CHAPTER III

SOCIAL MORALITY

WITH REFERENCE TO

• A DOLL’S HOUSE
• THE WILD DUCK
• GHOSTS
• PILLARS OF SOCIETY
• THE LADY FROM THE SEA
• AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE
Morality is a very wide but ambiguous term. The dictionary meaning of the word morality is the standards of conduct that are generally accepted as right or proper or the rightness or wrongness of something as judged by accepted moral standards. It may further be described; as the principles and standards of human conduct in accordance to those regarded good or bad by the society. In the words of, Levy: “Morality, then, is that which tends to reproduce, to bless, to consecrate, to advance, to humanize, to promote, human life.”(97) Morality is not a very definite term. It is what and how we perceive in relative contexts but something, which gives it a strong basis, is the fact that it is a set of beliefs usually and often universally, and accepted by majority of the people. Hence, we are able to classify a particular behavior as moral or immoral. But one thing which holds valid is the fact that, morality has undergone several changes with time. The content of this chapter shall be the social morality with reference to the social conditions prevalent during Ibsen’s time as portrayed in some of his plays. A contrast shall be presented between the expected morality and reality and hypocrisy behind it. In this chapter a comparison shall be made of the expected and prevalent social moralities with their real status during the nineteenth century and how Ibsen has shown it in his plays. The object of this chapter is to expose the truth concerning the importance, validity and reliability of these moralities.

Change is the law of nature. There have been numerous changes since time immemorial. With the changing times, there has been change in the living patterns of the people, the living standards of people, in the educational system, changes in the scientific field and also in the values and morals of people and society. It is an inevitable truth that all ages have some specific characteristics particular of that age. The nineteenth century is known for its revolutions, its progress, its scientific
inventions, its reasoning and its acceptance of reality. Many literary works produced during this era introduce us to the new thinking and transformed perception of life. They take us to the world of reality.

Ibsen was born at an age when the society was going through many alterations. It constantly underwent many kinds of changes which influenced Ibsen and other people so much that their influences could be felt in the contemporary literature, but amongst the many changes, the one to be chiefly discussed here is the change in the social morals and values during the nineteenth century and how they are depicted in the dramas of Henrik Ibsen.

Ibsen was a Norwegian dramatist who wrote mainly during the nineteenth century. It was a time when there were lots of tumult and neoteric variations in the society. The launch of the industrial revolution brought with it several new avenues for the various people who were by now virtually classified into three various classes, the upper, the middle and the lower classes. People were highly profited with it. Rich became richer and the poor also got some chances to uplift themselves. New job opportunities came up for those who could avail. Urbanization increased and science progressed further. The religious norms altered and people started reasoning due to which the faith in the Divine lessened a lot. People started questioning about various changes and these changes attracted a large multitude of people. People from far off places also tried to better their lives. But as we know, all that glitters is not gold, i.e. what usually seems attractive from far may also have something undesirable about it, when it is closely seen. All the innovations and discoveries in the scientific and industrial sector may have brought monetary gains to people, families and society as a whole but to a great extent at the cost of morality and values. The social morals and values definitely degenerated and reduced with the advent of the new industrial
culture. Moreover, the family system also underwent many changes, some good and some bad. The use of machinery came as harbingers of the miseries of the working class. Poor people suffered immensely whereas the rich flourished. The consequence of this economical imbalance appeared in the form of all kinds of immoral acts. The poor people were forced to compromise with their values and ethics in order to survive and the rich deliberately threw away their values in order to make merry.

Another area where the change occurred was in the position of the women. Women had always been the weaker gender in the society. The new system changed the position of women in such a manner that where on one side, women now got opportunities of formal education etc., just on contrary they had very limited fields of earning for themselves and living in a respectable way. They were still limited to managing the households, nurturing the children and being a moral pillar of the family. They were under so much pressure of the society and its outlook, that little could they live their lives, their own way. The society and morals, had handcuffed the liberties of women and they were bound to accept these. Not only women, men were also engrossed with the social morality fear and they held a pretence to remain a respectable figure in their societies even if they were not so. Hence, social morality held special importance but only outwardly. From within, the society had become corrupted and selfish. “For Ibsen there is no higher moral gospel than the assertion of the true personality, no higher moral law than the devotion of the personality to its ideal.” (Key 18)

The new living conditions, the changing political and social scenario and the scientific advancements were collectively responsible for the new moral structure of the society. This change has been the subject matter and highlight, of many contemporary works. Ibsen was one of those writers who were deeply influenced
with the changing patterns of society. The society affected him so deeply that it occupied most of the subject matter in his plays. It is said of him:

Ibsen’s social panacea, we have said, is truthfulness. As poet, thinker, and social critic he dedicates himself to the service of Truth. By truthfulness, he means loyalty and fidelity to one's self. Maintenance of selfhood is the foremost duty. Man should take no dictates from without. The measure and motive power of his conduct should proceed from within. He should do what his will prompts him to do. Only in this case can he be called a personality. (Heller 70)

Most of the plays of Ibsen, at some point or the other, focus on issues which mirror the real society. The social morals of the age saw a marked decline and they were transparently presented by Ibsen in his several plays. Boyesen expresses, Ibsen’s thought about the society and the hypocrisy, which most men observed but feared to speak aloud:

From many utterances of Ibsen, both in public and private, it is obvious that he believes modern society to be in a state of dissolution. He notes on every hand evidences of decay, such as preceded the breaking up of the ancient civilization and the overthrow of the Western Roman Empire. One of these - and perhaps the most significant - was a hypocritical profession of conformity to customs and beliefs which had long since lost their meaning and vitality. Men publicly professed to believe in gods whom privately they mocked. They pretended to act on the supposition that they possessed a political liberty which de facto they had lost. The forms, both religious and political, survived, while
the reality which they were meant to express had long since departed.

(180)

The satirical plays, *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, and *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, examine the problems with certain beliefs held by the people, both men and women, of the Victorian age. Furthermore, the different classes in the contemporary society held their own beliefs on moral code.

Ibsen has tried to show a contrast in his characters. His characters show both the sides of human nature. On one side they are the moral and responsible social beings whereas in contrast to this artificiality, they are quite susceptible to human flaws. They put on airs of morality and pretence and it is this pretence which takes away their happiness. In the *Discourses of Ibsen*, Rabbi J. Leonard Levy, D. D. writes: “In every community there are those who are regarded as pillars of society, yet whose lives are as hollow as those whom Ibsen condemned in his play, and whose wealth has been obtained by means as reprehensible as that which his play disapproves”. (88) His characters are not created. They are picked up from real life that is why his treatment of these characters, seems treatment of our inner selves. In his plays Ibsen has shown the reality with all limitations and boundaries which were often neglected prior to him. During his life, there were certain limitations on men and women by the society. Men were expected by the women and by the rest of the society to perform functions that proved their masculinity. They were the heads of their families and hence they were expected to act likewise. Women expected them to be focused on their jobs and earnings. The decisions of the family matters were at the sole discretion of the man. He was expected to be an example for the children, the family and the society. He was much at liberty in comparison to the opposite gender. The prime requirement for a male head was to be the earning member of the house. A person who earned well and
catered to the needs of his family was considered a respectable and dutiful person. Just as Helmer, in *A Doll’s House*. He is the sole earning member of the house, and is bound to shoulder the responsibilities of his family which comprise of his wife and his children. He fulfills his moral duties of being a husband and a father:

NORA. You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money. (4)

HELMER. It is splendid to feel that one has a perfect appointment, and a big enough income. It's delightful to think of, isn’t it? (8)

Contrary to it Krogstad in *A Doll’s House* fails in securing a similar position for himself, and hence, he does not earn the same respect as Helmer does. In this and in many such like examples, Ibsen has given a picture of the morals, values and standards laid down by the society, for the individuals. Those who abided by those maintained the position of an honourable human being. Those who didn’t, they lost their dignity, but this was a superficial arrangement of honour. In reality the people who followed the customs of society, may have been honoured by the society, but they were not necessarily moral and those who did not comply with the moral standards were not always immoral. This is the reality Ibsen shows in most of his plays.

Similarly, the responsibility of the breadwinner lay in the hands of Dr. Stockmann in *An Enemy of the People*, Karsten Bernick in *The Pillars of Society* or Hialmar in *The Wild Duck*. All these people perform their duty as the supposed head of the family. Not only are they expected to earn money but they are expected to do it with all honesty. Their social morality demands complete honesty from them. If ever, they deviate from this social standard, they lose their reputation and endanger their social morality. Therefore, In *A Doll’s House*, Helmer always tries to display himself,
a very virtuous and ethical human being; else he cannot maintain the morality pressure at his home, upon his wife and children:

HELMER. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. We two have kept bravely on the straight road so far, and we will go on the same way for the short time longer that there need be any struggle.

