



VISAGE OF FEMININE OBSTACLES IN HENRIK IBSEN'S A DOLL'S HOUSE

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Abstract

The main goal of this research is to concentrate on the feminist study of Henrik Ibsen's famous play A Doll's House. Henrik Ibsen was a great dramatist and a well-known poet of 19th century. Social issues were the major themes of his most plays. Ibsen has raised his voice in favor of women and women's rights in this famous play A Doll's House. Critical Discourse Analysis is an approach that examines the connections between language and socio-political aspects in which it is used. It investigates issues like gender, politics, race, economy, religion etc. which are connected with the use of language in social setting. The present study does the critical discourse analysis of Ibsen's well-known play A Doll's House. The results of this study are based on CDA model of Van Dijk. According to Van Dijk's CDA primarily studies the way social power abuse, supremacy, and discrimination are endorsed, replicated, and repelled by text and talk in socio-political contexts. The findings of this study reveal that Van Dijk's model is equally fit to comprehend the writer's perception of feminism in written texts. The researcher will explore of how and to what degree Ibsen, one who mostly famous for his dramas and too been accredited for his feminist characters how he deals with women's issues and how he appreciates women's struggle. Through the Character of Nora Helmer his conception for the equality is presented subsequently in this play. The researcher will conclude with the justification how Henrik Ibsen through his female characters try to show some common problems faced by women in patriarchal society and how these women are struggling very harder to escape from this trouble.

Key Words: Feminist, Patriarchal, Acquaintance, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Literature is true reflection of life and the social conditions of a society. Patriarchy and male hegemony were the common traits of Victorian age in which women were downgraded and limited to domestic domain of life. Women's fight for their rights and women's rebellion against such biased system were great social problems of that time which were addressed by the writers of that age through their writings. Henrik Ibsen is known as a father of modern drama. Through his literary works; Ghosts, Hedda Gabbler and A Doll's House Ibsen painted social problems of his age. The present study deals with his famous drama A Doll's House which is the story of a daring woman Nora who makes detriments for her husband and children. Under masculine power of her husband she feels like she is deprived of her own identity and self-esteem as Torvald who treats her like a doll. Torvald as a product of patriarchal social system was more concerned about the protection and propagation of his ideological power both at home and in society. For this purpose he launches some strict rules for his wife to obey.

How the state of mind affects our discourse that causes to divulge what is hidden under the layer of our realization it will be highlighted in this research work. CDA Critical Discourse Analysis will be used as a tool by researcher. CDA is a critical method for study of linguistic structures including words and their reciprocal relation in their social and political situation. In his paper, Teun A Van Dijk (1995) expounds the definition of "critical discourse analysis"; Critical Discourse Analysis has become the general label for a special approach to the study of text and talk, emerging from critical linguistics, critical semiotics and in general from a socio-politically conscious and oppositional way of investigating language, discourse and communication". In spite that the Characters of A Doll's House do not seem very outstanding still the play is celebrated an inordinate contribution to feminist literature. Ibsen never openly acknowledged himself as a feminist but some of his speeches and links prove that he was concerned with the women's freedom



and gender equality; this is also proven by his play's development and characters. A lot of tribute and devotion is given to the central character, Nora Helmer, who is more or less the true embodiment of a modern woman when it comes to choice and behavior by the end of the third and final act. Painting the Nora's character, Ibsen (1879) foresees the "new women" being rebellion against patriarchal society and fighting for her rights. Making contribution in feministic movement was not Ibsen's only purpose of writing this novel but also to seek the right of every individual who has his own identity, sense, thought and feelings and has equal rights to enjoy equal privilege in the society.

Literature Review

The English word "discourse" originated from the Latin word "discursus," which means conversation or dialogue. But contemporary science gives speech a lot of definitions. Discourse is explained here in the context of linguistics, namely applied linguistics, since it impacts on many different facets of human life. Two sets of linguists are choosing the discourse. One group merely refers to "Texts," whereas another group uses "Speech." In order to highlight significant units such as paragraphs, utterances, full texts, or genres, Fairclough (1992) separated discourse into two comprehensive sets. Using the word as a countable noun, the discourse offers an example. Cook (1990) asserts that "discourse" can include books, short conversations, or moans. In 1988, Hodge and Kress clarified the distinctions between speech, text, and message. The lowest semiotic form is communication, which has a social content, purpose, source, and objective. The two larger units are conversation and text. "CDA is used to assess critical discourses, including politics, race, gender, social class, and hegemony," Van Dijk stated.

