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### Nora's Re-birth as a Human: A Critical Analysis of Ibsen's A Doll's House

#### A B S T R A C T

This paper scrutinizes Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House where the female protagonist character is analyzed through investigation of the three elements of human beings: soul, body, and mind. This analysis of the play is processed along with the analysis of the dramatic elements, techniques, and conventions of dramatic criticism. The investigation of the stages of social drama in the female character's situation as presented in this play is intended to highlight woman's tragedy in patriarchal society. Ibsen sees women caught in a tragic situation where Nora is found in confrontation with society and its patriarchal concepts. This paper, thus, traces women's attempts to challenge gender inequality as presented through the female protagonist's acts. The female character actions in incidents of stereotyping, objectification, and oppression which reflect gender politics, sexuality, and power relations, should reveal her stand facing gender inequality under patriarchy. Evidence in the play text that demonstrate the female character's negotiation, rejection, and/or objection to all that deprives her equal rights to those of man as human should reveal to which extent, she manages to challenge gender inequality. By so doing Nora breaks the inferior status imposed on her being a woman.

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الولادة الجديدة لنورا كإنسان: تحليل نقدي لمسرحية ايبسن بيت الدمية

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#### الخلاصة:

يتناول هذا البحث مسرحية بيت الدمية لهنريك ايبسن حيث يتم تحليل الشخصية الأنثوية الرئيسية في النص من خلال البحث عن عناصر الكيان الإنساني الثلاث : الروح والجسد والعقل. يتم العمل على تحليل تلك العناصر بالتزامن مع تحليل عناصر الدراما وتقنيات وأعراف النقد المسرحي. إن تفحص مراحل الدراما المجتمعية في حالة الشخصية الأنثوية

كما تم تقديمها في هذه المسرحية بهدف الى تسليط الضوء على مأساة المرأة في المجتمع الذكوري. يرى الكاتب المسرحي هنريك ايبسن ان المرأة من خلال افعال الشخصية الأنثوية الرئيسية في المسرحية. حبيسة موقف مأساوي حيث نجد شخصية نورا في مواجهة مع المجتمع ومفاهيمه الذكورية. يتتبع هذا البحث محاولات المرأة لتحدي انعدام العدالة بين مكوني النوع الاجتماعي من خلال افعال الشخصية الأنثوية الأساسية في المسرحية. إن افعال الشخصية الأنثوية في هذا النص في حالات التمييز و التجسيد المادي والقمع والتي تعكس سياسة النوع الاجتماعي والجنس وعلاقات القوة يفترض ان تكشف موقفها في مواجهة عدم التكافؤ بين مكوني النوع الاجتماعي في ظل الهيمنة الذكورية. امثلة في النص المسرحي المختار لهذا البحث تستعرض تفاوض، رفض، او اعتراض الشخصية الأنثوية لكل ما يحرمها من حقوقها المساوية للرجل كإنسان والذي من المفترض ان يبين الى اي درجة تتمكن من تحدي انعدام العدالة بين مكوني النوع الاجتماعي في هذا الشأن. إن قيام نورا بما سلف يحطم المكانة المتدنية المفروضة عليها كونها امرأة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** النظام الذكوري، عدم المساواة بين مكوني النوع الاجتماعي ، والقوالب النمطية ، التجسيد المادي، والقمع، سياسة النوع الاجتماعي ، الجنس ، علاقات القوة

## Introduction

*A Doll's House* is Ibsen's first drama with female protagonist challenging the norms of the Victorian Age. It has won Ibsen the reputation of being feminist, which he denied by claiming that his urge for this play and similar other plays is to address the bad situation of women and that it was a humanistic rather than feminist urge (Ibsen, *Speeches and New Letters* 1910). *A Doll's House* was first published and enacted in 1879. In this play Ibsen presented 'Nora' who is his most known dramatic female character. Nora's transformation towards the end of the play marks a new generation of female characters in Victorian drama towards Modern drama. Surveying relevant literature indicate a rejection by most critics to the idea that Nora develops normally throughout the text from a child/doll wife into the self-determined woman at the end of *A Doll's House*. This kind of deficient understanding of Nora's character spurs from an unintegrated analysis of the character dictated by the patriarchal conception of woman.

This paper is to scrutinize incidents of stereotyping, objectification, and oppression respectively and explain how they reflect aspects of gender politics, sexuality, and power relations and relate them to the theories of feminist existentialism, sexual politics, and human basic needs which are utilized to disintegrate woman as soul, body, and mind in order to prevent her from living a complete human experience.

## *A Doll's House*

The story of *A Doll's House* play is about "Nora" who is presented in a realistic setting of a middle-class household that can be anywhere any year around Christmas time of the year, the plot of the play is presented preserving two of the traditional three unities of tragedy: place and story. The time frame exceeds the limit of 48 to 72 hours probably to allow enough time for the character exposition, maturity, and transformation. The plot that is centered on Nora starts with the exposition of what seems to be a happy family haunted by a secret. It is soon after exposing the hint about the secret, the conflict is revealed to be between Nora and Krogstad who – in a rising action of the play – confronts and blackmails Nora with her committing of forgery. Nora once secretly has borrowed money from Krogstad

to save her husband's life and she had to forge her dying father's signature to get that money. However, the complication occurs when Nora fails to avoid Krogstad's blackmailing when she fails to convince her husband to keep Krogstad in his job. At the escalation of events, Nora dances the Tarantella in such a dramatic way as if her life depends on it, which was the reality of the matter at that moment. In suspense, Nora and the sympathizing audience/readers are left waiting for a relief to be brought by Kristine who determines to persuade Krogstad to give up his blackmailing scheme. The play reaches climax when Helmer is finally to read the letters including the ones that exposes the forgery Nora has committed. The play reaches a climax when Nora decides to commit a suicide while Helmer reads the letter. The catastrophe in this play is at the point when Helmer reads Krogstad's letter, knows about the forgery and the threat it brings to his reputation and thus launches a harsh attack on Nora as result of what he has known. Then at the falling action everything became clear to everybody. The recognition is reached when Nora reaches to a realization about the truth of the marriage she has been in for eight years. At the resolution, Nora finds the courage in herself to change and to leave the Doll's House and try to achieve a better understanding of herself and society.

### Review of Related Literature

In his article in the *Journal of Canadian Social Science* entitled "Gender Struggle over Ideological Power in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*", Guo Yuehua explains that the gender relation expressed in *A Doll's House* reveals ideological power struggle. Yuehua discusses the differences in gender in relation to power. In this respect, he states that "men manipulate their power in an open way" (79). On the other hand, he maintains that "women demonstrate their ideological strength with their forceful challenge of masculine in a more tactful way, and deconstruct the traditional myths of gender roles." (79) In other words, men are so direct in demonstrating and practicing their power. Women, on the other flip, who may seem submissive, can manipulate the manifestation of their power via undermining the masculine power and/or using their tactfulness to obtain the required power. After discussing the power struggle in *A Doll's House*, Yuehua concludes that the masculine or patriarchal power is an ideological one. It makes males have a distorted perception of their opponent; women and of the gender role of men and women. Yuehua further holds that the social construction is responsible for this unrealistic gender role perception. In fact, he demonstrates in this essay his belief that women are more powerful than men. This is because they have a more realistic understanding of gender roles and thus are able to manipulate men's power by lingering their existence in an illusionary world of male dominance.

