Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Drama occupies a unique position as a genre of literature. It is also the most active of other genres of literature because of the immediate impact it has on the audience. It is used to inform, to educate, to entertain and in some cases to mobilize the audience. It is different from other genres of literature and it is realized in performance. Drama enjoys the special privilege of an independent and unquestionable existence as a major bulk of literature though it is a collaborative effort of different art forms like acting, stage setting and choreography. It represents some layers of reality by using real human beings as actors to create its fictional universe. Reading a play is a different experience from attending a theatrical performance. It is a private matter and can be a leisurely and open-ended activity.

Literate audiences have been reading plays since the sixteenth century, when drama began to be staged in commercial theatres and plays were first printed for private reading. By the late nineteenth century, reading plays had become so much a part of ordinary literary culture that playwrights often published their plays before they were performed in theatres.

But according to Marjorie Boulton, a play is, “...not really a piece of literature for reading. A true play is three dimensional; it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes” (3). The same idea is reinforced by the reiteration of Tennesse Williams in the preface to The Glass Menagerie:
... a play in a book is only the shadow of a play and not even a clear shadow of it .... The printed script of a play is hardly more than an architect's blue print of a house not yet built. The colour, the grace and elevation, the structural pattern in motion, the quick interplay of living beings, suspended like fitful lightning in a cloud, these things are the play, not words on paper....(122)

All these observations establish the fact that a play is something essentially to be acted. It is a script and not a book. Hence, it necessitates performance on the stage for its whole effect. Drama as a performing art involves real-life people who pretend to be imagined people. It lays special emphasis on action of a concentrated, often intense kind.

The early nineteenth century was one of the most unrewarding periods in the English theatre. It was a great era in poetry and fiction, but men of letters when they came into the theatre seldom found themselves in a congenial atmosphere. The audience was content with farce and melodrama and extravagant displays and no management had the courage to attempt any elevation in their tastes. The legitimate theatres had been constantly enlarged so that natural acting was no longer possible. Only spectacle and declamation could appeal to the large and sometimes unruly audience that filled the vast auditoria of Covent Garden and Drury Lane.
The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of drama, which had been neglected by the Victorians as a powerful literary force. As time passed, new trends were introduced in drama and every effort was made by dramatists to make drama life-like, realistic and appealing to the common man. Twentieth century drama becomes the essence of what J.B. Priestley states: "... bringing life to the theatre and theatre to life" (67). The new social problems rising in the new set up of values cried for solutions, and drama seems to be a fitting medium in which justice could be done to solving the social and economic problems of the times. The modern dramatist takes up this task seriously as an organist, "... playing on two keyboards at once, the audience cannot respond as it wishes to respond" (67) and gave an outlook to drama which it had not had in the Victorian age.

Realism is one of the most significant and outstanding qualities of one branch of modern drama. In literature it was first developed in France in the mid-nineteenth century and this movement began as an experiment to make the theatre more useful to society. Realist writers sought to present their plays from an objective, unbiased perspective that simply and clearly represented the factual elements of the play. They became masters in making detailed descriptions of every-day life in realistic settings, and dialogues captured the rhythm and idioms of natural human speech. The realists endeavoured to accurately represent contemporary culture and people from all walks of life.
Two other "movements" that developed concurrently with realism warrant one's attention, Naturalism and the Independent Theatre Movement. Each of these influenced the developing realist movement. The chief representative of naturalism was Emile Zola (1840-1902), who urged playwrights to analyse and report real conditions in society and real problems of ordinary people. Zola advocated a drama based on "real life"—plays about characters taken from the middle or lower classes, who spoke realistic dialogue. The dramatists of the early years of the twentieth century were interested in naturalism and realism and it was their endeavour to deal with real problems of life with a realistic technique in their plays. It was Henrik Johan Ibsen, a Norwegian dramatist popularized realism in modern drama. He is considered the founding father of modern realistic drama. He deals with the problems of real life in a realistic manner in his plays. The highly commending words of George Steiner, “With Ibsen the history of drama begins anew” (290), point out that in the hands of Ibsen drama underwent a remarkable change in form and content.

