

Ibsen's a Doll's House: A Move Towards Self Actualization

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Abstract

This paper is targeted to scrutinize A Doll's House in the light of Maslow concept of 'Hierarchy of Needs'. 'Hierarchy of Needs' seems to be a driving force behind human endeavors, actions and behaviors. Ibsen's characters give an impression with this pervasive force to fulfillment of their basic needs. Nora the protagonist of the play seems to be the only person among all characters in the play; who is gifted with 'Self Actualization' her move towards 'Self Actualization' appears an aid to understand human behavior and action. It is further observed that every character in the play seems raring to fulfillment of their needs; her move towards 'Self Actualization' appears an aid to understand human behavior and action.

Introduction

In Modern literature, Ibsen's A Doll's House, a text famous for its thematic richness, structural splendor, and immensity of interpretative dimensions is widely discussed by different scholars and critics since its publication.

The phenomena of women's woes and their resistance still exist in the world. This happens not only in Eastern states but also in west. It seems universal and still takes place and true to life. The issues like Gender discrimination and oppression still have value to debate. Here in this work we try to discuss about women's struggle to achieve their goals and all the hurdles in their ways; are counted as patriarchal discrimination in the society. We are looking A Doll's House as woman's struggle on her way to attain "Self-actualization". Scholars and researches have carried out almost all the perspectives of the character's life, but the aspect of Self-actualization in the light of Abraham Maslow is maiden and unique in its nature. The present study is set to explore the characters in A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen in the light of Maslow's concept of "Hierarchy of Needs" and the term 'Self-actualization' and its implication on Nora's character in the play.

Abraham Maslow; a famous psychiatrist of 20th century is of the opinion that all human activities appear to fulfill the needs and move towards 'Self-actualization'. This term was firstly introduced by Kurt Goldstein. Later, Maslow used this term in his book Motivation and Personality (Maslow, 1954). He forms the classification for his concept and facts it into five different levels in which starting point is "Physiological Needs". A hungry man can never write a majestic poetry, so one must have its basic needs in order to step up which is "Safety" it is vital demand of every human being at planet. "Love/belonging", is the next stage of needs in which they interact physically and socially with their fellow beings. "Esteem" which is the finishing step toward final destination named as "Self-actualization". At esteem level human beings demand for the respect and they are much more careful about their relations and prestige associated with relations and society. Self-actualization is the peak point of one's esteem. Once you are at the heights of your esteem then you realize yourself and name this stage as "Self-Actualization".

Introduction of Henrik Ibsen

No one else can be called the "Father of Modern Drama" except Ibsen; was born on March 20th, 1828, in a port town of Skien Norway. He started writing plays for theatre based on Scandinavians myth, famous as sagas. In 1865, he made his first publication of *Brand*. He continued his success with *Peer Gynt*, a fantastic verse drama. *ADH*, *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabbler* in 1890 are the best photograph of the Ibsen's views. He created *An Enemy of the People* in 1882; it was a response in the protest publically protests against *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*. In his later plays we can aptly find a transition from his realistic social dramas to highly symbolic and psychological plays. *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886) and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) are his symbolical master pieces. Ibsen died on May 23rd, 1906 in Christiania. Ibsen is heralded as most famous person after Shakespeare in Norway.

Introduction to *A Doll's House*

A Doll's House is a play that takes marriage problems and social problems of human life in 19th century as its central theme. The play starts with a protagonist female character Nora Helmer, who transform herself into a self actualized lady, it is not easy for a lady who is called little Nora, little squirrel, little sky lark by her husband Helmer. ADH is the vivid picture of European society of that era. Helmer: A manager in the bank, Dr. Rank: a family friend, Kristine Linde: friend of Nora, Krogstad: clerk at bank. The story enriched in its thematic views and powerful depiction; revolves around the Nora and her family.

Research Questions

This study will cover the following questions:

1. How do characters in *A Doll's House* reveal and fulfill Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs'?
2. How does Nora's journey through the text appear to be a move towards 'Self-actualization'?

Rationale of study

Since the publication of the Ibsen's play, different analytical and theoretical tools have been used to analyze it. *A Doll's House* characters demand a new lens to see their fulfillment of needs and Nora banging the door at the end of the play in the light of a move towards "Self-actualization". This study has its weight that for the first time Ibsen's characters are viewed out of the archetypal concepts such as feminism, post colonialism, post modernism and post feminism.

