CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:
MAKING OF THE ARTIST
Henrik Johan Ibsen was one of the greatest and most acclaimed dramatist of his time. His contribution as a dramatist is matchless. After years of struggle and controversy, he finally gained the recognition due to him. He popularized Norway as no other dramatist did. Today people know Norway because of this legendary figure. His name holds great significance in the sphere of dramas of the nineteenth century but prior to throwing light on the life and achievements of this great dramatist, it is important to briefly describe about the origin and development of drama.

European drama has had a distinct stature in English literature. Drama is one of the earliest forms of imitations. In the words of Tomlins, drama is: “the imitation of action and feeling, expressed by gesture and dialogue.”(7) It has originated from our religious instincts. “During the middle ages, the higher aspirations, emotions and ideas of the people were clustered around the church. In their religious worship alone did they find the expression of their spiritual natures. In the stories of the Bible, and later of the saints, therefore, they felt the deepest interest.” (Golden 13)

Churches have been functional in the growth of drama. This particular form of art has been very effective as it was the only means of recreation and very influencing. It was meant to popularize morals and values. Episodes from the life of Jesus Christ, moralistic stories and incidents from religious scriptures were presented through enactment. Drama became more secularized and attracted huge crowds. Since churches were not spacious enough, drama shifted to open spaces.

This shifting of drama brought several changes. The sphere of the play changed from church to market places. Slowly short enactments were transformed into complete plays which gave birth to Mystery Plays. “The oldest form of dramatic composition in our language is the Mystery Play.” (Ibid 15) The mystery plays bore serious as well as comic elements.
The fifteenth century saw another form of plays known as morality plays. “Mr. Collier defines Morality as ” a drama, the characters of which are allegorical, abstract,' or symbolical, and the story of which is intended to convey a lesson for the better conduct of human life." (Tomlins 17) These plays represented the good and the evil side of human nature in a conflict. “These plays were allegorical with two sets of people personifying virtue on one side and evil on the other thus producing a conflict in the minds of the audience. Struggle between the powers of good and evil for the mastery the soul of man. The personages are abstract virtues or vices, each acting and speaking in accordance with the name; and the plot, often of extreme ingenuity, is built upon their contrasts and influences on human nature, with the intent to teach right living and uphold religion.”(Schelling 24) Everyman is considered as the best morality play. Apart from these in a typical morality play, there were supernatural or metaphysical powers as well. The later morality plays became more secularized yet didactic.

The next form of drama was the interlude popular in the mid sixteenth century. “The term "interlude" came more and more to be employed during the Tudor period, as the plays grew shorter and more courtly, and as the gradual disappearance of the religious element rendered the expression "moral play" increasingly a misnomer.” (Brooke 69) John Heywood is believed to have raised the interludes to a distinct dramatic form. Interludes were plays meant for pure entertainment. They had no didactic or moral purpose. They were usually satirical. The renaissance was encouraging a new versatility in art. The young playwrights were not only introducing song into drama but they were adopting Latin themes also. The best of the interludes are of John Heywood.
Next in succession of the English drama comes the artistic play or the drama as we know it. Its purpose is to represent life as it is. English drama noticed the most considerable growth, in the late sixteenth century. The advent of renaissance brought along with it the classical translations. The works of the classical playwrights contributed in raising the imaginations and creativity levels of the new playwrights. Seneca influenced tragedy and Plautus and Terence influenced comedy. Moreover, the changing interests of the people, transformation from medieval to modern and a different outlook were responsible for this revised form of drama. *Ralph Roister Doister* is the first classical comedy. It is the first play to be divided into Acts and scenes. It is a drama of five acts. There is a combination of ancient and real English characters. This play is an attempt to induce simple laughter and to present a well knit plot. Besides regular comedy, tragedy and historical plays, tragic-comedy was written during this period. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Johnson and Webster elevated the level of drama.

The growth in the national English drama in the Elizabethan age was due to certain reasons. Entertainment was in high demand and drama was the only possible source of entertainment. Drama could be enjoyed even by the unlettered masses. It was one of the best means of depicting nationalism. National themes were dramatized which added to the growing national feeling. It was an age of actions, thoughts and emotions and all the three factors could be best expressed through dramas. It led to a complete awakening of all senses. The dramas of this age were a fusion of academics, popularity, supernaturalism, music and various spectacles. Where it was a source of income for the playwrights, it was a source of entertainment for the audience. Thus it was a profitable business which satisfied the authors and the public both.
The end of the sixteenth century witnessed full swing in dramatics. The number of audiences were increasing rapidly. Staging of the dramas was becoming a more and more concrete activity. This gave the dramatists the idea of establishing permanent theatres. The concept of theatre would help the organizers as well as the audience.

The Elizabethan age was fond of thrill, superstitions, witchcrafts, blood shedding scenes, supernatural, revenge etc. A number of dramatists raised the levels of the English national drama. They were Thomas Kyd, Nash, John Lyly, Robert Greene, George Peele, and Christopher Marlowe. Together they were known as the “University wits.” These dramatists completely reformed the English drama. “Each of these playwrights added or emphasized some essential element in the drama which later appeared in the work of Shakespeare.” (Long 130) They were multitalented dramatists. They knew their craft well. They made drama a means of expression of their age. Shakespeare is indebted to them in some or the other way. “It is somewhat remarkable how thoroughly they prepared the ground before him with experiment in what he was afterwards to triumph. Lyly offered to Shakespeare's imitation court manners and dialogue, wit and repartee; Greene the naturalness of every day comedy, its humour an occasion, its pathos. Kyd is the most constructive tragedian, touching with rough but not unskillful the psychology of revenge; while Marlowe gave the supreme example up to his time of tragic force and the power of the magic of poetry.” (Schelling 74)

Elizabethan period has been regarded as the greatest in the history of English literature. This period has been marked with tremendous changes “received from the Renaissance, the Reformation and the exploration of the new world” (Long 179).
Nationalism, patriotism, religious tolerance, etc. added to the glory of the age and of the literature of the age.

The age following this (between 1625 and 1675) has been called the Puritan age. The key features of the age were to fight for righteousness and liberty. The corrupt monarchy was replaced by the Commonwealth. Under Oliver Cromwell, many healthy changes took place, although during this period no theatrical performances were held at London and the theatres were closed. With the restoration of Prince Charles as King Charles II, London theatres again became functional but with a difference. The common audience was now replaced with the more courtly and cavalier ones which brought about a change in the themes and the forms of drama. Drama of the restoration period noticed the rise of the Heroic Tragedy. The main restoration Dramatic forms are: the Heroic Tragedy and the Comedy of Manners. Where Heroic Tragedy was a response to the craving of romance and heroism, the Comedy of Manners was the representation of the saloons and coffee houses of those times. These plays are usually set in public parks. The one remarkable feature of this literature was realism. The dramatists represented their society very transparently.

