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Neo-Genesis Of European Drama: An Overview Of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* And *Ghosts*.

Dr. Narayan Surjit Behera
Assistant Professor of English (Stage-III)
KKS, Women's College, Balasore

ABSTRACT:

The genesis of European Drama dates back to the ancient Greece of 5th century BCE. It is commonly believed that Greece is the land of early Dramatic effervescence followed by Rome during 3rd BCE. Drama was the popular pastime of the people of ancient Greece and Rome and it was deeply associated with their culture. In ancient Greece and Rome plays were enacted primarily during festive occasions to honor their deities, retell their myths, legends and historical events to the public and above all to showcase the artistic talents of the land. Sophocles, Seneca, Plautus and Aristophanes were the veteran of classical European Drama. During Medieval period Liturgical dramas, Mystery plays and Morality plays were in vogue. Coming to Renaissance drama, William Shakespeare is the key figure but his dramas are all about royal themes and characters. During first half 19th century drama continued to adopt the traditional style. However, with the advent of Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist in the late 19th century, the face of European drama took a different turn. He delved into the varied human problems and their psychological nuances in a realistic manner. Instead of portraying royal themes in a grandiose manner accompanied by classical theatricalities, he tried to challenge the shallow social norms and depicted the human struggle to keep pace with life, sometimes terribly feeling upset, sometimes getting frustrated and alienated. In fact, Ibsen's innovative approach to realism propelled the birth modern European drama. This paper focuses on the new wave that Henrik Ibsen's brought to European drama through the two plays the *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House*.

KEY WORDS: Effervescence, Renaissance, Psychological, Alienated, Propelled

INTRODUCTION:

The neo-genesis of European drama emerged decisively in the latter part of the 19th century with the arrival of Henrik Ibsen on the literary stage. Ibsen was a revolutionary figure who liberated drama from the constraints of classical and romantic traditions, consistently exploring new thematic dimensions and theatrical techniques. The Ibsen Norwegian Company writes, "Ibsen's work examined the realities that lay behind many façades, revealing much that was disquieting to many contemporaries. It utilized a critical eye and free inquiry into the conditions of life and issues of morality". Often hailed as the father of modern drama, Ibsen challenged prevailing norms by introducing psychological realism, a dramatic mode that emphasizes the inner lives of characters and the social realities they navigate. Ibsen's significance lies not only in his thematic innovations but also in his transformation of drama into a medium for social and psychological inquiry. As Mullik observes: "Under the influence of Ibsen, the serious drama in England from 1890 onwards ceased to deal with themes remote in time and place. He had taught men that the real drama must deal with human emotions, with things which are near and dear to ordinary men and women" (P-220). According to Britanica, "Henrik Ibsen was a major Norwegian playwright of the late 19th century who introduced to the European stage a new order of moral analysis that was placed against a severely realistic middle-class background and developed with economy of action, penetrating dialogue, and rigorous thought". In fact, Ibsen's impact resonated across Europe, inspiring a generation of dramatists including George Bernard Shaw, Anton Chekhov, and August Strindberg.

DISCUSSION:

Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House* was first shown in Copenhagen in December 1879. At that time, it shocked many people because it talked about women's rights and questioned the way marriage and relationships worked. The play showed how men often controlled women in the name of love or family. It made people think about whether the values they believed in really made families happy or society better. Ibsen used this play to talk about problems in marriage and showed that even when a relationship looks perfect on the outer level, there can be serious problems inside. Regarding Ibsen's, *A Doll's House*, the Ibsen Norwegian Company remarks, "The play is a scathing criticism of the marital roles accepted by men and women which characterized Ibsen's society".

At the outset, Nora, the protagonist and wife of Helmer Torvald seems like the perfect Victorian wife, cheerful, obedient, and loving toward her husband, Torvald. Their home looked happy, especially with Torvald's new job, which brings more money and status to the family. But this happiness is short lived. Underneath it, there are problems like control, emotional dependence, and Nora losing her sense of self. The main issue in the play is Nora's secret borrowing of money to save Torvald's life. Even though she did it out of love but this is not acceptable in a society where women had no legal or financial right. Moreover, "a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent" (*A Doll's House* - Act-I,Page-43) Torvald, a product of the same mind set, when knows about this deceitfulness of Nora, done for the sake of Torvald's life gets furious, saying, "Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home, each breath the children take in such a house is full of the germs of evil" (*A Doll's House* - Act-I,Page-43)

Theme of male dominance over female is the main subject of Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*. Throughout the play Torvald's relationship with Nora is not based on equality or mutual respect. Torvald's relationship with Nora is based on control and condescension. He uses pet names like 'little squirrel' and 'skylark' that might seem loving, but actually he views her as weak and childish. He treats her like a pretty object to be admired and controlled. Torvald expects Nora to be happy, behave well, and make his home feel warm, but he doesn't want her to think for herself or challenge his authority. He sees Nora as a possession, not a partner. He's more concerned with his own image and reputation than respecting Nora's thoughts and feelings. By treating her like a child, he strips of her autonomy and agency, forcing her to conform to his expectations. As a result, Nora feels trapped and suffocated in her marital life. She's expected to play the role of the perfect wife, but she is not allowed to be herself. This tension ultimately leads to her decision to break free from the constraints of her marriage and forge her own path in life.

