

A Doll's House and Women's Domestic Life in the Nineteenth Century

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A Doll's House and Nineteenth-Century Gender Norms

The play A Doll's House is based on the protagonist name, Nora, who is a woman and shows her characteristics according to her societal norms. This play is based on three main acts and written by Henrik Ibsen. The play was premiered in late 19th century in Denmark, Europe. The play was published at a time when most world societies were man-dominated. The writer showed the position and responsibilities of Nora, a married lady who wants to survive well in her main dominated society. (Ibsen, 1879/2005)

The play not only represents the character of Nora, but it also focuses on the relationships of a married couple of the late 19th century. The play showed the characteristics, actions, thinking, values and norms of late 19th-century marriages. The main character, Nora, always tries to help his husband, Torvald and does everything that she needs to do to make him happy, but Torvald reveals to Nora that he is a traditional person having traditional norms, neglecting the love factor in his life.

Nora's Marriage and Domestic Identity

Nora is a charming, naughty and beautiful person, and she is in love with her husband, Torvald. She is living a faithful life with him considering him her everything. She spends her married years with her complete devotion and love with Torvald, except for a secret that she always hides from her husband.

After marriage, Torvald got sick badly, and his life was in danger. Nora does not have such an amount of money to save his husband's life. So, she decides to lend money to a person who is a friend of Torvald. His name is Krogstad, and he lent money to Nora. Later on, Nora moved to Italy for the treatment of his husband and successfully saved his husband's life. The married couple returned happily and started their life together.

Nora saved money to return to Krogstad and started giving him his money in small installments. Moreover, Torvald gets promoted and becomes the bank manager. Nora is so happy about his promotion and tells his friend Mrs. Linde about his husband's promotion. Mrs. Linde congratulated her and asked her to give her a job so that she could be able to earn a better lifestyle because she is a widow. Nora promised to ask her about the job to her husband.

Secrecy, Conflict, and the Breakdown of Marriage

Then suddenly Krogstad came and told Nora that her husband is going to fire him and she should stop that, if she was not able to do that then he will tell her secret to her husband. Nora starts to convince Torvald not to fire Krogstad, but he does not agree. Nora starts to feel tense about her married life because she knows that when Torvald gets to know about her secret, he will surely punish her or leave her.

When Torvald comes to know about Nora's secret, Nora decides to commit suicide because she never wants to live a life without Torvald. Then Torvald tells her that she had made a huge mistake, which she should not have done; she broke his trust. He told her that he would not let her raise his children, and she ruined his life forever.

Later on, Krogstad came and told Torvald that he would no longer blackmail Nora about the money and Torvald should forgive her for her mistake. Torvald came around instantly by judging the situation, but sadly he broke Nora's heart. Nora becomes so depressed that why she loves that person so much who does not even deserve her love. Why did she lend money only to save his life, and why did she decide to end her life just because she did not want to live without her husband? She decided to leave Torvald, and she did it at the end of the play.

Female Sacrifice and Social Expectations

The play and its story showed the love of a married woman who had done everything to make his husband happy and even lent money just to save his life. It is a cultural context of married women in our societies and communities. A woman always sacrifices her wishes, her life, her habits, her dreams, and even her honor just to make her husband happy. It's the culture of our society where the man is free to do whatever he wants to do, and no one blames him even for his wrong acts just because most societies are male-dominated.

The only mistake of Nora is that she never tells her husband that she lent money to save his life, and she saves money all these years to return to the person who lent her money. It was not a mistake that could have made her wrong, but in reality, she had done the sweetest thing because she was in love with her husband and faithful to him. She just wanted to save his life, but his husband was a traditional man who only saw the little mistake of Nora and made it so huge that it hurt Nora badly.

She spent her precious life years with this man who suddenly changed because of a little mistake and who was the one who promised her to make her happy for the rest of their lives. Nora did what she needs to do, whoever was in her place do that what she had done, but sadly the man does not worth that love and affection.

Domestic Life and the Wider Condition of Women

The play not only pictured the life of one traditional lady of the 19th century, but it represents the domestic life of every woman of the 19th century. In the past, traditional values and norms were strictly applied to women and their married life. She was the one who suffered and never complained just to make their family and husbands happy. Numerous women sacrificed their dreams, wishes, love, and friendships just for the sake of their husbands and the husband, mostly the ones who were not worth that love and sacrifices, similarly to Nora.

At the end of the 19th century, the social standards of marriage were critically applied to women and their domestic lives. They were not allowed to tell a lie, keep a secret, go outside without permission or make a decision in their lives. The most responsibility of married life was of women, and she was the one who never complained about any of her circumstances with anyone. (Moi, 2006)

Roles of women included the house chores, taking care of children and taking care of her husband. If a man gives divorce to his wife, then the wife suffers the most from the bad circumstances. The child custody was taken by the husband because the woman did not have enough resources or a job to take the child custody. In the case of Nora, she made the right decision at the end of the play, which empowered the role of women in society and the community. She left her husband because he hurt her that much and was not even worth the love of Nora. So the decision of Nora showed that it is the right of every woman to decide her life despite the fact that what the society or what the social norms will say about her. She is a human and deserves happiness and has the right to make the right decisions for her.

References

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