The first half of the eighteenth century was quite blank in dramas. Many reasons contributed to the barrenness of the drama like the physical conditions for stage performances were unfavourable. This was an age of many revolutionary changes. Developments and progress were given more attention. Moreover, the Licensing Act confined dramas to Drury Lane and Covenant Garden Theatres. Most of the works done in this period were related to magazines, pamphlets, etc hence drama and poetry were not found suitable. Prose gained prominence. This was a time when the novel also came into existence.
There was a considerable decline in the drama of the nineteenth century, although Sheridan and Goldsmith tried to revive it. According to E. Albert, “From the dramatic point of view, the first half of the nineteenth century was almost completely barren. Many of the major poets had tried drama, but none of them had achieved any success. The greater part of their work never saw the stage.” Robert Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelly, Scott etc. were amongst those who expressed their opinions and views in their dramas and tried to preach before the audience but inevitably failed. Their plays became the ‘closet plays’ and not stage plays. Dramas flourished in the age of action not speculation. This period was contemplative hence survival of drama became challenging.

Any worthy drama became defunct. Whichever persisted were far from reality. Then came a revival phase around the mid nineteenth century. The Licensing act of 1843 made way for new play houses and an increase in the number of playgoers stimulated the growth of dramatic criticism. Demand and suggestions for more theatres came and critics like Mathew Arnold emphasized the need for betterment of stage.

Towards the end of the century, the English drama revived under the foreign influences predominantly under ‘Henrik Johan Ibsen’ the Norwegian dramatist, whose work became known in England around 1890. He gave a momentum to a realistic movement. He altered the concept of drama. His characters bore depth. His plots were perceptive. He revolutionized and influenced modern drama. He brought realistic drama to the forefront. The most remarkable attribute of Ibsen’s modern Drama is his introduction of modern tensions in it. He presented human feelings naturally. Domestic problems, social conventions, behavioral contemporary trends were most naturally depicted in his plays. “With the single exception of Shakespeare,
no writer has exercised so wide an influence on the drama of the civilized world; (Bates 127)

Prior to Ibsen the plays written in Europe either followed the romantic trends or “well-made” play trends. Dramas were staged for “the trivial, shallow taste of the public” (Simons 165). The main purpose of this drama was to cater to the tastes of the people by entertaining them. However with the advent of Ibsen, drama underwent a complete makeover. His dramas had manifold purposes. He brought realism in order to unveil the prevailing social evils. His wrote dramas not only to entertain but to awaken the society. His impact lay such that Ibsenism became taste of the public and playwrights both. Some of the followers of Ibsen in England were Sir Arthur W Pinero, John Galsworthy and Harley Granville-Barker and Henry Arthur Jones. The themes of their works were influenced by Ibsen. They propagated the idea of natural dialogue. Frederick Hebbel, in Germany was becoming popular with Biblical drama whereas Bjornson, the Viking gave impetus to domestic comedy

John Galsworthy and Granville Barker were those dramatists who discussed the various problems of real life. Galsworthy’s characters are quite familiar characters belonging to middle class families. His dealing with real life problems is real and impartial. He was didactic but not a propagandist. Barker dwelt in his characters more than Galsworthy. He focused more in his characters.

Modern drama seems to be incomplete without the mention of George Bernard Shaw. His form of writing has varied from historical to comedy of purpose but his plays are dipped in social problems which maintain its humanistic approach. *Widower’s House, Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (1898) are some of his problem plays. *Widower’s House* brings the problem of slums. The theme of *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* is a question on Prostitution. In *Arms and the Man* (1894) he brings out
the idea of Love and War. Shaw was also known as Ibsen idolater. He was a great follower of Ibsen and praised him always. Shaw wrote *Quintessence of Ibsenism* to popularize him.

The age of modern drama became popular because of several dramatists amongst whom Ibsen had an outstanding position. These playwrights brought drama to the level of a common man. Cavalier and courtly subject matters were replaced with real and natural social problems. The most important dramatist in the sphere of Drama of Ideas, Henrik Johan Ibsen was born on 20th March 1828 in the small Norwegian port of Skein, nearly a hundred miles from Christiana (now Oslo), and the capital of Norway. He was the second child of Knud and Marirech Ibsen, their first child Johan Ibsen died at the age of two making Ibsen’s mother over concerned about him. Ibsen’s father was a businessman, while his paternal ancestors had been sea captains. At a very tender age Ibsen had to face the consequences of his father’s financial losses.

The family ruined down to poor conditions because of which thereafter they moved from their fashionable house to some cheap lodgings. In his work, *Henrik Ibsen: Critical Studies*, Brandes writes about the bleak childhood of Ibsen:

> At the time of his birth, in the little Norwegian town of Skien, his family was in a position of precarious affluence. Both his parents belonged to the most respected families in the town; his father was a merchant in a varied and extensive business, and was fond of showing unlimited hospitality. But in 1836 he failed, and nothing was left for the family except a country property in the vicinity of the town, Thither they removed, and thus dropped out of the circles to which they had previously belonged.” (41)
This was the beginning of Ibsen’s challenging life. A life full of anxieties awaited for him ahead. At fifteen Ibsen left school to work at an apothecary’s shop at Grimstad. He had to work arduously for several years which resulted in just four hours of sleep. What was most surprising about him was that with so many engagements, he managed to take out time for his matriculation examinations. He studied Greek and Latin as well. In 1835, the Ibsen family hit upon hard times. Debt forced Knud Ibsen to sell his house and move everyone to the family farm in Venstop. While there, Ibsen kept very much to himself, reading and painting. He made himself a reading nook in the closet, and quietly poured through large volumes that his sister later surmised must have included the bible along with the great sages of Norway. He loved to peruse the volumes of books left in his attic.

Loneliness drove him to initiate an illegitimate affair with a servant girl. This made the girl pregnant and Ibsen had to bear her compensation for fourteen years. This illegitimacy bore some resemblance with his own supposed birth. Many of his plays contain this feature of illegitimacy along with many other autobiographical elements. In writing to his German translator, Ludwig Passarge, he said (June 16, 1880): Everything that I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal experience; in every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification for a man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs. (Gosse 147) “During his stay at Grimstad he produced his first play Catiline, (1850) which was a tragedy in verse.

Ibsen passed his matriculation examination and then he joined Christiana University. He still wanted to become a painter else a doctor as he had gained enough knowledge at the apothecary’s shop. In the meanwhile he wrote his second play, The
Warrior’s Barrow which was also a tragedy in verse. His interest grew in literature and theatre. In one of his interviews Ibsen confessed that, “I began to write at the age of nineteen. My father was a shop owner and I was to have studied medicine. My natural bias forced me into a literary career. I wrote a tragedy, Cateline, my first work and since then I’ve continued to write” (Interview in Era, 1891). A National Theatre was established in Bergen, whose charge was given to Ole Bull, a musician by Profession. Ole bull came to know of Ibsen’s theatrical pursuits, he called for Ibsen and offered him a job at the National Theatre which Ibsen accepted. In 1851 he became the stage manager of this new theatre in Bergen. Ibsen was sent to Copenhagen and Dresden to groom him in the art of dramatics. In both these cities he had an opportunity to audience the performance of Shakespeare’s plays like Hamlet, King Lear, As You Like It etc. Motivated, Ibsen returned and wrote a few another plays out of which Lady Inger Of Ostraat, (1855) and The Feast Of Solhaug, (1856) were approved by the critics. Now it was clear to him that to make himself successful he would have to set his plays either in the Middle Ages or in the Viking Period. Another reason for Ibsen’s failure was his art of characterization. Either good or bad characters were in demand but Ibsen’s characters were a combination of both. This clash between Ibsen and the audience always tormented him.

