

## **Critical Review of final decision of Ibsen's Nora**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

“Feminism” and “Women’s Right Movement” are the topics much focused and discussed by writers in their writings to give a new edge to the movement. But one should favor feminism and women’s right movement only if it provides some sort of benefit to one’s life. Feminism is just destroying and ruining family system and lives of females. Family relations become a main victim of feminism. Women are destroying their lives by wearing the chains of feminism, leaving their children unsheltered and deprived of motherly love. Divorce rates have been increased especially in Europe due to favor of women’s rights. We are highlighting Nora’s act of leaving her home in this research paper by working under the frame-work of CDA and analyzing whether Nora’s step of leaving her husband and children is justified or not in the play “A Doll’s House” by Henrik Ibsen.

## **KEY WORDS:**

Nora, Feminism, Freedom, Ego, Sacrifice, Family Relations, Liberty.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Discourse can be used for an assertion of power and knowledge and can be used for resistance and critique. One of the central attributes of dominant discourse is its power to interpret conditions, issues and events in favor of one or the other. CDA is concerned with studying and analyzing written texts and spoken words to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced and transformed within specific social, economic, political and historical contexts. It tries to illuminate ways in which the dominant forces in a society construct versions of reality that favor their interests.

The objective of CDA is to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the words of our written text or oral speech in order to resist and overcome various forms of power over to gain an appreciation that we are exercising “power over” unbeknownst to us.

Under the framework of CDA we are analyzing the text, “A Doll’s House” by Henrik Ibsen and in this research paper we are highlighting that the end of Ibsen’s play “A Doll’s House” is not justified and appropriate. Nora’s action of leaving her husband and children comes as a bombshell to the readers.

We have selected this play for our research because most people especially in Europe favor Feminism and Highlight the issues that females should have freedom and liberty and take Ibsen’s play in Feminist perspective whereas there is no feminist sort of issue in this play nor the female “Nora” is being beaten by her husband neither her rights are being snatched. The play is a trumpet-call to the women to rise and claim their due, whereas adopting individual liberty and following women’s rights movement or the feminism means ruining one’s relations and causes destruction to one’s family system. Nora’s act of leaving home is a destructive and most selfish one, which shows that Nora was deprived of motherhood love for her children.

If we see at other perspective, we find that so-called freedom and liberty has not provided any benefit to females except loneliness, depression and anxiety. Nora’s step of leaving her family is entirely a selfish and wrong decision. It is not feasible for a woman to destroy her family relations behind her “ego” and neglected her responsibilities.

### **SUMMARY:**

“A Doll’s House” is the story of Nora and her husband Helmer. They have been married for 9 years and have three children. Eight years ago Nora had borrowed some money from a man called Krogstad, against a promissory note on which she had forged the signature of her father,

who was supposed to be a surety for the repayment of the loan. Nora had found it absolutely necessary to obtain this loan. Her husband had fallen critically ill and the doctors had advised her to take him away to a warm climate. Having no money and desperately anxious to save her husband's life by taking him to Italy, she had raised this loan. Her husband had fully recovered. Since then, Nora had regularly been paying monthly installments to Krogstad against the principal amount and the interest accruing thereon. However, she had never told her husband about the loan, about the purpose for which the loan was taken, about the terms of the loan or even about the monthly payments she had been making. Nor did she ever have any notion that by forging her father's signature, she had committed a serious criminal act. Now after 8 years, Krogstad needed Nora's help to save his job in a bank at which Nora's husband had been appointed manager. As Nora found it impossible to help Krogstad, he revealed her secret transaction with him and the fact of the forgery to her husband through a letter. Helmer becomes furious with his wife for having been guilty of the crime of forgery. Nora is shocked by her husband's attitude. She had thought that he was capable of making any conceivable sacrifice for her sake, but she finds that he is a self-centered man. She also finds that he is incapable of living up to the moral principles which he has always been professing loudly and emphatically. Her love for him drops dead and she leaves him and also her children.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Some critics such as "**Else Host**", do not think that

**"Nora can be newly fledged feminist"**

*Templeton, J. (1989)*

because she is silly, childish and carefree. Also critics do not like Nora's use of vocabulary and see her as an unintelligent airhead.

Feminism is the radical notion that “women are people”, and Nora is proving this notion when she says:

**“I am first and foremost a human being just as much a one as you are.”**

*Ibsen, H. (2007)*

It’s a simple, powerful line and one among many that makes “A Doll’s House” a feminist play.