(5)

The society boasted of honesty, principles and values just as Helmer does repeatedly in the entire play. The people had to obey to most of these customary norms in order to be a part of the moral society. The people had to make a position and standing in the society and they tried their best to secure one for themselves. Mrs. Alving, in the play *Ghosts* compromises with the happiness and dreams of her life just to maintain a reputation and name for her husband. Her husband, Mr. Alving, a morally corrupt chamberlain to the king, dies prior to the opening of the play. In order to maintain a good name for him, Mrs. Alving makes all kinds of sacrifices. She sacrifices all her happiness, desires and wishes, just in order to comply with the moral standards. Being a wife, it is her moral duty to safeguard the good name of her husband. The wives ensured to keep up the name, respect and glory of their husbands. Whether it is Gina in *The Wild Duck* or Mrs. Bernick in *The Pillars of Society* or Mrs. Stockmann in *An Enemy of the People* or Nora *A Doll’s House*, all tried their best to prove worthy of their husband’s. In *A Doll’s House*, when Mrs. Linde asks Nora, if she had revealed the truth of borrowing the money from Krogstad, to Helmer, she denies by saying:
NORA. Good Heavens, no! How could you think so? A man who has such strong opinions about these things! And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Helmer, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now. (17)

She does not want to hurt Helmer and his faith in the ideals, and therefore she conceals the truth from him. Another reason for not telling Helmer about it is that it is her duty as a wife to respect Helmer and his feelings. Pastor Manders, in *Ghosts* states the duty of a wife in his following dialogue:

MANDERS. To crave for happiness in this world is simply to be possessed by a spirit of revolt. What right have we to happiness? No! we must do our duty, Mrs. Alving. And your duty was to cleave to the man you had chosen and to whom you were bound by a sacred bond. (119)

Another aspect which brought respect to an individual, was, his perfect family. A man or a woman with a perfect family, husband-wife together, living happily with their children, if not in reality, at least they impersonated to be fully contented and happy, earned respect for themselves. The opening scene of *A Doll’s House*, presents an ideal picture of a husband and wife. In his *A Commentary on the Writings*, Boyesen, remarks about the scene in the following words: “The whole scene is admirable, because it is absolutely typical of the relation between a young husband and wife in a civilised family.” (201). A home meant a dwelling with a husband, wife and their children. Manders specify the meaning of a home and family life in the play *Ghosts*: 
MANDERS. Oh, but I am not talking of bachelor establishments. By a home I mean family life—the life a man lives with his wife and children. (117)

The concept of a family is also depicted in *The Lady from the Sea*. Throughout the play, the characters crave for a happy family. Dr. Wangel’s family is a compact one comprising of himself, his second wife, Ellida and his daughters, Bolette and Hilde. The family is complete but not happy because it lacks the devotion of a wife and a mother. It is only when Ellida, drops the idea of going with the stranger, that she is able to live freely and devote herself in her ‘home’ and make it a happy family. After this change, Ellida becomes an even more respectable member of her family.

This perfect family structure gained people a reputation in society. Whatever may be underneath, superficially this pretence was demanded of a reputable family. The perfect example of this is Helmer’s family in *A Doll’s House*. Nora feels proud about her family and extremely happy in presenting them before her friend, Mrs. Linde:

NORA. There they are!...Look at them, Christine! Aren’t they darlings? (19).

“Being just what society expects a young married woman to be, she has also every reason for being contented with herself. She has the delightful consciousness of being a good wife and a good mother.” (Boyesen 202). Helmer is blessed with a devoted wife (housewife) and three sweet little children. The family seems to be close knit, with Helmer performing the role of the patriarchal head. The work of framing rules was a work done by the male head. Whether it was a petty issue or a major rule, all were framed by the males or the heads of the families. In *A Doll’s House*, Helmer
makes all kinds of rules for his family even if it could be done away without them or even if they meant seizing the independence of others:

    HELMER. (Wagging his finger at her). Hasn’t a Miss Sweet-Tooth breaking rule in town today?

    NORA. (Going to the table on the right). I should not think of going against your wishes. (7)

As a wife Nora, complies with all the duties of a true wife. She obeys her husband and at other instance, we see that Nora performs her duties as a devoted mother:

    NORA. Yes, yes, it will. But come here and let me show you what I have bought. And ah so cheap! Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy.--they are very plain, but anyway she will soon break them in pieces. And here are dress-lengths and handkerchiefs for the maids; old Anne ought really to have something better. (5)

Similar example of a moralistic marriage could also be seen in *The Wild Duck*, where Hialmar is happily married to Gina, a true life mate, and blessed with a daughter, Hedvig. Gina is a very devoted wife who performs all the household duties and helps Hialmar in his work but within the moralistic confines (although much beyond our expectation, things turn out to be different at some later instance.)

The essence of a happy marriage lies in two facts; first, to perform one’s duty with utmost sincerity and devotion and second, to let the males and females perform their individual roles without one interfering into the domain of the other. Whether a husband or a wife, when both contribute equally, they make a marriage successful.
But the notion of contribution was different when Ibsen wrote his plays. It was an age which expected minimum from a man and maximum from a woman. As soon as the contribution equation altered, drastic results were observed. As soon as Helmer, in *A Doll’s House* dispossesses Nora, from her duties, his happy marriage ends. Similarly, when Hialmar, in *The Wild Duck*, withdraws his duties, his marriage falters. Unless Ellida, in *The Lady from the Sea*, takes over her duties as a wife and as a mother, her married life lies in abyss. The moment she resumes her responsibilities, she enters into a happy married life. We see that, in *Pillars of Society*, Karsten Bernick, performs his duties towards his family, hence his marriage runs smoothly. In all these plays, we see that the role of the individual is the determining factor in making a marriage run smoothly. When either of the two, fail to shoulder their responsibilities as stated down by the contemporary society, or when any one tries to trespass the other, the marriage falters. There was no room for adjustments then. Either marriages worked or they failed. A second chance was quite a rare scene. The main reason for all this was the submission to the irrational customs and the useless moralities.

Mrs. Bernick, in *The Pillars of Society*, is very satisfied with her marriage and with her duties as a wife. She never interferes in the works of her husband and she is not permitted to do so, because she is a woman. It is required of her to agree to the morals of the society else she will fail in her marriage just as Nora, in *A Doll’s House* does. Nora fails to comply with the morals of the society and secretly borrows money, by forging her father’s signatures, to save the life of her husband. But her husband charges her of being immoral and dispossesses her from her duties. Thus the ‘morality’ robs her of her happiness. What people considered being a happy marriage usually proved fake whenever put to test? Helmer seems to be extra protective about his wife Nora. He addresses her as “my little skylark”, “my little squirrel” (4), etc. all
these expressions seem to signify Nora as a baby, a sweet little property of Helmer whom he patronizes. His love for Nora seems to be more guardian or father like. His love for her appears to be artificial and superficial. He treats his wife more like a doll than a wife. For him, his wife’s existence means only her physical presence. She is like a puppet to be used by her husband. She has no entity of her own. The entire age during Ibsen had similar notions. The men were at liberty to treat their wives the way they wanted. Helmer is a true demonstration of his society, the 19th century European society. He is the mouthpiece of the males of those times who believe that women are of weak disposition, easily influenced by anything and therefore, they must be protected because they cannot fend for themselves:

HELMER. Aha! So my obstinate little woman is obliged to get someone to come to her rescue? (A Doll’s House 27).

