

SOCIAL REALISM IN “A DOLL’S HOUSE”

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Abstract:

Among the four problem-plays which construct the tetralogy in the middle phase of Ibsen’s literary career, the most remarkable play ‘A Doll’s House’ was penned second in the sequence. After publication of ‘The Pillars of Society’ in 1877, Ibsen resumed the thematic flow of socio-ethical consciousness in ‘A Doll’s House’ which was published in 1879. The condition of women in the 19th century Scandinavian society was really a matter of serious deliberation. Women were denied the basic rights given to men. **Vijaya Khatri**, researcher and a great scholar of English wrote that **women were considered weaker than men and thereby the gender roles were biased. Wives, mothers, daughters and sisters were confined to do household jobs and were restrained from pursuing higher education or indulging in any professional work, whereas men would go out and earn money for the home.** If a woman wanted to do something beyond their predefined roles, she would be reprimanded. There are three dimensions of Social Realism – individual life, society and human relationships. All these three dimensions form the foundation for Social Realism. Social Realism favors freedom of action for individuals over state control and emphasizes the moral worth, liberty and importance of each person. Society is the nucleus of concern in Social Realism. In this technique, the social life and activities are acutely observed in their usual form i.e. there is a simple recording of social events. Human-relationships form the integral part of study in Social Realism. The sole aim of a woman was to marry, reproduce offspring and serve them the rest of their lives. A married woman was not allowed by law to make deals without the consent of her husband. Women were even deprived of marital property in case of marital separation, albeit the separation is initiated by husband. They were not permitted to participate in any financial discussion or activity. They could not involve themselves in political activities like men. In the present paper the research scholars try to draw the public attention towards the most significant burning issue of the community, and stimulate pathos in the readers/audience by highlighting the sufferings of the most afflicted people of the time. Social Realism does not misrepresent or falsify life. It does not beautify the banality of ordinary life.

Key Words: Social Realism, Separation, Human –Relationship, Gender, Serve, Issues, People.

Introduction:

The term ‘**Social Realism**’ denotes portrayal of minutest details of society with emphasis to trivial, filthy, neglected and unclean subjects. A fiction is said to have adopted the narrative technique of Social Realism if the society portrayed in it replicates the actual society comprehensively in every aspect. It is a sort of laboratory where the problems of the ordinary human beings, evils of the society, problems of the individual and family, and the nature of human relationships are all impartially observed for judgment by the keen eyes. The gist of Social Realism is completeness and truthfulness in dealing with a social issue. Social Realism does not approve

peachiness. A Social Realist fiction differs from the Socialist Realist fiction in that, in the latter the society is depicted in its idealized form rather than its actual form, and along with presentation of the contemporary problems, their solutions are also offered. Contradicting Social Realism, there is sermonizing and didacticism in Socialist Realism which is the typical Marxist approach. Social Realism concentrates on the present whereas Socialist Realism probes into the future.

The approach of Social Realism in a literary work can be justified by the following six aspects:

1. There is a socio-critical perspective.
2. The action is in the contemporary setting.
3. The plot is natural, characters are plausible and the events are commonplace.
4. The controversial issues and problems of society are the subjects of debate and concern.
5. There is truthful and complete depiction of the society with point-to-point resemblance, and without any fancy, ornamentation and exaggeration.
6. No explanations, solutions or instructions are conveyed to the readers/audience.
7. Character is more important than action and plot.
8. Ethical choices are often the subject.
9. Attention is focused on bourgeoisie
10. Diction is natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic.

Objectives:

The objective and purpose of the present paper is to draw the attention of the readers towards the most significant burning issue of the community, and stimulate pathos in the readers/audience by highlighting the sufferings of the most afflicted people of the time. Social Realism does not misrepresent or falsify life. It does not beautify the banality of ordinary life. The research scholars further attract the attention of the readers and lovers of literature towards the miserable situation of women in the society. The research scholars write that the family is completely incomplete without women but they are not given proper respect and regards by us. We forget that in our day –to – day life they are equal to men and they always help and care us to lead a happy and peaceful life. The present attempt is a pleasant gift to the readers and the readers of the world who think that women are not inferior to men and their contributions are also very important for all-round development of the nation.