Van Dijk perceives a text composed of various levels and frameworks, each of which reinforces the others. He divides it up into three parts. The macro structure comes first. One can observe the general or broad meaning of a piece by looking at the topic or theme that is portrayed in a story. Next is the superstructure. The text's textual organisation, or how its elements are combined to create the book, is referred to by this discourse structure. The third is the microstructure. Can a word, sentence, statement, clause, paraphrase, or other brief passage of a text convey the content of a speech? A useful perspective for examining how rhetoric and persuasion are used in communication is a discourse framework. The message Van Dijk claims that such elements can be used to examine any text. Despite its diversity, it is composed of several parts that cooperate to support one another. Van Dijk distinguishes three levels of discourse: text, social cognition, and social context. By combining the three discourse dimensions, Dijk provides a comprehensive analysis. What is being evaluated is how the text supports a particular theme through the employment of textual group and discourse techniques. Rahimi went on to say that CDA supports the idea that developing critical thinking skills is beneficial to a society in which equality and justice are objectified and power is shared by all people. This logical ability encourages readers and listeners to take action against prejudice and the unfair distribution of power by enabling them to discern between language that is biased and condemnatory. Henrik Ibsen's Norwegian drama *A Doll's House* has long drawn the interest of scholars and critics. The work has been the subject of several studies. The play has been the subject of numerous textual analysis techniques. Joan Templeton (1989) highlights Ibsen's feminist stance. He clarifies that when Ibsen began writing the novel in the summer of 1879, he was neither particularly interested in women's rights nor planning to compose a work on a feminist topic. However, when he came upon certain dubious issues in the spring of that year, he not only became interested in women's rights but also began to enthusiastically support the feminist cause. His approach to authoring the book then shifted to the topic of women's rights. In his paper, Balaky (2016) critically evaluates Ibsen's book from a



feminist perspective. He draws attention to the way Henrik Ibsen depicts a liberal woman in his play who rejects the traditional life that patriarchal society dictates. Balaky notes that Ibsen does away with the stereotypical portrayal of women in English literature in this way.

A Doll's House does not appear to be particularly feminist at first glance, but as the plot unfolds and approaches its conclusion, the play challenges contemporary misconceptions about women and the lead character. Nora transforms into a unique human being from a doll and a custodial figure whose sole function is to entertain her spouse. Additionally, Hossain (2016) examines Ibsen's play A Doll's House and his depiction of women, determining how Ibsen depicts women's responses to their pain, relegation, mistreatment, and suppression. He elevates Ibsen's work to highlight a powerful female character who defies society as a whole in order to discover who she is.

In his work, Barry (2012) examines the treatment of gender inequality in Ibsen's play A Doll's House. He declares: Throughout the play's body, Ibsen portrays Nora and Torvald using stereotyped gender attributes. In the play's final minutes, he strongly challenges the stereotypes to demonstrate that interior strength and weakness are characteristics of humanity rather than gender. Yuehua (2009) utilises A Doll's House to demonstrate that if a man clearly dominates a woman, she can challenge his authority and control with her strong philosophical abilities. In a culture dominated by men, men hold social, political, and household power because they dominate the economy. Azam (2014) reviews Victorian literature and how women were portrayed during that era. He has attempted to ascertain "the conception of females and women's rights in Victorian period and Victorian literature" in his study work. Azam (2014) goes on to show how Ibsen's A Doll's House and numerous other fictitious works of art exposed the general public to the crucial truths of feminism.

Nora Helmer, a lady who left home for her own dignity, is embodied in Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House. In this literary work, the family is described as one in which women are viewed as dolls—dead but ornamental in the hands of males. The portrayal of married life also included the image of women. As a result of Nora's arranged marriage, she was rejected. After examining the literature, it is discovered that numerous academics have focused their insightful research on gender bias against women and feminism in Ibsen's masterpiece, A Doll's House.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows;

1. Divide the women Gender roles in the patriarchal society.
2. Identifying the elements of loss of women's self-identity and representation of women through the feminist study of Doll's House
3. Find out that either transformation of Nora leads towards identity crisis or achievement of individuality.

Research Questions

1. What are the problems and issues related to women's lack of freedom of thought as well as of action?
2. How does the writer, Ibsen, divide the women's gender roles?

Research Methodology

A way which is carried out by a researcher to conduct his or her research is known as research methodology. Van Dijk model and critical discourse analysis have been used to examine the female language in Ibsen's A Doll's House. According to Van Dijk (2004), a subfield of discourse analysis research called critical discourse analysis emphasizes on how social power exploitation, dominance, and inequality are expressed, reproduced, and resisted through text and speech in