**“For Marxists, A Doll’s House envisioned the emancipation of men and women to be joined in free contact, mind to mind, as a whole and completed entity”**

*Durbach, E. (1991)*

Many feminists however argue that it may not have been Ibsen’s intention to write a feminist play, but many scholars accept what he produced, to have feminist ideas. It can be difficult for some people to not see the feminist ideas in the play.

**“When you put Nora’s actions and dialogues in the context of early feminist writers (e.g. Mary Wollstone Craft, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Martineau are a few Templeton mentions specifically) and Ibsen’s own circle of ‘personal’ feminists (Templeton cites his wife Suzannah Thoreson Ibsen, Magdalen Thoreson-Suzannah’s former governess- and Camilla Wergeland Collet) one sees in their texts and struggles ‘a compendium of every thing’ that early modern feminism denounced about women’s state”**

*Templeton, J. (1989)*

Also,

**“Ibsen’s 1898 speech is not his sole musing on the matter”.**

*Templeton, J. (1989)*

Ibsen wrote this when sketching out an early draft of the play:

**“The more I write this the more I think of the play when Nora insists to Torvald that they both must change in order for the ‘wonderful thing’ to happen. He would have to be willing to learn lessons himself instead of continuing to ‘teach’ or ‘guide’ her. I have to educate myself and you’re not the right man for the job.”**

*Ibsen, H. (1828-1906)*

**“Critical views of ‘A Doll’s House’ either try to rescue a great play from being consigned as a feminist work by asserting the universality of Nora’s struggle or deny her the mantle of feminist because, ironically, she’s simply too much of a flighty, flawed woman.”**

*Templeton, J. (1989)*

George Barnard Shaw was keen to say that:

**“Ibsen was too great of a playwright to focus on ‘issues’, instead he was a poet of the truth of the human soul”**

*Shaw, B. (1891)*

**“All female, or no woman at all, Nora loses either way” (30).**

**Ironically, the binary divide is similar for Ibsen. Either he is a**

**feminist champion or unfettered observer of human nature; either a playwright steeped in his time and place that used the theatre to illuminate issues of the day or a playwright whose dramaturgy of essential human truths allows his works to exceed any specific time and place. Just as bell hook’s graphics tries to maintain the broadcast conceptualization of feminism, one that is divers and can admit a number of different ‘kinds’ of feminists under its mantle, perhaps can we conceive of Ibsen and Nora. Both/and instead of either/or. To my mind, you can’t get more feminist than that.”**

*Templeton, J. (1989)*

**“The situation arose when the actress playing the part of Nora, Hedwig Niemann-Raabe feeling that in such a situation she would never have left her children, refuses to play the ending as written.”**

*Tornquist, E. (1995)*

*Egil Tornquist* gave an alternative German ending to the play reading as follows in English

Translation:

**Nora:** ....where we could make a real marriage out of our lives together. Good Bye.

(Begins to go)

**Helmer:** Go then! (Seizes her arms) but first you shall see your children for the last time.

**Nora:** Let me go! I will not see them.

**Helmer:** (draws her over to the door left) you shall see them. (Opens the door and says softly).

Look, there they are asleep, peaceful and carefree. Tomorrow, when they wake up and call for their mother, they will be motherless.

**Nora:** (Trembling) Motherless....!

**Helmer:** Motherless!

(Nora struggles with herself, lets her traveling bag fall and says)

**Nora:** Oh! This is a sin against myself, but I cannot leave them. (Half sinks down by the door).

**Helmer:** (joyfully but softly) Nora! (The curtain falls)

*Tornquist, E. (1995)*

**“Home is broke up; it may also be seen as a hint that the future  
in store for her will be a hard one”**

*Tornquist, E. (1995)*

To the defense of Helmer (not signifying that he is correct, but) one must consider the time, social structure and statement made by William archer in his critical review,

**“If Helmer helped to make Nora a doll,  
Nora helped to make Helmer a prig.”**

*Archer, W. (1984)*

Also critic Harold Clurman highlights in his critical analysis of the play that;

**“Torvald remarks about a mother of bad temperament having  
negative effects on her children in a statement that is indeed true  
in its nature. Torvald was just stating what is believed to be  
factual and true, even today. Children learn bad habits from  
parenting. For every undesirable trait that Torvald displays,**

