘ennobling men’, what Rita does in _Little Eyolf_. But
death gives them more meaning rather than life. Rebecca West and Rosmer
reconcile with death which gives fulfilment to their souls, whereas in _The Lady
from the Sea_, Ellida reconciles herself to life which gives her complete freedom
and fulfilment. In order to live, she gives up her romantic fantasy with her
demonic lover and seeks help from her husband.

Freeman is “freedom”, may be a spiritual challenge for the human race as
embodied in Ellida, but what Freeman offers is a compulsion. Wangel dissolves the
marriage contract, “Now you can choose your own path – in full freedom... mean it –
with all my miserable heart” (_LS_ 685). It sounds like love, really a reverence for another
consciousness. When Wangel says, “Now you can choose in freedom – on your own
responsibility,” Ellida feels like a new being. She can exercise her own free will. Ellida
could not believe the words of Wangel, again and again she exclaims, “Responsible to
myself? Responsible? How this – transforms everything!”(_LS_ 685). Throughout the
agonized attraction to the stranger, Ellida doesn’t have a ‘self’ to be responsible to. No
wonder she gets scared of the stranger. Later on she realizes and accepts the
transcendence and chooses land which represents growth.
Elinor Fuchs opines, “The Lady From the sea, the debate between Sea and Land, with their manifold associations, becomes a romantic search for a transcendent principle to govern human existence” (Marriage, Metaphysics 436).

In the early Acts, Ellida is physically immobilized in the arbour, alienated from those around her, and dissociated from the self. She is aloof and is depressed and the depression causes unnecessary apprehension. The anxiety mounts when she happens to learn that Freeman would come and claim her. She is not enjoying her romantic fantasy; it is a threatening danger to her. Ellida finds it very difficult to hold her foot on land, always running towards the sea. The sea entices her and she wants to get immersed into it. The reality strikes her in the form of Dr. Wangel and he allows her to take responsibility for her life. This transforms her being gradually she understands her responsibility and commitment to the land. She realizes her own self and attains a new self.

This new self takes her to a new life which assures happiness and motherly love. She surrenders everything to Wangel and she believes that he is her true life partner. She is assured of a family and it wipes away all her anxieties. Ellida never thinks about death even in the extreme hysterical moments. As a doctor, Dr. Wangel cures her by treating her in right way and their life thereafter would be the happiest and the truest. Ellida, out of her free will, selects a life which affirms fulfilment and contentment to her soul.
Contrary to this, Hedda invites her own destiny and meets death willingly but she could have reconsidered her life by giving up her ‘ego’. Her egotistic nature destroys her. Even in death, she affirms her identity as an egoist.

Hedda represents the higher tension of self-contradiction. She is an image of boundless demands for freedom and the decisive rejection of every duty and responsibility, an image allied with a weakness that yields to everything perishable. Hedda finds herself halfway between the wild and the tame, vacillating between free or bound, without the courage to accept the consequences of the polarity, or the irreconciliability. Her innate nature is wild but she pretends to be tame. Hers is a poverty-stricken soul, she does not appear to the readers like a creature who wrestles with her existence, and vainly seeks to bring her inmost self to outer expression.

Hedda is Ibsen’s only female figure whose experiences do not contain a struggle or growth towards the new. Her concern is with superficialities. She possesses an inclination to the wildly adventurous, but since she lacks a zest for life, she withdraws into a shell and hides carefully all impulses that could damage her reputation. From the beginning, she gets scared of scandal. But secretly she involves herself in unhealthy relationship with Lovborg and encourages Brack to come in between her and Tesman. When Brack tries to come too close, she could not tolerate the situation.
As an alienated outsider, Hedda fails to engage her time fruitfully and to
while away the time she plays dangerous games with men. Something of the
freedom for which she secretly wishes as a young girl she gains for herself
precisely by letting herself in for the burdensome captivity of marriage. She does
not possess the courage to be truthfully open and without restraint. She becomes
free only through a deception which protects her.

