

**Women Identity in Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll's House* and Robert Frost's *Home Burial***

*Project submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of*

**Bachelor of Arts**

**in**

**English and History**

**by**

**Ananthakrishnan K J**

**CCASADER16**



**March 2021**

**Department of B.A English & History**

**Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda**

**Kerala-680125**

## **Declaration**

I, Ananthkrishnan K J, hereby declare that this project entitled **Women Identity in Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll's House* and Robert Frost's *Home Burial***, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History, is a research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of, **Miss. Ansiya T A** Assistant Professor, Department of English & History, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda.

Irinjalakuda

March 2021

Ananthkrishnan K J

Department of B.A. English & History

Christ College (Autonomous)

Irinjalakuda-680125

## **Certificate**

This is to certify that this project entitled **Women Identity in Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll's House* and Robert Frost's *Home Burial***, a record of research work carried out by **Mr. Ananthakrishnan K J** under my supervision and guidance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History submitted to the University of Calicut.

**Mr. George Alex**

Coordinator, Dept. of English & History

Christ College (Autonomous)

Irinjalakuda

**Miss. Ansiya T A**

Dept. of English & History

Assistant Professor

(Supervising Teacher)

## **Acknowledgement**

I owe my gratitude to God for his endless blessings and intervention in helping me complete my project without any hassles and on time. I am indebted to my supervising teacher, **Miss. Ansiya T A** Assistant Professor, Department of English & History, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda, for guiding me throughout the project and for the countless hours and efforts she put in to help complete my project.

I thank Mr. George Alex, Coordinator, Department of B.A. English & History, for the timely help and generous encouragement.

I am eternally grateful to Rev Fr. Jolly Andrews, the Principal, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda for the congenial research he has always tried to foster.

I owe my thanks to my parents, my teachers, my friends and all those who have helped me indirectly and indirectly, in the successful completion of the project work.

**Ananthkrishnan K J**

## Contents

Chapter Number	Contents	Pages
	Introduction	1 – 4
Chapter 1	Feminist Reading in Ibsen’s A Doll’s House and Frost’s Home Burial	5 – 10
Chapter 2	Representation of Woman Identity in Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s Hous	11 – 15
Chapter 3	Representation of Woman Identity in Robert Frost’s Home Burial	16 – 19
	Conclusion	20 – 21
	Works Cited	22 – 23

## Introduction

Drama is an objective and impersonal representation of life. The chorus of the ancient Greek tragedies often functioned as the author's mouth piece. The main function of the chorus was to narrate the events that took place off the stage and to make some comments on the morality of the actions presented on the stage. In modern plays, the place of the chorus is taken by one of the characters in the play, who functions as the mouth piece of the playwright. With the critical comments of such characters, the playwright tries to bring out a social criticism of life.

Bernard Shaw regards social criticism as the most important function of all art. Bertolt Brecht insists that drama is not just an imitation of an action but a powerful tool for the determination of social conditions. Apart from providing entertainment, it can become a powerful instrument for effecting social change. A socially committed playwright can use drama as a power medium to explore social issues of his times and express them through personal or domestic conflict in his plays. The ancient Greek plays criticized the social and political issues taking themes of mythology. In the medieval age, drama was used to enact biblical stories and lives of the saints to teach morality.

In the modern period, playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Strindberg discussed in their plays complex social issues. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* reveals the playwright's social concern, especially the status of women in a patriarchal society. Bernard Shaw was the advocate of the problem play in England. He employed drama as a medium for social betterment. In the hands of John Galsworthy, drama became a powerful instrument for social criticism.

Henrik Johan Ibsen was a major 19th-century Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. He is often referred to as "the father of realism" and is one of the founders of Modernism in theatre. His major works include *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Emperor and Galilean*, *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *When We Dead Awaken*, *Pillars of Society*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Master Builder* and *John Gabriel Borkman*. He is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare, and *A Doll's House* became the world's most performed play by the early 20th century.

*A Doll's House* is not only one of Henrik Ibsen's famous plays but also a great contribution to feminist literature even though the characters do not seem very outstanding at first sight. Ibsen never explicitly identified himself as a feminist but some of his speeches and acquaintances prove that he was concerned with the women's cause; this is also proven by his play's development and characters. Usually a lot of credit and attention is given to the protagonist, Nora, who is more or less the epitome of a modern woman when it comes to choice and behavior by the end of the third and final act. This study will not only focus on her but also the other characters, be it male or female, and how they have contributed to the play.

The project tries to analyze how Ibsen's female characters do not absolutely fit into any of the main stereotypical images of women in literature as the angel in the home or the madwoman in the attic. For that purpose, the study will make use of Anglo-American feminist criticism which is also concerned with the stereotypical and false representation of women in literature. Furthermore, it will explore how Ibsen challenged the public/private split of society and the common belief that a woman's activity in the male-dominated public sphere will result in her depravity. It will also discuss how Ibsen portrays the contrasting fate of couples whose marriage is either based on equality of both spouses or the dominance of the husband and suppression of the wife.

Robert Lee Frost was an American poet. His work was initially published in England before it was published in America. He is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. His work frequently employed settings from rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. One of the most popular and critically respected American poets of the twentieth century, Frost was honored frequently during his lifetime, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry. He became one of America's rare public literary figures, almost an artistic institution. He was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1960 for his poetic works. On July 22, 1961, Frost was named poet laureate of Vermont.