social and political settings. Critical discourse analysts seek to understand, depict, and eventually confront societal injustices through such an insubordinate investigation. According to Griffin (2005), discourses "have meanings, force, and effects" in social contexts. In contrast, CDA primarily concentrates on "discourse," which is incomprehensible without context. Feminist theory concentrates on gender politics, power dynamics, and sexuality in an effort to understand the nature of women's inequalities. Additionally, it advocates for causes including fair pay, sexual harassment, discrimination, sexual violence, domestic violence, maternity leave, and procreative rights. Among the topics covered by feminism include patriarchy, labelling, discrimination, and subordination. Feminist philosophy is based on the idea that a person's gender shouldn't dictate their rights, status, or obligations. Many people have criticised modern feminist theory for being primarily, though not exclusively, associated with the academic middle class in the West. However, feminist action is a grassroots movement that transcends racial and class boundaries. It tackles issues pertaining to women in that society and is historically accurate. Some topics include universal themes, rape, incest, and mothering. *The Second Sex* (1949), a thorough examination of women's oppression and the first tract of modern feminism, is the most well-known work by French author, social philosopher, and feminist Simon de Beauvoir (1908–1986). It addresses how women have been treated historically and is frequently cited as a foundational text in feminist philosophy. De Beauvoir's idea of women as "the other" is demonstrated by it, since she states that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (301). It claims that traditional society has overlooked women's experiences. "Two distinct beings, in different circumstances, face to face in freedom and seeking justification of their existence through one another, will always live an adventure full of risk and promise," as de Beauvoir states in her book *The Second Sex* (248). "Our societies are patriarchal and a woman must break the bonds in order to be herself as a human being," according to Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (125). "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 a judicial system that judges feminine, from a masculine point of view," Ibsen states in a note written for *A Doll's House* in 1878 (Meyer, 1971b:9).

Findings

1. The findings of the research divulge the position of women in patriarchal societies where they are treated as inferior beings.
2. It also reveals through CDA how individual's behavior towards gender is imitated in their discourses.
3. It can also be part of findings that how Ibsen differentiates feminism in his work.
4. Findings also show that power and identity are crucial for people to keep their status benign and high ranked in patriarchal societies.
5. The data also throws light on the key factors that make women inferior being in society.
6. The study also illustrates how a feminist can advocate for the autonomy of women.

Discussion

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* highlights the numerous societal and personal glitches that rise when women lack the freedom to think and act freely. The play, written in 1879, analyses the preventive standards of 19th-century European society, where women were expected to be meek, reliant, and limited to their domestic roles. One of the main issues in the play is the suppression of women's intellectual freedom. Nora Helmer, the protagonist, primarily seems to be a immature and frisky wife, but as the play grows, it becomes obvious that she has been treated as an intellectual inferior by her husband, Torvald. Torvald often infantilizes Nora, calling her "my little skylark" and "my little squirrel" (Act 1), supporting the idea that she is incompetent of serious



thought. This treatment averts her from developing her own opinions and making independent choices, leading her to covertly copy her father's signature on a loan to save Torvald's life. Women in Ibsen's society were economically dependent on men, which strictly constrained their freedom of action. Nora tells Mrs. Linde, "I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so." (Act 3). This reveals her apprehension that she has been monetarily and emotionally controlled, leading to her final decision to leave. Nora's frantic act of forgery reflects the bigger issue of women's lack of legal power. Since women could not take loans without a male custodian's consent, Nora's actions, though ethically vindicated, are supposed unlawful. Krogstad reminds Nora, "The law does not concern itself with motives." (Act 1). This shows how inflexible legal structures punish women for trying to exert agency. Nora's eventual understanding that she has been living as a "doll" in a "doll's house" (Act 3) highlights the emotional and psychological distress instigated by the lack of freedom. In her final conflict with Torvald, she says, "I must try to educate myself; I must stand quite alone if I am to recognize myself and everything about me." This moment shows her breaking free from domination and choosing self-discovery over conformity.

Ibsen thoroughly analyzes traditional gender roles throughout the play, representing how they trap both women and men in obstructive societal expectations. Throughout the play, Nora conversions from a submissive, lively wife to a liberated woman who discards societal norms. At first, she follows to Torvald's expectations, saying, "Whatever you do is always right." (Act 1). However, by the end, she rebels the stereotype, stating, "I believe that before all else, I am a human being, just as much as you are." (Act 3). Torvald, who epitomizes male-controlled authority, is exposed as weak and two-faced when he panics over Krogstad's letter. When he discovers the forgery, he yells, "Now you have ruined my happiness—jeopardized my future!" (Act 3), revealing his egocentricity. This contrasts with Nora's courage, showing that women are just as proficient of strength and independence as men. Mrs. Linde serves as a contrast to Nora, showing a woman who has worked and existed freely. She tells Nora, "I have learned to be self-reliant." (Act 1). This presents a counter example to the traditional dependent wife. Ibsen pulls to bits the misconception of the perfect marriage by displaying that Torvald's love is conditional. He only values Nora when she satisfies him, calling her a "little songbird", but when her secret is exposed, he turns unkind, saying, "From now on, forget happiness." (Act 3). The most radical moment in the play is when Nora leaves her husband and children, discarding her role as a wife and mother. She tells Torvald, "I must take steps to educate myself." (Act 3). This disregards the 19th-century concept that a woman's duty is merely to her family.