Yuehua highlights in his essay an important feature of Ibsen's social drama. He indicates that "[i]deological power embodied through gender relationships in *A Doll's House* helps people to reflect on the stereotyping of both men and women in literary works and have a new and rational perception of the gender roles in our modern world." (87) Such comments on Ibsen's social dramas add to their authenticity and to the soundness of their characters, which are the focus of the current study.

A sufficient literature review about *A Doll's House* is presented in John Templeton's essay "The Doll House Backlash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen" (1989). Templeton demonstrates in her lengthy article many different criticisms directed to Ibsen and his *A Doll's House* and especially to the character of 'Nora'. The unifying factor of those criticisms

is that they are all negative. Critics seem to have worn out their pens to save Ibsen from the accusation of being a 'feminist writer'. In Templeton's essay, there is a similar discussion to that of Ibsen's biographer Micheal Meyer, who argues that *A Doll's House* is not about women's rights. Instead, it is about "the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she is and to strive to become that person." (28) In the introduction, Templeton collects a criticism about Ibsen, 'Nora', and *A Doll's House*, which either rejects any intentional effort by Ibsen to defend women's rights, or refute any possibility of 'Nora' to be a representative of female gender rather than human beings in general. Templeton concludes the introduction with a reference to R. M. Adams' point of view, regarding *A Doll's house*. Adams believes that "like Angels, Nora has no sex. Ibsen meant her to be every man". (28)

In the first part of her essay that she calls (The Demon in the House), Templeton highlights that some criticism that condemns 'Nora' as a feminist character, illustrating her instead as a 'demon'. Templeton states that 'Nora' was seen by anti-feminist male critics as "an irrational and frivolous narcissist; an 'abnormal' woman, a 'hysteric'; a vain, unloving egoist who abandons her family in a paroxysm of selfishness" (29). The eight critical views of 'Nora' surveyed by Templeton seem to be motivated by the moral convictions of the Victorian Age, which she rebels against. Therefore, Templeton presents in this essay the fact that 'Nora' is being attacked because she defies moral norms set by the patriarchy, including the critics themselves. The current study is situated at the level of this argument. It negotiates the situation of female characters in confrontation with and under the effect of the same Victorian morals and mind set. When 'Nora' has rejected the patriarchy these critics advocate, it has become impossible for them to tolerate her.

Another critics' opinion revealed in Templeton's essay is that some critics accused 'Nora' of different kinds of neuroses and of having an instable character, shallow mind, deception, and lack of reasonability. Some even have stated that the true 'Nora' that Ibsen wanted to present is the one appears in the first two acts of *A Doll's House*. They further claim that the other 'Nora' in the third and fourth acts is psychologically unconvincing and cannot be evolved from the same 'Nora' at the beginning of the play. This study is to demonstrate how such shallow criticism of the female characters is a natural result of looking at them in fragments. Have the female characters been looked at and investigated as integrated humans of mind, soul, and body, a more profound and reasonable understanding would have resulted from any critical analysis about them.

Most of what Templeton proposes in her essay presents a survey of Ibsen's character as defender of the rights of women. She uses, in the most part, Ibsen's words to prove this proposal. As a case in point is her reference to Ibsen's declaration in the sketching of *A Doll's House*, "A woman cannot be herself in the society of today, which is exclusively a masculine society, with laws written by men, and with accusers and judges who judge feminine conduct from the masculine standpoint." (36) The preceding is a clear piece of evidence that Ibsen himself is quoted in defense of women rights. A more straightforward quote Templeton presents is a comment by Ibsen upon urging the Norwegian parliament to pass a bill that allows separating the property of married women. In this quote, Ibsen finds that consulting men, regarding granting women such a right is pointless. According to Ibsen, "[t]o consult men in such a matter is like asking wolves if they desire better protection for the sheep" (38). It is so eloquent a statement by Ibsen that needs no further comment. In this vein, Templeton

reveals that “*A Doll House* is not about Everybody’s struggle to find him- or herself but, according to its author, about Everywoman’s struggle against Everyman.” (36)

### **Stereotyping as Manifestation of Politics of Gender**

Evidence of stereotyping in *A Doll’s House* is examined in the text of the play to find out whether the protagonist; Nora surrenders to and accepts stereotyping, or does she negotiate or reject it. Consequently, it is to find out how successful is Nora in escaping stereotyping and thus whether she maintains a soulful existence which facilitates a potentiality into a rebirth as human as a success in challenging gender inequality.

There are many stereotyping incidents presented in *A Doll’s House*. From the beginning of the play, Nora sways between accepting, pretending to accept, and undermining some prototypes imposed on her as a woman in the patriarchal Victorian society. Right from the stage of character revelation at Act One of *A Doll’s House*, the reader/audience encounters the metaphors Helmer uses while addressing Nora. He addresses her as a skylark, a squirrel, and a singing bird (Ibsen, *A Doll’s House* 1-3). This name calling is an indication of stereotyping of Nora as a cute, pretty, and enjoyable thing which is below the human level. Such a stereotyping that associates woman with animal features indicates man’s supremacy that enables him to relate inferiority to the other gender: woman. This is affective on the selfhood of woman in the sense that it keeps her within the domain of the ‘other’.

Another example of stereotyping is obvious in Helmer’s indication that Nora is the one who is to maintain the housekeeping while he is to allocate his time and efforts for more important matters as business. The stereotyping of women as housewives confines them to the domestic sphere where they are not expected to do more than the maintenance job within the household. This is another expression of the politics of gender where job distribution, duties and rights are kept in the hand of the dominant gender: man. This kind of woman relatedness to man keeps her devoted to a state of indefinite ‘otherness’ being the object that is related and defined by the definite subject: man.

Helmer generalizes the underestimation of women as mindless when it is related to money issues by commenting: “Nora, Nora! Just like a woman!” (3) Here, Helmer enjoys the supremacy of his gender that entitles him to downgrade women to a stereotyping that women are irrational moneywise due to their gender. Such incidents show another example of the politics of gender that work on fostering the inferior identity of woman confined to a controlled gender. Such estimations that women are unable to think and rationalize force them again into a relative existence and a state of dependence. More animal like addresses to Nora come with ‘little pet’ and ‘sweet-tooth’ (4-5) which keep reflecting the supremacy of man over woman allowing him to practice the politics of gender to subordinate woman and confine her to a relative inferior selfless status. The same concept goes for belittling Nora as “Poor little Nora” (6) as Helmer addresses her. The stereotyping of women as dependent negative beings is expressed even by women themselves who identify themselves with the patriarchal conceptions of both genders. Mrs. Linde thinking that Nora has accepted money to save her husband from some secret lover indicates that she accepts and reflects that kind of negative stereotyping of women as crippled dependent creatures who are useless without the help of men. Such negative beliefs are fostered in the politics of gender that women are seen



as lost soulless creatures of no lame chance of existence without the support, guidance, and guardianship of men.