Robert Frost's *Home Burial* is a narrative poem that speaks of lives tragedies. Robert Frost's writing style is very straight-forward and direct. In *Home Burial* the setting appears to be the background of a tragedy that centers around the death of a child. It is important for the reader to recognize that *Home Burial* was published in 1914. That gives the reader a better insight to understand the husband's reaction to the death of the child. During this time period society dictated that men should not show their true feelings. Therefore men tended to have dealt with conflicts by working hard and

being domineering. *Home Burial* demonstrates how one tragedy can cause another to occur. There are three different tragedies that transpire throughout this poem. The first tragedy is the burial of the child. The second tragedy is the burial of the marriage. Finally the most symbolic and ironic tragedy is the burial of the home. Because of unfortunate circumstances, the three things closely associated with this home becomes buried all of these tragedies occurred as a result of the child's burial. This couple's marriage could not survive such an emotional loss. Therefore the marriage becomes buried. When the marriage became buried the home became its own burial spot for this family's life. *Home Burial* tells a tale of tragedy in one's family life. Robert Frost portrayed a very realistic chain reaction to tragedy in *Home Burial*.

The project aims at different ideas like analyzing the representation of woman after the Victorian period and twentieth century through Ibsen's *The Dolls House* and Robert Frost's *Home Burial*. More over the project tries to check whether the situation was same in Europe and America. Another important objective is that to find out the extent of influence of feminist movement in male authors. Through this comparative study, project focus on the similarity and dissimilarity in the plot and themes of both works.

In Ibsen's *A Doll's House* Helmer says, "Before everything else you're a wife and a mother." Nora says, "I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before everything else I am a human being just as much as you are. At any rate I shall try to become one." In a Life magazine article entitled *Women are Learning to Express Outrage* a writer who attended numerous meetings of Women's Liberation describes her reactions: "These experiences unnerved me, despite reminders that I should not take it personally, and an understanding of what lay behind the fear and hostility. The negative reactions toward me expressed a great deal of what Women's Lib is about: women's long-suppressed anger at being used, women's sense of vulnerability and defenselessness, women's suspicion and mistrust of other women, women's insecurity, lack of confidence in their judgment, the secret fear, as one girl put it, that maybe we are inferior."

All of the above aptly describes woman's identity crisis. It is not simply a modern anomaly, but an age-old dilemma familiar to each individual. Eventually each of us recognizes the need to know who we are.

Much attention has been given to this identity crisis. Both women and men have grappled with our struggle to be equally human. Today identity problems of woman are matter of discussion in all over the world. To great extent women folks were suppressing by the male dominated society. Feminist and identity related themes have much importance in literature.



That also to be matter for discussion. Women were dolls in the hands of males. In the history of literature women had no role at all. Since the Victorian period onwards we can see the contributions of women. The feminist movement had a great role in this upliftment. Today the same tendency came in the minds of males also. Male writers are now focusing on different gender issues. Here the Ibsen's *The Dolls House* and Robert Frost's *Home burial* focus on this gender issues, the identity of wives and women. The males have no time and thoughts about the selves of their better halves.

In this play Ibsen tackles women's rights as a matter of importance. Throughout this time period it was neglected. *A Doll's House* was written during the movement of Naturalism, which commonly reflected society. Ibsen acknowledges the fact that in 19th century life the role of the woman was to stay at home, raise the children and attend to her husband. Nora Helmer is the character in *A Doll House* who plays the 19th woman and is portrayed as a victim. Michael Meyers said of Henrik Ibsen's plays: "The common denominator in many of Ibsen's dramas is his interest in individuals struggling for and authentic identity in the face of tyrannical social conventions. This conflict often results in his characters' being divided between a sense of duty to themselves and their responsibility to others."(1563) All of the aspects of this quote can be applied to the play *A Doll House*, in Nora Helmer's character, who throughout much of the play is oppressed, presents an inauthentic identity to the audience and throughout the play attempts to discovery her authentic identity.

Textual and content analysis, literature review, literature based methodology, reanalysis of results and findings, interpretivism, theory oriented and comparative study are the major methods are following under this project

## Chapter – 1

### Feminist Reading in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Robert Frost's *Home Burial*

When Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was first published in 1879, it was a coming of age play that dealt with the lives and anxieties of the bourgeoisie women in Victorian Norway. Feminism is the dominant theme, as Ibsen investigated the tragedy of being born as a bourgeoisie female in a society ruled by a patriarchal law. The first thing that I am going to start with is shedding light on the feminist attributes that this play is throbbing with and try to see it with the eyes of feminist writers like Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault and other feminist writers. The feminist school of thought has brought revolutionary ideas by exposing masculine stereotypes, reevaluating women's roles in society, studying women's cultural and historical background, studying female literature, and criticizing social sexist values.

Norma Helmer is the best illustration of the illusioned woman who lives in a society where the male oppresses the female and reduces to a mere doll or plaything. Nora Helmer is that doll living in her fake doll house, which reinforces the fragile idea of a stable family living under a patriarchal and traditional roof. One can argue that Nora Helmer and the other female figures portrayed in *A Doll's House* are the best models of the "second sex" or the "other" that the French revolutionary writer Simone de Beauvoir discussed in her essay, *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir argues that throughout history, woman has been viewed as a "hindrance or a prison". Aristotle also said, "The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities. We should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness." Woman is always depicted as secondary to man. She does not exist as an entity by herself but as the "Other".