In 1857, Ibsen became the artistic director at the New Norwegian Theatre in Christiana. In his letter to, The Norwegian Government, Christiana, 10th March 1863, he wrote, “I resigned my appointment at the Bergen Theatre in 1857, and at once accepted that of "artistic director" of the Norwegian Theatre here in Christiania.” (Ibsen Letters 71-72) In 1858, he got married to Susannah Thoresen, the step child of novelist Magdalene. The following year their only son Sigurd Ibsen was born. “In 1858 I married a daughter of the late Dean Thoresen of Bergen, and I have one child
by this marriage.” (Ibsen Letters 72) Success was not yet in the cards. *Love’s Comedy*, another play by Ibsen was rejected by his own theatre. Now Ibsen had to write hack poems to earn his livelihood. Dejection and disappointment led him to drinking. His anguishes heightened by the fact that his pleas to the Government for the writer’s pension were all rejected whereas younger writers were granted the same.

In 1863 the government granted him four hundred dollars out of the six hundred he had asked for, as scholarship for travelling. Deeply grieved with the attitude of the country and its people, Ibsen embarked on a long period of self imposed exile and left Norway with his wife and son. On April 5, 1864 Ibsen sailed for Rome where he spent the next twenty seven years of his life and returned to Norway to spend the last fifteen years of his life. His visits to Europe enabled him to enhance his creativity. Now came a period of Ibsen’s creative genius. *The Pretenders* (1863) was his first success followed by *Brand*, a play in verse which became a huge success and it earned him money as well. The motto of *Brand* was ‘all for nothing’. *Brand* was meant to be read and not acted. Success followed Ibsen with his play *Peer Gynt*. The staging of this play took after seven years.

From 1868 to 1891 he lived mainly in Dresden, Munich and Rome. It was during this period that he wrote most of his European plays that established his European reputation. *A Doll’s House* (1890), *Ghosts* (1881) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890) aroused storms of controversy but by now Ibsen’s position as a dramatist was soundly established.

He returned to Norway in 1891. The remainder of Ibsen’s life was passed in the Norwegian capital, with the brief interruption of a journey in 1898. He died on May 23, 1906, in his seventy-ninth year. The latter portion of his life had brought him, after long and hard
struggles, the gratification of every conceivable ambition: wealth, distinctions, ease, celebrity as the world's recognized chief dramatist, the allegiance of a younger generation of writers, and the well-nigh frenzied gratitude of a whole nation unanimous in calling him its first citizen. But the final years were darkly clouded. For six years the poet, now mentally infirm, had to endure the tragic fate of Oswald Alving, the curse of enforced inactivity (Heller 18).

Bjornson and Ibsen both were considered Norway’s greatest poets but Ibsen maintained his reputation chiefly as a dramatist. Ibsen had brought great credit to Norwegian literature. He was a dramatist of rare genius. He always confined himself to his dramatic persona. James Joyce and Thomas Mann studied Norwegian language to read Ibsen’s plays in their original form. A severe paralytic attack hit upon Ibsen due to which he could not write anything for the last five years of his life. He died at the age of seventy eight.

Ibsen said, “Environment has a great influence upon the forms in which the imagination creates.” (Ibsen Letters 200). A person’s environment consists of his family background, the locale and the period of his education, the places he chooses or is obliged to live. Ibsen was born in Norway. What surrounded him from his childhood had a profound effect on his thematic treatment. The Norwegian influence was clearly evident in his works. Up to 1814 Norway was a province of Denmark but after independence it was given by Britain and Russia to the Swedish defiance of Napoleon. The Norwegians were politically and culturally feeble. Politically Norway became a Province of Sweden whereas culturally it remained a province of Denmark. Hence Norway may be regarded as a microcosm of bourgeois society. It was one of those dark and dismal societies where people needed enlightenment. Hypocrisy
reigned and pretence supported it. The age was adorned with vices. Morality had
degenerated and spirituality became baseless. Society agonized Ibsen and shook his
conscience. “Along the way, Ibsen experienced multiple shifts in dramatic form and
philosophy as he gradually came to terms with the intellectual, emotional, and
spiritual forces that were at war within his complex psyche. But throughout, his plays
are characterized by their rebellious spirit and their unforgiving scrutiny of Ibsen's
own faults and virtues” (Heller 22). He determined to wage a war against the
relentless vices of the age. On 9th December 1867 he wrote to Bjornson telling him
that “for I feel that this anger is invigorating all my powers. If it is to be war, then let
it be war! If I am no poet, then I have nothing to lose. I shall try my luck as a
photographer… If it is to be war, then so be it. I shall try as a photographer. I shall not
spare the child in the mother’s womb” (Ibsen Letters 146)

Ibsen’s work examined the realities that lay behind the many façades of
everyday life. His fearless treatment of contemporary social issues—the role of
religion in modern life, the hypocrisies of family life, the subordinate status of
women, and corruption in public affairs—was considered scandalous in his own time.
Ibsen's works shattered illusions by presenting characters with flaws and ambiguities,
often engaged in settings and actions without a clear moral resolution. He wrote with
an aim to improve human life. He wanted to enable the humans to reflect in their
lives, to analyze humans virtues and vices, to achieve a self realization and enjoy a
peaceful and happy life.

In his fifty years of literary career, Ibsen tried different styles of writing, from
Shakespearean fantasy to Roman tragedy, from light verse comedy to world
historical drama. When some critics identified him as an imitator of Dumas, he wrote
to Brandes: To Alexandre Dumas I owe nothing, as regards dramatic form—except
that I have learned from his plays to avoid several very awkward faults and blunders, of which he is not infrequently guilty. (Ibid 406)

In all Ibsen wrote 26 plays. The chronological list of his first fourteen plays regarded as the works of his first phase is:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catiline</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Ibsen’s first play, written in verse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Warriors Barrow</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>second play in verse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>a tragic opera, in rhymed and unrhymed verse with some passages in prose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s Eve</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>a romantic comedy in prose and verse.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lady Inger</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>a historical tragedy in prose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Feast at Solhaug</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>another romantic verse and prose comedy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olaf Litjekrans</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>also a verse and prose comedy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vikings of Helgeland</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>a historical tragedy in prose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love’s Comedy</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>a modern satire in verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pretenders</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>another historical tragedy in prose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>a play in verse meant only for reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Gynt</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>another play in verse meant only for reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The League of Youth</td>
<td>1869</td>
<td>a modern prose comedy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emperor and Galilean</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>his last historical play in prose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For a long period Ibsen wrote plays in verse forms. In the early years of his writing he wrote as a lyricist. ‘It is not quite clear that Ibsen became fully conscious in his youth of the extraordinary poetic gifts that dwelt within him. Certainly the "lyric cry" was not overpoweringly strong in him. He never excelled as a songwriter. In the epic genre the metrical story of Terje Vigen (1860) was his only noteworthy effort. His many prologues and other poems of occasion demonstrate, in the main, nothing more than an exceptional facility in the handling of verse and rhyme. (Heller 16-29) With the League of Youth and The Pillars of Society (1877) began the second phase of Ibsen’s dramatic career. It was a phase when Ibsen wrote about the social problems. It was a radical change in the society, a turning point in the history of English drama. The drama became more and more realistic. This gave birth to Modern Drama and Henrik Ibsen came to be known as the ‘father of modern drama' because his plays moved away from the popular romantic style of 19th century theatre toward realism.

