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

The play not only represents the character of Nora, but it also focuses on the relationship 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 her husband, Torvald and does everything that she needs to make him happy, but Torvald reveals to Nora that he is a traditional person with 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 to be her everything. She spends her married years with complete devotion and love for 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 enough money to save her husband’s life. So, she decides to borrow money from 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 her husband and successfully saved her 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 back in small installments. Moreover, Torvald gets promoted and becomes the bank manager. Nora is so happy about her husband’s promotion and tells her friend Mrs. Linde about her husband’s promotion. Mrs. Linde

congratulated her and asked her to help her get a job so that she could be able to earn a better lifestyle because she is a widow. Nora promised to ask her husband about the job.

Secrecy, Conflict, and the Breakdown of Marriage

Then suddenly Krogstad came and told Nora that her husband is going to fire him and that she should stop it; if she is unable to do so, 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 anxious 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 learns 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 serious 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 changed his attitude immediately after reassessing the situation, but sadly he broke Nora's heart. Nora becomes so depressed that she wonders why she loves a person who does not even deserve her love. Why did she borrow 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 her husband happy and even borrowed 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.

Nora's only mistake is that she never tells her husband that she borrowed money to save his life, and she has saved 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 her 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 precious years of her life 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 needed to do; whoever was in her place might have done the same, but sadly, the man was not

worthy of 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 also 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. They were the ones who suffered and never complained just to make their families and husbands happy. Numerous women sacrificed their dreams, wishes, love, and friendships just for the sake of their husbands, many of whom were not worthy of that love and sacrifice, 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. Most of the responsibility for married life fell on women, and they were the ones who never complained about any of their circumstances with anyone (Moi, 2006).

Women's roles included household chores, taking care of children and taking care of their husbands. If a man divorces 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 obtain 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 so deeply 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 what society or social norms might 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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