Mrs. Linde expresses another stereotyped model of women by indicating that the whole existence of women should be focused on taking care of others when she expresses the emptiness of her life as there is “[n]obody to live for any more” (11) in her life after the death of her husband and mother. This limited role prescribed to the female gender as the performer at the domestic sphere is yet another indication that man has anchored woman’s existence in a state of relativity. Later in the play, it is to be revealed that Nora frees herself of such negative mindset challenging the other with full rebellion against negative restraints by rejecting to live for others with total denial of herself.

Nora’s intelligence should be acknowledged here being aware of the politics of gender that imposes inferiority on woman. Nora realizes that, in the patriarchal world, she is supposed to live as an attractive physical figure that is desirable for man, i.e., to live as a body rather than a living soul. For this reason, she saves the revelation of the big secret of saving her husband’s life to some future time. That time is, as she indicates: “when I’m no longer as pretty as I am now. ... What I mean of course is when Torvald isn’t quite so much in love with me as he is now,” (P.15) because she understands that the relationship with her husband is carefully designed by the politics of gender. That politics of gender allocate roles that emphasize the gender gap and relate the existence of the subordinate gender; woman to the existence of the main gender; man. It is that stereotyping of women as a commodity is what makes Nora realizes that one day her husband will not be in love with her as much as he is now. This is, as she states, “when he’s lost interest in watching me dance, or get dressed up, or recite” (P.15). However, at moments of despair and weakness, Nora surrenders to the negative prototype of woman fashioned by the patriarchal society. She says: “Many’s the time I was at my wit’s end. [*Smiles.*] Then I used to sit here and pretend that some rich old gentleman had fallen in love with me. ...” (16) This model of the imaginative woman connotes to the female gender weakness. It is a devotion into a passive existence that drives value from the holder of the gaze and, thus, the source of power; man.

At the time Nora seems to slip into passive indulgence in dreams finding some relief in the idea that she may stop struggling against patriarchy and may accept to love the limited existence allowed to her as passive woman, the play seems to take a twist in events. In the middle of Nora’s conversation with Mrs. Linde expressing acceptance to her stereotyped patriarchal model role of wife and mother, the doorbell rings alarming and awakening her into reality of her existence.

Nora expresses a challenge to the patriarchal model of woman who is graceful, soft voice, passive and obedient to the powerful man on many occasions. The fact that she eats forbidden macaroons is a challenge to the power of her husband. That she wants to say ‘Damn’ to her husband is a wish to express challenge. However, the actual challenge is by attempting to be dependent, to make decision, raise money and manage business to obtain economic independence that is the foundation for other forms of independence.

Nevertheless, Nora enjoys a carefree time with her children as a typical Victorian woman within the limits of the model designed for a mother in a patriarchal world. She plays with her children as if they were dolls just as she allows her husband to play with her. Again, While Nora indulges in the illusion of the patriarchal world, she is shocked into reality. Ibsen

chooses Krogstad to be the harsh reminder to Nora that she cannot fall into the illusion of the passive woman. There is also a reminder of the challenge she accepted to take through the appearance of Krogstad on stage.

The dialogue between Nora and Krogstad reveals incidents in which Nora going through the struggle of either confining to or struggling against gender inequality that is presented in her acting and in Helmer's dealing with her within the prototype of the passive, dependent woman. When Krogstad threatens Nora of revealing to Helmer the secret of her borrowing money behind his back, she dwindles to the illusion of the dependent protected woman that her husband would pay off the money. She was ready to accept the passive role of the female gender. This illusion does not survive long that it is shattered by Krogstad confronting Nora with an accusation of forgery. At this point Nora is shocked with reality of her action that she challenges her passivity and claims responsibility. It is so clear in the stage directions that she is at a moment of realization when "Nora [*after a moment's silence, throws her head back and looks at him defiantly*]. ... It was me who signed father's name." (28) While it was expected from a woman in Nora's situation facing a life shadowed by a dying father and a dying husband to surrender to fate and accept whatever the patriarchal society offers her, she resisted. She challenged the passive prototype and subverted the passive reality of her gender. She did not bother her dying father with news of her dying husband. She did not accept to sit in passivity watching her husband dying due to his stubbornness refusing to borrow money to save his life. Nora must have been aware that she is breaking the margins of power relations allowing her human soul to live in an unexpected dimension that connects between love, caring, and responsibility. She chose to break into the active domain that man has made taboo for woman through convincing her to accept the passive stereotyping of her gender.

Patriarchy has attempted to keep power in the hand of men so that women cannot take any action without the consent of some 'guardian' man in their lives as a father, husband, or any relation that guarantees women's relative existence based on gender to the powerful male gender. According to Simone De Beauvoir, man stereotypes woman in patriarchy into a dependent eminence that cannot have an independent existence as there is no chance for her to live the experience of transcendence (*The Second Sex*, 1989). That has resulted in man's categorization of woman as dependent commodity as a daughter, wife, or prostitute. In such a situation as that of Nora, woman is confronted with choices of accepting loss or accepting to sell her body which she is expected to be all about as a woman in patriarchy if she insists on saving her husband. Yet, the fact that Nora, has thought, felt, decided, and acted is a challenge to the gender inequality imposed on her through the politics of gender that deprives woman any of these actions as they lead to a human acquisition of an essence. A condition of existence that man does not want to see come true for woman.

Nevertheless, Nora is still struggling in the re-birth stage. A re-birth from a passive subordinate creature into a human woman. She is not yet re-born as a full human. She still negotiates her relativity to Helmer. After Krogstad leaves, she is negotiating whether to accept the passive dependent role or to stand for what she has already chosen. As a typical Victorian woman, she is supposed to tend the house but earlier she threw the children's clothes everywhere as indication of defiance to that typical model. Now that she is caged by the power of the other gender, she regresses to passivity. She is a good housewife according

to the standards of patriarchy and thus, she [*Begins gathering up the children's clothes*] (29). Also, in a soliloquy, she states: "We'll have a lovely Christmas tree. And I'll do anything you want me to, Torvald; I'll sing for you, dance for you..." (30). These actions expose Nora's position in negotiation with gender politics. Going back and forth in accepting and denying the role designed for her in the prototype of the passive woman is part of her struggle to retain a soul and get a re-birth as a human.

The dialogue that goes between Nora and Helmer to the end of Act One of the play completes the revelation about the stereotyping of Nora as passive woman seized by the politics of gender in the hand of man. From speaking for her to addressing her with animal adjective as a 'little song-bird' to reminding her of the size of her gender role as woman, Helmer tries to make sure that Nora remains within the limits set by the politics of gender in the patriarchal house he feels confident to be in full dominance of.

At this stage comes the fancy part to reveal that Nora is on her way to separate between her reality and illusion imposed on her as a woman. While she speaks about her life and whole existence, she tells Helmer that "Everything seems so absurd, so pointless" (31) in an indication to the kind of existence she has in a patriarchal world. His response is sarcastic, however, saying: "Has my little Nora come to *that* conclusion?" which shows insistence on her inferiority and inability to think logically.

According to the typical models of married men and women in patriarchy, Helmer and Nora live the illusion of a happy couple as exposed in their dialogue.

Helmer. Aha! So my impulsive little woman is asking for somebody to come to her rescue, eh?