In her husband's eyes, Nora is nothing but a silly "squirrel", a "little skylark", a "song bird" or a cute "scatterbrain" whose thoughts are nonsensical and typical to any other woman's. Since her childhood, Nora has been regarded

as the “other” by her father. Then, her father handed her to her husband who treated her like a valued possession. This is best depicted by Nora’s self-realization and awakening towards the end of the play: “When I lived at home with Daddy, he fed me all his opinions, until they became my opinions. Or if they didn’t, I kept quiet about it because I knew he wouldn’t have liked it. He used to call me his dollchild, and he played with me the way I used to play with my dolls. And when... Daddy handed me over to you. You arranged everything according to your taste, and I adapted my taste to yours... Now, looking back, I feel as if I’ve lived a beggar’s life—from hand to mouth.”

Ibsen’s depiction of the weak and docile woman brings to mind the 18th century revolutionary writer Mary Wollstonecraft who argues in her essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that women are taught since their infancy to have the “softness of temper, outward obedience, scrupulous attention”. Once accompanied by the gift of beauty, these attributes will ensure them the protection of man. This is echoed very loudly in Torvald’s words, “Poor little frightened songbird...Rest assured; my wings are broad enough to shelter you. How lovely and secure our home, Nora, a sanctuary for you. I’ll keep you here like a hunted dove I’ve rescued unhurt from the hawk’s talons. ...For a man there’s something intensely reassuring and pleasurable about knowing that he’s forgiven his wife—and that he’s forgiven her sincerely, with all his heart. It’s as if she becomes somehow doubly his possession, as if he’s allowed her to be reborn, so that in some way she becomes both his wife and his child.” Moreover, Mary Wollstonecraft stresses that man tries to secure the good conduct of a woman by reducing her to a state of innocence and childhood. She states, “Children, I grant, should be innocent; but when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term of weakness.” This is very evident in Torvald’s treating Nora as a child. He forbids her to eat macaroons; he makes her dance for him, dresses up and recites for him. On the other hand, not only Nora is treated as a spoiled child but also as a sexual object that her husband fantasizes about. At parties, he keeps away and steals glances at her eventually pretending that they’re secretly engaged. When it’s time to go, he puts her shawl around her shoulders and pretends that she is his young bride. He fantasizes that they are just arriving from their wedding and are alone for the first time together. He is so possessive about her to the extent that he refuses to share Nora with female friends, like Mrs. Linde. Here, Nora becomes what Michel Foucault calls a docile body regulated by the norms of cultural life.

Thus towards the end of the play, Nora realizes that it is time that she regained her status as being the “One” after a long time of submission,

which established her role as the “Other”. As Simone de Beauvoir has stressed, Nora has been taught not to take but to receive. She has gained only what her husband and father have been willing to grant her. In this sense, Nora’s domestic life in such a patriarchal society is just a reflection of the middle class women of her time that De Beauvoir depicted vividly in her essay. “They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men—fathers or husbands—more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women.” Nora’s biggest fear is her husband hearing that she had forged her father’s signature to get the loan, which she needed to travel to Italy. Her motives were absolutely selfless because that trip saved her sick husband’s life. Nora knew that the revelation would have put her husband’s reputation at stake, but she felt deep inside that her husband would sacrifice his reputation to defend her as soon as he came to know that she did that to save his life. That feeling tormented her to the extent that she contemplated suicide. She is not worth her husband’s nobility! She is not even good enough to be a mother! Didn’t her husband tell her that “all young criminals have had dishonest mothers because it’s usually the mother’s responsibility”? Despite her great sacrifice driven by her love for her husband, Nora agrees that she is a bad influence on her children. She even decides to isolate herself from her kids and let the nursemaid take care of them fully. We can hear her saying to herself, “Corrupt my children. Poison my home. It’s not true. It could never be true.” This proves to us that Nora is very pleased with her role as the “Other”.

Yet, the doll house is shattered as well as Nora’s illusion. The doll finally recognizes that her role has been nothing but the “Other”. She is aware that it is she who agreed to the definition of the “One” and the “Other”. It’s a moment of profound awakening when Nora realizes that her husband’s values his reputation and job more than he values his love for her. Torvald’s resentment and accusations after knowing about what she had done comes as a blessing in disguise. We hear Torvald telling her, “For all these years, for eight years now, you’ve been my pride and joy, and now I find you’re a hypocrite and a liar, and worse, worse than that...a criminal! The whole thing is an abyss of ugliness! You ought to be ashamed.” Simone de Beauvoir says that if the woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about the change. But here we tell De Beauvoir that Nora is willing to bring about the change. The harsh reality smacks her in the face; a wave of disillusionment wakes her up. She decides bravely to abandon her family to escape the restrictive confines of the patriarchal society she lives in. She is resolved to go out into the world

and gain real experience. She is determined to think out everything for herself and be able to make her own decisions.

After all that has been said, we conclude that the woman figure/body in *A Doll's House* is reduced, as Susan Bordo believes, to a "text of culture" on which all cultural aspects of gender difference are reinforced. That is, the female ideology is supported and reinforced by the social structure in which women have little social, political, or economic power. The women figures in *A Doll's House* are depicted as socially and psychologically dependent on men in the institution of marriage and motherhood. In addition to Nora, we have the character of Mrs. Linde who was forced to break up with her fiancé and marry another man who could support her, her mother, and two brothers. We also come across the character of the nurse who had to give up her child conceived outside the wedlock in order to keep her job.