**one can find on underlying excuse for his disposition through looking at his society.”**

*Clurman, H. (1982)*

**“In A Doll’s House, we do see a transformation in Nora’s character but it isn’t done as “smoothly” as some critics would like. In the 1<sup>st</sup> two acts Nora is childish and is Helmer’s little skylark. However, after Krogstad threatens to reveal her crime she becomes nervous and feels she might go mad. We can see Nora’s “madness” when she rehearses the tarantella.”**

*McFarlane, J. (1994)*

**“Many people when approaching this play today, either do not talk about feminism or monitor it to keep it linked with the text.”**

*Shafer, Y. (1985)*

**“The problems that Nora, Anna-Marie and Kristine face are compounded by their gender. Ibsen’s play is considered by many to be a feminist work, illustrating the erroneous treatment of “the woman issue”, as Ibsen called it. Though he said in a speech once that Nora was supposed to represent the Everyman, and that he hadn’t been trying to address the issue of women’s rights. Critics argue that the presence of feminism in the play is inherent and “justifiable whatever Ibsen’s intention was and in spite of his speech”**

*Templeton, J. (1989)*

## **Analysis**

There are numberless revolutionary ideas brought forth every day. But all ideas are not made to be followed by all. Every new thing presented is not to be practiced in all climes, we have to check it out which idea or theory is to be productized. Human mind produces limitless ideas and thoughts and all are of course not useful or advantageous in real life, we should follow the favorable ideas that fit in our lives.

Feminism is the advocacy of women's right on the ground of equality of sex. The issue of rights for women first became prominent during the French American revolutions. It begins in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as a social moment – feminism is both on intellectual commitment and political moment that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms. Feminism is the concept which is celebrated and admired by most of the modern approaches, but the question arises, what are the consequences of feminism and what has it given to women? Does it really work? Does it satisfy all aspects of women? Is feminism suitable for society or does it just lead to destruction of families including the lives of children?

We find large application of feminism in Western countries. In these countries feminism is breathing lively but it has suffocated family life, presumed and frustrated. Europe highly praises feminism now-a-days but if we see it's out come, the results are depressing.

Women are admired for forgiveness, love, care, endurance and self sacrifices; a dignified sacred creature. Wrapping these angelic qualities in covering of feminism is somehow unsatisfactory. Freedom no doubt should be there for women, which is generally called as women's rights. Which should be given at any cost but frankly speaking, feminism is snatching the real women spirit from females. Wretched family conditions in Europe and high divorce rate are speaking proof of ruining aspects of feminism. Following feminism you might challenge the

whole family system. If we talk about an individual's liberty than Liberty also has its limits. If everyone will be free to act according to his/her personal wishes, desires and ideology than certainly there will be disintegration everywhere as J.S Mill said in his essay "On Liberty":

"Individual is free as long as he does not harm other people. Individual should have freedom of expression and freedom of action but if his freedom adversely affects others, a person should be held accountable for that act."

Here we will examine the modern play "A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen which is commonly interpreted as a feminist play.

From initial part of the play we find Helmer as a loving, caring and kind husband. It suddenly catches the attention of any female that Helmer is in deep love with Nora; he is fond of his wife and treats her like a lovely sweet one's. Helmer seems to be extra caring husband which is mostly the demand of females, and often he makes use of soft words, expressions and gestures to show his love. He addresses his wife Nora, with such lovely words that appeal. He even selects gentle sentences to rebuke Nora, like on catching her eating macroons, we find him addressing his wife in such sweet expression that is touching and he truly seems to have great care for his wife:

**"Is that my little lark, twittering out there?"**

**..... When did my squirrel get home?"**

*Ibsen, H. Act 1(2010-2011)*

Helmer had forbidden Nora from eating macroons because her teeth will destroy by eating sweets- But Nora is in habit of telling a lie- We find Helmer a husband who blindly trusts Nora but Nora is not a sound character. She eats macroons secretly but tells a lie to her husband that she had not eaten macroons. On asking of Helmer whether Krogstad had come home behind

him, Nora refuses and says “No” whereas Helmer had seen Krogstad going out from his home. Still Helmer forgives Nora and teaches her politely never to lie again. Throughout the play, we see that Helmer remains tender and lovely with Nora;

**“It’s a sweet little bird, but it gets through a terrible amount of money. You wouldn’t believe how much it costs a man when he’s got a wife little song-bird like you!”**

*Ibsen, H. Act 1(2010-2011)*

Helmer tells Nora not to be extravagant and to spend money wisely:

**“Why shouldn’t I look at my dearest treasure? - at all the beauty that is mine, all my very own.”**

*Ibsen, H. Act 3(2010-2011)*

Helmer had possession over Nora and treats her like a delicate “doll” that should be kept with great care.