Research Methodology: The Tools and Methods used for writing this paper are purely realistic and the systemic analysis of literature review, rigorous approach by studying different research articles. The framework of this paper also appreciates the historical and cultural context used as a technique for analysis. It is purely thematic and conceptual.

Role of a social realist writer:

A social realist writer is a socially conscious individual who is committed to depict the realities of contemporary society faithfully in his work without idealizing anything. He is a practical person who lives in reality and sees world with the eyes of a common man. His role is to acquaint the public with the tribulations of ordinary men in day-to-day life. He devotes himself to reveal the true and complete picture of the existing social system as it actually is without skipping over anything, no matter how ugly or painful it is. He abstains from envisioning things in an impractical idealized form. Nor does he introduce any sort of imagination or irrationality in his literary work. His literature is free from fantasy, mystery and supernaturalism. The writer has to describe as truthfully as possible what he himself observes in the synchronic society. His characters should be plausible and should belong to all walks of life. The work should be centered on the burning social or political problem of the time and should discuss the effect of the controversial issue on the lives of working/middle-class people. A true realist portrays an individual and society as interdependent entities and gives a complete picture of both highlighting all the aspects.

Significance of Social Realism:

Since literature is the mirror of life and reflection of society, it can be justified truly only by the art of Realism which is committed to portray the true picture of the contemporary society and life without any fabrication. Whatever is observed is painted faithfully without any embellishment. There is no artificiality, fantasy or supposition. Social Realism presents and discusses controversial subject-matter which is socially significant albeit offensive and unpleasant. The problems dealt with are social/political issues like injustice, gender bias, prejudice, discrimination, flaws in the institutions of marriage and law, loopholes in administration, conflict between labor and capital, and likewise. The social realists draw the public attention towards the most significant burning issue of the community, and stimulate pathos in the readers/audience by highlighting the sufferings of the most afflicted people of the time. Social Realism does not misrepresent or falsify life. It does not beautify the banality of ordinary life. There is a complete fidelity in representation of society and ordinary life. The story in a social realist literature is taken from the real life of the bourgeoisie, the characters are plausible whom we daily come across in our life, the language is informal, the settings are mundane, and the events are commonplace. The readers and audience can thus live through the story and can identify themselves in the characters of the literature. The truthful depiction of the social/political problem impels the readers and audience to contemplate on it towards its solution. Thus instead of simply charming the audience and readers like other forms of literature, Social Realism aims at reforming and positively developing the society.

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN'S STATUS IN 19TH CENTURY SCANDINAVIAN SOCIETY THROUGH THE PLAY:

Premiered in 1879, Ibsen's social drama 'A Doll's House' depicted the wretched condition of 19th century Scandinavian women and their struggle against the tyranny of males. The play is a scathing criticism of the traditional roles of men and women in Victorian marriage. The play lacks sentimentality and romance of any kind. In the play, the female protagonist Nora (along with her mother) endures the despotic rule of her father before marriage, and puts up with the rebukes and affronts cast by her controlling husband Torvald after marriage. Torvald does not treat his wife Nora as his equal; rather he behaves with her in a condescending manner treating

her as his inferior. He controls her, exercising his power over every detail of her daily life. Their home has been only 'a doll's house', Nora being the doll entertaining Torvald and children. The incessant suppression agitates her mentally, and eventually coerces her to protest the oppression and stand up for equal rights. The ending is shocking, revealing that the marriage of Nora and Torvald is just a facade. Guided by her conscience and rebellious spirit, Nora abandons her familial obligations by leaving her husband and children, and sets off her expedition to search her own identity as a human being. Nora justifies her step by claiming that she has to perform duties to herself. The story is realistic as there is no piece of aesthetic beauty in it. The aim is to expose the miserable life of women what it really was in 19th century Scandinavia.