Trapped by the marriage to Tesman in the prosaic, every day reality of his
world, Hedda acts to reassert her aesthetic perspective and to realize her ultimate
aesthetic values. She breaks Thea Elvsted’s power over Lovborg, burns his
manuscript, and gives him one of General Gabler’s pistols to commit suicide.
Hedda’s purpose is aesthetic but her actions are not moral. George Tesman is
brought together with his old flame, Thea Elvsted, in the task of reconstructing
Lovborg’s work, and Hedda is left entirely to Brack, who finally gains full control
over her. Only he knows that she has given Lovborg the pistol with which he is
shot, and if Brack shares his knowledge with the police, the scandal would be
unavoidable. Losing her status as an aesthetic object and her position as a looker-
on, Hedda loses her identity. As the consequences of her actions crowd in on her,
Hedda Gabler becomes Hedda Tesman with a vengeance. So she makes her exit.

Hedda believes in her values so totally, rejects so utterly their negation by
Brack so that she could bring herself to meet her own demands. She becomes
courageous and decides to design her own fate. Olsen assesses Hedda’s ideals in a
positive and convincing way, “she has become precisely a person who can do such things. Absurdly, destructively, but with a strange kind of integrity, Hedda has broken through in the only way she can” (608).

At the end of the play, it is clear that the conditions for the continued existence of Hedda Gabler no longer exist. Her suicide is the physical manifestation of a disintegration which has already taken place. It is correct that through suicide Hedda realizes her aesthetic ideal in a way which brings about the integration of the aesthetic and ethical perspectives in a final, decisive action. By destroying herself, Hedda destroys the “lovely Hedda”. The dead Hedda is an object, no longer of admiration, but of horror. Tesman exclaims to Brack, “(sticking to Brack). Shot her! Shot her in the temple! Can you imagine?” (HG 778).

And the “beautiful art” itself takes place in the inner room behind drawn curtains; the beauty of the act is hidden from the other characters as well as from the audience, just as Hedda’s conception of beauty has been hidden in obscurity all through the play. Muriel Bradbrook’s comment is registered by Olsen, “No judgment is passed upon Hedda, or even invited, the audience is not asked to respond with a verdict, and this objectivity of presentation, this neutral response is the most discomfiting thing about the play” (609).

But actually the truth is that Eilert Lovborg and Hedda Gabler lack the vital requirement for living, a code of conduct, a morality to guide action and regulate the self. The audience is clearly informed of the conflicting personalities; Tesman,
the weak personality wholly governed by the conventions of society; Brack, the 
vicious hypocrite using the conventions of society to serve his own ends; Lovborg, 
the creative individual defeated by the disabling conventions of society; Hedda, 
the strong and uncompromising personality searches for sublimed values which 
she could find only in the final art of defiance —suicide. She chooses this end only 
when she is threatened by Brack. Instead of giving up her morality by accepting 
Brack, she opts for death which provides her honour. In a sense, a girl of certain 
VICES is not ready to surrender to the desire of Brack but she destroys herself very 
boltly. The final act of Hedda really proves her courage and integrity. Hedda’s 
judgement must be balanced by a proper appreciation of Tesman’s virtues and of 
the tesmanesque background against which Hedda acts. But the situation is beyond 
her judgement and Thea could step into her place in the tesmanesque background. 
Death at last frees her from entanglement and gives fulfilment which is denied to 
her throughout her life.

Solness in *The Master Builder* appears as a gloomy, cynic, who never gives 
space to the youngsters to grow in his field. As a master builder, Solness has ceased to 
built high steeple churches due to the loss of his twin boys in a fire accident. Mrs. 
Solness is found to be desperate; this desperateness triggers Solness’s guilt. He is 
burdened with guilt, at the same time he spends his time with Kaja, his book keeper. 
The personal loss demotivates him, and he is numbed into entertaining no motive. He 
maintains his professional station which preserves his personal identity.
Young Hilda Wangel enters his life and leads him out of the paralysis. The alienated soul immediately finds a support to creep and he is mesmerized by the past story of Hilda. By recalling the past, Solness expects to build his future. He strongly believes that his mission lies in the construction of the kingdom Orangia for his princess. This offers him a life-force which strengthens his identity, forgetting his true self, especially after that accident.