Ibsen's plays are significantly different from the romantic plays of Shakespeare, 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 intellectual engagement with the result that many subjects removed from humanity have become refined and revamped in his hands to look more accommodative of human life. They deal with
problems of marriage, justice, law, administration and strife between capital and labour. He uses the theatre as a means of bringing about reforms in the conditions of society prevailing in these days.

Ibsen’s plays evoke and carefully record the life of modern bourgeoise. Ibsen becomes popular with his realistic plays because of the interest shown by the audience in such depictions. Arthur Miller aptly acknowledges in “The Family in Modern Drama”:

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 these suited to express either primarily familial relation at one extreme, or a primarily social relation at the other. (219)

The plays should not impress the audience only as an imitation but as life itself. Ibsen achieved this and his name is always associated with realism.

Ibsen was the first Norwegian writer who could make a mark on world literature. His contribution to the field of drama has been exceptionally remarkable and far reaching. Joseph Woodkrutch states:
During a considerable part of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the contemporary drama in England and America was both intellectually and artistically stagnant. From, shall we say the death of Sheridan to the emergence of Oscar Wilde, no Englishman and no American of considerable talent devoted himself chiefly to writing plays. The theatre, though it was sometimes commercially flourishing, was generally considered as non-literary and intellectually dead as it was artistically null. (3)

This is true not only of England and America but also of other Western countries including France. It was Ibsen who restored drama to its earlier glory. In his hands, drama became a serious art. It served as a means of self-discovery and awakening rather than pure entertainment. He establishes a new tradition of dramatic writing which in one form or another still continues.

Ibsen’s plays are notable for their intellectual and artistic appeal. He often stresses the close relationship between his work and his life. In a letter to his German translator, Ludwig Passage, written on 16th June 1880, he comments, “Everything I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my actual experience: every piece of writing has for me served the function of acting, as a means of finding spiritual release and purification” (Ibsen’s Dramatic Technique 23). He also points out that the
situation in Ibsen’s own family seems to form a background upon the pattern of which the situation of his plays are constructed. In a sense, it is necessary to learn about Ibsen the man because many of his plays are loaded with his personal experiences either directly or indirectly. Henrik Johan Ibsen was born on 20th March 1828, in a small shipping town called Skien in Norway. His father Knud Ibsen was a well-to-do businessman but he became bankrupt when Ibsen was eight years old. Nothing was left of their possessions except a small farm. The family moved to the North of town for shelter. Neglected by their rich relations, the Ibsens remained here for seven or eight years in total obscurity. The ground was thus prepared, as John Gassner observes: “for the future writer who was to castigate the false respectability and complacency of the middle classes” (John Gassner Masters of the Drama 357). Ibsen’s days at the farm passed in solitary musings, reading and drawing. For sometime he attended a small private school in the town but had to keep away from the class in order to earn his living.

As a typical petty bourgeois, he started his career as a young apprentice at the National theatre in Bergen between 1851 and 1857, directed some twenty-one plays by Augustine Eugène Scribe (1791-1861), who was a French dramatist and librettist, known for the perfection of his ‘well made plays’. Ibsen experimented with this method in his early plays, and little by little transformed the Scribean formula.
Scribe's formula of a well-made play often contains a secret revealed at the climax; the revelation of this secret leads to the villain’s downfall and the hero’s triumph. The action builds through a series of reversals to the climatic revelation or obligatory scene. Compromising letters, precisely timed entrances and exits, misunderstandings and other devices contribute to the suspense. The denouement or the “unknotting” of events is always carefully prepared and manipulated. Scribe pioneered a formula still used in many popular plays, films, and television scripts. His focus on tightly knit cause-and-effect plots was appropriated for powerful purposes by the next generation of dramatists, the naturalists and realists. The new psychological investigations in plays like Ibsen’s increase the interest in character as distinct from plot, and the realistic drama aims more and more at the impartial presentation of real life, contemporary rather than historical. It is Ibsen’s influence which establishes the drama of ideas as the popular drama of the early twentieth century.