RELEVANCE OF THE PLAY WITH THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETAL REALITIES:

This incident, and thereby the worldliness and narrow-mindedness of the contemporary Norwegians bothered Ibsen earnestly, and set his mind running on a fresh dramatic endeavor complying with the need for women empowerment. The day before Ibsen set to write the revolutionary play '**A Doll's House**', he wrote to his friend and English critic Edmund Gosse (in a letter dated 4th July 1879): "I have been occupied with the thought of writing a new drama which is a serious family drama, dealing with the modern conditions especially the problems which complicate marriage." The play established Ibsen as a resolute realist. In Quarterly Review, Oct. 1906, Mr. A. Symons said "**A Doll's House**" is one of the earliest plays in which the puppets have no visible wires."

Ibsen wrote 'A Doll's House' to portray women's dependent status in the society contemporaneous with him. Through the play he ridiculed the contemporary stereotyped beliefs and thoughts about the gender roles which were biased. As an iconoclast he challenged the erroneous traditional views about marriage, and conveyed the message of women's freedom from male dominion. The play showcased a conventional wife's rejection of discriminatory bourgeois values and prejudiced gender roles which impede women's autonomy. The play inspired Henrik Jaeger to say: "Women also shall be themselves, and shall be human beings, rather than being merely their husband's wives and their children's mothers."

The world of '**A Doll's House**' resembles the real world contemporaneous with Ibsen, and this can be justified by following observations:

- During late 19th century, social class was considered significant, and standards were set for prospering classes, especially for the upper middle class which had prospered considerably with great economic boom in 1843. The growth and development in foreign trade, mining and agricultural productivity had been the major factors for this upsurge in economy.
- The impact of Industrial Revolution was conspicuous in Norway after its independence in 1814. The country thrived remarkably after the establishment of industries and educational institutions, and became financially stronger creating abundant job opportunities. As a result, more and more people acquired higher education and entered into upper middle class by working hard and earning handsome money. But this prosperity brought with it an obsession with money. People became over conscious about wealth and became stingy.

- In the latter half of 19th century, the population explosion in Norway and subsequent poor financial condition provoked several citizens to emigrate from their native town to United States for better job opportunities. But some of them feared to do so. Nils Krogstad in the play is one of such aspirants.

Facts and Findings:

The facts and findings are purely realistic and relevant to social norms prevalent in the society during those days. The tone of this paper is serious, intense and somber. The major facts are the conflicts women faced those days against the selfish, stifling and oppressive attitudes of their husband's and the role of society which they represent. The scarifying attitude of women and their longing for freedom finally turns some of them as rebellion against the society.

Summing Up:

To sum up; the research scholar writes that Social Realism is a significant art movement which aims at accurately depicting the true and complete picture of the ugliness of the real life of middle class society in the contemporary age. This art faithfully and objectively presents the ordinary human life and society as observed, avoiding any imagination, exaggeration or ornamentation. The birth of this literary movement is credited to a strong revolt against romanticism and idealism. The Industrial Revolution, development of science, Darwin's Theory of Evolution, wars and skepticism all ignited this revolt against fantasy, emotions and ostentation. The literary style of Social Realism is employed in novels and dramas to consummate the art. French writers Balzac, Flaubert and Zola were the precursors of this style. The fiction especially drama when exploits this technique, gives the precise glimpse of the actual life on stage and arouses the concern for the society we live in. **Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekov, G.B. Shaw, Galsworthy** have consummated this art through their finest works in fiction. **Social Realism** through the straightforward presentation of contemporary contentious issues of society arouses socio-political consciousness and the sense of responsibility towards the betterment of society. What is noteworthy about Social Realism is that, in this technique the psychological disorder and sufferings in the lives of common men of middle-class are all keenly observed by the writer in his/her contemporary society and are presented before the readers for deliberate contemplation. **The present paper is an attempt to attract the attention of the readers towards an ordinary man who is shown struggling laboriously to survive in the adverse conditions. The literary style of Social Realism is employed in novels and dramas to consummate the art.**

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