The following twelve plays are those ‘Modern Dramas’ on which Ibsen’s fame as a dramatist rests.

*Pillars of Society* 1877
*A Doll’s House*, 1879
*Ghosts*, 1881
*An Enemy of the People*, 1882
*The Wild Duck*, 1884
*Rosmersholm*, 1886
*The Lady from the Sea*, 1888
*Hedda Gabler*, 1890
*The Master Builder*, 1892
During this second phase of his writings Ibsen established himself as a real dramatist. The problem plays gained momentum in the Norwegian form of literature. The most important exponent of the problem play, however, was the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen, whose work combined penetrating characterization with emphasis on topical social issues, usually concentrated on the moral dilemmas of a central character. Ibsen gave drama a whole new rule book that fit right into the modernism that was beginning to replace the Victorian Age. He conceived and structured his plays so that they would transcend mere entertainment. His chief aim was to create characters and events with which audiences could identify. That meant the characters had to speak and behave naturally and that the situations they found themselves in had the quality of real, everyday life. It also meant abandoning his own early methods of having characters speak in verse, and monologues. Since the 1880’s, Ibsen’s name has served throughout the world as a symbol of the struggle for realistic art, for the integrity and inner freedom of man, and for renewal of spiritual life.
abandoning his own early methods of having characters speak in verse, and monologues. (Sommer *Curtain Up*).

Ibsen’s plays commonly known as ‘Modern Dramas’ have also been labeled as ‘problem plays’, ‘social plays’, or ‘thesis plays’. These plays were a result of the change in the thinking of the dramatists and the audience. Reality became an integral part of these plays and social and philosophical issues became the concern of the society. The chief issues of Ibsen’s dramas were social roles of men and women, family relationships, sexual behavior, religious, political and social morals. The term "problem play" refers specifically to the type of drama which Ibsen wrote beginning with *Pillars of Society* in 1877. In these plays, the emphasis is on the presentation of a social or psychological problem. These plays deal with contemporary life in realistic settings. Far from being plays with fatal flaws, as one might imagine from the name, problem plays are actually plays which are designed to confront viewers with modern social problems. Typically, the theme of the play is socially relevant, and the characters confront the issue in a variety of ways, presenting viewers with different approaches and opinions. After seeing a problem play, one is supposed to be filled with interest in the topic at hand, and hopefully inspired to enact social change. The plays were set among ordinary people.

The concept of problem plays arose in the 19th century, as part of an overall movement known as realism. Prior to the 19th century, many people turned to art as a mode of escape which allowed them to look outside the world they lived in. In the 19th century, however, art began to take on a more introspective, realistic air, with a conscious focus on ongoing issues such as the social inequalities exacerbated by the Industrial Revolution. The term problem play was coined by Sydney Grundy who satirized the intellectual drama of the nineties. The term problem play was used for
the new realistic and intellectual drama that developed in Europe in the later half of the nineteenth century. Given the contemporary settings and dialogue, the playwright was able to confront his characters with problems that similar to those his audience might face—problems that he might want them to examine from a personal perspective. “He is known to be the father of realism and has been a pioneer in the transformation and revolution of modern drama.” (Suleiman 4) The real strength of Ibsen's approach to the so-called problem play was that it combined realistic, in-depth characterization with important social issues. In his speech to Christiania students in 1874, Ibsen said, "All I have written, I have mentally lived through. Partly I have written on that which only by glimpses, and at my best moments, I have felt stirring vividly within me as something great and beautiful. I have written on that which, so to speak, has stood higher than my daily self. But I have also written on the opposite, on that which to introspective contemplation appears as the dregs and sediments of one's own nature. Yes, gentlemen, nobody can poetically present that to which he has not to a certain degree and at least at times the model within himself." To illustrate some of the problems he famously addressed, there's *A Doll's House* (problem: the restriction of women's lives), *Ghosts* (problem: sexually transmitted disease), *An Enemy of the People* (provincial greed). When you consider how these dramas influenced the likes of Anton Chekhov, George Bernard Shaw and Arthur Miller, it's no wonder he is called the Father of Modern Drama. In his essay, *The Dramatist*, Bjorn Hemmer writes about Martin Lamm’s opinion on Ibsen’s drama: "Ibsen's drama is the Rome of modern drama: all roads lead to it ....".

The problem play was an experiment in the art of drama and it derived its force from its contempt of false romantic ideals and mere commercial ventures. These social plays expose the relation between the individual and the society. Ibsen had a
deep insight with which he exposed the corruption and fraud prevailing in the society which was usually the basis or foundation of it. Moreover, Ibsen left his readers and audiences pensive and questioned. His social plays instilled conflict in the mind of people regarding the real and vague. Ibsen’s work gave a sense of intense reality.

The society suffers from moral degradation, from illusions, from deception etc. in a situation like this it becomes the duty of the educated, literary, aware and the patrons of the society to bring about an awakening amongst the people. Ibsen did the same. He brought the social issues to the forefront. Social matters got a new significance and the human minds were compelled to open their minds to darker side of society. He was probably the first to shape the century with a deep contemplation. He sensed what was going to become perhaps the shaping force of the century to come. Ibsen had taught people that drama if it was to live a true life of its own, must deal with human emotions, with things near and dear to ordinary men and woman.

According to Bjorn Hemmer:

He took deep schisms and acute problems that afflicted the bourgeois family and placed them on the stage. On the surface, the middle-class homes gave an impression of success — and appeared to reflect a picture of a healthy and stable society. But Ibsen dramatizes the hidden conflicts in this society by opening the doors to the private and secret rooms of the bourgeois homes. He shows what can be hiding behind the beautiful façades: moral duplicity, confinement, betrayal, and fraud not to mention a constant insecurity. These were the aspects of the middle-class life one was not supposed to mention in public, as Pastor Manders wished Mrs. Alving to keep secret her reading and everything
else that threatened the atmosphere at Rosenvold in *Ghosts.* (*The Dramatist*)

The society, for all its power is in Ibsen’s views dead. It is true that he ceased to judge it to be merely evil; he came to recognize that society was the context, only within which certain valuable qualities should be generated and developed such as love, respect, faith, honesty, loyalty etc. But a society is not a source of the energy behind it because of which people with unfulfilled aspirations are born. Ibsen’s plays portray such collisions in the most natural ways. His characters are not unnatural human beings. They are socially vulnerable and violable as well. The protagonists of his plays are, like any other human being, affected by the opposing forces of the society. They are equally subject to the effects of all kinds of variations in their lives. Given the contemporary settings and dialogue, the playwright was able to confront his characters with problems that similar to those his audience might face--problems that he might want them to examine from a personal perspective. He presented his characters in the most realistic manner, people with a deep insight. Conditions affected them as much as they affect any non fictitious person. Distress, anguish’ anxiety tore them from within. The heroism of his characters lies in the way they face the society and learn to survive in it. His protagonists are people from amongst us, people whom we are familiar with, people with flaws. They are not people only from fiction. In his plays Ibsen focused on character rather situations and created realistic dramas of psychological conflict. His central theme was the duty of the individual towards himself.