The realist playwrights like Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, George Bernard Shaw and Anton Chekhov portray time-honoured social customs and traditional morality as the cause of problems. Their themes may be incest, marital unhappiness, betrayal, desertion, class conflict and hostility, despair, suicide and sexual license. The most notable feature is that the realists dealt pertinaciously with problems in the lives of individuals which were till then shunned by dramatists. Ibsen, for one, never permitted “whited sepulchers” and probed the more intimate problems among individuals, especially among men and women,
and problems with the deeper selves of the individuals. The conclusion is that people like Ibsen and Strindberg arrived at radically questioned accepted social, sexual, cultural mores of contemporary society and provoked at first dissent and even violence of their ideas and even techniques, and then provoked new thinking.

Anton Chekhov's (1860-1904) plays portray a detached and clinical view of Russian life and an ironic attitude toward the characters. His noteworthy works are The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard, etc. Chekhov is known more for poetic expression and symbolism, compelling psychological reality, people trapped in social situations, hope in hopeless situations. Characters in Chekhov's plays seem to have a fate that is a direct result of what they are. His plays have an illusion of plotlessness.

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was one of the earliest defenders of Ibsen, when the Norwegian playwright's dramas were evoking a storm of protest in Europe. The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891) is a brilliant and succinct exposition of Ibsen's leading plays up to the time of Shaw's publication of Widower's Houses (1892), Arms and the Man (1894), Candida (1894), Caesar and Cleopatra (1898), Man and Superman (1903), Major Barbara (1905), Pygmalion (1913), Heartbreak House (1920) and Saint Joan (1923). In contrast to the psychological depth of Ibsen's characters, Shaw's dramatic figures are witty
spokespersons for his own social and political views. Shaw’s prefaces to his plays, often as long as the plays themselves, explain in detail his own views on his characters, plots and themes.

Though the contribution of these two playwrights is phenomenal, 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 matters of stage directions he is meticulous. In the decades before Ibsen, the situation is that plays were unrealistic and complicated. But 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 though he is not completely alone resorting to and exploiting conventional techniques where convenient for script.

Especially in the last twelve plays, he has followed the fashionable mode of Sardou, Scribe, Meilhac and Halevy, and turned it into a vehicle for his own passionate concerns. One of the claims to fame made on his behalf is the neatness of his expositions, the naturalness with which he brings characters on and off stage, the positioning of his climaxes and the bringing down of his curtains. He disciplines himself to avoid the awkwardness of monologues and asides and rids himself of the complicated plots and sub-plots. He makes his plays tell by actions rather than by words. His plays are not for amusement. To Ibsen, the theatre is a
place of truth of ruthless analysis; a place where the minds and souls of human beings are revealed with honesty that sometimes seems unbearably harsh. A great actress once thanked Ibsen for creating such wonderful roles for women, to which he angrily replied: “I have never created roles. I have written of human beings and human destinies” (Gallienne xiii).

Ibsen’s enduring greatness as a dramatist is not simply due to his technical innovations, but due to the depth and subtlety of his understanding of human character. He himself comments on his play crafting:

Before I write down one word, I have to have the character in mind through and through. I must penetrate into the last wrinkle of his soul. I always proceed from the individual; the stage setting, the dramatic ensemble, all of that comes naturally and does not cause me any worry, as soon as I am certain of the individual in every aspect of his humanity. But I have to have his exterior in mind also, down to the last button, how he stands and walks, how he conducts himself, what his voice sounds like. Then I do not let him go until his fate is fulfilled. (http://ibsen society.htm.)

Ibsen can travel to the depth of the soul and lift that reality on the stage. The philosophy of Ibsen is composed of four main constituents namely: 1. Every human being has the natural right to live his or her own life, 2. the only real
tragedy in life is the refusal of love, 3. absolute honesty and truthfulness one must
never compromise; and 4. the minority could be right and government by majority
is a form of tyranny. Raymond Williams states:

The orthodox account of Ibsen as dramatist proposes four
major periods: first, the “apprenticeship”, ending with *The Pretenders*; secondly, the major non-theatrical plays, *Brand*, *Peer Gynt, Emperor and Galilean*; thirdly, the prose plays,
sometimes called the domestic plays, beginning with *The League of Youth* and passing through *A Doll’s House* and
*Ghosts* to *Hedda Gabler*; and fourthly, the “visionary” plays,
from *The Master Builder* to *When We Dead Awaken*. (Drama from Ibsen to Brecht 26)

His dramatic career spans a period of fifty years. His first play was
published in 1850 and his last play, *When We Dead Awaken*, was published in
1899. His creative period covers the second half of the nineteenth century.