It can be debated that the male-female relationship in *A Doll's House* is based on a Master-Slave ideology which Friedrich Hegel, the great Enlightenment theorist, started. The relationship between Torvald and Helmer evolves according to a MasterSlave relationship. Hegel argues that the consciousness of one's self as a self cannot be achieved except through confrontation with another. Both Nora and her husband Torvald recognized their dependency on each other and that self-consciousness led to Nora's awakening in the end. Thus, Nora's character self was made through the dialectical special interrelationship between her and her husband on one side and between her and the patriarchal society on the other. Hegel says that the self "through supersession, receives back its own self, because, by superseding its otherness, it again becomes equal to itself; but secondly, it equally gives the other selfconsciousness back again to itself, for it saw itself in the other, but superseded this being of itself in the other and thus lets the other again go free." First Nora acknowledges Torvald as her master and she dutifully assumes her role as the slave who is dependent on her master. After the confrontation, Nora realizes the master's dependency on her which leads her to supersede him and be free of him.

I also noticed that we can trace the roots of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in Plato's Allegory of Cave. Nora's life with her husband is an illusion, and their marriage is a masquerade. As she confronts Torvald, she says, "Our house has never been anything but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as I was daddy's dollchild when I was at home. My children as well, they've been my dolls. I used to enjoy it when you played games with me, just as they enjoyed it when I played games with them. That's all our marriage has been, Torvald." Thus, her life in the doll house was like the life of the people chained in the cave. What she saw was not the true reality, but the shadow

of reality. She was content with her role as the subservient female whose fate was determined by that of her husband. She also never questioned her inferior predetermined position in the relationship. This is evidenced in her complete confidence in hiding the truth about borrowing money in order to save Torvald's health. About that she told Mrs. Linde, "it would be a terrible blow to Torvald's masculine self-esteem; he'd find it so painful and humiliating to think that he owed me something. It would completely unbalance our relationship. It would be the end of our beautiful, happy home." Thus, Nora emerges from that cave that showed her the distorted reality. Upon realizing her value in her husband's life, the true reality dazzles her like the bright sun. She realizes that she has been living with a stranger for eight years; she becomes aware of the crippling society that she is living in. Therefore, she decides to leave the dark cave and embrace the luminous freedom that she grants herself.

Frost was an American poet and he was born on March 1874 in San Francisco, California. He is extremely viewed for his realistic portrayals of rural life and his knowledge of American idiomatic communication. His work normally employed experiences from rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, using them to inspect composite social and ethical themes. Frost's poems contract with man in relation with the world. Man stands alone and weak as compared towards the massiveness of the universe. His personal life was full of grief and loss. Frost had experienced the loss of his personal children and could understand the depression related with the similar in *Home Burial* poem. Karen L. Kilcup says: "Interestingly for our purposes, a central source of friction between the couple is the divergence between their self-conceptions, expressed in their different attitudes toward grief; while he mourns inwardly; she affirms the necessity of its outward expression. In her pain and anger she threatens him with her physical absence (her emotional absence is only too evident), yet, when she makes this threat, his real fears of sexual inadequacy surface: "Amy! Don't go to someone else this time." What stands out for me at this moment--and elsewhere--is the duplicity of the language in which the husband couches his desire, for this line represents both plea and command. Furthermore, his words exhibit a wide veering from his behavior: "Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs.' / He sat and fixed his chin between his *fists*. / 'There's something I should like to ask you, dear" (emphasis added). Throughout the poem a language of endearment masks and conventionalizes the sub verbal menace emblemized in his physical gestures. Echoing an issue that emerges differently in poems like "The Housekeeper" and "The Fear," Frost understands--only too well, perhaps--

the psychic weight carried by the threat physical violence embodied here by the husband, and his is deeply sensitive to the wife's vulnerability. If masculinity requires bodily supremacy, it also collides, however unwittingly, with psychological dominance. Yet the consequence of this dominance seems to be only greater alienation, sexual as well as emotional. . . . [T]he portrait of the husband on the verge of a violent brutishness both reflects and interrogates early-twentieth-century notions of muscular masculinity. In *Home Burial* we are left a capacious space in which to imagine the transformation of a prior intimacy into an utter fracture of relationship. As the husband reflects on his wife's kind of grief, he pleads, "You'd think his memory might be satisfied--," and she responds, "There you go sneering now!" "I'm not, I'm not!" Frost breaks this line in the middle to suggest how profoundly at odds they are, how much psychic as well as literal space separates them. Once again, the relationship between the husband and wife's creativity emerges most clearly in language: his language wounds powerfully, and, however unwittingly, he, not she, is the metaphor-maker, the poet who speaks of fences when his heart aches. When the wife accuses, "'You can't because you don't know how to speak,'" she is unable to hear the pain and beauty in his lament: "'Three foggy mornings and one rainy day / Will rot the best birch fence a man can build!'" We see a moment in which the poet urges and encodes the efficacy of language but only to an audience that can understand it--the reader willing to respond emotionally as much as intellectually. Frost acknowledges that Amy--like Elinor, perhaps--is confined by the literal creativity that her role as wife demands and by the emotions that such limitation imposes. Being *only* a place of "confinement" for her, home is too much where the heart is.

