Abstract
ABSTRACT

Drama is unique among the representational arts which represent "reality" by using real human beings-actors-as characters to create its fictional universe. Henrik Johan Ibsen, a Norwegian writer stands supreme among the moderns, as the most thoughtful and systematic influence on the English stage in the Nineteenth Century. Ibsen is the first major dramatist to write tragedies concerning ordinary people in ordinary situations, and he uses colloquial prose for dialogue. Ibsen has cleaned up plotting by doing away with the old artificial conventions on which theatre had depended in earlier years. Readers find depth and psychological complexity in the portrayal of Ibsen’s characters.

In Ibsen’s hands, drama becomes a serious art – a means of self-discovery and awakening rather than pure entertainment. He experimented with the Scribe’s formula of a, “well-made play” in his early plays and later on he transformed drama little by little. Ibsenism becomes a force in the realm of modern European drama. He draws men and women realistically. He is aware of the crudities of life. His characterization departs from the conventional form that existed in contemporary drama. Even in the matter of stage directions he is meticulous. In Ibsen’s immediate past, the situations in drama were unrealistic and complicated. Ibsen gives them verisimilitude. His characters speak the language of everyday life. He eschews the hackneyed modes like mistaken identity, intrigue, incredible coincidences and unlikely incidents.
The main thrust of the study is to focus on the human predicament in Ibsen’s works. As existential outsiders, the protagonists of Ibsen cross a tunnel of illusion which provides self-imposed confinements, and the reality elevates them to self-realized individuals. This study is substantiated by comparing Ibsen’s plays and thereby pointing the fact that modern man is pressed with numerous problems in life and he is desperate and alienated. But there is a possibility for self-realization provided that he has to surrender his ‘self’ to the betterments of self and the other. And further this thematic study is reinforced by referring to symbols and techniques from the plays of Ibsen.

Ibsen was convinced that in a serious literary work and in life in general men and women are not wholly good or evil; they are, it could even be said in the mode of E. M. Forster that they are good-and-bad. He has thinned out the wider context of human relationships in order to search more deeply into the mind. He defines each character more strongly in opposition to others; motives and desires are exposed, questioned and analyzed. He designs his plays to affirm the moral responsibility of the individual. A tightly organized plot makes his characters confront each other and their own past. Ibsen’s early plays focus on the search for a vocation, but in the later plays, the protagonists strive to achieve self-affirmation though they wallow in a sense of guilt and retribution.

The first chapter “Introduction” introduces the dramatist and his contribution to modern drama. It traces the evolution of Ibsen as a modern dramatist. This chapter gives a brief note on naturalism and realism. Realism and
naturalism differ from each other so much. Realism focuses on literary technique whereas naturalism concentrates on a specific philosophy. Ibsen is branded a realist who has paid careful attention to construct his plays in the fashion of Eugne Scribe. He emphasised that the convention of the well-made play must deal with robust characters, procedures, act-speeches, etc. Ibsen skillfully avoids the awkwardness of monologues and asides of the well-made plays. He rid himself of complicated plots and subplots in his plays. Ibsen's aim is to convince the readers that his characters are anchored in real life situations.

The second chapter “The Existential Outsider: The Dangerous Seductions of the Past” focuses on how man is torn by his guilt-ridden past. The protagonists find it difficult to relate themselves to others around them and hate the atmosphere due to their sinful past and culpability. They feel alienated and stamped as outsiders who experience interpersonal alienation, social alienation, estrangement from God and religion, existential alienation and self-estrangement. The outsiders perform different roles as reformers, rebels, liberators etc. The ‘self’ feels incomplete until it gets fulfilment and self-fulfilment is possible only with free will in their own choices of life.

The third chapter “Transition from Romantic Illusion to Reality” analyses the true essence of truth and freedom. The feeling of alienation drives man to the “absurd” condition, and the longing for finding the truth in life is the leading problem of all. This alienation steers the protagonists to get their consolation in the form of indulging in romantic fantasy which pleases them in an illusory life. The
illusion comforts them and they refuse to free themselves from its entanglements. They wish to be in the same state of mind but reality forces them to transform themselves.

The fourth chapter “From Self-imposed Confinement to Liberation: Choice of Free Will” elucidates how the protagonists find liberation from the self-imposed confinements by making choices of freewill. The necessity of choice is very crucial in one’s life. Several characters of Ibsen reconcile themselves to life and some to death. Though they welter under illusion and reality, they are all representatives of modern men and women who have in them some unknown powers capable of charging their lives for good or bad.

The fifth chapter “Summing Up” consolidates the aspects of affirmation and fulfilment of self, as analyzed in the preceding chapters of the thesis. As existential outsiders, the protagonists strive to achieve fulfilment in life. But they are enmeshed in a web of romantic illusion which seems to ensure them comfort and solace. Reality encounters them and they are pushed to a state of helplessness. By choosing death as a final resort, many presume that they are liberated from the self-imposed confinements and entanglements. Few characters continue living by their wiser choice. By this existence or denial of living on earth, their identities are proved, whether they live or die, they are propelled towards a state of realization. This self-realization drives the ‘self’ towards affirmation and fulfilment.