Nora. Please, Torvald, I never get anywhere without your help. (32)

In politics of gender and within the roles allowed for each gender, women are to be totally controlled by men where their existence is that of total relativity and dependence. They have no soul of their own to live their own free life. It is the model Helmer wants for **his Nora**. And again, with persistence of patriarchal stereotyping by Helmer the dialogue goes as:

Helmer. My dear Nora ... Practically all juvenile delinquents come from homes where the mother is dishonest.

Nora. Why mothers particularly?

Helmer. It's generally traceable to the mothers, but of course fathers can have the same influence. (33)

Within the system of politics of gender, man allocates the superior position to his gender leaving the inferior position to the other gender. Thus, ironically, for Helmer, women are the cause of corruption while it is man who is driving woman to corruption by limiting her options in life to total dependence which man directs to virtue or vice as has been highlighted by Beauvoir in her existentialist feminism.

By the end of Act One, Nora seems to have given up the struggle and accepted her destiny as an encaged soul without any genuine existence when she expresses an embrace to Helmer's beliefs. However, she still reflects subversion when she doubts Helmer's bad beliefs about the negative impact of a woman on her family. The ending soliloquy of the revelation act and in a dramatic preparation for an escalation in action, Nora expresses her doubts: "Corrupt my children...! Poison my home? [*Short pause; she throws back her head.*] It's not true! It could never, never be true!" (34)



Act Two escalates the conflict between Nora as representative of female gender and both of Helmer and Krogstad on the other side of the equation of the politics of gender. While Helmer is the main Antagonist, Krogstad is still another front of the unfair patriarchy which is antagonistic to women. Act Two starts with Nora amid the dilemma of believing or denying that her life may change or even that she may have to end it in another sacrifice to save her husband's reputation this time. Act Two of *A Doll's House* is full of double meaning or multi-layered meaning of many words and sentences uttered by the characters. This artistic feature of Ibsen's drama continues in *A Doll's House* till the end of Act Three. Ibsen intends to keep the critical sense of the Victorian traditions alive throughout the play using such techniques.

In a symbolic reference, Nora asks for the box of fancy dresses. This box of fancy dresses refers to all illusions and typical models imposed on her by the patriarchal society. At the time she intends to amend one of those fancy dresses (which is a metaphor of the prototype of the entertaining enjoyable sexy woman) to wear again, she declares: "Oh, if only I could rip them up into a thousand pieces!" (35). As it has been indicated earlier, Nora is still in a state of negotiations whether to submit to the typical model of wife and mother or whether she should escape it and work to discover herself as a human. The fact that she wants to shatter the fancy dresses is an indication that she wants to save herself from the falsehoods of being 'a good woman'<sup>1</sup> in the terms of the patriarchal society.

In the dialogue between Nora and Mrs. Linde, Nora reports what Helmer believes she should wear or do rather than expressing her belief in doing the same. This stage of disintegration between what she thinks her husband wants and what she does indicates an awareness of the patriarchal dominance Helmer practicing on her as the dominant gender in their marriage relationship. Thus, the conversation between them goes as:

Nora. .... Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan fisher lass and dance the tarantella. ...

Mrs. Linde. Well, well! So you are going to do a party piece?

Nora. Torvald says I should. Look, here's the costume, Torvald had it made for me down there. (37)

In her statement: "Torvald says I should", Nora mirror's the man-dominated world she lives in. She declares that the world in which she lives has been dictated by Torvald Helmer who is leaving her without any choice. Further indications of woman's limited chance to have essence/soul in the patriarchal society are in the dialogue between Nora and Torvald where he denies her the freedom to do things her way. However, Nora keeps negotiating her chances under the politics of gender. She shows readiness to play the typical wife model her husband wants. She does so just to escape a horrifying event that she thinks may oblige her to end her life.

Nora. If a little squirrel were to ask ever so nicely ...?

Helmer. Well?

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of good woman has been discussed by De Beauvoir as a restricted existence for woman designed by man-dominated society to subordinate woman. She explains that the term 'good woman' is coined by the civilized society which is man made to impose on woman certain qualities that please man and which she should obtain in order to be 'good woman', 'real woman', or 'true woman'. Sayers (Sayers 1990) indicates that 'a good woman' means 'a second-rate human being'.

Nora. Would you do something for it?

Helmer. Naturally I would first have to know what it is.

Nora. Please, if only you would let it have its way, and do what it wants, it'd scamper about and do all sorts of marvelous tricks.

Helmer. What is it?

Nora. And the pretty little sky-lark would sing all day long. ...

Helmer. Huh! It does that anyway.

Nora. I'd pretend I was an elfin child and dance a moon light dance for you, Torvald.

This dialogue exposes how Helmer deals with Nora as a doll with no essence. She is taken for granted. Nora on the other hand seems to be aware that a soulless doll is a role she has to play to survive in the patriarchal house of Helmer. Yet, she still seems to be numbed by the daydream drawn to her by Helmer as he keeps promising: "my own darling Nora. When it comes to the point, I've enough courage, believe me, for whatever happens. You'll find I'm man enough to take everything on myself" (44). Thus, in accepting to play the doll's role she believes there is true love in return by a man whose ready to give up his life for her. For Nora to transform, she needs to awake from the effect of that fantasy of a secret lover.

Ibsen's clever use of chorus characters is clear in employing the character of Dr. Rank who, in addition to Helmer, plays a good role in revealing how patriarchy encompasses woman. It is through blocking her every chance of evolvement from the degraded status of a sub-human that is drained of soul and is, thus, an expression of incomplete existence. Dr. Rank, the dear friend with whom Nora feels an escape from her doll role is yet another embodiment of patriarchal politics of gender. He is yet another barrier and awakening shock for Nora that she is being stereotyped. She, however, rejects to be seen as a means of amusement and rejects the reward for it which may have saved her from the secret that haunts her marriage and life, at least as far as she thinks.

Another symbolic indication to the male dominance in Nora-Helmer relationship is traceable in the conversation between Nora and Mrs. Linde where the mailbox with the letter in it is a metaphor of the marriage relationship to which the key is always in Helmer's possession as well is the existence of all that is inside the box, including Nora's existence.

Nora. It's no use. It's hopeless. The letter is there in the box.

Mrs. Linde. Your husband keeps the key?

Nora. Always.

This is how the 'little singing bird', the 'sky-lark', and the 'squirrel'; Nora cannot escape! This is how a woman is imprisoned in a marriage built on politics of gender where woman is drained of soul and molded into patriarchal ready-made typical models.

A final demonstration of politics of gender in Act Two of A Doll's House is in the action escalation when Nora tries through the tarantella practice to fit again into the typical model of entertaining desirable female which she seems to find herself tearing apart in her attempt to survive. She, then, counts "Thirty-one hours to live" (61) in which she is again the 'little sky-lark'.