It is this attitude of Helmer or we may say of a typical husband, which forbids Nora to disclose the truth. She has always expected that her husband will come to her rescue whenever she needs him because, he is like her guardian; he will protect her from all dangers in all situations and this would be very agonizing for Nora, hence she conceals the truth from her husband. Levy writes in Discourses Of Ibsen:

Nora had fondly hoped that when he, who had called her "his love, his lark, his songbird, “would learn the worst, he would have said to her,' My darling, is it true that you have made this mistake? " To which she would have replied, dropping her eyes and gasping for breath, " Yes; but forgive me !" And then her husband, she had hoped, would have said, "Never mind, dearest of women, you are not the first woman who has made a mistake, nor will you be the last. I love you, and love drives out all selfishness. I will, for your sake, bear everything. The
world shall know that not you, but I, committed the forgery. I will suffer for you." But no such scene takes place. Helmer violently upbraids his wife, and never gives a thought of her, until he received Krogstad's letter of apology and the forged note. Only then, when he realizes that he is saved, through Mrs. Linden's sacrifice, though he knows it not, does he recover his equanimity and tender forgiveness to the berated wife. (109-110)

This is the exact, narrow-minded view many men displayed and which Ibsen makes us familiar with. Men believed that they were obliged to protect women. They considered women as weak and indecisive and if at all they could decide, their decisions were based on little knowledge and quite prone to disastrous results and when they were put to test, they failed to score anything worthy. Ellen Key writes about the men, in *The Torpedo Under The Arc* “The men therefore often drag down to their own level of incompleteness and indecision, the women who have surrendered themselves to them; or they betray them at the supreme, critical moment of life.” (Key 19)

In *Ghosts*, Pastor Manders has the same conception that women are incapable of taking any decisions. When once Mrs. Alving, gets tired living with her immoral husband and approaches to him to for help, he convinces her by reminding of her familial obligations and her ethical responsibilities as a wife without paying any heed to her miseries because she is a women, doomed to lead a sacrificial life always. “She takes refuge with Pastor Manders. The voice of Manders, Public Opinion in a white necktie, persuades her to return to Alving. It is her duty. She obeys the ordering of society; and goes back to her hell” (Macfall 206)
MANDERS. Have you forgotten that after barely a year of married life you were standing at the very edge of a precipice—that you forsook your house and home? That you ran away from your husband—yes, Mrs. Alving, ran away, ran away and refused to return to him in spite of his requests and entreaties?

MRS. ALVING. Have you forgotten how unspeakably unhappy I was during that first year?

MANDERS. To crave for happiness in this world is simply to be possessed by a spirit of revolt. What rights have we to happiness? No! We must do our duty, Mrs. Alving. And your duty was to cleave to the man you had chosen and to whom you were bound by a sacred bond. (Ghosts 119)

Manders who is a prototype of Helmer or a nineteenth century male in common, believed that a woman had no role in decision making, whether it concerned herself or her family. In any case she had no right to judge her husband. She was simply bound to act and not to react.

MANDERS. But it is not a wife's part to be her husband's judge. You should have considered it your bounden duty humbly to have borne the cross that a higher will had laid upon you. But, instead of that, you rebelliously cast off your cross, you deserted the man whose stumbling footsteps you should have supported, you did what was bound to imperil your good name and reputation, and came very near to imperiling the reputation of others into the bargain. (120)

Ibsen was practically the first of his contemporaries to have the courage to examine the threads of the "torn web of life." Thereby he became deeply and
permanently convinced that the value of existence for the individual and the worth of
the individual for existence depend exclusively upon the completeness of the passion
with which each surrenders himself to that which is for him the highest value of life
and which he recognizes as his ideal. (Key 7)

A man could conduct any immoral deed and he could be pardoned but a
woman had no choice. She could not even manage her own life:

Alving is a libertine, a loose fish, enfeebled in mind and body; and
Mrs. Alving has to sink her individual life, to give up all attempt at
being truthful and the doing of what she knows to be right, in order to
avoid collision with her husband and the society to which she has
bowed the neck. She sacrifices health and happiness to save his name
from execration and to screen his life from the world that she has made
his and her judge by remaining with him. In the place of truth she sets
up the hypocrisy of society. (Macfall 206)

In the nineteenth century, prior to her marriage, a woman was considered her
father’s property and after marriage she was her husband’s responsibility. Her life
was to be designed by her husband. But contrary to this, a man was a master of his
own life. He could do any immoral deed, commit any adulterous deed, cheat on his
wife and yet come out free from any blame. These feelings of a woman have been
described by Ibsen through Nora who believes that women are never free. They are
like puppets in the hands of the males and the males simply play with them. Ibsen
tries to convey to us the idea that the women are bound by social moralities which do
not permit them to live a life of their own. They lead a life given to them by their
male heads. They have no right to live life, the way they want:
NORA  It is perfectly true, Helmer. When I was at home with papa, he
told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same
opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because
he would not have liked it. He called me his doll-child, and he
played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I
came to live with you--I mean that I was simply transferred from
papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to
your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you--or else I
pretended to, I am really not quite sure which--I think sometimes
the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems
to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman--just from
hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you,
Helmer. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a
great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my
life. *(A Doll’s House* 85-86)

Men of all ranks took the liberty of practicing adultery. They preached
morality but did not follow it themselves. They did whatever they wished to and still
blew the trumpet of morality. They could be unfaithful towards their moral duties but
they still expected their wives or mistresses to be faithful whatever their own
misdemeanors were. Few examples of such deceitful and treacherous men in Ibsen’s
dramas are Mr. Werle in *The Wild Duck*, Karsten Bernick in the *Pillars of Society* and
Captain Alving in *Ghosts*. All three characters are the depiction of the male adultery.
Women were expected not to interfere in matters outside home whereas men could
slide out free from any accusation and continue to lead a life of his choice. In the play,
*Pillars of Society*, Karsten Bernick, easily confesses all his crimes and treacherous
acts and continues enjoying the life, the same way as if nothing had happened to him or his life. In the first act of the drama, we are made aware with the social position of KARSTEN Bernick, who is regarded as the strongest pillar of his society:

MRS HOLT. The idea of her thinking such a thing! Karsten Bernick—a man of the world and the pink of courtesy, a perfect gentleman, the darling of all the ladies...

MRS RUMMEL. And, with it all, such an excellent young man, Mrs. Holt--so moral. (400)

Until he confesses his crimes, he is regarded very moral some, but even after the confession, he is exonerated of all blames because he is a male, whereas Gina, in The Wild Duck, does not commit any crime deliberately, yet she is held responsible for the crime which Werle does and it is so, just because she is a woman.

On the other hand, Manders from Ghosts, was never convinced that Captain Alving could ever be wrong or blamed of any accusation. He believes in that it is the duty of women to be moral and that men deserved pardoning while women, who were the foundations of families, deserved repentance. Again Ibsen tries to attract our attention towards the shallow morality. A society holds different rules for males and females. Male members enjoy all sorts of liberty and female members have no right to question them or put a check on them. They simply have to abide by the moral principles.

Pastor Manders finds no difficulty in pardoning the fraudulent, Engstrand but it worries him to pardon Mrs. Alving for the crime which she has not committed at all. Her only desire in life had been to seek happiness, that denied by religion, she tries to keep her son happy, for which she is denied all liberty as religion and morality do not permit her to do so.
MRS. ALVING. You know very well what sort of life Alving was leading - what excesses he was guilty of.

MANDERS. I know very well what rumours there were about him.

Mistress’s were quite common in that age. The poverty and paucity at homes forced women in this profession. The women became a part of this due to their miserable conditions and the men took advantage of their situations. It gave them a chance to fulfill their shameful motives. All the infidelity was performed mainly by those males who always desired to lead a completely free life. They never wanted to limit themselves within the confines of marriage. They always wanted more and more. Ibsen has repeatedly highlighted this aspect in his plays. He shook the whole age by writing about syphilis. Oswald, in the *Ghosts* and Dr. Rank, in *A Doll’s House* are two characters who are shown to be severely affected with these. But extra marital affairs and illegitimate relationships were definitely some of the root causes of such diseases. It is also to bring to the knowledge of the readers that immoral deeds prevailed in those days and that they had severe consequences. If we look into the texts, we find the characters like Captain Alving and Mr. Werle from the plays, *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck* respectively, involved in this affair. We also see what consequences, their relations lead to and how their individual acts ruin many families. Ibsen has also shown the plight of those people who were the result of some immoral relationship. Dina in *Pillars of Society*, Regina in *Ghosts* and Hedvig in *The Wild Duck*, are a few examples who had to suffer because of their parent’s debauchery. When the society came to know of their parentage they were looked down upon as models of immorality:
DINA. They all handle me in such a gingerly fashion, as if they thought I should go to pieces if they --- oh, how I hate this kind heartedness. …Yes; if only I could get right away from here. I could make my own way quite well, if only I did not live amongst people who are so--so—

RORLUND. So what?

DINA. So proper and so moral. (Pillars of Society 402)

Morality was a synonym to the conduct of a woman in accordance with the norms laid down for them by the society. Women who followed these norms strictly, were considered respectable. “The Norwegians, living as they do, in a corner of the globe, have always felicitated themselves on their remoteness from the great world-life, and their consequent escape from the vices which contaminate and the convulsions which agitate the larger societies.” (Boyesen 183) Any deviation from the expected behaviour blemished the reputation of the woman. Lona Hessel is one such character who did not bother about society. Although she did not commit any treachery, yet her change in the lifestyle and her own way of living caused murmurs in society. While talking about Lona Hessel, the so called “moralistic” woman, gossip:

MRS. RUMMEL. It is the dark spot among the sunshine of their good fortune, as Rummel once put it. So never speak about it in this house, Mrs. Lynge… She was an extraordinary person too! Would you believe it, she cut her hair short, and used to go about in men's boots in bad weather! (Pillars of Society 399)

These women are so focused on the moral standards, that nothing except a moral behaviour is acceptable to them. Whatever may be the conditions or
requirements of a person, yet if he deviates from the ‘moral standards’, usually accepted in society, he is regarded as a social outcast:

MRS. LYNGE. But what has this Miss Hessel made of herself in America?