The first phase of Ibsen’s writing comprises of nine plays, from *Catilina* to
*The Pretenders*. Except *Catilina* and *Loves’ Comedy*, all the plays are based on
national history, folklore, legends or sagas. *Brand* (1866) and *Peer Gynt* (1867)
are called “Poetic dramas” and they are remarkable for their vigorous poetry and
extravagant fancy. They are the best and strongest expressions of Ibsen’s romanticism, and “form a kind of bank for Ibsen to draw on in all his later plays” (Gassner *Masters of the Drama* 354).

The second phase of Ibsen’s writing makes him famous and earns him the title of the ‘father of the modern drama’. This period extends from *The League of Youth* to *An Enemy of the People* (1882) and they are described as ‘social’, ‘realistic’ or ‘problem’ plays. At this stage Ibsen’s outlook takes a turn from romanticism to the stark realities of the world around him. Contemporary social problems become the subject of these plays and he submits their problems to a radical revaluation.

In the plays, as G.B. Shaw puts it, “The problems of conduct and character of personal importance to the audience are raised and suggestively discussed” (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 137). The only exception is *Emperor and Galilean* as it is a historical play of philosophic import. The next phase includes the plays *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886), *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890). In these plays, Ibsen turns from society to the individual and from public issues to private questions. These plays analyze the workings of the human mind.

The last four plays, *The Master Builder* (1892), *Little Eyolf* (1894), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1869) and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) constitute the last phase of his dramatic writing. Here, Ibsen moves away from the realm of individual psyche to that of individual conscience. Kernodle opines:
His concern is rather with the inner experience of the individual, with his often unaided exploration of that experience, with the reassessment and revaluation of his past at some ultimate turning point of his soul’s pilgrimage. (10)

His capacity as theatre poet and assistant at the National Theatre at Bergen, enabled him to stage and direct nearly 150 performances of plays by Shakespeare, Labiche, Holbery and Scribe. His experience in stage craft facilitated him to produce his own little-known verse plays (The Warrior’s Barrow, Lady Inger of Ostra and The Feast at Solhaug), which were received by the Bergen audience with little enthusiasm.

Most of his poems deal with romantic subjects were written during 1851-1857. There is continuity in Ibsen’s work, from the poems to the later prose plays. The natural images of mountain and sea, storm and sunshine, permeate the prose plays, both in the settings and in the language.

Ibsen chooses the medium of prose for writing his plays rather than verse because it would suit his bourgeois world. Ibsen writes to an English admirer who regretted that his first major prose play, Emperor and Galilean (1873), was not in verse. Watson registers Ibsen’s words:

It was the illusion of reality I wanted to produce... we no longer live in Shakespeare’s time.... In general the form of
the language must be adapted to the degree of idealization that is given to the account. My new play is no tragedy in the old style; what I wanted to portray was people, and it was precisely for that reason that I did not allow them to speak with ‘the tongues of angels’. (113)

Women often appear as central characters in the realist plays, because the status of women in the late nineteenth century readily lent itself to an exploration of social problems. Realism thus registers as an avant-garde reaction to the heroic, sentimental, melodramatic and spectacular plays that mainstream audiences had favoured for several generations. He wanted to expose the inadequacy and injustice of the social regulations that governed gender roles, the place of religion, the relations between men in different walks of life, without seeing them in broad classification like the rich, the poor, the masters and the servants. The vindication of women’s rights is not a conscious attempt of Ibsen as he himself confesses at a banquet of Norwegian Society, “I thank you for drinking my health, but I must reject the honour of having consciously worked for the women’s cause. I am not even clear what the woman’s cause really is. For me it has been an affair of humanity” (Brian Down 160). Though Ibsen did not intentionally portray women’s problems, unconsciously he always has the thought in his mind and he is unwilling to let the woman suffer and be ruined.

Ibsen does not want to fight for the rights of women but to plead for her proper treatment. The range and variety of his portraits of women are
incomparable. Especially in his later plays, when more and more he deals with the hidden subconscious forces of human beings, he becomes increasingly absorbed in his studies of the female mind. It is perhaps his poetic mind that gives him such a sensitive understanding of the mysterious life of these women he portrays.