**“Your squirrel would turn about and do all her tricks if you would be nice, and do as she wants... Your skylark would chirp about in every room, with her song rising and falling.”**

*Ibsen, H. Act 2(2010-2011)*

Nora seems to be taking advantage of Helmer’s politeness and wants to make her sayings obeyed. But at the end of the play, on knowing the forgery that Nora had committed, we see Helmer in quite different and angry mood. This is the obvious reaction of any person on knowing that whom one trusts blindly had covered many things secretly from him. If Nora had told Helmer about the forgery beforehand, then things would not have gone wrong. Because it is a fact that people of middle class have nothing precious than self-respect and forgery is a crime

which destroys the reputation of a person badly. Although Nora committed forgery to save her husband's life but she should have told Helmer after his recovery but she kept it secret and when Helmer came to know, he burst into anger. Nora thought Helmer will take her side in saving her but he reacted angrily and Nora got disappointed. Of course Helmer would have taken her side if things were disclosed to him initially.

**“There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt.”**

*Ibsen, H. Act 1(2010-2011)*

This is Helmer's view when he tells Nora not to take debt in any situation from anyone.

**“An atmosphere of lies like that infects and poisons the whole life of a home. In a house like that, every breath that the children take is filled with germs of evil.”**

*Ibsen, H. Act 1(2010-2011)*

Helmer takes the forgery as a serious crime while in Nora's views it is not serious if someone is committing this crime to save her husband's life. But what Nora did is in fact a crime; forging of signature which might have hurt Helmer badly. No doubt she did it to save her husband but it's a fact that men would prefer to die instead of losing their respect. Helmer might have preferred to die on knowing Nora's crime of forgery. She should have disclosed the things to Helmer at initial stage.

In the end of the play we find Helmer in miserable condition. He was ready to change himself for Nora in order to satisfy her but she cruelly leaves her husband and children. Krogstad had returned the paper to Nora, things got settled but Nora made it an ego problem and left the home without even thinking of her children. She should have forgiven Helmer for her children

at least, who were innocent and completely dependent upon their mother for nutrition and care. Throughout the play, Nora is pleased that she had saved her husband and had done a great job but why then did she kill her husband in the end by leaving home?

**“I have existed merely to perform for you, Torvald. 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. Our home has been nothing but a play room. I have been your doll-wife just as at home I was papa’s doll-child; and the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been Torvald.”**

*Ibsen, H. Act 3(2010-2011)*

Nora is considering herself pitiful by thinking of herself as a doll in the hands of her husband and her father, neglecting the care and love given by them to Nora. A doll is a great thing which is always kept with care and great love. Helmer was fulfilling all her needs and had given her freedom to spend his money as she liked. How can she be a play doll in Helmer’s hands? Helmer even forgives Nora on her lies and mistakes and kept her like an innocent and delicate tender object which should be handled with great care. He didn’t even forbid her from meeting Dr. Rank who was their family doctor and with whom Nora was quiet frank. Helmer used to take care of Nora always, which is evident from his speaking and calling names like skylark, squirrel etc which shows he treats Nora with possession and love for Nora in delicate manner. She had no restrictions upon her. Then how could she be a play doll? She was a doll for

her husband but not in the sense that Nora thinks, rather in the sense of a delicate soft and lovely thing.

This final act; the decision of Nora to leave her husband, home and children alone is adored and appreciated in Europe and called a new start which is most selfish and destructive one actually. Feminists had focused very much on feminism and on individual rights and Nora had neglected all her duties as a mother and as a wife behind individuality. In a family, every individual has to sacrifice his/her desires, personal wishes and expectations for other family members. One should not care only for one's own desires. A woman has to compromise at times to save the relations and tolerate big blunders made by our beloved ones if you love them wholeheartedly instead of thinking of her own ease. We can't call this compromise the suppression of women's rights or women's desires. Compromises save the relations. If Nora had loved her husband, she should have forgiven him because as Shakespeare had said:

**“The rare action is in virtue than in vengeance”**

**(Shakespeare, The Tempest, act 5, Scene 1)**

Thirdly the solution of every problem is not to end the relation by leaving that person. Misunderstandings often get created between husband and wife but merely finishing the relation is no solution of it. Nora should not have left her home; instead she should have made Helmer realize his faults. Helmer would then have worshipped Nora on realizing the greatness of his lady and the innocent little buds (her children) would not have thus lost their shelter and might not have been deprived of motherly love.