Working against the stereotype of the nostalgic regionalist idyll, Frost is especially critical of representations of home as merely a source of renewal and refuge. Amy is home-less, and the religion that sometimes filled the Frost household is echoed in her circumscription, in her repeated affirmations that she has to escape, get out, go, "'Somewhere out of this house.'" She wonders, "'How can I make you--'" understand, we assume, but she is inadequate even to complete her sentence. The husband's "sentence" that concludes the poem--"I'll follow and bring you back by force. I *will!*"--represents both desperate plea and the final, overt expression of the menace that has underscored his speech throughout the poem. Structurally as well as semantically, the poem enacts the enclosure of the feminine self and feminine speech; to read this last line as merely desperate is seriously to under read the danger that the husband poses. Echoing the voice of cultural authority, he becomes both judge and author of his wife's fate:

house arrest.”(Karen L. Kilcup. *Robert Frost and the Feminine Literary Tradition*.

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988: 72, 75-76.)



## Chapter – 2

### Representation of Woman Identity in Henrik

#### Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906), a significant Norwegian poet and dramatist, is known as the most influential man of the theatre in the nineteenth century. He has been a source of great influence for many playwrights of the nineteenth as well as twentieth century. His influence on George Bernard Shaw is especially notable. It was the social drama or the drama of ideas which he particularly propagated. His major works are: *Love's Comedy*, *The Pretenders*, *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *The League of Youth*, *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Hedda Gabbler*, *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf*, *John Gabriel Borkman* and *When We Dead Awaken*.

The present paper is based on his mostly acclaimed play, *A Doll's House*. The paper intends to analyse whether this play is an articulation of feminist ideology or not. Written in the nineteenth century, the play outlines the women's realisation of their rights and their endeavour to search for their role in society. It is an effort by a woman to assert her individual self.

This play also exposes the defects of the Victorian patriarchal society. It is the triumph of the woman over all hindrances whether social, masculine, or economic. Once I finished reading the play, I was left in a reflective state. I thought about the universality of the woman figure portrayed in Ibsen's play. Now, about 130 years after the publication of *A Doll's House*, many women still face the same circumstances that Nora faced. For instance, today's women working in the same capacity as men make about 72 cents compared to a dollar for men. Additionally, many women face discrimination in the workplace and in life in general. Many professions remain dominated by men in a day when women are more than capable of physically handling the job. Despite all their social, political, and career advancement, some women still feel emotionally crippled as their destinies are tied to that of the patriarchal society. The rise in the number of women suffering from anorexia and bulimia nowadays is an evidence of the emotional oppression that women are subjected to. Susan Bordo believes that social norms of beauty, motherhood, absence or presence of sexual modesty position the woman in a struggle with the prevailing social images and conventions.

"I believe that before anything else, I'm a human being, just as much of as you are...or at least I'm going to try to turn myself into one," Nora tells

Torvald in a moment of self-realization. This has been the woman's quest throughout history. Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House* triumphs over all obstacles and finally recognizes her duty towards herself which had always been neglected. Yet, many more women still continue to shatter the collars of gender anxiety and enslavement placed by the masculine world around their necks.

The play *A Doll's House* was written in the nineteenth century, when women were struggling for economic and social rights equal to men in society. Most of the women were act passively as they are expected to not to go outside their houses and child bearing their main role in family and they do not actively participate in society. In the words of Marianne Sturman, "In *A Doll's House*, he especially probed the problems of the social passivity assigned to women in a male oriented society (2004, p. 51)". It was the time when men and women had been following the age long traditions, as they were assigned specific roles to play.

The question, whether *A Doll's House* is a feminist play or not, depends on Ibsen's relationship to feminism. Gail Finny writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*: "The question of Ibsen's relationship to feminism, whether one is referring specifically to the turn-of-the-century women's movement or more generally to feminism as an ideology, has been a vexed one. The view supporting Ibsen as feminist can be seen to lie along a spectrum of attitudes with Ibsen as quasi-socialist at one end and Ibsen as humanist at the other". (1994, p. 89)

As is clear from the above views, Ibsen has not been regarded a feminist writer, rather he is regarded a socialist and humanist. His advocacy for women's rights lies in his advocacy for equal treatment of them in society. He emphasises more on the equality for man and woman and women's struggle for identity. As Razieh Eslamie opines: "Nora attempts to show the journey of such a woman as she gradually comes to the conclusion that her life and identity are a lie, and her real needs and aspirations go beyond the bounds of her marriage." (2015, p. 100)

In fact, the play was written during a time when women were enslaved in their gender roles and where certain restrictions were enforced on them by male dominant culture. It was a system of patriarchy, in which every woman was raised believing that they had neither self-control nor self government but that they must yield to the control of dominant male gender. In that society, men were individuals and wrote laws, prosecuted the criminals and judged women on their own point of view. Although Ibsen communicates strong ideas about women's rights, the play also contains issues of imprisonment of men in their role in patriarchal system and society. It is

those rules and norms of society that are boldly questioned by Ibsen through the relationship of Torvald and Nora – the unequal power sharing of men and women. As Abdul Baseer remarks: “The society is a male dominated society where language is a tool in the hands of the dominating gender, and is utilized fully to create an impression of ruler and be ruled; possessor and possessed, supervisor and subservient” (2013, p. 626)

Another notable point is the anti-feminist language used by Helmer. He uses animal terms to refer to Nora, his wife, such as ‘skylark’, ‘squirrel’ and ‘singing bird’, which suggests that Helmer does not love Nora as an equal, and treats her like a pet. Even more, he calls her a ‘possession’, as if she were a thing and not an individual with a separate identity. His use of demeaning terms highlights the society’s norm of treating women as inferior. Moreover, Helmer is portrayed as having the powerful in their relationship as he controls all the money and gives it to Nora as gifts.