Not that Ibsen's plays are exclusively concerned with women; his gallery of men is equally impressive. His concern for the state of the human soul cuts across class and gender lines. It is reflected in the speech he made at a banquet given in his honour at the Norwegian Women's Rights League on 26th May, 1898:

"I am not a member of the Women's Rights League. Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people for the toast. (McFarlane 90)"

Like an architect, he builds characters. Marker records, "He was an architect, and he built. He always built his plays, and he knew exactly: 'I want this and that'. He points the audience in the direction he wants it to go, closing doors, leaving no other alternatives" (Four Decades in the Theatre 222).

Ibsen feels that a man and a woman should, ideally, go through life together as perfect equals, in perfect honesty, free to develop each in his/her own way into a complete human entity. He insists everyone must work out his own destiny in the world
and go straight towards it. Ibsen always necessitates the existential decision. Almost all
the protagonists of Ibsen are caught up in existential dilemmas.

Ibsen always believes that his plays project a powerful vision if one could
read all his plays in the chronological order. Rolf Fjelde documents Ibsen’s words:

Only by grasping and comprehending my entire production as
a continuous and coherent whole will the reader be able to
receive the precise impression I sought to convey in the
individual parts of it. I therefore appeal to the reader that he
not put any play aside, and not skip anything, but that he
absorb the plays – by reading himself into them and by
experiencing them intimately – in the order in which I wrote
them. (The Complete Major Prose Plays by Ibsen 4)

Ibsen uses the “well made play” to show men and women who rebelled
against the basic attitudes of nineteenth century society. Many of the books that
come under the labels of the realistic and naturalistic literature tear off the mark of
respectability and show human beings in real nature. Man is made to face facts and
expose corruption and hypocrisy. Anton Chekhov asserts, “To make a man better, you
must first show him what he is” (Drama Classical to Contemporary 728).

As a realist, Ibsen provides one the essential qualities of one’s life and he
gives not only individuals, but individuals in their own situations. The things that
happen to his stage figures are things that happen to a human being. One consequence is that his plays are much more important to human beings.

Many of the characters of Ibsen’s plays are compelled to revise their views and opinions on life and its complexities. Ibsen exposes through his characters, who is good and who is bad, but he never states that they are good or bad. Instead he presents almost the same situation to his protagonists and makes the viewers realize how they would like to fit in themselves. The deeper part of the point is that many characters who appear bad eventually turn out to be capable of good and many who appear to be romantically idealistic turn out to be selfish at the core; for instance, Torvald and Krogstad of *A Doll’s House*.

Rather than types, he created characters in ‘minute and elaborate’ detail. In his best works, the characters are fully alive and they are controlled by the pressure of a central theme. Thus in *Rosmersholm*, Kroll and Rosmer embody incompatible ethics, and the conflict dramatized is as much a collision of values as of personalities. In *The Wild Duck*, and to a lesser degree in other plays, Ibsen tries to set even his minor characters in different lights, or at least to salt their speech with phrases as revealing of personality as the action would allow. He makes every character distinct and interesting. The best example is Mrs. Sorby in *The Wild Duck*.

Ibsen adopts the retrospective technique to capture the past moments in relation with the present. The protagonist who is marked as outsider travels to the past and registers its inevitability in the present through this technique. For
instance in *The Wild Duck*, Gregers is stamped as the outsider who probes the past of his friend Hjalmar and makes his life unhappy. The main characters always have a hidden past, about which they would prefer others to remain ignorant. Their pasts have, in turn, a connection with the present they are now striving to achieve. This is why they camouflage their thoughts, feelings, intentions and aspirations. It is because of this that they need to play-act to a certain degree when the dialogue touches upon some important aspect of their hidden lives. Many of Ibsen’s characters lead a camouflaged existence throughout and much of the action only comes out into the open shortly before the final curtain. This phenomenon is related to the process of revelation in the plays, which is so important in Ibsen’s dramatic technique in general.