Act Three with the climax and falling action is where Nora comes to final realization to the reality of the politics of gender and where she stops trying fitting into the prototype of the 'good woman'. Most of the beginning of Act Three is full of indications of women's sexuality. However, so convinced of the approaching end and the possibility of a miracle,

Nora asks her husband to finally read the letter that carries the dark secret that has been haunting her. Yet, this only happens after Helmer confirms: "You know, Nora ... many's the time I wish you were threatened by some terrible danger so I could risk everything, body and soul, for your sake." (74) At this very point, Nora reaches the top of believing in the deceptive life offered by Helmer. She was about to believe in the misleading typical models of the guardian protecting husband and guarded and protected woman. It is at this point Nora could have lost the chance to escape that illusion forever except for the unexpected event that took place. Ready to end a life she spent as a shadow soul of her husband for the sake of him, Nora gets the hardest shock of her life. Helmer reads the letter but that does not bring up the miracle Nora was waiting for as a dreaming woman whose existence is affixed in passivity and waiting. The politics of gender has situated the two genders at the two ends of a relationship. At one end is woman who is only giving while being deprived the right to claim possession of anything including her body. On the other end is man who is only taking with an absolute right of possession to all that he has power on including woman's body. However, Nora realization this fact in her indication: "Yes, now I'm really beginning to understand" (75)

Nora has started to change, but Helmer believes he still has power over her. He deems that Nora is yet to accept as true what he thinks on her behalf. He does not thank her for saving his life. He underestimates or even trivializes her intention to end her life to save his. Instead, he holds her responsible for all the troubles in his life: "I'm done for, a miserable failure, and it's all the fault of a feather-brained woman!" (76). All the good Nora did to Helmer including living a miserable life for saving his life, let alone playing the role of the pleasing doll wife, all of this is nothing for Helmer because it comes from an inferior creature; a "feather-brained woman". Helmer cannot but think patriarchy and patriarchy stereotypes women as useless at thinking. For this reason, he is not ready to accept anything that comes of her thinking deeming it unreasonable and irrational. In addition to trivializing her mentality, Helmer does not care a bit about Nora's feelings. All he cares about is "save the bits and pieces from the wreck, preserve appearances..."(76). At this point of climax in Nora's life revealing the whole truth about the absurdity of her existence as a wife and woman, it seems appropriate to recall what Beauvoir states: "One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be" (Beauvoir xix) It seems that for Helmer, who Ibsen chooses to be a typical representative of patriarchy, Nora is a shadow, a non-existent, a thing to handle as pleasing and as necessary. The climax of *A Doll's House* is the point of separation between Nora's life of non-essence and another with essence. It is the point of transformation from a shadow into a human. It is the stage of a rebirth from soulless to a soulful existence.

A new Nora is present who is aware of the reality of her existence and has full realization of how unfair it was and how further unjust it tends to be. However, indications of stereotyping within the politics of gender are still presented by Helmer at the time in which he does not realize or does not want to consider that Nora has broken off the cage. Nora got the awakening shock that allowed her to break the limits of eminence and feel an essence within her. She is now to practice a genuine existence that is expressed by free will and free choice. Nora decides to leave Helmer out of her own free choice. She does not want to try to

fit in the typical models of the 'other' which patriarchal man not only devises and controls but possesses too.

Nora breaks off the illusions imposed on her by the typical models of good wife, good mother, and good woman which man defines and stipulates backed by the patriarchal politics of gender. When Nora gets sober to reality, Helmer gets double indulged in an illusion of reinforcing such typical models on Nora again and over again as he states:

For a man, there's something indescribably moving and very satisfying in knowing that he has forgiven his wife – forgiven her, completely and genuinely, from the depths of his heart. It's as though it made her his property in a double sense: he has, as it were, given her a new life, and she becomes in a way both his wife and at the same time his child. That is how you will seem to me after today, helpless, perplexed little thing that you are. Don't you worry your pretty little head about anything, Nora. Just you be frank with me, and I'll take all the decision for you. ...(78-79)

There is irony in Helmer offering Nora to give up herself as a living human being and alternatively to accept living in a double siege that is even a worse selfless life than the earlier one she lived with him. In a metaphoric language, Nora refers to the change in herself while she indicates changing clothes. It is the artistic use of metaphor Ibsen utilizes in *A Doll's House*. There are no more fancy dresses and thus no more fitting into typical models. Nora declares: "I've changed". (79)

Right from the beginning of the play it has been so clear that patriarchy through the practice of politics of gender devotes woman's existence to gender inequality which is well maintained that women find it so difficult to overrule or reject. From the beginning of *A Doll's House* and starting with the exposition, Helmer is a trained male in demonstrating politics of gender. However, Nora has shown a continuous struggle against such a kind of limited existence once by negotiating the prototypes imposed on her and other times by pretending to fit into them. By the end of the play, Nora ends up in a total rejection to be stereotyped.

### **Objectification as Manifestation of Sexuality**

Objectification is one clearly confirmed aspect in *A Doll's House*. There may be one major incident at the revelation stage of the play in Act one. However, there are many more increasingly appearing in the play at the escalation and climax in acts Two and Three. In tracing the theme of objectification, this paper investigates how, when, and why Nora is being looked at as a female body that is mostly a sexual object. In addition, it is investigated whether Nora accepts, negotiates, or challenges and rejects this objectification. The emphasis in analysis is on the concept of 'the image of woman' by Kate Millett as presented in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970).

At the exposition stage of the play in Act One it has been clearly shown the superiority and dominance of the husband over the wife maintained by the patriarchal politics of gender. However, the objectification of the protagonist; Nora, starts to get noticed around the middle of Act One. Again, with the same declaration Nora makes about the reason for keeping the secret of saving her husband's life to the future, the study finds a major indication of Nora's realization of objectification. In the dialogue between Nora and Mrs. Linde, Nora expresses that she is looked at merely as a body. Nora states that she expects a

day: “when I’m no longer as pretty as I am now. ... when Torvald isn’t quite so much in love with me as he is now, when he’s lost interest in watching me dance, or get dressed up, or recite” (15). Nora seems to be aware of how she is perceived by Helmer as an entertaining, attractive, and enjoyable body. This statement by Nora shows the emphasis on sexuality in the Nora-Helmer relationship. This image of woman by Millett, stresses that women in patriarchy are seen as sexual bodies to be dominated and utilized by men. For this reason, Nora who realizes this fact keeps a secret which she hopes will make her of some value to Helmer when the time comes that she lose her value to him as a sexual body, a source of entertainment and joy, when she is useless as a sexual body.

Nora seems to have fed up with the attempt to be the object that man utilizes for entertainment: a sexual body. She expresses a wish to tear down what manifests her surrender to that mold of objectification. It is the symbolic use of those fancy dresses again. It is the molding and fitting of woman into an entertaining sexy object that satisfies man’s desires. She states: “Oh, if only I could rip them up into a thousand pieces!” (35). Thus, Nora wishes she were able to escape the destiny of amusing and satisfying man. According to Millett’s theory, there is a social construction of men and women’s sexual roles. From the concept of sexuality, it seems that those social constructions made women desired by men in certain images that best restricted them to being sexually attractive bodies. There is evidence of women subordination and their being dominated by men with regards to ‘the image of woman’. In selecting what to wear for the fancy dresses party, Nora tells Mrs. Linde that “Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan fisher lass and dance the tarantella.” (37) Helmer chooses what Nora should look like and what she should be in order to be sexually attractive. Nora has no right to choose how to dress or what to do. Even love in patriarchy has a different full of dominance façade. It is the love of man to what he possesses as object. Addressing Mrs. Linde, Nora says: “Torvald is so terribly in love with me that he says he wants me all to himself.” (38) Thus, Nora is reduced into an object owned by Helmer.