Through *A Doll's House*, Ibsen critiques the absence of freedom that women experience and steadily dismantles traditional gender roles. Nora's conversion from a submissive wife to an liberated woman challenges the notion that women should be submissive and dependent. By emphasizing legal, economic, and emotional oppression, Ibsen makes a powerful case for gender equality, making *A Doll's House* a eternal feminist work.

Both research questions explore themes of gender subjugation in *A Doll's House*, but they approach the issue from different viewpoints. While the first question centers on "the problems initiated by women's lack of freedom", the second inspects "how Ibsen vigorously criticizes those obstructive gender roles" through his characters and storyline. The first question highlights the "negative effects of patriarchal control" on women's lives. It inspects how Nora's lack of independence in thought and action leads to psychological tyranny, legal susceptibility, and economic dependency. The second question swings from examining the "problems" to discovering how Ibsen "challenges and deconstructs" these gender norms. Instead of only



depicting oppression, he presents “resistance and transformation”. In addition, both the questions have some resemblances; both deal with gender oppression in a patriarchal society. Both focus on Nora as the central character of women’s struggle and change. Both examine marriage as a sign of control at first, as a prison (Q1) and later, as something that can be rejected (Q2). Both highlight power disparities between men and women and how they shape identity and independence.

Teun A. van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a suitable framework for investigating *A Doll’s House* because it examines how “language, power, and ideology form social structures”, mainly gender roles. Using Van Dijk’s theory, we can examine both research questions “women’s lack of freedom” and “Ibsen’s dismantling of gender roles” through three key levels of discourse: “text (micro-level), cognition (meso-level), and society (macro-level)”. According to Van Dijk, discourse imitates and emphasizes “power hierarchies”. In *A Doll’s House*, the “language used by male characters” imposes women’s relegation, restraining their freedom of thought and action.

Textual Level (Micro-Analysis): Language and Power

Torvald’s “diminutive language” toward Nora calling her “my little skylark,” “my squirrel,” “little spendthrift” creates a “discursive power imbalance”. The use of “possessive pronouns” like “my” proposes ownership and control over Nora’s individuality. Torvald’s imperative statements (“You can’t do that, Nora.”) limit her autonomy. Language here “naturalizes gender inequality” by making submission seem loving rather than tyrannical.

Cognitive Level (Meso-Analysis): Social Perception and Internalized Tyranny

Nora initially “internalizes societal expectations”, considering her role is to please her husband and stay dutiful. She echoes Torvald’s values, saying, “Whatever you do is always right.” Mrs. Linde, however, interrupts this mindset by declaring, “I must work if I am to find a purpose in life.” Women’s self-perception is designed by prevailing philosophies. Nora is imprisoned in a “discursive framework” where obedience is romanticized.

Societal Level (Macro-Analysis): Power Structures and Gender Roles

The legal system in *A Doll’s House* echoes “institutionalized male dominance” (Nora is incapable to take a loan without a man’s approval). Krogstad tells Nora: “The law does not ask reasons.” This shows how the law ignores women’s agency. The “macro-discourse” (laws, economic dependence, and marriage standards) strengthens “patriarchal ideology”, making women’s suppression seem “natural” and lawfully obligatory.

Using Van Dijk’s framework, we see that “domination and struggle are molded through discourse”. “Women’s lack of freedom” is kept through “linguistic control, internalized ideologies, and societal norms”. Ibsen segregates gender roles by stimulating repressive language, changing women’s self-perception, and criticizing institutional structures. Thus, *A Doll’s House* is not just a feminist play it is a “discourse of resistance” that decomposes the very language and ideas that withstand patriarchy.

Conclusion

It is necessary to recast any discussion of *A Doll’s House* as either a play about women or a feminist play. In response to the question, “Is it just about women?” Ibsen said that *A Doll’s House* was a humanist drama rather than a feminist one when asked about his motivations for composing it. Ibsen asserted that it was about justice for all of humanity, not just women. It suggests that the problems of every individual are addressed in this drama. Thus, it may be claimed that even though *A Doll’s House* doesn’t seem very feminist at first, as the story progresses and the play gets closer to its ending, it challenges modern stereotypes about women. In summary, it can be argued that the author has used Kristine Krogstad and Nora-Torvald to illustrate gender-specific duties. The drama focusses on the challenge of preserving a distinct individuality—the feminine personality.



The play can be classified as feminist since it highlights the female voice and focusses on a woman's struggle for independence and power.

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