MRS. RUMMEL. Well, you see, over that (as my husband once put it) has been drawn a veil one should hesitate to lift.

MRS. LYNGE. What do you mean?

MRS. RUMMEL. She no longer has any connection with the family, as you may suppose; but this much the whole town knows, that she has sung for money in drinking saloons over there--

MRS. HOLT. And has given lectures in public--

MRS. RUMMEL. And has published some mad kind of book. (*Pillars of Society* 400)

Since Lona Hessel, does not conform to the social standards, she is not accepted as an honourable and reputed social being. She lives for herself and she does not bow down before the useless rules of society just to please others therefore, she has no place in the moralistic circles:

MRS. RUMMEL: Yes, it is true enough that Lona Hessel is one of the spots on the sun of the Bernick family's good fortune. (*Pillars of Society* 401)

Morality was much weighed and spoken about and especially if it concerned some women. Women were not permitted to enjoy their lives outside their households. Their lives were centered on their own family and children. The society held strict laws for them. As stated in the speech of Manders in *Ghosts*, women did
not live for happiness. They survived only to be moral preachers at home. This difference in the position of the two genders attracted the attention of Ibsen.

Ibsen endeavored to point out difference between the reality and hypocrisy prevalent in the society. This attempt made by him stained his plays as scandalous especially at such a time when European theatre was expected to portray strict morals and ethics of the society. He refused to accept the moral principles as standards for judging people and their ethics. In a letter to Brandes, he wrote: "The conception of liberty is extended in its claims; the newly attained, higher conception of morality has no eternity in itself. Yes, not even the most evident syllogisms are absolute truths. For who can affirm that, upon the planet of Jupiter, 2x2 do not equal 5?" (Key 15)

Woman needs, in a still higher degree than does man, to be awakened by Ibsen to the deliverance of her personality….But she has been fettered in addition by an archaic ideal of woman which men created after their own desires, for their own convenience and in accordance with which women fashioned themselves. (Key 22)

Men could conduct any immoral deed and come out safe and blameless, easily. They had several ways of proving themselves innocent and if at all they were on the fear of accusation, they would use their influences to safe guard their name and reputation. People like Mr.Werle, in The Wild Duck, were among such men who committed incestuous deeds, lived lives on their own terms and finally made up for their actions by the use of some influence or by the use of their power and money. Mr. Werle cheated on Old Ekdal who was his business partner. Due to Werle’s deception Old Ekdal, was nearly ruined. He not only cheats Old Ekdal, but he also exploits his maid, Gina. Now, to, make up for both his evil deeds, he decides to makes up for the loss incurred upon the Ekdal family and upon Gina. Therefore, he
designs a wonderful plan. First he lets Hialmar meet Gina, one of his former maids and then very craftily arranges their marriage. All this is kept a secret from Gregers. When Gregers comes home he seems shocked and then Hialmar, who is still unaware of the real state of things, tells him about all the entire affair how Me. Werle, helped them in their times of distress:

HIALMAR. Yes, certainly. He didn't wish it to be generally known; but he it was and of course it was he, too, that put me in a position to marry. Don't you — don’t you know about that either? (703)

Hialmar is very contented with whatever Werle did for him. He seems to be more than happy for all the help given to him by Werle:

HIALMAR. In short, I thought it best to break, once for all, with my old surroundings and associations. It was your father that specially urged me to it; and since he interested himself so much in me. (702)

Even when Gregers comes to know about all what his father had done for Ekdals, he feels very happy and satisfied. He feels as if he misunderstood his father:

GREGERS. Oh, unquestionably. My father seems to have been almost a kind of providence for you. (Ghosts 705)

At this instance Gregers feels that his father has a heart too because till then he felt that his father was not the right kind of person so he simply kept professional contacts with him and he had reasons to do so. When the conversation breaks out between Gregers and Hialmar, he comes to know that it was his father who prohibited Hialmar to keep in any kind of touch with his son. This was why Hialmar never corresponded with his childhood friend:
HIALMAR. [Sentimentally.] After all Gregers, I thank you for inviting me to your father's table; for I take it as a sign that you have got over your feeling against me.

GREGERS. Why should that give me any feeling against you? Who can have put that into your head?

HIALMAR. I know it did, Gregers; your father told me so himself.

GREGERS. [Starts.] My father! Oh indeed. Hm.— Was. That why you never let me hear from you? — Not a single word.

HIALMAR. Your father said I had better not write to you at all, about anything. (Ghosts 701)

But in spite of this he feels happy that his friend managed to re start his life and all this because of his father. He enquires from Hialmar about his work:

GREGERS. Tell me: was it after your engagement - was it then that my father - I mean was it then that you began to take up photography?

HIALMAR. Yes, precisely. I wanted to make a start and to set up house as soon as possible; and your father and I agreed that this photography business was the readiest way. Gina thought so too. Oh, and there was another thing in its favour, by-the bye: it happened, luckily, that Gina had learnt to retouch.

GREGERS. That chimed in marvelously.

HIALMAR. [With emotion.] He did not forsake his old friend’s son in the hour of his need. For he has a heart, you see. (The Wild Duck 705)
All things seem to go on well between friends. Both are happy for the kindness shown by Mr. Werle. Gregers in particular is very relieved and happy at the prospects of Hialmar’s settled life:

GREGERS. So you are a married man, Hialmar! That is further than I shall ever get. Well, I hope you are happy in your married life?

HIALMAR. Yes, thoroughly happy. She is as good and capable a wife as any man could wish for. And she is by no means without culture. (*The Wild Duck* 703)

Everything seemed to be pleasant and pleasing to Hialmar and also to Gregers. But actually Gregers knows his father very well and is also aware of his relationship with Gina which existed in the past and which became the cause of his ailing mother’s death. So he doubts whether his father has been genuinely concerned about Ekdal family or is it some influential action performed by him to conceal his evil deeds. He sarcastically remarks to his father about his relationship with Gina, who is now Hialmar’s wife but whose marriage was a well planned action of Werle who wanted to remain spot free because his reputation was most important for him:

GREGERS. No more I was. But [Lowers his voice] there were others in this house who were particularly interested in her. (*The Wild Duck* 713)

But it is evident from this entire conversation that Werle is the actual culprit, both in Ekdal’s case as well as in Gina and Hialmar’s case. He uses his monetary and social influence to keep Ekdal, Gina and Hialmar silent. This way he manages to play around and come out spotless.

Captain Alving, from *Ghosts*, is another in likeness with Werle of *The Wild Duck* and with many other men of the society. He commits debauchery throughout his
life and it results in his illegitimate relationship with Regina’s mother Johanna as stated in Mrs. Alving’s words when she confesses of Alving’s misconduct to Manders and recites the whole incident of how she came to know about Alving’s misdeeds for the first time:

MRS. ALVING. Yes; here in our own home. It was there (Pointing towards the first door on the right), in the dining-room, that I first came to know of it. I was busy with something in there, and the door was standing ajar. I heard our housemaid come up from the garden, with water for those flowers.

MANDERS. Well—?

MRS. ALVING. Shortly after, I heard Alving come in too. I heard him say something softly to her. And then I heard—[With a short laugh]—oh! it still sounds in my ears, so hateful and yet so ludicrous—I heard my own servant-maid whisper, "Let me go, Mr. Alving! Let me be!" (Ghosts 125)

In the beginning of the play Pastor Manders does not believe Mrs. Alving and all what she says about her husband. Instead he blames her of being a disloyal and weak wife:

MANDERS. Do you remember that after less than a year of married life you stood on the verge of an abyss? That you forsook your house and home? That you fled from your husband? Yes, Mrs. Alving—fled, fled, and refused to return to him, however much he begged and prayed you? (Ghosts 119)
Even when Mrs. Alving tells him of how grieved and desolate she felt right in the first year of her marriage, he condemns this absolutely and explains to her, her duties and responsibilities:

MRS. ALVING. Have you forgotten how infinitely miserable I was in that first year?