Nora is forbidden to think and is unexpected to be anything more than what the functions of her feminine body entail her to. This is an evidence of disintegrating women where soul and mind are drained leaving a sexual body dominated and subjugated by man. However, Nora shows evidence throughout the play of consciousness of that state of disintegration.

Although the play may have many indications of the objectification of women, Ibsen keeps the major indications to the climax in Act Three. It is to highlight that the transformation happens to a woman from being perceived merely as a commodity to being a self-aware human with integrity. In Act Three, close to the climax, Helmer displays Nora to Mrs. Linde as if she were some possessions. Helmer “[*removing Nora’s shawl*]. Well take a good look at her. I think I can say she’s worth looking at. Isn’t she lovely, Ms. Linde?” (67) Helmer’s words are such an exposition of patriarchal objectification of woman. Helmer is proud of possessing the beautiful Nora and he gives permission to people to have a look at his possession. Sexuality in feminism finds that women are being reduced into a sexual body owned and entertained by man which is the case in hand as is discussed above. In the same incidence, Helmer is bragging about how his sexy Nora charmed everybody in the party and how he decides it is time to withdraw his performing creature to celebrate the win. Helmer



makes important declaration of patriarchal dominance on the objectified and hence subjugated woman in his address to Mrs. Linde as:

Helmer. Isn't she quite extraordinarily lovely? That's what everybody at the party thought, too. But she is dreadfully stubborn ... the sweet little thing! And what shall we do about that? Would you believe it, I nearly had to use force to get her away. (67)

These words by Helmer expose how a patriarchal husband perceives his wife. For Helmer, Nora is just a "sweet little thing" which he uses to compete with others in possession. There is also a reference to the possibility of using force by Helmer not to correct some mischief but to oblige Nora to follow his desires. According to Kate Millett, man entitles himself the use of **force** to subjugate woman. It is exactly what Helmer finds himself authorized to use to compel Nora against her desire. Thus, the sexuality of woman as a body is dominated totally by man who uses all means to control.

Helmer further emphasizes the sexuality of Nora, her objectification and his absolute dominance when – speaking about Nora – he reports to Mrs. Linde about the achievement of **his Capri girl!**

She dances the tarantella, there's wild applause—which was well deserved [...] The main thing is she was a success, a tremendous success. Was I supposed to let her stay after that? Spoil the effect? No thank you! I took my lovely little Capri girl—my capricious little Capri girl, I might say—by the arm, whisked her once round the room, a curtsy all round, and then—as they say in novels—the beautiful vision vanished. (67-68)

Helmer reports of controlling Nora after she performs the movements taught by her master like a performing creature of no wits or feelings. Helmer shows off the success and makes the exit with the best effect. This can only indicate that he did not go to the party as a husband with his wife but rather as a master followed by some creature which he uses to show off, gain satisfaction and leads out. This is an incident that reveals an absolute objectification of Nora and reduction to a subhuman creature that is led by whims and accordingly needs to be controlled. The image of the objectified woman who is possessed and controlled by man is further emphasized in Helmer's address to Nora: "Can't I look at my most treasured possession? At all this loveliness that's mine and mine alone, completely and utterly mine." (69) This is such a clear declaration of Helmer's perception of a woman who is objectified and possessed.

In Act Three, Nora has been displayed by Helmer as a beautiful body, used to compete and gain satisfaction, forced against her will, and declared as an owned object. It is such a vivid image of woman in patriarchy that Ibsen reflects in *A Doll's House*. It is exactly what Millett refers to as the theory of Patriarchy where the image of woman is that of a female body that is possessed, used, and humiliated by man. To complete the picture, it is enough to find out how Helmer further addresses Nora in the same occasion. In reply to her rejection to be addressed as a possessed object, Helmer says: "You still have the tarantella in your blood, I see. And that makes you even more desirable." (70) This completes Millett's theory of patriarchy where women are subjugated by men through sex. When Nora danced the tarantella, she was wild and after that she was stubborn, thus all what Helmer seems to be thinking of is to tame her wildness by making her surrender to his sexual desires. For man, sexuality is what the entire woman is about when it comes to man-woman relationship in

patriarchy. If Nora rebels, she may have a choice and that is not allowed to woman. If she thinks, she may use her brain which is also denied in the patriarchal norms. For this reason, even though by force, Nora is reminded of what she is and can only be; a desired sexual body for man to please his desires.

Ibsen presents Helmer in *A Doll's House* as the best representative of patriarchal conceptions and beliefs when it comes to man-woman relationship. All that Helmer can see in Nora as a woman is her sexuality. Besides that, she is some entertaining pet, some possession. In his dialogue with Nora, Helmer indicates:

And when it's time to go, and I lay your shawl round those shapely, young shoulders, round the exquisite curve of your neck ... I pretend that you are my young bride, that we are just leaving our wedding, that I am taking you to our new home for the first time .. to be alone with you for the first time ... quite alone with your young and trembling loveliness! All evening I've been longing for you, and nothing else. And as I watched you darting and swaying in the tarantella, my blood was on fire ... I couldn't bear it any longer ... and that's why I brought you down here with me so early.... (70)

'The image of woman' as a sexy body is well reflected in Helmer's expression of his perception of Nora above. He can see in his wife only a body that is young and charming. When he looks at his wife in public, she is a sexual body that he desires to take and subdue repeatedly each time they go out to a party. She is his desired bride; scared and virgin, only his own just like as a patriarchal man would want woman to be. Helmer finds Nora a personification of sexuality that only can set his blood on fire of sexual desire to control, subjugate and tame that sexual subhuman: woman. As a result, when Helmer steals what he calls 'his bride', he thinks of sexual intercourse that boosts his sense of power and control. In this regard, Kate Millett indicates that "[i]ntercourse is an assertion of mastery, one that announces his higher cast and proves it upon a victim who is expected to surrender, serve, and be satisfied" (Millett 20). One may ask in this context, what does Nora think? How does she feel about all that? Where does she find herself in the party story? Does she really exist? Was she ever allowed to think? Can she react or reject? The answer to these questions is in Nora's response to Helmer's burning sexual desires when she says: "Go away, Torvald! Please leave me alone. I won't have it." (70) This is a completely neither expected nor accepted response of woman to man's desires in patriarchy. However, it indicates that she has a soul that makes a choice, she has a brain that thinks and decides, she has a life and a lived experience that make her act and react not just receive in passivity. Nora for the first time is not a passive sexual body, but an integrated human with concerns. She doesn't surrender to sexuality that man wants her to believe she is all about.

What is an attractive woman for a patriarchal man who makes him feel so manly? The answer is provided by Helmer: "I wouldn't be a proper man if I didn't find a woman doubly attractive for being so helpless." (78) Therefore, after it has been seen that a woman is attractive as a sexual body, she is 'doubly attractive for being so helpless'. This is the new situation that Nora is offered in the patriarchal marriage she is in. Helmer tells her: "That is how you will seem to me after today, helpless, perplexed little thing that you are. Don't you worry your pretty little head about anything, Nora." (78) So, pretty, little head, and helpless is

all Nora needs to be to live at Helmer's home. Objectified, reduced to a sexual body and subjugated by sex is all that she can be in a patriarchal marriage. However, Nora is no more negotiating. Her reply to that offer is the literal meaning of "Torvald, I have changed." (79) She is reaching an integrity, She is pulling together her fragments and she decides that she only can control her body which she does not want to be a sex object and does not want to be subjugated through it.