The Lysanger episode and their dialogue capture Solness’s intense combination of self-castigation and self-affirmation. Hilda’s unpitying response and accusation of ‘a fragile conscience’ make a turning point in Solness’s life. It is he who names as ‘trolls’ the motivating force about which she herself is inarticulate. They build their identification through images like Vikings and birds of prey.

Solness transforms Hilda’s challenge unconsciously, believing he frees himself as he does so. He is in a fantasy that he can recreate himself, which secures him the reputation of master builder. Solness’s sexual tease with Kaja and awkwardly demonstrative, whereas Hilda has come to admire and challenge his talent, to sustain it through unconsummated sexual submission and adoration. The reality of the self has been cancelled in both and they are ready for self-transcendence.

Hilda exactly understands that Solness discloses the first principle of his unhappy self-creation when he tells her that he has fought off youth to protect himself from retribution. She questions, “Is that true, what you said? Can you find
a use for me?" (MB 812). This challenges him at precisely the right moment but contains an ambiguity that her exuberance keeps hidden from her. She clearly imagines that he would use her to free himself from retribution and the order of values sustained by guilt. Her searching gaze and trembling mouth sublimate sexual passion and allure and present her youthful energy as a spiritual promise and challenge.

When Hilda suggests that Solness regards youth as a friend to be let in at the door, she makes the term ‘new’ an opportunity for transforming affirmation of whatever past event has made him fear of retribution. He believes that she could spark that desire in him. Ibsen highlights the ambiguity and error floating in the pair’s giddy hope for a “new” action. Hilda requires Solness to confirm his need and desire for her.

Solness faces the existential struggle that he has to fulfil the wish of Hilda and his position as a master builder in a professional world. Solness’s will struggles against its self-destruction and the instability of Solness’s instrumental rationality. Anyway Solness is not found in the joyful self-creation.

Solness has abandoned church building and started building homes for happiness. The houses he builds all have steeples; including the new one he has built to cancel Aline’s loss of her ancestral home. He wants to repent the past by allowing Ragnar to establish construction business on his own. He believes by climbing the steeple of his own house he could overcome his fear and affirms his
position as a master builder. He wishes to be the admirer of Hilda. For thirteen years, Solness has lived divided against himself, ambivalently and ambiguously balancing creative self-preservation and self-advancement through guilt.

Instead of building churches, constructing "homes for human beings" gives soul satisfaction to him. From that time forth, his career has prospered. Now he realizes, building homes for human beings is scarcely worth talking of. His supposed success is meaningless, "Nothing really built. And nothing sacrificed for the chance to build, either. Nothing, nothing – it all comes to nothing" (MB 847).

Solness is burdened with guilt towards Aline and his frail conscience finds comfort in exploiting others. Thus his life as a man remains unstable, and the structure of his self is vulnerable. He has come to the painful realization that his declaration of independence from God at Lysanger has proved meaningless. He has sacrificed his potential as a builder and his pagan quest for happiness for himself and others has degenerated into a selfish pursuit of bourgeois status as he builds for people who "don't know how to use these homes of theirs. Not for being happy in" (MB 854).

As a man and builder he is flawed. Solness is to climb in order to assert his unity as man and builder and thus prepare the way for a future with Hilda. Calderwood comments, "Unfortunately for the climbing Solness, the builder of structures is himself a structure, and because he has built his self without much attention to "detail work" either, he is most mortally subject to gravity" (628). He
does climb what he has built, and he does fall. The moment when Solness hangs the wreath on the tower, indicating that the human being has measured up to and merged with the artist-builder, it is both a victory and defeat.