Apart from the retrospective technique, Ibsen also implements the dialogic mode which presents a genuine moral dialectic, the opposition not of a point of view but of a person. For example, the scenes of Rosmer with Rebecca in *Rosmersholm*, of Nora with Torvald in *A Doll’s House*. The dialogue is shaped for analysis, and the focus of the scene is not a grief or anger of either person but the responsibility of two people to each other. Rosmer and Rebecca in *Rosmersholm* are alone together on the stage for nearly one third of the play. The readers are given only a glimpse of their feelings, when Rebecca speaks of the beginning of her love for him. The play, however, goes beyond personal relationships to explore a theme that runs deep
through Ibsen’s work; the grip of the past, with its guilt, on those who long to stand free in the present. During Ibsen’s period, systematic efforts were made to materialize psychic and symbolic landscapes on stage.

The twelve prose plays clearly picturize the helpless state of the protagonists who strive to achieve success in the absurd world but they could face only death. Ibsen’s achievement lies in the transformation of the stage of the ordinary world that sincerely reflects bourgeois existence into a selection of the invisible forces behind the phenomenal world. Fundamentally, Ibsen’s plays are notable for their intellectual and artistic appeal. He treats a contemporary subject in a realistic manner. On several occasions, he raises his literary pronouncements from his own inner self. His social problem plays are tragedies on the stage with a sensation. He enumerates the sickness of contemporary society with its lack of moral courage and conscience. He pleads for the freedom of the individual and especially for the cause of women.

Ibsen’s first modern prose drama *The Pillars of Society* (1877), delineates Bernick, an outsider, is considered as society’s pest. On the basis of private lies, Bernick has built up an economic empire. Since then, he has acted on the basis of a public lie, namely that he has been spearheading his business deals with the sole aim of promoting the interests of the community. There is no real communication between him and his wife, between him and his young son, nor between him and
his employees. He tries to justify his social and personal machinations. In this process, the impurity of his relationship with everyone in the family and in the society to which he belongs, brings feelings of guilt.

In *A Doll’s House* (1879) Ibsen bravely depicts a female protagonist, Nora Helmer, who dares to defy her husband and forsake her duty as wife and mother to seek out her individuality. Her husband Torvald wants Nora to be a doll in his hands to be played with. The inferior, doll like nature starts ebbing out when she gets an inspiration from Mrs. Linde, because she has experienced the independence that Nora longs for. She wants freedom not only from her home but from within. The outsider here performs like a liberator like Rosmer in *Rosmersholm*. But in *Rosmersholm*, he is pushed to a state where he would embrace death finally, whereas Nora emerges as an empowered woman.

In the next play, *Ghosts* (1881), Ibsen delineates Mrs. Helene Alving, a widowed mistress of an estate and Rosenvold, an outsider who is burdened with her past life. She has had a bitter life with Captain Alving and her marriage has been a ruinous one. Due to the Captain’s drunken and lecherous behaviour, she flees from the disastrous marriage and comes to the priest Manders. But he refuses to give her support. Throughout her life, she lives like an outsider who feels alienated at heart and finds her son as a final resort. But unfortunately he is already
doomed, inheriting the disease from his father. Captain Alving, like a ‘ghost’, haunts the life of both Osvald and Mrs. Alving. She wants to attain atonement through her son for her past guilt. But she is forced to live a life of loneliness.

Dr. Stockmann in *Enemy of the People* (1882) is perhaps the simplest and least ambiguous of the outsiders in Ibsen. In his honesty, personal integrity and sincerity of purpose, he stands out in the midst of lying, hypocritical authorities and a morally indifferent public. Dr. Stockmann produces scientific evidence that the Baths are polluted and demands their closure and repair. He emerges as a social rebel railing against the dangerous enemy of truth and freedom. Stockmann is ostracized by society and completely treated as an outcast. His daughter Petra is dismissed from her teaching job because her employer “daren’t” do anything else. Stockmann is dismissed from his post as medical officer at the Baths. His sons Eylif and Morten are dismissed from school. Thus social ostracism drives the outsider into total isolation. Dr. Stockmann is a militant reformer outsider who carries out a one man crusade against society. He is almost the only one of Ibsen’s outsiders who remains a heroic figure till the end.