MANDERS. It is the very mark of the spirit of rebellion to crave for happiness in this life. What right have we human beings to happiness? We have simply to do our duty, Mrs. Alving! And your duty was to hold firmly to the man you had once chosen, and to whom you were bound by the holiest ties. (Ghosts 119)

Manders is less of a friend and more of an advocate of the morality of his age. He preached about morality, duty, responsibility, etc even at the cost of his friend, Mrs. Alving’s happiness. He believed what his age forced him to believe, that a man can never be accused whatever he does whereas a woman can never live life in her own way. Her mere existence was for her family whether she liked it or not. Mrs. Alving tries to tell him about the infidelity of her husband but he reacts with a chauvinistic air:

MRS. ALVING. You know very well what sort of life Alving was leading—what excesses he was guilty of.

MANDERS. I know very well what rumours there were about him; and I am the last to approve the life he led in his young days, if report did not wrong him. But a wife is not appointed to be her husband's judge. It was your duty to bear with humility the cross which a Higher Power had, in its wisdom, laid upon you. But instead of that you rebelliously throw away the cross, desert the
backslider whom you should have supported, go and risk your good name and reputation, and—nearly succeed in ruining other people's reputation into the bargain. (Ghosts 119)

Manders is one of those moralistic meddlers or prototype of his age who believes in the absolute submission and surrender of the women. He openly advocates the case of Alving without going into the depth. Mrs. Alving tries to acquaint him with the reality but he proves a deaf ear to all her pleadings and believes in the unrestrained existence of a man. ‘All the fault lies in the woman,’ is his theme of life. What he says is not his individual idea. It is the belief of his age. Even when Mrs. Alving talks about Engstrand’s carelessness or his relationship between Engstrand and Regina, Manders comes in defence for Engstrand:

MRS. ALVING. They say he's often very careless with matches.

MANDERS. He has so much on his mind that man—so many things to fight against. Thank God, he is now striving to lead a decent life, I hear.

MRS. ALVING. Indeed! Who says so?

MANDERS. He himself assures me of it. And he is certainly a capital workman. (Ghosts 111)

Manders feel that a man who apologizes once cannot commit any crime because he is a male and moreover he cares for his responsibilities unlike a female. When Engstrand fools him with his hypocritically innocent apology, he falls for it and believes in the words of Engstrand:

MANDERS. Ah, that melancholy weakness! But, he is often driven to it by his injured leg, lie says,' Last time he was in town I was really
touched by him. He came and thanked me so warmly for having
got him work here, so that he might be near Regina. *Ghosts* 111

Engstrand is another epitome of immorality. He is the legal father of Regina
but the biological father of Regina is Captain Alving. Engstrand is ignorant about this
truth but he is aware of the fact that Regina is somebody else’s daughter. Still he
agrees to marry Johanna. It is only his greed and gluttony that permit him to marry
Johanna. Mrs. Alving confesses the whole truth to Mr. Manders who had been forced
to believe that Regina was the daughter of Engstrand. Engstrand had made up his own
story full of another apology of why he married Johanna in haste and Manders always
believed him:

**MRS. ALVING.** The girl left our service at once, and got a good sum
of money to hold her tongue for the time. The rest she managed for
herself when she got to town. She renewed her old acquaintance
with Engstrand, no doubt let him see that she had money in her
purse, and told him some tale about a foreigner who put in here
with a yacht that summer. So she and Engstrand got married in hot
haste. Why, you married them yourself. *Ghosts* 129

**MANDERS.** But then how to account for—? I recollect distinctly
Engstrand coming to give notice of the marriage. He was quite
overwhelmed with contrition, and bitterly reproached himself for
the misbehavior he and his sweetheart had been guilty of.

**MRS. ALVING.** Yes; of course he had to take the blame upon himself.

**MANDERS.** But such a piece of duplicity on his part! And towards
me too! I never could have believed it of Jacob Engstrand. I shall
not fail to take him seriously to task; he may be sure of that.—and then the immorality of such a connection! (Ghosts 130)

Further when Manders comes to know that it was for mere three hundred dollars that he accepted Johanna, he finds it ridiculous on the part of a man to marry a ‘fallen woman’ but when Mrs. Alving compares the case with her life, Manders is not able to accept it.

The societal values did not encourage a man to accept a ‘fallen woman’. But there were no such rules for a ‘fallen man’. Whether it was Mr. Alving (Ghosts) or Mr. Karsten Bernick (Pillars of Society) or Mr. Werle (The Wild Duck), they are all examples of the male supremacy of that age.

Not that only debauchery, intrigue, etc. existed in that age. Immorality reigned in various forms and structures. Industrialization was expanding. More and more people shifted to industrial areas. Population concentrated in these areas. People looked out for in these places. Machines were replacing men. Ample labour was there to work at low wages and so the working classes were very poorly paid. Their social, financial and living conditions deteriorated day by day. Insecurity reigned supreme about the financial worries amongst the people working in these areas. They were always under the threat of living workless and in poverty stricken situation. Even the farmers and land owners found it difficult to cope with the new economical conditions. Eventually they found nothing better to cope with this situation than to sell off their agricultural lands and to shift to the urbanized areas to find for work for themselves. This revolution brought pain, torture, persistent anxiety and financial instability for the middle class or the poor on one side and a phenomenal growth, a sudden hike in economy for the capitalist class. This revolution widened the gap
between the rich and the poor. This altered the economic scenario and brought along a number of changes in the social life of people.

There was an urge to earn more money in less time in the capital class. They wanted money and profits at any cost. This frenzy caused them to act uncaringly about the labour class. An example of a similar kind of immorality has been depicted in *Pillars of Society* through the protagonist of the play Karsten Bernick. He owned some business regarding shipbuilding. The industrial revolution had a profound effect both on the owners and the workers in various industries. Similar effect has been featured in this drama. The introduction and use of machines starts replacing the manual labour which becomes a growing concern for the workers. When Aune pleads the case before Karsten in different ways, he is warned by the firm, Bernick & Co. not to favour the workers. Krap, the clerk in the same firm, advises Aune not to perform actions which would bring loss to the firm:

KRAP. You must not use your own time in making the men useless in working hours. Last Saturday you were talking to them of the harm that would be done to the workmen by our new machines and the new working methods at the yard. What makes you do that?

AUNE. I do it for the good of the community.

KRAP. That's curious, because Mr. Bernick says it is disorganising the community.

AUNE. My community is not Mr. Bernick's, Mr. Krap! As President of the Industrial Association, I must--

KRAP. You are, first and foremost, President of Mr. Bernick's shipbuilding yard; and, before everything else, you have to do your duty to the community known as the firm of Bernick & Co.; that is
what every one of us lives for. Well, now you know what Mr. Bernick had to say to you. (*Pillars of Society* 388)

Later in the play when Aune tries to defend his work and the workers, he is blamed by Bernick for giving provocative speeches. Even though he tries to put the real situation of the labour class before Bernick, Bernick ridicules him for his behavior:

BERNICK. That is not the reason. Krap has told me the whole truth.

You do not understand how to work the new machines I have provided—or rather, you will not try to work them.

AUNE. Mr. Bernick, I am well on in the fifties; and ever since I was a boy I have been accustomed to the old way of working--

BERNICK. We cannot work that way now-a-days. You must not imagine, Aune, that it is for the sake of making profit; I do not need that, fortunately; but I owe consideration to the community I live in, and to the business I am at the head of. I must take the lead in progress, or there would never be any.

AUNE. I welcome progress too, Mr. Bernick.

BERNICK. Yes, for your own limited circle--for the working class.

Oh, I know what a busy agitator you are; you make speeches, you stir people up; but when some concrete instance of progress presents itself—as now, in the case of our machines—you do not want to have anything to do with it; you are afraid.

AUNE. Yes, I really am afraid, Mr. Bernick. I am afraid for the number of men who will have the bread taken out of their mouths by these machines. You are very fond, sir, of talking about the
consideration we owe to the community; it seems to me, however, that the community has its duties too. Why should science and capital venture to introduce these new discoveries into labour, before the community has had time to educate a generation up to using them? (Pillars of Society 417)

Aune is genuinely concerned about his colleagues. He argues for the right thing but Bernick is not ready to listen to him. He forces him to just obey the commands:

BERNICK. You read and think too much, Aune; it does you no good, and that is what makes you dissatisfied with your lot.

AUNE. It is not, Mr. Bernick; but I cannot bear to see one good workman dismissed after another, to starve because of these machines.

BERNICK. Hm! When the art of printing was discovered, many a quill-driver was reduced to starvation.

AUNE. Would you have admired the art so greatly if you had been a quill-driver in those days, sir?