Ibsen had Shakespearean influence so much so that his early plays *Catiline*, *The Warrior’s Barrow* and *St. John’s Night* seemed like Shakespearean plays. Scribe also influenced him much. But any influences barred Ibsen from coming out with
what was within him. “In 1852, when he was sent by the management of the Bergen Theatre to study the Danish stage in Copenhagen, he writes to his employers: ‘In respect to the repertory we have been very fortunate, having seen Hamlet and several other plays of Shakespeare, and also several of Holberg’s.’ The other plays of Shakespeare which he probably saw at this time were King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, and As You Like It. Of these, Lear and As You Like It must greatly have impressed him, for he cites them years afterwards; but it does not appear that his acquaintance with Shakespeare was ever wide or deep.” (Archer 421). His innovativeness, his ideas, his perception of the society urged him to produce his original form. He could no longer continue under any more influences. Gradually, Ibsen introduced his own themes, his own style of writing. He opened his mind and heart for all his readers. He explains the changes in his art in the following way: “I imagined that which I saw with my eyes around me in the world. I had to include it...and up from the fissures of the soil there now swarm men and women with dimly-suggested animal-faces. Women and men - as I knew them in real life.”

Ibsen's work examined the realities that lay behind the many façades of everyday life. His fearless treatment of contemporary social issues—the role of religion in modern life, the hypocrisies of family life, the subordinate status of women, and corruption in public affairs—was considered scandalous in his own time. Ibsen's works shattered illusions by presenting characters with flaws and ambiguities, often engaged in settings and actions without a clear moral resolution. “More than anyone, he gave theatrical art a new vitality by bringing into European bourgeois drama an ethical gravity, a psychological depth, and a social significance which the theater had lacked since the days of Shakespeare” believes Professor Bjorn Hemmer. 

(The Dramatist)
The play on which he marked the beginning of his reputation as a real playwright is *The Pillars of Society*, (1877). He began his career as a poet dramatist but with *The League of Youth*, (1869), he abandoned it and began his new phase as a prose dramatist. When he was asked why he gave up writing poetic drama, he answered

I might say briefly; that it followed of itself. At that time I turned to the study of treatment of modern life. Poetry could not have been used to develop my ideas. It would have been used out of place. (Achorn 737-48)

In his essay, ‘*Henrik Ibsen*’, Robert M. Adams writes, “Major Norwegian playwright of the late 19th century who introduced to the European stage a new order of moral analysis that was placed against a severely realistic middle-class background and developed with economy of action, penetrating dialogue, and rigorous thought.” Ibsen wrote many plays with his modern spirit, based on contemporary social issues. The plays on which Ibsen’s reputation as a dramatist rests are an unbroken series of seven plays. In these social plays, he made contemporary problems his themes and picked out characters from his society. The plays were the representation of the conflicts of the individual within themselves and with the society. He closely observed how pitiful the society had become. It was an amalgam of hypocrisies and unethical ways. Ibsen worked upon these problems and exposed the pretence prevailing in the society. He endeavoured to disclose the truth and the downfall in the social values through these plays which are as follows:

*Pillars of Society*, 1877

*A Doll's House*, 1879

*Ghosts*, 1881
An Enemy of the People, 1882

The Wild Duck, 1884

Rosmersholm, 1886

The Lady from the Sea, 1888

These plays portray the society in its real colours. The following study will focus on the condition of the society and the contemporary problems due to the deteriorating values of society and its relation with the protagonists of his plays.

The first play through which Ibsen struck the society was Pillars of Society. In this play he exposed the façade of respectability and morality on the surface but behind which lay selfish motives and deception of others. This play is an effort by Ibsen to unmask the social set up. It is an indictment against the sham social structure that rests on the rotten pillars, pillars nice and beautifully adorned but hollow from within.

Karsten Bernick, the strongest pillar of society, is a very affluent ship owner and the benefactor of his town. He marries a woman whom he does not love but whom he marries for the fulfillment of his ambitions. He is at the height of his career which he has reached through deception and lies. Fifteen years prior to the opening of the play, Bernick is caught in an actress’s bedroom although he is engaged to another woman. He has a bosom friend Johan, whom he robs off his good name by asking him to take the blame upon him and to emigrate. But when he returns from America and threatens to bring out the truth, Bernick lets him go in a rotten ship but when it’s discovered that his own son is sailing in the same ship, he realizes his crime and is left unpunished. In this play Bernick also betrays another lady Lona Hessel, a third woman whom he loved but did not marry in order to marry her stepsister who would bring her money and position. One of the characteristics of Ibsen’s writing was his
questioning approach for his readers who have to find appropriate answers for his questions by themselves. Through this play Ibsen puts up the question, what are these pillars of any society? The answer is simple to give but many times difficult to adopt. These pillars of society are truth, honesty, trust and sacrifice but neither of these attributes is a part of Bernick’s life yet he is the strongest pillar of his society. Ibsen brings out the reality through his apt characterization and deep laid plot. His satirical approach forces his readers to think deep after they finish the play and decide themselves what is morally sound and what is not.

Another play of Ibsen which came as a bombshell to many, is *A Doll’s House*. Next in series to the seven plays, *A Doll’s House* was a big blow to the society. This play is about the married life of a couple namely Nora and Helmer who seem to be the happiest couple of the world but when put to test, reality is just contrary to what they deemed it to be. Nora the wife of Helmer seems to be very gratified about her marriage with Helmer whom she believes in, more than her own self. They are married for the past eight years. Through all these years she has been keeping a secret from Helmer about the loan she had secretly taken from Krogstad an employee in the same bank where Helmer also worked, by forging her father’s signatures. She had taken the loan to assist Helmer in his proper recuperation but without letting him know of it. Things go well for quite sometime but the problem arises when Mrs. Linde, Nora’s school friend turns up and is about to replace Krogstad in the bank. On learning about the whole affair Krogstad tries to blackmail Nora that he would expose her if she did not influence her husband for not dismissing him from his official services and let the world know about the loan and her forged signatures. In all this Nora believes that on knowing about the entire affair Helmer, who loved her so much and always spoke of being her savior and who promised to shield her from any
danger, would take the entire blame on himself and let her go protected. This she
would not be able to bear and she tries all ways to prevent Helmer from seeing his
letters lying in the letter box. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Linde tries to persuade Krogstad
to withdraw his letter but all the same she takes it as an opportunity for Nora to
confess her truth. All believe that on knowing the truth Helmer would understand
Nora an pardon her but contrary to Nora’s expectation Helmer scolds her bitterly for
her crime and thinks only of himself and his reputation. He also decides to bar Nora
of all his motherly and wifely duties. But as soon as he learns about Krogstad’s
decision to leave them unharmed, he switches over to be the same old protective
Torvald. This revelation of Helmer’s hidden character leaves Nora dumbstruck and
she instantly decides to free herself from the marital clutches of Helmer and to leave
his house in the search of her identity as an individual.