He climbs on his own tower and delivers a challenge which is quite impossible for Solness. But Hilda makes the ‘impossible’ possible. She cries, “My–my master builder!” (MB 860). Her master builder ‘got right to the top’ and but to others her master builder ‘couldn’t do it’, and had ‘his head...all smashed in’. Triumph and defeat and upward and downward pull co-exist. Solness climbs to prove that he is worthy of Hilda’s love and undoubtedly he is the master builder, the man he has dreamed of being. Through death, Solness affirms a new kind of ego functioning and surely the ego is the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer. Death for Solness is a triumph, not a defeat. He is the master builder in the mind of Hilda forever and not a defeated personality. He fulfils the commitment towards Hilda and his soul.

In one sense, Little Eyolf is an answer to The Master Builder. Solness executes the ‘impossible’, but the execution of his greatness is not complete because he falls down and is killed whereas Little Eyolf progresses upward. Jacobs lauds, “Alfred and Rita Allmers move abruptly from despair to something like serenity as they respond to the (literally) crying needs of the poor children in the village below and look upward – for solace – toward “ the peaks,” “the stars” and “the great silence” (604).
Alfred and Rita are found to be in distress and despair. Allmers is not aware of his capacity for self-deception in relation to the most important concerns in his life; his half-sister Asta; his crippled son Eyolf; and his magnum opus *On Human Responsibility*. Jacobs adds, "Alfred’s capacity by no means matches his aspiration and that his mission to transform Eyolf into an intellectual paragon is mere self-devotion" (605). Alfred could not concentrate on the completion of his book and now changes his mission to nurturing of Eyolf into a responsible, intellectual prodigy. In this situation, Rita, his wife, becomes more passionate towards Allmers, but his mind is focused on Asta, his half-sister. In this vicious triangle, little Eyolf is caught up, who appears to be an observer in the play. Allmers has married Rita only for her wealth, to protect his half-sister. The arrival of Rat-wife suggests death and the child gets drowned in the well while playing with the village children.

Rita becomes obsessed with the thoughts of Eyolf’s fall and she imagines, she hears bells tolling, endlessly repeating the horrible words “The crutch is floating” (*LE* 928). For her, the child’s eyes are eyes “staring and staring out of the darkness. And into the darkness, too” (*LE* 925). In that inner darkness, she confronts her own guilt.

Allmers’s failure of romantic, logic derives from the habitual confusion of finite existence and the infinite possibilities of metaphor. He fails to understand
the personal relationships and mistakes the facts of the physical world for spiritual ideals. Durbach records:

How can human being be a god – like ‘Everything’ to another...? No human partner can offer this assurance because the partner is real. However much we may idealize and idolize him, he inevitably reflects earthly decay and imperfection. And as he is our ideal measure of value, this imperfection falls back upon us. (120)

Allmers restricts himself to accept the reality. Asta, driven out of her own spiritual needs is able to confront the law of change without hysterical denial and deterioration but she accepts it as potential possibility. *Little Eyolf* powerfully captures the dynamic forces – organic life, personal relationships, family structures and even human identity, which change with changing perspectives on the past.

Asta discovers in the redefinition of her role in the family, the hope of a passion no longer incestuous. She submits herself to the law of change which has miraculously given her a lover by changing her identity. Asta has no choice but to save herself by leaving Allmers. Borghejm may be a poor secured choice of her, but at least he does not constantly pretend to be her brother.

Asta’s action is one possible response to the failure of romantic solutions to death and the quest for immoral value in human affairs. She commits herself not to
perfection or ideal marriage, but to the best she could make of her life with a pleasant man. Her departure leaves Rita and Allmers, deprived of their last defense against cosmic emptiness and against each other. Almost all the protagonists feel emptiness and they are overwhelmed by nothingness. Here too, Allmers and Rita feel cut off from the comforting reassurances of faith, incapable of leaving each other, and yet equally incapable of helping each other. They seem almost beyond redemption from the nothingness of their lives. Durbach quotes D. H. Lawrence’s words to register the essence of the existential predicament:

We live in an age which believes in stripping away the relationships. Strip them away, like an onion, till you come to pure, or blank nothingness. Emptiness. That is where most men have come now: to knowledge of their complete emptiness. They wanted so badly to be ‘themselves’ that they became nothing at all: or next to nothing. (123)

With an effort of will, he breaks through the fixed and static patterns of incest to confront the earth bound sexuality. His sense of building attachment to Rita, their living together, has changed them in which they may possibly find their salvation. Their conversation visuallyportrays the change of Rita:
ALLMERS. Perhaps the law of change can still hold us together.