From a feministic perspective, the society of that time gives both the sexes stereotypical, social roles to play. It does not give them freedom to explore who they are and what they want to be. Nora and Helmer are faithfully conforming to their social roles. Nora, for example, fulfills the role of a dutiful wife and mother. She does not work and stays at home and takes care of the children. But she is not really fulfilled, or self-actualized, through this role. The role of wife and mother does not bring out all her potential. Her reminiscences about doing a bit of copying to pay off her debts, she feels: “it was almost being a man” (Ibsen, 2010, p. 18). She finds the experience “fun” (Ibsen, 2010, p. 18). She does it secretly because her role does not allow her to work like a man. It is, in fact, the negative effect of confining men and women to stereotypical roles. She is not suitable for the role of a good mother as the maids spend more time than her with the children and she only plays with them like “dolls” (Ibsen, 2010, p. 83). She is a suppressed woman because it is apparent from her conversation with Dr. Rank and Kristine that she is unable to say the word “Damn” in front of Torvald as it was considered extremely rude and vulgar in the society of that time.

Torvald Helmer, too, is a victim of society’s expectations. He sees himself as bold and strong; social conditioning is responsible for his assuming of that identity. It is evident from his conversation with Nora that he wishes that she were in danger so that he could risk “everything” (Ibsen, 2010, p. 76) for her sake. However, when she is really in danger from Krogstad’s blackmailing, Helmer proves himself only a coward and a selfish person. He is unable to fulfill the role assigned to him by society and he only shatters the stereotype of a perfect model husband.

Another aspect of the play from the feminist point of view is the economic dependency of women. The woman was not allowed to work even if she wanted; she had to depend upon her husband, father or son for money. The work of earning money was assigned to man and he used to do the same not because he loved his family, but as feeling proud of being the master and protector of his family. He calls Nora a “spendthrift” (Ibsen, 2010, p. 5), to symbolize her weakness in contrast to his strength. Yet, Nora acts oppositely, having both the qualities of man and woman. In the words of Amir Hossain: “Ibsen, however, has carefully constructed Nora so that her independent and farsightedness might have always shown through her adolescent capriciousness. This mixture of wisdom and childishness is Nora’s strongest quality. It enables her to oppose the knowledge of books and the doctrines of her worldly husband and to test by experience the social hypothesis which declares duty to the family is the most sacred.”(2015, p. 12)

A comparison and contrast can be made between two women characters shown in the play. Nora and Kristine are the two models of womanhood in the nineteenth century as created by Ibsen. On the one hand, Nora is an uneducated, materialistic and impulsive woman. Kristine, on the other hand, is an independent and bold woman who had to work to save herself and her family. Nora is a dynamic character because her character develops. From a “little lark” (Ibsen, 2010, p. 43) who performs tricks for Torvald, she develops into an independently thinking woman who leaves her husband and children to find herself. Up to the end of the play, she seeks Torvald’s supervision to do little jobs like dance practice or selection of her ball dress. Kristine also has faced trials and tribulations in her life and she knows about the “hard world” (Ibsen, 2010, p. 14). She breaks the stereotypical mould that the society had fashioned for woman, that is to be docile and subservient objects of male attention. As Fatemeh Ghafourinia and Leila Baradaran Jamili write: “Nora resists and rejects the domestic role and acts in opposition to the social conventions and morals. The problem portrayed in the play is about women’s rights, as human’s rights. It is about the need for every woman to find out herself and stand on her feet in order to recognize the truth about herself, her life and her society. Moreover, it is about the need of every woman for self-discovery and acting based on the truth even though that truth is opposed to the social acceptance and for fighting against social conventions in the search of the truth.” (2014, p. 428)

As N. Eakambaram quotes about Nora’s asserting her identity that “No appeal to books, religion, sanctity of family, or question of conscience can stop Nora from seeking her freedom and truth (2007, p. 5)”. As Torvald also fails in playing his role of a protective husband, Ibsen thinks that it was

necessary to make the society aware of their limited capacity to play their roles. He wants to say that these roles have been created initially only for convenience, not for compulsion.

Thus, it can be said that rather than writing solely for women's rights, Ibsen wrote to free both men and women who were trapped in their gender roles during this period. He saw that there was need to revolt against the conventions and moral issues of society and he demanded justice and freedom for every human being and he wanted to inspire society towards individualism and free them from suppression.

To conclude, the author has shown gender specific roles in the form of Nora-Torvald and Kristine-Krogstad relationships and pinched them to his advantage to illustrate the difference between conditional and absolute love. The play deals with the difficulty of maintaining an individual personality – the feminine personality – within the confines of a stereotyped social-role. Thus, the play can be called a feminist one as it articulates the female voice in the play and it aims at a woman's struggle for assertion and identity.