BERNICK. I did not send for you to argue with you. I sent for you to tell you that the "Indian Girl" must be ready to put to sea the day (Pillars of Society 417)

When Bernick threatens Aune about his dismissal, Aune feels compelled to surrender before him and agrees to his terms and condition. Bernick warns him by saying:
BERNICK. Oh, where there's a will there's a way. Yes or no; give me a decisive answer, or consider yourself discharged on the spot.

*(Pillars of Society 420)*

He continues his speech to force Aune to accept his conditions by blaming him for not accepting the new trends and for being ‘obstinate.’

BERNICK. Still, if there is nothing else for it, the lesser must go down before the greater; the individual must be sacrificed to the general welfare. I can give you no other answer; and that, and no other, is the way of the world. You are an obstinate man, Aune! You are opposing me, not because you cannot do otherwise, but because you will not exhibit 'the superiority of machinery over manual labour'. *(420)*

When Aune is conditionally pressed to make the ship named ‘Indian Girl’ ready to sail or he loses his job, he gets the ship ready for sail, but this action of his, brings him under suspicion and Krap reports to Bernick about the issue.

KRAP. The "Indian Girl" can sail tomorrow, too; but I am sure she will not get very far.

BERNICK. What do you mean?

KRAP. Just this--that I believe Aune intends to let the "Indian Girl" go to the bottom with every mother’s son on board.

BERNICK. Good God!--what makes you think that?

BERNICK. I cannot believe it, Krap. I cannot and will not believe such a thing of Aune.

KRAP. I am very sorry--but it is the simple truth. Something very suspicious is going on. No new timbers put in, as far as I could see,
only stopped up and tinkered at, and covered over with sailcloth and tarpaulins and that sort of thing—an absolute fraud. The "Indian Girl" will never get to New York; she will go to the bottom like a cracked pot.

BERNICK. This is most horrible! But what can be his object, do you suppose?

KRAP. Probably he wants to bring the machines into discredit—wants to take his revenge—wants to force you to take the old hands on again … but, excuse me, what do you propose to do?

BERNICK. Report the affair, naturally. We cannot, of course, let ourselves become accomplices in such a crime. I could not have such a thing on my conscience. Moreover, it will make a good impression, both on the press and on the public in general, if it is seen that I set all personal interests aside and let justice take its course. (Pillars of Society 447-448)

Bernick withdraws from the entire event. First he compels an honest man like Aune to anyhow complete the work of repairing the ‘Indian Girl’ within no time and when he does so he is blamed of the misconduct. Not once does he realize why Aune behaves so unusually. Instead he conspires to trap Aune and take the credit of community welfare himself.

The entire incident is the depiction of another kind of immorality on the part of the rich class and the conditional compulsion on the poor people who were unwillingly forced to act immorally, if need be.

It is during this period that immorality, draped in moral attire, gained a new recognition in society. An Enemy of the People, is a grave satire on the innate
immorality among the educated and powerful rich class who have strong influences on the entire society. In this context Boyesen expresses his views in these words “Ibsen had endeavored to demonstrate that the moral sources of society were poisoned and corrupt; his representative in the play makes the same discovery in regard to the water-supply of the town of which he is an inhabitant.” (Boyesen 235)

In this play, Ibsen reproaches, those officials and dignitaries who deliberately ignore the corrupt practices going on around them. Instead of keeping a check and prohibiting those, they encourage such practices and remain unnoticed themselves.

Peter Stockmann, The Mayor of a coastal town of Norway, forces his brother and the Medical Officer of the Municipal Baths, Dr. Thomas Stockmann, to withdraw his report about the contamination of the Baths, which he refuses to agree to. All influential people like Hovstad, the Editor of the ‘People’s Messenger’, Billing, the sub editor and Aslaksen, a printer, assure him their support in exposing the truth about the baths and in getting them disinfected but Peter Stockmann, uses his influence to sway them away from this noble deed. Dr. Stockmann endeavors to treat the baths of its contamination so that it may not be harmful to others. He says:

DR. STOCKMANN. Because it is not merely a question of water-supply and drains now, you know. No--it is the whole of our social life that we have got to purify and disinfect”. (An Enemy of the People 225)

All those people who most readily stand by Dr. Stockmann in the beginning of the play withdraw their support instantly, the moment the Mayor takes them into his confidence. A misleading speech by the Mayor is enough to wash all their morality and dutifulness. The same people, who had spoken quite highly of him, isolate him for, for power and charge him of being ‘an enemy of the people’:
ASLAKSEN. By the votes of everyone here except a tipsy man, this meeting of citizens declares Dr. Thomas Stockmann to be an enemy of the people. (An Enemy of the People 265)

A genuine concern for his townsfolk, an honest concern for all other people and a noble cause in mind, does not pay Dr. Stockmann what he had expected. All his virtue blemishes in front of those corrupt, immoral and deceitful people, who cannot bear the sight of a virtuous man like him. These immoral hypocrites cover themselves under the cloaks of morality and take advantage of the innocence of people.

Preaching morality, gospels of accepted social behaviour, moral codes etc. were some common issues, frequently discussed in the society. Society’s self-destructive tendency of running behind useless morals has occupied prominence in Ibsen’s various dramas, for example in A Doll’s House Helmer, expects his wife to set an example before their children by being moral and religious. His doctrines of morality take away all reasoning from Nora and she is forced to believe what Helmer wants her to believe. “Self-sacrifice has been drummed into her head as the womanly ideal. Suddenly she is called upon to give a moral judgment; she has none to give. But she knows that self-sacrifice should be her heroic aim.” (Haldane 192) He drills it into the mind of Nora that ‘deceitful mother’ and father, exercise strong influence over their children. He reinforces his opinion by giving the example of Krogstad, whose immoral influence lays a negative impact on his children:

HELMER. My dear, I have often seen it in the course of my life as a lawyer. Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother.

NORA. Why do you only say--mother?
HELMER. It seems most commonly to be the mother's influence, though naturally a bad father's would have the same result. Every lawyer is familiar with the fact. This Krogstad, now, has been persistently poisoning his own children with lies and dissimulation; that is why I say he has lost all moral character. (Holds out his hands to her.) That is why my sweet little Nora must promise me not to plead his cause. Give me your hand on it. Come, come, what is this? Give me your hand. There now, that's settled. I assure you it would be quite impossible for me to work with him; I literally feel physically ill when I am in the company of such people. (A Doll’s House 36-37)

Like Helmer, Pastor Manders (Ghosts) is the mouthpiece of the moral preachers of his age. He also believes in the morally blessed society. He believes that the basis of a happy family, a healthy society and a progressive nation is morality. Immorality was a curse for the entire society. Immorality was a multilayered concept. It prevailed in the society in various forms. Ibsen was a realist. He believed in bringing out reality in the simplest manner without decorating it. He wrote what he saw. Nothing in his dramas was a flight away from life. His works revolved around the real life situations. He did not overstate immorality which had many dimensions and varieties:

In fact, Ibsen writes of his times, his contemporaries, and the social and political concerns and problems of the day. He is the first dramatist in modern drama who criticizes severely the social and political circumstances of his society. He puts under debate the relationship between sexes, social and political moralities, commercial
considerations versus general social considerations, environmental considerations the individual emancipation etc. in his realistic plays, Ibsen is mercilessly in his quest to expose all social façade, hypocrisy and pretence. He is an inflexible and destructive dramatist of all false idols and corruption and dynamiter of all social and political deceit and dishonesty. He endeavors to deracinate every stone of social structure. He is looking for truthfulness and freedom. (Goldman 12)

Immorality was manifold. It was be in the form of an illicit relation (that of Old Werle and Gina in A Wild Duck or of Captain Alving and Johanna in Ghosts etc.), double standards in life (like those adopted by Helmer in A Doll’s House and Karsten Bernick in Pillars Of Society), making money through illegal and corrupt procedures (like Karsten Bernick in Pillars Of Society and Krogstad in A Doll’s House who made money through wrong procedures), one’s character assassination (like that of Karsten Bernick in Pillars Of Society, Peter Stockmann in An Enemy Of People or Engstrand in Ghosts etc.) These and many more are the types of immoralities which were prevalent in Ibsen’s age. Immoral people were looked down upon yet the influential people managed to enjoy the fruits of immorality and go unnoticed. They had one aim in life and that was to benefit themselves. Since morality was much talked about and held good importance in society, immorality was masked some way or the other. Mrs. Alving in Ghosts does the same to save the reputation of her late husband who practiced immoral behaviour throughout his life and his wife just put a curtain over it:

MANDERS. And it is to this man that you raise a memorial?

MRS. ALVING. There you see the power of an evil conscience.