RITA (slowly nodding). There is something changing in me now. It's such a painful feeling.

ALLMERS. Painful?

RITA. Yes, like something giving birth.

ALLMERS. That's like, or a resurrection. A passage into a higher life. (*LE 928*)

She achieves this maturity out of greater pain than that of Allmers; she is able to relinquish her frightening possessiveness, and she brings herself to admit Asta into her relationship with her husband. She would fill her emptiness with responsibility to a world of 'Eyolfs', not as a pretentious abstraction, but with a humanity. This approach satisfies her spiritual quest. It is not casually selected. She attains this through a lot of pangs and affirms her determination against a thorough awareness of personal failing and incapacity. Above all, she extends herself towards her husband in compassion, offering him help in the difficult business of living and discovering in life itself the reason to live.

Rita's offer to Allmers suggests, 'Yes, that's so! For you, too! (Moving toward him.) Oh, let's just live our lives out together, as long as we can! (*LE 931*). This is not only self-assertion, but life-affirming common-sense which becomes the answer to the search for meaning in the emptiness and the silence.
Little Eyolf depicts a world of mundane and workaday responsibilities, illuminated by flashes of spiritual values and a sense of life’s larger purposes. Both Allmers and Rita move towards the path of spirituality which gives more meaning to life. The dialogue between Allmers and Rita surely affirms the path of righteousness.

RITA. Where should we look, Alfred –?

ALLMERS (his eyes fixed on her). Upward.

RITA (nodding in agreement). Yes, Yes–upward.

ALLMERS. Upward–toward the mountain peaks. Toward the stars. And toward that great silence.

RITA (extending her hand to his). Thank you! (LE 936)

This path leads to the affirmation of self and the self attains fulfilment.

This study began with an aim of analyzing Ibsen’s portrayal of characters in the light of inner experience and self-realization. Now it concludes that this self-actualization transforms the self for affirmation and fulfilment.

Ibsen presents the protagonists’s search for consolation in the face of death, and their attempt to rediscover a world of lost paradisal hopes in the mythology of Romanticism. Redemption from cosmic nothingness and meaninglessness is the nature of the romantic quest which Ibsen’s people share.
Human life is a series of decisions. The individual must continually decide what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong, what to do and what not to do. There are no objective standards of rules to which a person can turn for answers to problems of choice because different standards supply conflicting advice. The individual therefore must decide which standards to accept and which ones to reject.

The existentialists conclude that human choice is subjective and the individuals must make their own choices without getting help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules or traditions. Individuals are completely responsible for their own choices.

The *Wild Duck* emphasises 'life without deception and lies', *Rosmersholm* reiterates 'ennobling individual', *The Lady from the Sea*, highlights 'life with responsibility', *Hedda Gabler*, stresses an idea of 'responsibility', and *The Master Builder* reinforces 'achieving greatness and nobility'. The protagonists of these plays have failed to achieve these, but Ibsen proves that these virtues could be attained by an individual and it is possible for every individual by acknowledging Rita and Allmers in *Little Eyolf* as prototypes.

All the themes of Ibsen have their immediate relevance to the present. It may not be an exaggeration to state that all the themes dealt with by Ibsen in his plays have a sort of universality about them in the sense that they have their
bearing on the past, present and on the future. Though the world changes, man’s basic nature remains the same and static and it is from this permanent stuff of man’s fundamental attitudes that the themes have stemmed.

The researcher has focused the study on ‘Affirmation and Fulfilment of Self’ only but other aspects which could also be explored by focusing on themes like Self versus Society, The Role and Nature of the Artist in Modern Society, Living Heroic Life in Modern Tragedy, Wild Nature versus Tamed Assimiliation, Self-liberation versus Self-renunciation, Mode of Characterization etc.