## Chapter – 3

### Representation of Woman Identity in Robert

#### Frost's *Home Burial*

This project aims at the common problems faced and experienced by woman when she had lost her newly born baby and also experienced death of the marriage due to treatment of husband. The wife in the poem is very depressed for the death of her child. Essentially it is not the error of the wife to misjudge her husband; it is the nature of a lady. Nora struggled his husband understand his emotions and also express his feelings about his child but she failed, she thought that his husband is emotionless and he has not any type of sorrow for his child. "If a funeral awaits Nora, surely it is the funeral of his individuality" (Milking, 69).

The title *Home Burial* specifies the death of the son and indicates the death of the relationship between the mother and father. This title also advocates both a home graveyard and a home buried in one-sided sorrow. The lady worries after a dreadful wisdom of self-alienation, as well as alienation from her environments. And, more than the corporeal solitude, man hurts from the aloneness inside.

This poem explains some rare moments of emotional discussion in a worried relationship among a rural husband and wife who had lost his new born baby. After the death of his child the woman is upset after holding sight of the child's grave over the window and more thus when her husband doesn't nearly know the reason of her sorrow. She efforts to leave the house; he persists her to stop, just for once, and then she share her sorrow with him to provide him a chance. According to his wife he doesn't recognize what it is he does that upsets her or why she should sorrow externally so long. She hates him totally for his self-control, what she realizes as his hard-heartedness. She exhausts some of her anger and hindrance, and he takes it, but the coldness between them was still there. She opens the door to leave, as he calls after her.

How important a role does gender play in this tragedy? Certainly it has some relevance. There are the husband's futile, abortive physical threats, as if he could physically persuade her into sharing her grief—but these are impulses of desperation.

And both husband and wife acknowledge that there are separate spheres of being and understanding. "Can't a man speaks of his own child he's lost?" asks the husband. "I don't know rightly whether any man can," she replies. A little later he laments, "A man must partly give up being a man / with

womenfolk.” He sees his taciturnity and his inability to say the appropriate thing as a masculine trait, and she seems to agree. (Yet she sees his quiet grave digging as nearly inhuman.) Additionally, it is fairly standard to assume that more outward emotion is permitted of women than of men— the tragedy of this poem might then be seen as an exacerbation of a pervasive inequality. Yet one enduring stereotype of gender distinctions is the man’s inability to read between the lines, his failure to apprehend the emotions underlying the literal meaning of the woman’s words. In this poem, husband and wife fail equally in this manner. A woman, perhaps, might be less likely to dig a grave to vent her grief, but she is just as likely to react to death by withdrawal or by immersion in quotidian tasks. The reader witnesses the breakdown of a marriage (the burial of a home, expressed in the title’s double entendre), but more basically, this is a breakdown of human communication.

Partly, that breakdown is due to the inescapable limits of any communication. Much of the literature of the twentieth century stems from an acknowledgement of these limits, from attempts to grapple with them and, paradoxically, express them. A great deal of Frost’s poetry deals with an essential loneliness, which is linked to the limits of empathy and the sense that some things are simply inexpressible.

Here I want quote some line criticizing the male folk.

*““You don’t know how to ask it.”*

....

*“You can’t because you don’t know how to speak.”*

While talking or speaking, husband never thinks about the situation and emotional mood of wife. Also never consider the importance of time. That she says he does not know asking manner and speaking manner. But women folk can talk and speak based on situation. A kind of empowering women society can be seen in this poem.

While wife looking emboss of the child’s tomb in the morning, husband’s questioning manner also not appreciable. “He said to gain time: “What is it you see? .... She let him look, sure that he wouldn’t see, /Blind creature; and awhile he didn’t see. /But at last he murmured, “Oh,” and again, “Oh.””

Here, speaker just asks “what is it you see”. Actually speaker knows very well about the scene. Still he asks about looking. If he has common sense he won’t ask any such questions as the death just a day before. Speaker has not so much feeling as wife. Wife only know the feeling of the loss of child. So in

this context these kinds of questions should be avoided. So according to Amy, the wife, male folks are blind creatures. They have external and internal blindness. They can't even see their wives and their feelings. Moreover, his reply also with careless manner "“Oh,” and again, “Oh.””. It was very pathetic reply of course.

In the coming line, she admits that *“Two that don't love can't live together without them.”*

In this condition they can't live together. So she wants freedom an ultimate freedom from this negligence.

*“If you had any feelings, you that dug  
With your own hand—how could you?—his little grave;  
I saw you from that very window there,  
Making the gravel leap in air,  
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so  
lightly And roll back down the mound  
beside the hole.*

*I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.  
And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs  
To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.  
Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice  
Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,  
But I went near to see with my own eyes.  
You could sit there with stains on your shoes  
Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave  
And talk about your everyday concerns.”*

These above mentioned lines very vehemently criticizing the male folk. After the cremation he talks about everyday concerns not in the feeling of lost child. These lines also substantiate feelings of women stronger than the male. Latter she says...