Gregers in *The Wild Duck* (1884) is portrayed as a liberator who is at par with Dr. Stockmann. He is an idealistic outsider who presumes that he can reform others and liberate them from their illusions and delusions. But the pay off is that he is driven to frustration. He identifies himself as a saviour of deceptive lives
built on falsehood but turns out to be a villain in his friend’s (Hjalmar’s) life by revealing to Hjalmar that Gina, his wife is the discarded mistress of his father, Werle Senior. As a result, Hjalmar suspects his daughter’s (Hedvig’s) paternity and Gregers misleads Hedvig to sacrifice her pet wild duck to prove her affection and love for the father. Gregers Werle thus emerges as an impractical, idealistic, reformer outsider, whose vision of the external world proves to be unreal.

Dr. Stockmann’s and Gregers’s roles get redefined in Rosmersholm, through Rosmer and Rebecca. Rosmer’s wife has drowned herself in the opening of the play. He has a young house-keeper named Rebecca West, who perceives Rosmer’s potentialities and thinks that she could help him to fulfil them.

Both of them exchange their love. Rebecca now learns from Kroll, Beata’s brother, that she happens to be the mistress to her step father. This information makes her feel guilty that when Rosmer asks her to marry him, she refuses to accept the proposal. Finding that they could not get married, they commit suicide by throwing themselves into the mill-race.

The next play The Lady from the Sea, answers the question if the protagonist is given enough freedom with responsibility to make a choice in her life, how she would react to it. Ellida Wangel makes a right choice in her life by selecting her own husband, as the best companion to her, rather than a stranger.
In *Hedda Gabler*, the main character is a General’s daughter who finds herself trapped in a conventional bourgeois marriage with a dull academic husband, George Tesman. A former admirer, Ejlert, reappears in her life. He is a brilliant writer but a dissolute man. Hedda’s friend of old days, Thea, has helped Ejlert to get rid of his drinking habits and persuaded him to start writing again. Hedda becomes jealous of Thea. She plots against Ejlert and Thea, and makes Ejlert shoot himself with Hedda’s pistol. She is blackmailed by judge Brack, another admirer of hers and at last she shoots herself.

*The Master Builder* deals with a self-made architect called Solness. He is entangled in a loveless and childless marriage. Hilda Wangel, a young girl of twenty-three, comes to see him. Ten years ago he climbed to the top of a new spire which he built in her town. She has often dreamt of him, and she comes to offer herself to him. He has just completed a new house with a spire. She wants to see him at the top of the spire, but unfortunately he falls and dies.

The next play *Little Eyolf* centers on romantic fantasy wherein Alfred Allmers leads the life of a gentleman scholar, having married a beautiful and wealthy landowner, Rita, for the sake of her ‘gold and green forests’. Whatever affection he may have once felt for his wife has long since faded. His emotional life is now dominated by incestuous fantasies involving his half-sister Asta.
His infant, little Eyolf falls from his bed when he is guarded by Allmers. Eventually he becomes crippled and Allmer's hope of life is shattered. While playing with children, Eyolf gets drowned in the well. The loss of little Eyolf shakes the couple.

Rita feels jealous of her husband's attachment to his son. But the death of Eyolf transforms her completely and now she is ready to tend the village children, committing her life to this mission.

*John Gabriel Borkman* delineates the story of Borkman who has managed to become a wealthy financier. Before the play begins, he embezzles some money, though for idealistic reasons, and is imprisoned. Released after eight years of imprisonment, he now lives alone in an upstairs room of his house. As a young man he married not for love but in order to get a foot-hold in life. Now his wife's sister Ella, whom he once loved, approaches him and requests that she should be given charge of his son Erehart. As the two sisters argue for possessing a son, Erehart shocks everyone by marrying a woman who is almost twice his age and left the mother. Borkman wanders out of the house and dies on the mountain side.

*When We Dead Awaken* is a subtle and complex play that blends together the spheres of everyday reality and universal, mythical experience. The old sculptor Arnold Rubek, achieves fame but his marriage with a much younger wife, Maja, is a dissatisfied one. Returning to Norway, he meets Irene, his past lover who had at one time been a model for statues. Her mind is now deranged and she accuses him of
having wrecked her life. Both Rubek and Irene climb to the top of the mountains. There he meets his wife Maja, with a hunter with whom Maja has fallen passionately in love. A storm begins to blow. Maja and the hunter go down to safety while Rubek and Irene continue to climb towards the top where they are killed by an avalanche.