Nora confronts Helmer at the stage of recognition in the play. She reveals her realization of how things are going on all against woman in the patriarchal marriage she has been in for eight years. She faces up to Helmer's false protection as a husband. She tells him that when he felt his reputation was in danger, he blamed all on her and cared only about saving himself. Then, when danger cleared, he made sure that she is as double helpless as she was before as Nora states: "I was your little sky-lark again, your little doll, exactly as before; except you would have to protect it twice as carefully as before, now that it had shown itself to be so weak and fragile." (84-85) But to that state of objectification, Nora does not find herself fit in anymore. She speaks out: "I realized that for eight years I'd been living with a stranger, and had borne him three children ... Oh, I can't think about it! I could tear myself to shreds." (85) Accordingly, when Nora got integrated and started feeling herself a human, she found out that Helmer looked like a stranger with whom she shares nothing. Worse than that, all that has been between them is the dominance he had on her as a body with its sexuality and productive function. She reached into that integrity that brought her to a realization of a reality that she would rather get worn to shreds.

Examining Objectification in *A Doll's House*, reveals that Nora was intended to live with one fragment of her being as a human which is the fragment of the body. She was intended to live a doll's life where her husband after her father enjoyed playing with as a possession. She was not expected to be more than a pretty thing. As For Helmer, she lived with him a life of sexuality where she is so attractive as a helpless, beautiful, and sexy body. She has been subjugated through sex and man has used force to subordinate and control her. She was objectified until she started getting aware of the reality of her being reduced to an object and a sexual body. It is then when she started rejecting that destiny which is not better than that of a possessed senseless and brainless doll. Reaching the resolution of the play, Nora is outspoken, and she refuses returning to that objectification. She doesn't surrender to her husband's attempt to subdue her through sex.

### **Oppression as Manifestation of Power Relations**

The investigation of oppression in *A Doll's House* examines incidents where patriarchy practices oppression against woman as a demonstration of power relations. In this regards, Nora's experience of and reaction to oppression is analyzed through Maslow's 'Theory of Human Basic Needs'<sup>2</sup> (Maslow, 1943).

There is a contradiction in Nora's financial status. First Nora is seen tipping the porter who delivers her shopping. Then, she begs her husband for money. Follows this preparation to anticipate the reality of Nora's financial situation is a disclosure of the financial oppression

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<sup>2</sup> Maslow's theory selected for the current study is called by Maslow 'A Theory of Human Motivation', yet it is referred to by scholars as 'theory of basic needs', 'theory of motivation', 'theory of self-actualization', or 'theory of needs hierarchy' with reference to its content.

Nora experiences at Helmer's home. Helmer has all the economic power in the house being the earning person while Nora has to ask for money for whatever needs she has all the time. She is totally dependent financially on Helmer the thing that renders her dependent on him in almost all decisions she is required to make. In other words, she is to live through him. As a matter of fact, not only women in patriarchy are left with a lame chance to be earning persons but they also have a kind of guardianship on their financial commitments. Among the oppressing rules patriarchy sets in society is that which Mrs. Linde mentions: "Well, a wife can't borrow without her husband's consent." (14) This is an incident of oppression for a woman cannot even act to save her husband's life, as is Nora's case without having a male financial guardian. And how does that guardian act? Nora tells that "it was his duty as a husband not to give in to all these whims and fancies of mine—as I do believe he called them." (14) It is clear from the above mentioned that patriarchal practice of power relations places power utterly in the hand of man leaving woman totally dependent on him. This lack of dependence leaves women with a constant sense of insecurity. That sense of insecurity is not on the economic level only but is rooted in economic insecurity. When a woman is merely a sexual body, and when all her existence is defined through and subordinated to man, then the lack of financial security is the final fraction in the equation of subjugating her. She cannot feel secure because if she is dismissed from man's world as old or useless, she then has no means of any dignified survival.

Nora seems to have experienced insecurity on different occasions. When both her father and husband were in a critical health situation, she felt vulnerable in a society where a woman can only live through a man let him be a father, husband, brother, or even lover or pimp. This sense of insecurity is an oppressing patriarchal society pushed her to forging her father's signature to save her husband's life. Love may be a motif to save his life, but insecurity is a genuine motive to act without hesitation. However, rescuing Helmer does not end the oppression. Power is still in the hand of man who oppresses woman on many a level. Nora still lives a sense of insecurity and consequently for the day she is dismissed as useless as a sexual body, she keeps the secret that she saved Helmer's life to secure her status in his house. (15) Abraham Maslow has explained in his theory of Human Basic Needs that when there is a lack in the satisfaction of one need of the five human basic needs, all human's potentialities are directed then towards satisfying that need to some degree.

Another indication of Nora's oppression is clear in that she is also afraid of telling Helmer how she managed to get the money to save his life. She tells Mrs. Linde:

Torvald is a man with a good deal of pride—it would be terribly embarrassing and humiliating for him if he thought he owed anything to me. It would spoil everything between us; this happy home of ours would never be the same again. (15)

Nora tries to justify why it is not proper for Helmer to know the secret. However, her justification clearly exposes the reality that the construction of man-woman relationship in patriarchy has granted man supremacy in the power relation of the two genders. It is then shameful in the patriarchal conception that a man should owe anything to a woman who is supposed to be a follower who is dependent on him. This extreme oppression that denies woman even the right to demand the credit of a good deed to her husband leads to another oppression that she is even cannot celebrate any chance of self-esteem, not even secretly. It is because patriarchy oppresses women through power relations. That is why they are not able

to have self-esteem. In such a situation, Nora seems to gain her self-esteem through claiming her husband's power just like she has her existence through his. She tells Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde: "Yes, it is terribly amusing to think that we...that Torvald now has power over so many people." (19) Partially living the excitement of his success as hers, and partially realizing it is his rather than hers, Nora seems to be in a perplexing position. She's falling between surrender to oppression and acknowledgement of masculine supreme power and between realizing the fact of her oppression that he can celebrate an accomplishment being a man while she cannot just because she's a woman. This confusing situation is comprehensible in her conversation with Krogstad:

Nora. How dear you cross-examine me like this, Mr. Krogstad? You, one of my husband's subordinates? But since you've asked me, I'll tell you. Yes, Mrs. Linde has got a job. And I'm the one who got it for her, Mr. Krogstad. Now you know.

Krogstad. So my guess was right.

Nora. [*walking up and down*]. Oh, I think I can say that some of us have a little influence now and again. Just because one happens to be a woman, that doesn't mean. ... People in subordinate positions, ought to take care they don't offend anybody...who...hm...

Krogstad. ... has influence?

Nora. Exactly.

[...]

Krogstad. All right, All right. But to come to the point: there's still time. And I advise you to use your influence to stop it.

Nora. But, Mr. Krogstad, I *have* no influence.