Nora realizes that Torvald doesn't truly love her for who she is. He loves the idea of having a perfect wife who obeys him. But Nora is more than that, she's smart, caring, and brave. She saved Torvald's life by borrowing money and working hard to pay it back, even though it was against the law. She did all this without telling him because she knew he wouldn't understand. This shows Nora's strength and moral courage. She's the one who's truly strong and selfless in the relationship. Torvald, on the other hand, thinks he's the leader and Nora should be always at his disposal. He is only concerned with the reality or the sentiments of a wife. He doesn't appreciate Nora's sacrifices or see her as an equal. He's more concerned with his reputation than Nora's well-being. He prioritizes societal expectations over his family's needs. He is obliviousness to Nora's sacrifices:

HELMER: I would gladly work night and day for you. Nora—bear sorrow and want for your sake.
But no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves.

NORA: It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done.

(*A Doll's House* - Act-III,Page-109)

Nora realizes she can't stay in a marriage like this where she's not valued or respected. She wants to be free to make her own choices and decisions. She wants to be treated with kindness and respect. Nora decides to leave her marriage because she deserves better. She deserves to be treated as an equal and have control over her own life. She doesn't want to be told what to do all the time or be treated like a child:

HELMER : It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

NORA : What do you consider my most sacred duties?

HELMER : Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

NORA : I have other duties just as sacred.

HELMER : That you have not. What duties could those be?

NORA : Duties to myself.

(*A Doll's House* - Act-III,Page-106)

Woman's emancipation is another important theme. Nora decides to leave her husband and children. It is a profound and courageous act of self-discovery. She has been living a life dictated by societal expectations, devoid of personal autonomy and genuine purpose. Nora yearns to transcend the confines of her predetermined role and uncover her true identity. She seeks to break free from the constraints of a life that has suppressed her freedom. In an era where women were bound by rigid conventions, Nora's choice is a bold defiance of the status quo. She rejects the notion that a woman's existence should be defined solely by her relationships and domestic duties. As she walks out the door, Nora embarks on a journey of self-exploration, driven by a desire for intellectual and emotional liberation.

Nora's slamming of the door serves as a poignant symbol of Nora's transformation. It marks the end of her old life and the beginning of a new chapter. With this decisive act, Nora asserts her agency and takes control of her own destiny, embracing the unknown with a sense of determination and hope:

Nora: I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as are – or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

(*A Doll's House* - Act-III,Page-106)

Through this play Ibsen not only exposes of a man's behavior and attitude towards his life-mate, his ill-treatment and exploitation but also exposes man's emptiness of heart, mind and culture. The events of the drama are extremely realistic. In fact, they had happened in reality itself. The drama was written by looking at the life and experience of a woman named Laura Kieler, who almost exactly resembles Nora.

Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghosts* was written at a time when people were expected to follow very strict rules about how to behave, especially when it came to family, religion, and morality. In 19th century, society cared a lot about appearances especially how things looked on the outside, and people were often forced to hide the truth in order to fit in. *Ghosts* is a bold play because it talks about disease, lies, broken families, and the pressure to appear proper. When the play first came out, many people were shocked because it challenged the ideas they believed in. However, over time it is recognized as a powerful work of art that made people think more deeply about life, society, and truth. Regarding Ibsen's, *Ghosts* the Ibsen Norwegian Company remarks, it is a "scathing commentary on the morality of Ibsen's society, in which a widow reveals to her pastor that she had hidden the evils of her marriage for its duration. The pastor had advised her to marry her fiancé despite his philandering, and she did so in the belief that her love would reform him. But his philandering continued right up until his death, and his vices are passed on to their son in the form of syphilis".