Thus, the twelve prose plays strike a similarity – an existential outsider, an individual who reflects over life, human existence and his own predicament in the universe and becomes aware of his alienation from society, other men, God and religion, the human condition and his own self. This awareness may strike him in ‘a personal crisis’. This personal crisis chisels the protagonists into self-realized individuals.

Ibsen believes in individualism, that it is part of man’s nature to strive to achieve the fullest realization of his selfhood, to be free in terms of his powers and potentialities. Self-realization is man’s highest value, an absolute value, and Ibsen’s belief in this kind of freedom is built into all his great protagonists, from the uncompromising idealist in *Brand* (1866), to the visionary artist Rubek in his last play, *When We Dead Awaken* (1899).

A man is not only an individual; he is also a social animal. He is not free and is bound by myriad constraints, the hampering thread-like pressures of society. Ibsen manifests this in most mundane contexts and every bit of powerful dramatization is the urge for freedom and self-realization in his protagonists.
Ibsen is still often regarded as primarily a “social writer” i.e. as a writer whose principal concerns are social themes, and whose prime interests are ideologies advocating social reform.

As a modern dramatist, Ibsen presents the human predicament in his works. Modern man is torn between the worlds of illusion and reality. The characters in his plays get caught in the web of illusion of their own making while some find an exit route to land themselves in the world of reality. The two extremes of life, illusion and reality, “…the contrast between the actual and the ideal” (Raymond Williams Drama from Ibsen to Brecht 32) form the central focus of most of Ibsen’s plays. The protagonists like Allmers in Little Eyolf and Ellida in The Lady from the Sea indulge in romantic fantasy and later on decide to live on the earth with noble responsibility. Allmers is attracted towards the mountains and the other is attracted towards the sea.

Several of Ibsen’s early plays turn on the search for a vocation, or rather than the struggle to affirm the self through a vocation “…the essence of freedom is to fulfill our call absolutely” (32). In Ibsen’s plays, the vocation is not for social reform, but is the realization of the actual self. And the purpose of changing the world is to gain the conditions for being oneself. Brand expresses this aspect in his words: “One thing is yours you may not spend your very inmost self of all / You may not blind it, may not bend, / Nor stem the river of your call./ To make for
ocean is its end./Self completely to fulfill , / That’s a valid right of man./And no more than that I will” (Williams 36).

For instance, in *The Wild Duck*, Hjalmar Ekdal believes himself to be wasting his talents in photography when he ought to be devoting all his energies to some wonderful invention; in *Rosmersholm* the flourishes of Ulrik Brendel offer a brilliant caricature of Rosmer’s conception of himself. Ibsen’s major themes, guilt and vocation, come together again as Solness in *The Master Builder* acknowledges the injury he has done to a woman in his drive towards self-fulfilment. Even though they wallow in a sense of guilt and retribution, everyone really intends to atone for the guilt-ridden past. Some protagonists like Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea* and Allmers in *Little Eyolf* strive to achieve fulfilment and affirm their identities by choosing a meaningful life on earth, whereas other protagonists like, Hedvig, Hedda, Solness, Rebecca and Rosmer atone through death and prove themselves tragic heroes and heroines.

As a realist Ibsen registers the characteristic traits of the realist movement in his plays and makes his characters speak and act in the realistic situations. Even though he adopts the “well-made play” techniques in his works, his craft is unique of its kind due to the nuances he introduces in the plays.

Though the twelve prose plays are parallel in themes, the researcher has taken only six plays, starting with *The Wild Duck* and ending with *Little Eyolf* in a chronological order, which offer high scope for the psychological study of the
protagonists. Wilbur Scott condenses the essence of psychological approach in

*Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*:

The application of psychological knowledge to art provides a more precise language with which to discuss the creative process.... A second application goes back to the study of the lives of authors as a means of understanding their art.... Third, psychology can be used to explain fictitious characters. (71-72)

Moreover, symbols are the real harbingers of the psychological aspect. So to enumerate this, symbolism has been adopted effectively to correlate with the themes in all the selected six plays.

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.