Krogstad. Haven't you? I thought just now you said yourself... (24-25)

Nora is oppressed, thus, is insecure, and has no sense of dominance. She needs to feel the self-esteem but she realizes that all power is in man's hand. She once claims the esteem through her husband's and later she claims esteem on her husband. In any of the cases, patriarchy is still oppressing her once through permitting the esteem only to her husband and then through shredding the dream of having esteem on her husband through another means of patriarchal oppression: Krogstad. Nora feeling threatened by Krogstad's presence takes a defensive position through claiming power. But Krogstad recognizes that women have no power in the patriarchal society. Therefore, he manipulates Nora and oppresses her through threatening to expose her forgery even though he knows how decent her motifs were, and how desperate she was. Although he identifies it is Helmer who is distressing his life, he does not mind crashing Nora on his way down because he has power on her not on Helmer.

The oppression placed on Nora being of the weak gender in the power relations continues to reveal its existence in Nora's life during Act One of the play. No matter how hard she works her mind to find an escape, she is besieged by masculine power. Ibsen, in this act, reveals bit by bit how patriarchy pushes the woman who challenged it to the unhealthy mental status that makes her attempt to commit suicide.

In Act Two, Nora is double oppressed by both the antagonists in her life; Helmer and the antagonist in the play; Krogstad. As power holders, they practice oppression on the weaker gender represented by Nora; Helmer through refusing to listen to her pleas to keep Krogstad, and Krogstad by refusing to keep the secret of her forgery. Nora, according to Maslow's theory of basic human needs, seems at the peak of lack of security. She is ready to

do anything to satisfy that urgent need to feel secure. She begs both men, yet in vain. That desperate situation makes her lose interest in life. She does not see anything to life than to death. She starts thinking of committing suicide because the lack of satisfaction of basic needs, according to Maslow, makes the person grow neurotic and thus she finds refuge in suicide.

In Act Three is the climax of Nora's struggle against patriarchal oppression. Even though Nora seems to be convinced that she is committing suicide to save Helmer's reputation, the truth lays behind the point of his being saved or not. It is because when his pride is ruined by the revealed secret, Nora comprehends that their life together would be unlivable. She tells Mrs. Linde, as has been explained earlier, that: "It would spoil everything between us; this happy home of ours would never be the same again." (15) Hence, with a unsatisfied need of love and a unsatisfied need of safety, which definitely deny any possibility of esteem, Nora will be living a life of mental depravation, a humiliated body, a soulless existence. Her best choice, whether consciously or unconsciously seems to be suicide. Evidence on that is Krogstad's indication that he also thought of suicide when harshness of life pushed him to desperate measures that ruined his chances of a decent life (53). Would he have done it to save his children reputation?!! An attempted suicide is the last offer of submission, sacrifice, and selflessness made by Nora. Helmer's decline of this offer makes her understand that it is time to live, not to die. She realized the truth of her marriage life. She tells Helmer:

I have been living here like a beggar, from hand to mouth. I lived by doing tricks for you, Torvald. But that's the way you wanted it. You and Daddy did me a great wrong. It's your fault that I've never made anything of my life.  
(80)

In this way, patriarchy which made an unequal distribution of power between the two genders; men and women, has placed power in the hand of the father and the husband. Nora has been living an insecure life even at the physiological level where she had to play the role of the father's and later the husband's doll to get fed. She lived like a beggar who earns food by self-humiliation. Nora lived a life of continuous oppression that threatened the development of her psychological health to the degree that she was at the fringe of getting neurotic. She was about to end her life that is anchored in depravation. While it was Helmer's life that was saved by her commitment of forgery, he and the children were living a comfortable life while Nora deprives herself of comfort on many levels. At the end, Nora 'has changed'. She got integrated, as been mentioned earlier. She is to seek to understand the world in which she lives and to discover herself. She is to try to satisfy her needs away from the pressure of the depression placed on her by Helmer and the kind of life related to him.

According to Maslow, although human basic needs need to be satisfied, they can be partially satisfied to disappear as urgent. Therefore, some of Nora's needs seem to have reached a degree of satisfaction when she changed. She has a shelter at her old father's house, she can earn living as she has already managed to raise money to pay dept, and she has



already had the love need previously satisfied through her children once and through the unspoken love of Dr. Rank. As for esteem needs, she reached into the self-respect that does not allow her to live in humiliation again. She has a faithful friend; Mrs. Linde as well as a loving and respectful nanny whom she entrusts for her children. According to Maslow's theory of Human basic needs, a human is closer to self-actualization when he/she reaches the realization that there is more to life than to death. This is a stage that Nora has reached after satisfying to some degree the four deficiency needs.

## Conclusion

The social drama in *A Doll's House* with its four stages is that of Nora against gender inequality of the patriarchal society. The 'breach' in that relation in which woman is subjugated occurs when Nora breaks the Norm and trespasses the domestic sphere to the masculine sphere. She acts independently and decides out of free will to borrow money and save her husband's life. The 'crises' is at the confrontation between Nora and gender inequality is when she faces blackmailing as a punishment for stepping into the masculine sphere. Then, Nora is at a stage where she tries 'adjustive and redressive mechanisms' while she offers to play the stereotypical roles and becomes Helmer's 'pet' again announcing satisfaction with being confined to the domestic sphere and daring never to think of gaining any esteem of any kind of accomplishment. However, she finds out that submitting again to gender inequality of patriarchal society is beyond her ability to accept because she is offered an intensive imprisonment in passive existence, sexuality, and oppression. It is at this stage that Nora decides that she cannot waive her right into a human life and thus decides on leaving. The 'cleavage' in *A Doll's House*, though on the surface seems to be between Nora and Helmer, is between Nora and all that imposes gender inequality on her as a woman.

While conducting analysis of *A Doll's House*, it has been investigated how gender inequality works its tools on Nora that she is found disintegrated and degraded to a sub-human status at some stage throughout the play. She has lived as the 'other' in a relative existence to that of her husband, Helmer. Nora's disintegration is set in a consistent attempt to exhaust her soul by shaping her into soulless typical models that respond to patriarchal stereotyping of woman. It is through the politics of gender that Nora is driven to living a relative identity to that of man. On the other hand, particularly through men in her life, patriarchy deprived Nora of all that make her develop psychologically as a normal human being. The oppression that presses hard on her to make her surrender to mindless life dried of any experience that adds to her development attempts to keep her at the physiological needs

satisfaction of food, drink, sleep, and sex. As for sexuality, it is meant to be woman's destiny in patriarchy, there was endless attempts by Helmer to limit Nora to a sexual body that he can control and subjugate through sex or force. Nora was under the process of objectification, and she was made a pretty doll. Nevertheless, Nora passed from negotiation to struggle to rejection of each of these patriarchal tools. At the end, she manages to maintain a body which she controls, a soul that defines her own existence and is responsible for her own choices and a mind that develops through the satisfaction of her human basic needs towards a healthy human psychological development. Having reached a state of integration, she realizes then that her most sacred duty in life is her duty towards herself (82).

The success of Nora to tear down all that hinders her rebirth from a fragmented subhuman to an integrated human status is finally declared in her words to Helmer: "I believe that first and foremost I am an individual, just as much as you are—or at least I'm going to try to be." (82) By the end of the *A Doll's House*, Nora achieves the integration of her human elements. She has control over her body that she is no longer defined by it. She has a soul that experiences a free will and free choice and thus lives an authentic independent existence. She has a normally developed mind that she managed to rescue from chronicle struggle against depravation. As an integrated woman, she is a human again. Nora has made the re-birth as she declared herself an 'individual' equal to man.

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