MANDERS. Evil—? What do you mean?
MRS. ALVING. It always seemed to me impossible but that the truth must come out and be believed. So the Orphanage was to deaden all rumours and set every doubt at rest. (125)

A glimpse of immorality is visible even in the elite and self controlled humans such as Dr. Rank in *A Doll’s House*. The Helmers give him the recognition of a family member. They regard him as an inseparable part of their lives. Dr. Rank is their friend, companion and confidant. They blindly rely in his companionship but in spite as soon as he gets a chance he flirts with Nora and expresses his love for her. He is well aware about the sound relationship between the Helmer and Nora, yet he takes an opportunity to put forward his feelings to Nora:

NORA. More than anyone else. I know you are my truest and best friend, and so I will tell you what it is. Well, Doctor Rank, it is something you must help me to prevent. You know how devotedly, how inexpressibly deeply Helmer loves me; he would never for a moment hesitate to give his life for me.

RANK. (leaning toward her). Nora--do you think he is the only one--?

NORA. (with a slight start). The only one--?

RANK. The only one who would gladly give his life for your sake.

NORA. (sadly). Is that it?

RANK. I was determined you should know it before I went away, and there will never be a better opportunity than this. Now you know it, Nora. And now you know, too, that you can trust me as you would trust no one else (52-53)

Even when Nora feels discomforted with Dr. Rank’s remarks, he continues with his confession:
RANK. To have loved you as much as anyone else does? Was that horrid? (53)

A man of Dr. Rank’s stature is not expected to behave in such a manner. The family who shelters him, treats him like a family, is rewarded by Dr. Rank, in this way. This is an example of a subtle immorality which was evident in Ibsen’s age. The higher the social status, the variety in the dishonest methods of the people was evident.

There were other means of deceiving people in the age too. Selfishness was and has been a distinct feature of human character in all ages. There have always been people who have worked only to fulfill their own selfish motives. They perform all actions simply to achieve their personal motives. There are several examples of such selfish characters in Ibsen’s plays who are so like the immoral counterparts of those times. Krogstad in *A Doll’s House* is one of those characters whose sole aim throughout his professional career was to make profit by any means. He secretly lends money to Nora by making her sign a bond and when he falls in trouble he uses it as a weapon for self defense. He blackmails Nora to advocate his case before Helmer. He deeply pressurizes Nora to persuade Helmer to withdraw his action of dismissing him. He meets Nora just before Christmas and very cunningly, persuades her to convince Helmer else he would ruin her happiness. At first Nora does not understand the purpose of his arrival before the expected date:

NORA. Today? It is not the first of the month yet.

KROGSTAD. No, it is Christmas Eve, and it will depend on yourself what sort of a Christmas you will spend. (*A Doll’s House* 27)

When Nora asks about the reason behind his arrival, he simply warns her either to use her influence or to be ready for the worst:
KROGSTAD. (changing his tone). Mrs. Helmer, you will be so good as to use your influence on my behalf.

NORA. What? What do you mean?

KROGSTAD. You will be so kind as to see that I am allowed to keep my subordinate position in the Bank. (A Doll’s House 28)

Krogstad had also forged signatures once. This he had done out of his selfishness where as Nora was forced out of circumstances to do the same but the unkind attitude of Krogstad did not let him sway from his motive:

HELMER . He forged someone’s name. (A Doll’s House 36)

The selfish and stubborn Krogstad blackmails Nora to take her husband into confidence and plead his cause before him. He visions this situation as an even better opportunity to raise himself to a higher position in the bank. Nora’s innocent forgery raises his greedy ambitions even higher and he starts demanding even more. His destructive and venal characteristic enhance with Nora’s growing fears about the disclosure of the forgery:

KROGSTAD. I will tell you. I want to rehabilitate myself, Mrs. Helmer; I want to get on; and in that your husband must help me. For the last year and a half I have not had a hand in anything dishonourable, and all that time I have been struggling in most restricted circumstances. I was content to work my way up step by step. Now I am turned out, and I am not going to be satisfied with merely being taken into favour again. I want to get on, I tell you. I want to get into the Bank again, in a higher position. Your husband must make a place for me-

NORA. That he will never do!
KROGSTAD. He will; I know him; he dare not protest. And as soon as I am in there again with him, then you will see! Within a year I shall be the manager's right hand. It will be Nils Krogstad and not Helmer who manages the Bank.

NORA. That's a thing you will never see!

KROGSTAD. Do you mean that you will--? *(A Doll’s House 58)*

When Nora refuses to adhere to his wicked intentions, he uses his tongue as a weapon to compel her:

NORA. I have courage enough for it now.

KROGSTAD. Oh, you can't frighten me. A fine, spoilt lady like you.

*(A Doll’s House 58)*

Another example of such mean and opportunist people can be seen in Regina *(Ghosts)*. She is one of those kinds, who can commit any kind of debauchery to fulfill their selfish designs. The whole life she had been provided care and protection by Mrs. Alving who made it sure that she would not fall under any harmful or evil influences. She saved her from the clutches of her dissolute father Engstrand who wanted her to become a prostitute. She provided her with the best care and guidance and involved her in all important household deeds. She wanted to make the best of her. Regina remained loyal to her as long as she was being profited. She even flirted with Oswald as long as he was healthy and fit but as soon as his disease was discovered she quit the house of the Alving and decided to lead a life of her own:

REGINA. Yes, but she was one of that sort, all the same. Oh, I've often suspected it; but—and now, if you please, ma'am, may I be allowed to go away at once?

MRS. ALVING. Do you really wish it, Regina?
REGINA. Yes, indeed I do.

MRS. ALVING. Of course you can do as you like; but—

OSWALD. [Goes towards REGINA.] Go away now? Your place is here.

REGINA. Merci, Mr. Alving!—or now, I suppose, I may say Oswald.

But I can tell you this wasn't at all what I expected.

MRS. ALVING. Regina, I have not been frank with you—

REGINA. No, that you haven't indeed. If I'd known that Oswald was an invalid, why—And now, too, that it can never come to anything serious between us—I really can't stop out here in the country and wear myself out nursing sick people.

OSWALD. Not even one who is so near to you?

REGINA. No, that I can't. A poor girl must make the best of her young days, or she'll be left out in the cold before she knows where she is. And I, too, have the joy of life in me, Mrs. Alving!

MRS. ALVING. Unfortunately, you leave. But don't throw yourself away, Regina.

REGINA. Oh, what must be must be. If Oswald takes after his father, I take after my mother, I daresay. (Ghosts 165)

Without giving a second thought to her decision, without caring for all what Mrs. Alving had done for her, without thinking about the need of staying there, she decides to leave the house at once. She does not want to spoil her life for those people who have always treated her like a family. Thanklessness, ungratefulness and selfishness, were quite common characteristic of many people in those times and...
most of Ibsen’s plays include characters with these traits, which are representations of real life.

Karsten Bernick in *Pillars Of Society* is a representation of a different category of human beings who plan, design, profit themselves, commit deception and yet they are exonerated of all blame easily because of their social standing, public image and their strong financial hold. Initially he refuses to let the railway project be allowed to be promoted in his town. But a year later the same Mr. Bernick secretly plans out the whole venture and quietly purchases all the property including the forest land, the waterfalls etc. along the branch line. He does this work so secretly that his closest friends including, Krap, Rorlund, Hilmar etc. do not know a word about it:

HILMAR. Oh, he is greatly taken up with the rumour that is going around, and is preparing to dish up an article about it.

BERNICK. What rumour?

HILMAR. About the extensive purchase of property along the branch line, of course.

BERNICK. What? Is there such a rumour as that going about?

HILMAR. It is all over the town. I heard it at the club when I looked in there. They say that one of our lawyers has quietly bought up, on commission, all the forest land, all the mining land, all the waterfalls--

BERNICK. Don't they say whom it was for?

HILMAR. At the club they thought it must be for some company, not connected with this town, that has got a hint of the scheme you have in hand, and has made haste to buy before the price of these properties went up. Isn't it villainous?--ugh!
BERNICK. Villainous?

HILMAR. Yes, to have strangers putting their fingers into our pie—and one of our own local lawyers lending himself to such a thing! And now it will be outsiders that will get all the profits!

BERNICK. But, after all, it is only an idle rumour. (*Pillars Of Society* 450-451)

In spite of being deeply involved in this project he feigns to be absolutely unaware, which proves how disloyal he is to his friends and family and what a big pretender he is. His close ones regard him an epitome of morality. In a conversation between Lona and Mrs. Bernick, Mrs. Bernick talks about Karsten as being highly moral as he had portrayed himself before her:

MRS. BERNICK. Do you think a man like Karsten, with his strictly moral way of thinking…

LONA. Pooh! He is not so terribly moral.