In this play again, Ibsen has brought out the shallowness of the contemporary
institution of marriage. He has tried to reveal through his strong characterization that
faith, truth, trust, honesty, love and duties have no importance in comparison to lie,
forgery, distrust and materialistic love. Social position of a person is supreme
whatever be the depth of it. This play was the exposure of the scandalous and
unethical truths of the society.

The next in this series is a very unique play named *Ghosts* which on the
surface appeared to be a play about a venereal disease and its implications but on the
other level the whole is the about the moral contamination conflicting with idealism.
Mrs. Alving married Captain Alving only to make her life more wretched and
miserable. He was a physically and mentally debauched wreck who made Mrs.
Alving’s life more and more degraded but the dutiful wife only covered it. When the
play opens we see that Engstrand persuading Regina to accompany him and earn
money through a rich marriage alliance or by any means as he himself had done it. Regina is a servant in the Manders house and the illegitimate daughter of a maid of Pastor Manders whom he had seduced. On this discovery Mrs. Alving tries to silently handle the situation by marrying Regina’s mother to Engstrand and giving him handsome money in exchange of the favour. Soon we see Mrs. Alving about to inaugurate the orphanage, opened to commemorate Captain Alving or rather to hide his flaws. In her younger days she had turned to Pastors Manders for a support who turned her back to fulfill her family duties whatever happened. Morally and socially bound she performs all her duty silently. In doing so she tries to keep her son Oswald away and sheltered from any ill influences of his father. For this she keeps him away from her in Paris for most of his life but all her sacrifice goes unrewarded as soon it is discovered that the son is the victim of his father’s illicit relations and playful attitude towards the opposite sex. The evil effects of Captain Alving’s deeds soon begin to grasp his own family first by the discovery of fire in the orphanage and then by the discovery of Regina’s and Oswald’s socially unacceptable advances and eventually of Oswald’s inherited disease of syphilis. Isolated by all, Mrs. Alving and Oswald are left alone. The play ends in a very gloomy and dismal note.

An altogether different approach in life, and even different treatment of the theme, this attempt of Ibsen brought him a lot of criticism and a social unacceptance. “Ghosts is a tragedy in which the tragic heroine has no tragic fault—she does not, for any reason, deserve to suffer as she does. In almost all tragedies prior to Ibsen, there is always a reason given for why the protagonists come to their tragic ends; but in Ghosts this notion is shattered, and the cause of the widow’s distress is not any fault of her own, but the very virtuousness which she had practiced, unhappily, for so long.
His audiences were often small, but there were many of them, and they took his plays very seriously. So did conventionally-minded critics; they denounced Ibsen as if he had desecrated all that was sacred and holy. Ibsen’s response took the form of a direct dramatic counterattack. Doctor Stockmann, the hero of *En Folkefiende* (1882; *An Enemy of the People*), functions as Ibsen’s personal spokesman. (Adams’ Essay: *Henrik Ibsen*)

*An Enemy of the People* was a response from Ibsen against the severe criticism of *Ghosts*. The Victorian belief was that the community was a noble institution that could be trusted, and Ibsen challenged this notion.

The setting of the play takes place in a town where a huge bathing complex is built which is essential for the economy of the town. The protagonist, Dr. Stockmann, a man of principles and convictions, finds that the much spoken baths have contaminated drainage system. Dr. Stockmann assures everyone that the problem can be fixed by replacing the water system. He tries to alert people about the same. Initially he receives support from Hovstad and Aslaksen. Both of them assure him support on their ends. Dr. Stockmann is moved by this. The entire scene changes with the arrival of the Mayor, also Dr. Stockmann’s brother. He is unhappy about the secret investigation of the water of the baths by Dr. Stockmann. He tries to influence Dr. Stockmann not to publish his report as it could cause financial ruin to the tourism of the town. Contrary to Dr. Stockmann’s expectations his own brother does not support him. The mayor is successful in turning the tide in his favour by convincing Hovstad and Aslaksen how dangerous the discovery would be to the entire town. Even Mrs. Stockmann tries to persuade her husband for not disclosing his discovery to which Dr. Stockmann does not agree. Now Dr. Stockmann is left without any support. Soon a meeting is held where Dr. Stockmann is prevented from addressing
the town. The angry Dr. starts addressing the crowd in a rage and talks about the contamination of the authorities and the public. This enrages the mob. Aslaksen announces that by a unanimous vote Dr. Stockmann has been declared an enemy of the people. He leaves with his family, as the crowd chants "enemy."

His landlord sends a letter giving the Stockmanns notice that they have to move out. The doctor doesn't care because he is taking his family to the New World on Horster's next boat. Mrs. Stockmann asks him if they should move to another town in Norway, but the doctor replies that the population will be the same wherever he goes and he doesn't want his sons to grow up among the "lapdogs" of Norway. He thinks that in the New World things might be different.

As he is yet deciding to leave Mortien Kiel, the mayor, Hovstad, Aslaksen etc. come to him urging him to withdraw and retract his statements and enjoy his position again as right now both he and his daughter Petra are fired off their jobs. All this again bring about a change and Dr. Stockmann decides not to leave the town and to continue fighting for the right. Dr. Stockmann sums up Ibsen's denunciation of the masses, with the memorable quote "...the strongest man in the world is the man who stands most alone." He also says: "A minority may be right; a majority is always wrong."

An Enemy of the People addresses the irrational tendencies of the masses, and the hypocritical and corrupt nature of the political system that they support. It is the story of one brave man's struggle to do the right thing and speak the truth in the face of extreme social intolerance. (Henrik Ibsen Wikipedia)

The Wild Duck was another play by Ibsen. The protagonist of the play, Hialmar lives with his wife Gina, daughter Hedvig and his father Old Ekdal in an apartment cum studio where both Hialmar and his Gina work together. They have a
loft where they keep rabbits and wild animals. Old Ekdal had once been a lieutenant and had served imprisonment for financial offences for which Werle had been actually responsible. Gina has been Werle’s housekeeper and mistress in her former years. Werle arranges Hialmar and Gina’s marriage and also helps them in setting up their studio. When the play begins, Werle’s son and Hialmar’s friend, Gregers has come back for which Werle has given a dinner party. Gregers is not happy with his father and so he does not live with him. When he comes this time, he tries to make it known to Ekdal that his marriage is based on a lie. A neurotic as he is, Gregers creates doubts in the minds of Ekdal regarding the paternity of Hedvig. The real intention of Gregers is to make his friend’s marriage a blissful relation but in doing so he worsens the relational ties of the family members. Hedvig is deeply affected by this volcanic change in the family. In order to prove her love for her father she kills herself instead of killing her wild duck that she loved the most. The play ends in despair at the death of little Hedvig. In his futile effort of changing the base of Ekdal’s family life, Gregers makes it a hell for him. Young Werle, an idealist, feels that his mission is to advocate and preach truth and purity of soul whenever he can.

In a letter accompanying the manuscript for *The Wild Duck*, Henrik Ibsen wrote to his publisher, “This new play in many ways occupies a place of its own among my dramas; the method is in various respects a departure from my earlier one....The critics, will, I hope, find the points; in any case, they will find plenty to quarrel about, plenty to misinterpret.” The four plays immediately preceding it (*Pillars of Society*, *A Doll’s House*, *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People*) had launched a new style of prose drama.