Feminists raise the point that “Why should women always make the sacrifices and think of others?” But if we look at the present society, not only women but also “men” sacrifice and tolerate many things for the sake of their children and to keep the atmosphere of their home safe

and warm. If we go on following feminism, then the result will be only destruction of family and relations. The duties and responsibilities of a woman should be her first and foremost priority. Fights, misunderstandings and unexpected situations do arise at times but it does not mean that one should leave one's home and children unsheltered, by raising the slogans of "Individual freedom for women."

**"It is a fact that women bear children and are responsible for raising them; that keeps women in subordinate position. It follows that if legal, economic and political barriers to women's equality are removed, women's status will not change. Women will still be mothers and hence subordinates (1970). But the women did not accept this concept."**

*(The Dialect of Sex)*

Women sacrifice and compromise because they have such a great and pure heart, which sometimes men do not possess and we can say that men are not blessed by it. Women should act like a Uniting force in a family, to keep the family intact and joined. Their motive should be to keep all relations balanced. They should not act as a destructive agent as Nora did. We see Mrs. Ramsay in "To the light House" by Virginia Woolf, as a very dignified and graceful lady who always tried to keep her family life run smoothly. Certainly she faced a lot of hurdles. She struggled hard; her husband's mind seems to be totally in contrast with her. However, still she had not left her husband and home; rather she tries to keep everyone happy, even her husband who sometimes gave her scoldish looks. In the end her husband changes and considers his wife a God-like figure.

There is no such case with Nora, rather we find Helmer much caring and soft towards his wife and generously expresses his love for her. The two women Nora and Mrs. Ramsay are seen to be in contrast. Mrs. Ramsay, despite all her hardships, smoothly and happily runs her relationship with Mr. Ramsay and keeps the relation going on for the sake of her children where as if Nora had shown little tolerance, her children might not had lost their mother and motherly love.

In the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, Jane also leaves Rochester initially on learning about his previous marriage. Although Rochester was an innocent victim in that case, he was unaware of the fact that the girl whom he is about to marry is, insane. There, Jane leaves him, but in the end she comes back. Power of love calls her back. She comes back to Rochester in the end. Its love that cannot stop breathing once it gains life in any heart.

Now this also might be the hint about Nora's coming back to Helmer. So we might say that Nora's last decision was motioned in angry mood. She took decision of leaving home and in stress rather it is a wrong one. On getting cool-minded again, the heat of children's love might have warmed her heart again, in which feminism would have melted.

Feminists call it a new start revolution change, then why had it left destructive aspect behind it? Why had it left decay of love and unconcerned relationship?

In the end of the play we heard a door slam, that is not a new start of novel way, but Nora had actually closed the door at her family life. She had slammed the door of motherly love for her children. Other than that, lighting out the Christmas tree in the very last moment means happiness has gone, mourns are there because Christmas is the symbol of celebration, sharing and caring and Christmas is also a family based occasion. Vanishing of lights of Christmas tree indicates darkness in family which has now covered the life of all individuals of the family.

There is another aspect as well. We can interpret it as prediction that the consequences of the whole feminism that had taken start after Nora's action were not useful ones. On the other hand its waves are destroying families and the echo of the slamming door had actually made the love deaf.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Nora's exit, thus, is much more a self destructive assertion of her uncompromising and powerful ego. It is a necessary expression of her Romantic quest for freedom and then it is an intelligently earned insight into how best she can learn to function as an individual amid, a conforming and oppressive society.

Mostly people interpret Henry Ibsen's play "A Doll's House" as feminist play where as Ibsen himself says that I don't know what women's right movement or feminism is and I had not written the play in feminist perspective but had merely focused on humanity.

Ibsen insisted to the Norwegian feminist group that tried to honor him in 1898 for his work on the "woman's right movement" that he was looking at the larger "humanist" picture.

**"I thank you for the toast, but must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for the women's right movement I am not even quite clear as to just what this women's rights movement really is. To me it has seemed a problem of mankind in general. And if you read my books carefully you will understand this. True enough, it is desirable to solve the woman problem, along with all the others; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity.**

*Ibsen, H. (1964).*

Finally, the decision of Nora was wrong and she should have thought of her children. It seems to me as if Nora had a stone heart, deprived of motherly love and compromise.

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