*“Three foggy mornings and one rainy day*

*Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.’*

*Think of it, talk like that at such a time!”*

According to her, he was talking about everyday matters. Anyway in a nutshell we can say, this poem is strike against the male oriented society. More over the poem ends as Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, wife walking out from the Husband’s Home. Actually they are seeking ultimate freedom from the male domination and approaching their own space and room of their own. But this escape won’t be fruitful. Male folk will come back and take back them forcefully and he repeat the word “I will”. That reminisces in the last line *“I’ll follow and bring you back by force. I will”*

## Conclusion

Henrik Ibsen was a prominent poet and dramatist of nineteenth century. He wrote many plays for the social cause. *A Doll's House* is also one of his influential plays, in which he raised a voice in favour of women. He sought equality for men and women, which he subsequently presented in this play through the character of Nora Helmer. The paper aims to analyse the play on feminist grounds. In this play, Nora seeks individuality and autonomous selfhood, which she acquires on terms of breaking the shackles of gender roles of mother and wife.

If we go through the gist of the study based on *Home Burial* we will get a clear picture on the pathetic condition of women in the western part of the world. Suppression towards women in 20<sup>th</sup> century is no less even in America. Frost's poem clearly shows us feelings of woman named Amy neglected by her husband. Throughout the poem Amy was the embodiment of negligence.

As I have discussed in the last chapter, the poem "*Home Burial*" is about a husband and wife who have just lost their first-born son and have buried him in their back garden. It starts with the wife, "Amy" getting up in the morning and looks out the back window to see the grave sight. She immediately becomes depressed and looks down the stairway to where her husband is sitting. Her husband cannot figure out why she is all a sudden is so upset. Amy becomes very angry at the fact that her husband cannot even comfort her and tries to leave the house. Her husband then realizes the problem and begins to try and comfort Amy, but she is too upset at this point. Their marriage is at the point of being broken and they are dealing with the loss of their newborn son. Many people may look at this poem as a little feminist due to fact of showing how angry the wife gets with her husband. The poem shows the women getting angry with her husband and not showing husband getting upset at all. It seems as though he is trying to show that women are always "angry" but in reality anyone may be upset in the particular setting.

The poem tells that male folk never know the dealing mannerisms. He cannot understand the emotional domain of wife. He is blind to his surroundings. In the very last line, he shows his power over the wife and women telling "*I'll follow and bring you back by force. I will—*". Male folk not ready to surrender. He will use force with a 'will'.

Both *The Dolls House* and *Home Burial* represent two sides of one coin. Both pieces end in the same nature, female characters walk out. We cannot predict whether they are protagonists or not. They are just mere characters. If it is in their lives they play the role of minor characters. In Ibsen's *The Dolls House*, Nora Helmer suffered a lot, but the husband never mind it. He always sticks on his view point. She has done all for the sake of her beloved husband. Normally husbands think that dignity only to them. But he should know dignity for all.

This project highlights the role of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were merely dolls or puppets in the hands of males. In Robert Frost's *Home Burial* the woman character Amy facing same situations. Their husband has no love towards child and wife. No feeling at time of the death of their child and never minding his wife.

More over this project highlights various similarities and dissimilarities in terms of themes and plot. Amy and Nora are the embodiment of suffering and their name became the symbol of suppressed also. Here both works end in same level avoiding their husband in order to ultimate freedom.

The time and place of authors shows patriarchal system prevalent at that time all over the world irrespective of continents. Here America, Europe and Asia all are same. These authors devote their great effort to show their time's gender problems. Similar authors also will be in the different parts of the world. Actually these kinds of authors are very much influenced by the movement of feminism. Now let us consider them at the fourth stage of feminist movement as feminist oriented male authors. Now let us say them in this way as Feminist-Feminine-Female-Male tradition writers. They are doing their best for the empowerment of women. Even today in this 21<sup>st</sup> century there are lot of writers, they are supporting women receiving energy from the Frost and Ibsen.

## Works cited

Baseer, Abdul, Sofia Dildar Alvi, Fareha Zafran. "The Use of Symbolic Language in Ibsen's A Doll's House: A Feminist Perspective." *Language in India*. 13 (3): 622-630.

Eakambaram, N. "Naturalism in Drama and Ibsen's A Doll's House." *The Indian Review of World Literature in English*. 3 (2): 1-5.

Eslamie, Razieh, Hanieh Mazandarani. "An investigation of Adlerian psychoanalytic feminism in A Doll's House" *Journal of Scientific Research and Development*. 2 (1): 96-104.

Finny, Gail. "Ibsen and Feminism". *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*. Ed. James McFarlane. New York: Cambridge UP, (1994).

Ghafourinia, Fatemeh, Leila Baradaran Jamili. "The Women's Right in Henrik Ibsen's Doll's House". *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences*. 3(4) (2014).

Hossain, Amir. (2015). "Re-interpreting A Doll's House through Post-modernist Feminist Projections". *IRWLE*. 11 (1): 1-14.

Ibsen, Henrik. *Ibsen Plays: A Doll's House*. Trans. James Walter McFarlane. New Delhi: Oxford UP. (2010).

Sturman, Marianne. Cliffsnotes: Ibsen's A Doll's House and Hedda Gabler.

New York: Wiley Publishing. (2004).

Frost, Robert, Home Burial, North of Boston, New York: Henry Holt and

Company. (1915)

Bordo, Susan. Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body. The

Body and Reproduction of Femininity. Norton Anthology of Theory and

Criticism. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (2010)

De Beauvoir, Simone. The Second Sex. Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.

W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (2010)

Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, an Introduction. Norton Anthology of

Theory and Criticism. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (2010)

Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. Phenomenology of the Spirit. The Master Slave