All four plays touched social issues that, more than a century after Ibsen introduced such subjects into serious social dramas, are still the subject of discussion
today. The play depicts hatred for those people who try to invade other people’s life through the weapon of feigned morality. In an attempt to eradicate ethical issues, people often attack the personal lives of others. This play demonstrates the dangers of the claim of the ideals. While a few commended it notably, the playwright George Bernard Shaw and the poet Rainer Maria Rilke earliest critics found the play incomprehensible and incoherent. Audiences, as well, showed little positive response to *The Wild Duck*.

Romsersholm was next in number. In this play parson Johannes Rosmer is an ethical person. Johannes Rosmer, the owner of Romsersholm, is the last of a long and influential line of clergy, officers and senior civil servants. Before the play opens, Rosmer’s wife Beata has drowned herself. She was on the considered mentally ill due to not being able to bear a child. It was supposed that this pain of not being able to provide an heir to the line of aristocrats had driven her into despair. Rosmer has a housekeeper named Rebecca west. With the passage of time Rosmer and Rebecca fall in love. As the play advances Rosmer confronts a truth that Rebecca had deliberately made way for Beata’s suicide by falsely hinting her that she (Rebecca) was pregnant by Rosmer. On the other hand Rebecca learnt that the person whom he expected to be her foster father and with whom she had an affair was actually her father. This information makes her fill with so much remorse and guilt that when Rosmer proposes marriage to her, she refuses. Since both of them are not able to marry each other, they decide to drown themselves into the mill race and commit suicide. The moral values of the times disable the two to take any decision and hence they drown themselves.

*The Lady from the Sea* is the last in the series of his most famous plays. This play was an attempt to highlight the problems faced in matrimonial alliances. Ellida,
the chief character of the play is married to Dr. Wangel who is much older than her and has two grown up daughters from his first marriage. The relation of Ellida with her family, to be precise with her husband, seems to be strained as she is haunted by the memories of a sailor who once professed marriage to her. He had great compelling powers which could not let her forget him. They had linked their rings in a single key ring and thrown it in the sea. She feels disgusted and agonized in continuing her relation with her husband who had accepted her as his wife when the sailor did not return. Dr. Wangel on the other hand is quite anxious about her health and invites Arnholm to help her cure her depression. One day the sailor reappears and asks Ellida to accompany him. Dr. Wangel wants Ellida as her wife but all the same he does not want to force her to stay back. He does not want Ellida to suffer mentally and leaves it up to her to chose her next action. She almost decides to leave when but when permitted by her husband she alters her decision and decides to stay back with him as a dutiful wife. At the end of the play Ellida is a totally independent human being capable of taking her own decisions.

These seven plays in a series have been the most successful plays of Ibsen’s career as a dramatist. Ibsen laid great emphasis on the social issues. The distinctive feature of Ibsen’s dramatic genius has been his thematic representation of real life social problems. He has dealt with problems quite familiar in real lives of men and women. Most literary work prior to Ibsen has mainly been entertaining or didactic or even didactic. Ibsen took a leap from these and introduced a new literary world to his readers. This new and realistic form of his writing forced people to read and analyze what he had written and more important why he had written. What relevance it held and how far was it true. He always dealt with fundamental values, his themes remain universal. Freedom of speech, repression of women, the institution of marriage, abuse
of children, business ethics, hypocrisy, moral double standards, hypocritical morality
religion are some of the most commonly touched issues. Widely praised—and at
times disparaged—as a "provincial dramatist," Ibsen was frequently led by his social
conscience into open controversy in his homeland, and often engendered undisguised
public outrage toward the themes and the moral conflicts with which he imbued his
plays.

Along with his themes Ibsen has picked up characters from the real life. His
characterization has been very real. The themes of his plays tune very appropriately
with his protagonists. He made his characters confront with problems which his
readers could face in the real life. The settings provided for these were equally
realistic. His chief aim was to create characters and events with which audiences
could identify. He wanted to bring out the Nora or Mrs. Alving from each woman. He
wanted to expose the pretentious Helmer or Peter Stockmann or the Werle of the
society before the entire world.

Ibsen’s characters are victims of expectations. What they expect in lives is
usually beyond their achievable premises or society disables them from being
successful in attaining them. When they confront the grave but true realities of life
they feel repressed and frustrated. Moreover, the so called moral code of society
prevents them from attaining happiness when it’s the matter of a female protagonist.
The opposite gender is also subject to certain social bindings. They are the victims of
the feigned facades of social moralistic meddlers. A Doll's House is probably the
most famous play of Ibsen. It scandalized victorian audiences by portraying the
marriage contract (deemed since the enlightenment as the cornerstone of a well-
functioning and moral society) as totally corrupt, founded upon deceit and illusion.
Nora who has a flighting mind dotes on her husband Helmer who seems to be
patronizing her. Most loving wife as she is, she hides the fact of secretly borrowing money, from Helmer due to the fear that on knowing the truth he might take the blame on himself and this Nora will not be able to bear. But unexpectedly as things turns, she is shocked to face the real Helmer whom she loved all her life unconditionally but who is actually a hypocrite who has been thinking of Nora as a play thing and nothing else. This play is a transparent study of a woman’s real position in Society. Ibsen himself acknowledged “A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view.” (Ibsen's Workshop, 1912)

Mrs. Alving is another such victim of society. Her social and filial obligations overpower her desires to live her life freely without any moral pressure. She has suffered the consequences of her husband’s unrestricted ways of living and when she wishes to live her life of her free will she is forbidden to do so by a strong social figure in the form of Pastor Manders. She has to bear the repercussions of her husband’s deed without any complaints just because she is the weaker gender of the society.

Ambitions and desires make Rebecca strive for attaining them. In this she deliberately poisons Beata’s mind and instigates her to commit suicide. Her aspirations are influenced by corrupt and debauched mindset which persuades her to achieve her ill motives by any means. She is a real life portrait of the contemporary immoral and selfish society. Her aspirations lead her to moral degradation.

Gregers Werle is another example of the Ibsen’s characterization. In order to eradicate the hypocrisies and lies Gregers demolishes the entire family structure. He wishes to bring a reformation in the society by digging down the unnecessary . He is a
typical moralistic preacher who does not realize the results of his own actions. He wants to put things in order without realizing the appropriate methodology. He is a more theoretical person without any inclination towards the practical world.

The uniqueness of Ibsen’s characters is their extraordinariness. Although they are real life portrayals they are embellished with some distinctive qualities which help them highlight the social issues to the best of their abilities. For Ibsen, the power which is beyond the control of individual will and aspiration is society.

Ibsen introduced new traits in dramatics. He brought realism into the literary sphere. He depicted life from a common man’s point of view and not by aggrandizing it or embellishing it. His characters are picked up from real life as he had seen. This appealed to his audience although some critics blamed him of being parochial. As a riposte to this Archer wrote in an international monthly,

Moving, as we all know, in the most exclusive circles, they seek their tragic motives either in the mansions of Mayfair, or in the baronial halls of the aristocracy, their friends. I have just occupied an hour in going through the chief plays of our leading dramatists, and making a small peerage and baronetage from among their characters. I find that they introduce us to two Princesses, four Dukes, three Duchesses, five Marquises, one Marchioness, eleven Earls, seven Countesses, five Viscounts, and sundries, (such as Baronets, Ladies of undefined rank, and Honorable) to the number of about ninety-five. There is nothing "provincial," nothing "suburban" about this, is there? What could be more metropolitan or "smarter" than such a catalogue? How odd it is, then, that the "parochial" Ibsen should be world-famous, while Mr.
Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones are barely struggling into notice outside the English-speaking countries!