The story of *Ghosts* takes place in a single house, over the course of just one day. Even though the setting is small and simple, the story it tells is very deep and emotional. The main character, Mrs. Alving, is a widow who is getting ready to open an orphanage in memory of her late husband, Captain Alving. On the surface, it looks like she is honoring her husband's life but actuality she is pretending to give a cover-up to his late husband's mis-deeds. As the play goes on, we learn that Captain Alving was not a good man. He drank too much, cheated his wife, and lived a dishonest life. Mrs. Alving tried to hide these facts for many years, in order to protect her family's reputation. Subsequently, her adult son Oswald returns home and all the secrets from the past begin to come back. The title "Ghosts" does not tell us about real ghost rather they are symbols of the lies, pain, and bad choices from the past that still affect the present. These ghosts are not seen, but they are felt in the emotions, the conversations, and the consequences that unfold in the play.

The ghost of repression is one of the significant themes of the play. This means pushing down or hiding your feelings, your desires, or the truth because society tells you that you are not allowed to express them. For example, Mrs. Alving was not allowed to speak openly about her husband's bad behavior. Instead, she had to pretend that everything was fine. She had to stay silent and accept a life that made her unhappy, just to avoid people judging her or her family. This kind of silence leads to dangerous consequences and Ibsen shows us how dangerous it can be when people are forced to hide their true selves.

Generational trauma, which means the pain and problems of one generation being passed down to the next, is another ghost. Mrs. Alving even sent his young son, Oswald to be raised abroad, hoping to protect him from his father's bad influence. She believed that by covering up the truth and creating a lie, she could stop the past from affecting the future. Hiding the truth and pretending that everything is perfect does not protect children; it can actually harm them. As Ibsen puts it, "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children" (*Ghosts*, Act-I, page-55) The play suggests that it is better to be honest, even if the truth is painful, than to live a lie.

Ibsen also explores the ghost of hypocrisy, which means saying one thing but doing another. Many characters in the play care more about how they appear to others than about what is truly right. For example, Pastor Manders talks a lot about morality and religion, but he refuses to support Mrs. Alving when she tries to tell the truth about her husband. He maintains a double standard relating to the morality of men and women. Pastor Manders refers to an unmarried pregnant woman as a fallen woman but is silent about Mr. Alving, a lecherous fellow:

MRS. ALVING. Then what have you to say of me? I went and married a fallen man.

MANDERS. Why—good heavens!—what are you talking about! A fallen man!

MRS. ALVING. Do you think Alving was any purer when I went with him to the altar than Johanna was when Engstrand married her?

MANDERS. Well, but there is a world of difference between the two cases...

(*Ghosts*, Act II, page-41)

He is more worried about what people will say than about doing the right thing. This shows how society often punishes people who try to be honest, especially women. Mrs. Alving's struggle shows how hard it was for women to have a voice or make their own decisions during that time. Mrs. Alving's decision to stay with a man she despises serves as a powerful example of the societal expectations that govern women's lives.

But in the end, Mrs. Alving's efforts to bury the past do not work. The truth finds its way back, in a cruel and painful way. Oswald returns home as a grown man, sick with a terrible illness. He inherited this illness, most likely syphilis, as a result of his father's bad lifestyle and misdeeds. This illness is a "biological ghost," something passed down from father to son. Even though Mrs. Alving tried to shield Oswald from his father's sins, the consequences of those sins could not be stopped. This shows that some ghosts are not just memories or feelings; they can also be physical, passed through blood and body. It is a heartbreaking realization for Mrs. Alving, who sees that her silence and sacrifice were not enough to keep her son safe.

In this way the play is about how the past, whether it's personal or from our family or culture, affects family. It shows that we can't just ignore or hide our past mistakes and expect everything to be okay. Instead, we need to face them to move forward. *Ghosts* makes us think about how important it is to be honest and deal with our problems instead of hiding them.

CONCLUSION:

Henrik Ibsen's play "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts" were groundbreaking in their time because they tackled complex and sensitive issues that were not commonly discussed in theater. The theme of women's struggles, the consequences of past actions, moral hypocrisy, and double standards were considered daring and provocative. In "A Doll's House", Nora's decision to leave her husband and forge her own path was a bold statement about women's independence and autonomy. It challenged the traditional expectations of women as subservient wives and mothers. In "Ghosts", Mrs. Alving's tragic story serves as a warning about the dangers of staying in an unhappy and oppressive marriage. Her experiences highlight the consequences of societal pressure and the limited options available to women. Both plays showcase Ibsen's ability to tackle difficult subjects and spark important conversations. By exploring these themes, Ibsen shed light on the social issues of his time and encouraged audiences to think critically about the world around them. The contrast between Nora's and Mrs. Alving's stories is particularly striking. While Nora finds the courage to take control of her life, Mrs. Alving's situation serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of staying in a toxic situation. This contrast highlights the complexity of women's experiences and the need for greater understanding and support.

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