MRS. BERNICK. What have you the audacity to say?

LONA. I have the audacity to say that Karsten is not any more particularly moral than anybody else. (*Pillars of Society* 436)

Bernick is one of those men who do not speak their soul. They are those imposters who speak highly and act lowly. The entire railway project is kept a secret from everyone including his family and yet he boasts of the family as being close knit and together. He speaks of an ideal family:

MRS. RUMMEL. Your family affection is beautiful, Mr. Bernick!

BERNICK. Well, the family is the kernel of society. A good home, honoured and trusty friends, a little snug family circle where no
disturbing elements can cast their shadow - *(Pillars Of Society 407)*

People like Bernick feign to work for the betterment of the community and their people but in reality they are those profit makers whose sole consideration behind all activities is to gain the maximum for themselves. First they form deep rooted contacts with the people of their community and slowly and gradually they consume the society making it empty from within but always pose to be deeply concerned about the welfare and betterment of their people. Repeatedly Bernick speaks of his welfare of his society while in reality; he simply works to achieve his selfish objectives:

**RORLUND.** Do you really promise us so much, then, from this undertaking, gentlemen?

**BERNICK.** Yes, undoubtedly. Think what a lever it will be to raise the status of our whole community. Just think of the immense tracts of forest-land that it will make accessible; think of all the rich deposits of minerals we shall be able to work; think of the river with one waterfall above another! Think of the possibilities that open out in the way of manufactories!...We, the practical men of business, will be the support of the community by extending its welfare within as wide a radius as possible; and our women— *(Pillars Of Society 406-407)*

His actual concern for his society is projected in one of his conversations with Lona, where Lona speaks or rather comments sarcastically about the works Bernick has done for the town:
LONA. Mr. Bernick's great and good works everywhere. We have been up into the Recreation Ground you have presented to the town...And you have built a new school-house too; and I hear that the town has to thank you for both the gas supply and the water supply.

BERNICK. Well, one ought to work for the good of the community one lives in. (*Pillars Of Society* 424)

Lona is well aware of Bernick’s real intentions behind all the good he has done for the community. This statement of Bernick is analyzed by Lona in the most natural manner. Lona is not amongst those who consider morality, a criterion, for typifying good people. She believes in reality and truthfulness more than anything else. Therefore, when Bernick talks about the welfare of the community, she replies by saying:

LONA. That is an excellent sentiment, brother-in-law, but it is a pleasure, all the same, to see how people appreciate you. I am not vain, I hope; but I could not resist reminding one or two of the people we talked to that we were relations of yours. (*Pillars Of Society* 424)

Bernick often speaks of modesty and selflessness but none of his comments appear to be true. He is one of those rich class people who believe that society is being run because of them.

BERNICK. Do you suppose I acted as I did from selfish motives? If I had stood alone then, I would have begun all over again with cheerful courage. But you do not understand how the life of a man of business, with his tremendous responsibilities, is bound up with
that of the business which falls to his inheritance. Do you realise that the prosperity or the ruin of hundreds--of thousands--depends on him? Can you not take into consideration the fact that the whole community in which both you and I were born would have been affected to the most dangerous extent if the house of Bernick had gone to smash? (*Pillars of Society* 439)

Ibsen has satirized those high class people who consider themselves as pillars of society. Such people feel that it is they who are the backbone of society and society would not be able to exist if they were not there. On the other hand, Lona is the voice of Ibsen. Her speeches to Bernick are the thoughts of Ibsen or any common man. She replies to Bernick’s verdict in the following words:

**LONA.** Then is it for the sake of the community that you have maintained your position these fifteen years upon a lie?... But your fellow citizens know nothing about the lie?

**BERNICK.** The lie?

**LONA.** Yes - the lie you have persisted in for these fifteen years.

**BERNICK.** Do you mean to say that you call that?

**LONA.** I call it a lie - a threefold lie: first of all, there is the lie towards me; then, the lie towards Betty; and then, the lie towards Johan. (*Pillars Of Society* 440-441).

Lona is the representative of a common man, of a true human being whose life is not under any influence of immorality though initially it seemed so. She is an example of a real, moralist, though her immediate society may not consider her to be so. What no one could do what Bernick could not do by himself, Lona made him do? She showed the real mirror to him:
LONA. But you yourself, Karsten? Do you feel within yourself no
impulse urging you to shake yourself free of this lie? … What right
have you to the position you hold?

BERNICK. Every day during these fifteen years I have earned some
little right to it - by my conduct, and by what I have achieved by
my work.

LONA. True, you have achieved a great deal by your work, for
yourself as well as for others. You are the richest and most
influential man in the town; nobody in it dares do otherwise than
derer to your will, because you are looked upon as a man without
spot or blemish; your home is regarded as a model home, and your
conduct as a model of conduct. But all this grandeur, and you with
it, is founded on a treacherous morass. A moment may come and a
word may be spoken, when you and all your grandeur will be
engulfed in the morass, if you do not save yourself in time.

BERNICK. Lona--what is your object in coming here?

LONA. I want to help you to get firm ground under your feet, Karsten.

*(Pillars of Society 441)*

Lona wants Bernick to cast off his cloak of morality which he wears for the
‘good of the community’ (424) and to be a genuine pillar of society. She urges him to
finish off with the lie on which his reputation rests and to restart his life with honesty
and values.

Lona (earnestly and with emphasis): You have to go and be a pillar of society,
brother-in-law. *(Pillars of Society 445)*
All the plays of Ibsen are like eye openers for the immoral lot of his
countrymen. Just as Lona warns Bernick about the consequences of thriving on a lie,
so does Ibsen, who alarms people to be real and genuine. He demands them to
understand the difference between reality and hypocrisy. He attacks the immoral
society and all those self declared ‘pillars of society’ that use society instead of being
useful to it. They simply aim at prospering at the cost of the simple hearted townsfolk
without caring for them. Haldane tells us about the targeted people of Ibsen, “It is
against this lying morality of modern society that Ibsen directs his sequence of
modern plays. He takes what are considered respectable and praiseworthy men in
society, no blunderers and stage-villains, but those who pass as being reputable
citizens and honest men; and he strips them of their fine clothes, and shows their
souls naked to the world, self-seeking and contemptible.” (176-177)

Norway had never made Ibsen happy. The people there and their approaches
towards life had always upset him. The hypocrisy, the selfishness, the feigned moral
behaviour, the loss of reasoning, the acceptance to the age old social norms which
were no longer valid, the suppression of the poor by the rich, the confiscation of the
individualism by the society, the habit of being a mob, the attitude of self sacrifice of
the weaker people, sophisticatedly running behind money, etc. are some of the social
issues Ibsen has written about in his plays. Ibsen was deeply hurt with the show of
morality by the people of rank and by others who took advantage of the common man
to fulfill their selfish purposes. Through his plays, he wanted us to cudgel our brains
to see the reality underlying the morals and pretence of such hypocrites whom we had
allotted high ranks and positions.

Ibsen suffered excessive criticism for his treatment of morality. His plays
were categorized as scandalous but nothing deterred him from writing the truth.
He saw that only through the individual himself, may a man overcome and set aside the limitations, the dullness, hypocrisies, lifelessness, weaknesses, that the tyranny of the state thrusts upon all alike; just as only by his own individual will may he overcome the curses that lie black upon him through heredity - that neither state nor laws can give a man his strength. (Haldane 18)

Hence we see that through most of his plays, Ibsen has consistently tried to remove the darkness of ignorance from the minds of the people. He was not a dramatist who wrote for mere entertainment. His purpose was enlightenment of the mind and soul of people. His creations, whether it was Pastor Manders or Mrs. Alving, Karsten Bernick or Lona, Dr. Stockmann or Peter Stockmann, Werle or Gregers, Helmer, or Nora, all of these expose the society and its mush talked morality. All these characters are examples from real life. A study of his dramas stirs the minds of the readers who are bound to think about the resemblance they bear with us or with some or the other acquaintance of ours. It had similar impact of his audience even then but the so hyped moral structure of the society forbade them to talk or discuss these dramas or the issues presented in them. Although he did not gain as much as open recognition as he deserved, during his life time, but today he stands as the greatest playwright of the modern plays and it is the transparent treatment of life, in his plays, that win him this recognition. To conclude in the words of Moses, “Ibsen does not charm so much as he fascinates: his true worth, as an artist, is that he stimulates, he provokes the workings of conscience…. Only after one has been taught to reject the lie is one able to accept the truth. He would rather struggle than be at peace. (Moses 508-509)
WORK CITED