Earlier male characters dominated dramas. But Ibsen brought about a revolutionary change by making females as protagonists of his plays. Many of his plays revolve round women as leading characters and problems associated with them. In his plays the male characters are usually the embodiments of types in the society. They are influenced with social impulses and rarely project their minds as individuals. They are usually the mouthpieces of society or social trends with very little or nothing at all to say about themselves. Their desires, passions etc. are guided by social norms. They believe in society than an individual. They can sacrifice their family and life for fulfilling their social obligations. Helmer, in *A Doll’s House* is one of such example who agrees to compromise with Nora than to accept an anti social challenge.

Emotions have little room in their life. The women on the other hand are better sources of emotions and duties. They fulfill their duties and men exploit them which makes her revolt at some point of time. Ibsen’s characters are government officials, bankers, merchants, doctors, engineers, journalists. He actually descends to a photographer and a rat-catcher. He is a great creator of men and women, a great explorer of the human heart, a great teller of stories, a great inventor and manipulator of those "situations," those conjunctures and crises, in which human nature throws off its conventional integuments and expresses itself at its highest potency.” (Archer Review 182-201)

Ibsen’s dramatic vision had always been very clear. He wanted to depict life in its true form. In a reply to August Lindberg, who wanted to secure for himself the
right to stage *Ghosts*, Ibsen made it clear in August 1883 that the real effect of a play depended on "the audience's feeling that they are sitting hearing and watching something that is going on out there in actual real life". It was particularly important that the "spirit and tone of the play will be understood, respected and reproduced without any concession to the demand for full ruthless truth to life". He was very particular about his minor characters as well. In order to relate his plays to real life he made sure, that his minor characters were well justified. Ibsen altered the dramatic techniques and the age had to agree with them. The characters and themes were a part of the real life. He turned theatre from a place of entertainment to a place where people were compulsively driven to question and reconsider the basic principles of life. He brought serious discussion on personal and social issues which had never been untalked always.

Ibsen exploited the chances of serious and realistic dialogues in his plays. For Ibsen language was both an expression of a person's identity and a means to creating realism on stage. He strongly worked behind the dialogue writing and dialogue delivery.

Not that Ibsen only depicted a problem; he always worked for the regeneration of the society which had degenerated into a bleak and forlorn social set up. His efforts were directed towards the realization of the real state of his protagonists. His plays were a kind of an awakening for the entire suppressed mass of the society. "It is not for a care-free existence I am fighting, but for the possibility of devoting myself to the task which I believe and know has been laid upon me by God -- the work which seems to me more important and needful in Norway than any other, that of arousing the nation and leading it to think great thoughts." (Ibsen, *Letter to King Charles*)
Many critics blamed him as a pessimist but Ibsen could not help depict truth. He never believed in hiding reality. His intentions were to work upon the evils of the society. He could not directly eradicate the realities but his plays had always been instrumental in doing so. The principal aim behind his works was to make people notice the real society. His perception of the society came out in the form of his characters. His special efforts were rendered towards the upliftment of the domestic women. R. H. Hervey, in the Theatre of July, praised the truth of the play A Doll’s House:

That many women are dissatisfied with their social position, and that more become so every day, is an undoubted fact; and of their dissatisfaction Ibsen has made himself the mouthpiece...Those who have not read A Doll’s House or seen it acted can have no conception with what a master-hand the characters are drawn.

The social dramas of Ibsen are essentially of modern kind. They do not hold simply the mirror to nature, they try to derive certain reformative ideas. He is an honest human and a concerned writer who writes with a deliberate purpose. Once Ibsen said, "If you want to be useful to society you must make yourself into a tool." The playwright presents the real picture of life, the sordidness, the squalid, all that constitutes reality.

Shaw noted three basic elements in Ibsen’s plays. First, Ibsen’s exposure of the so called sophisticated and respectable society which was based on lie and secondly, the unconventional attitude towards women. Ibsen’s female protagonists rebelled against the false convention, the hollowness of the marital life. Lastly Shaw admired Ibsen’s personal approach to social, political and moral issues and his perception of these issues.
Archer appreciated Ibsen’s plainness and simplicity in his writings.

“Ibsen dealt with the life in the most natural form without adding much glamour to it. This approach of the playwright appealed to many playgoers who found drama very much to their likings and taste. The contemporary interest in his plays made him immediately popular and renowned to his audience. As a result Ibsenites sprang up from various parts of the globe. Born in a small country like Norway, he had to tread a difficult path but neither his origin nor his language disabled him from becoming known to the world. His Danish-Norwegian language is spoken by some four and a half million people in all, and the number of foreigners who learn it is infinitesimal. The sheer force of his genius has broken this barrier of language, but the fragments of it, so to speak, inevitably cumber his path. It is his fate to come before, not only the general reader, but the scholar and critic, in a more or less halting form. (Archer Review 182-201)

Ibsen did not conform to the old methods of playwriting. He substituted the art of sharp shooting at the audience, trapping them, fencing with them, aiming always at the sorest spot in their consciences. He altered the conventional mode of play writing. Realizing the futility of the primitiveness of playwriting, rendering to the tastes of the new audience and above all listening to his conscience he developed the social drama. He made his plays more natural, impressive and close to real life. His treatment of dialogues became more and more subtle. His plays were not beyond the comprehensive limit or interest of a common man.

Before Ibsen, many writers wrote on human destinies. Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare, Sophocles, all viewed life in totality along with its pleasant and
unpleasant passions and emotions. Yet, the impression made by them was not permanent like that of *Ghosts* or *A Doll’s House* or *The Wild Duck*. His plays contained messages which were hoped to help in the regeneration of society and man.

Ibsen’s superior plays have distinguished him as one of the greatest playwrights of all time next to other notable playwrights like Aristophanes, Voltaire, and even Shakespeare. Ibsen’s “problem plays” have helped people reexamine the world around them, and fix the problems that menace society. “He plays deal in those social issues which are commonly evident in a common man’s life. That he probed deeper into the problems of life than any other modern dramatist is acknowledged, but it was his surgical calmness which enabled him to do it.” (Gosse 239)

Ibsen spent his most productive years outside Norway yet he kept a watch on the changes his country was undergoing. He read all newspapers and articles about his country and clearly deduced the conditions prevailing there. His brief visits to Norway further helped him to understand the situations. He was a keen observer of the progress and development that was shaping a new Europe and hence he could not avoid his contribution in exposing the adverse effects of these changes taking place specially in Norway. Most of his dramas written in the later years, focus on the changes that took place in his country and the evils they brought along. He treated the social and moral issues with prime concern, scanned them thoroughly and put them before the people without draping it in fanciful attires. Thus the one of the most realistic dramatist made a controversial appearance in Europe but slowly became “the father of the modern drama.”
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