Literature Review

Charles Lyons depicts Ibsen as a paradoxical personality. He is of the view that Ibsen is a realist at the same time being iconoclast; no judgment can be bestowed on whether he is successful or failed idealist (Lyons, 1987). Ibsen asserts in one of his letter to Lorentz Dietrichson, who is his poet colleague. He says it is very difficult to achieve Self-actualization; one cannot easily reach to this goal. (Ibsen, Morison & Laurvil, 1908). Lale Behnam is of the opinion that it was Nora's lack of authority that pushed her to deceit and false doings; it was unfortunate that she had to conceal her competency because her husband and society could not face it. For her survival she had to be a doll wife in Helmer's house. It was very evident that she has learned that there was no option available to her other than this (Behnam, 2007). With respect to theme we can aptly find that Nora was trying to hide herself, firstly in the form of doll-child then doll-wife. She was in the search of fulfillment of her needs which led her to 'Self-actualization'. According to Behnam, in ADH all the characters are depicted as the victim of external forces in the name of conventions and social norms (Behnam, 2007). It must be noticed that Ibsen was quiet conscious of the matter that Nora had a beautiful soul who had an imploded meaning of child that's why her father and husband treated her as child. She was considered as puppet and like assets by both males in her life (Behnam, 2007). Finney is of the marks that to call Ibsen a feminist would be injustice to him; he can be seen as humanist and also a socialist writer (Finney, 2004). When we consider Ibsen as a humanist, it appears that basically he is trying to motivate the females to realize their selves. Gail Finney writes in "The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen" while regarding the question about feminism, it has always been ambiguous. It doesn't matter whether it is the situation of feminism or an ideology; it's controversial. Ibsen can be regarded a feminist but as the same time he portrays himself as humanist and socialist, so we can't label him just a feminist (Finney, 2004). Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs is loaded with interesting aspects which are too realistic in nature, foundations lying in the fact that it has created a lot of citations. This theory is never devoid of controversy; it is gender biased blamed by many critics (Cullen & Gotell, 2002). On the other hand Cay and Kovacs-long have claimed that it is pertinent to both genders (Coy & Kovacs, 2005). Anyhow based on the fact that this theory repeats itself in literature and inspires interest from every sphere of life; including researches and theorists, it must be counted as deserving research attention and a diligent focus. For having a purposeful empirical testing, as Marx and Hilix explicated, theory should be put down on a trodden way where a set of certain rules must be found that can be tested and thereby empirically. Firstly, the specific terms must be described which has sufficient stuff to explicate the needs and definition. Secondly, it should include all the relevant aspects and their impacts on the human beings and collectively on the society (Marx & Hilix, 1973).

Research Methodology

This study has been projected to examine the characters of *A Doll's House* on the basis of their needs in the light of Maslowian hierarchy of Needs and its influence on the life of Nora in order to get the goal of Self-actualization. So, qualitative research has been carried under debate to find the inner meanings of the text

Present research revolves around the text of a play *A Doll's House* written by Henrik Ibsen; the famous Norwegian dramatist. Characters' approach has been inspected under the light of Hierarchy of Needs; with close reading technique.

This analysis includes Reading of the text, Analysis of the text, Keen observation on powerful words, sentences and paragraph and to pick the extracts, sentences and paragraphs related to the concept of Hierarchy of Need. Text of the play is the chief source as data collection.

Analysis and discussion

In this portion all the characters are examined under the light of Hierarchy of Needs, particularly Nora's character who is alone in order to find the final destination.

Fulfillment of Nora's Physiological Needs

First of all the character of Nora is being portrayed how she accomplished her basic needs. "Nora: She is laughing to herself, she takes a packet of macaroon from her pocket and eats one or two ;"(ADH Act-I p-2) ,She is eating macaroon in the absence of Helmer.In her early age she was totally dependent on her father.

Money is the center of all needs. In order to fulfill her physical need Nora has to dance before Helmer for money sake."Nora: (turning round quickly) Money." (ADH Act-I p-2)So I think such dialogues confirm that in the life first of all we all must need to carry out our primary needs.

Fulfillment of Helmer's Physiological Needs

Helmer, the protagonist of the play; he remains as game changer throughout the play.

"Helmer: still, you know we can't spend money recklessly." (ADH Act-I p-02) He makes her clear that he can't waste money as he thinks that to use a lot of money on such things is useless while it was Christmas evening. Later in the scene "Helmer: do u think I don't know what a lot is wanted for housekeeping at Christmas time?" (ADH Act-I p-03) here Helmer's physical needs are fulfilled so it seems that all such things are useless and just a waste of money.

Fulfillment of Linde's Physiological Needs

Kristine; a friend of Nora comes to Nora's house to meet her and tells her marriage with a sugar daddy instead of her beloved. She tells her all of her family woes "my mother was alive then, and was bedridden and helpless, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justified in refusing his offer." (ADH Act-I p-11) her act seems clear to me that all the physical needs are prior in life.

Fulfillment of Nora's Safety Needs

Nora starts to make her life safe when she was sure about her basic needs. "Nora: my husband has been made manager of the bank." (ADH Act-I p-9) In the start of the play while she is conversing to Mrs. Linde, There was no need to tell Linde about this one as she was pre informed about her husband but she does so to realize Linde that she is safe now in her financial matters. In some other scene Nora starts talking with herself and says "Nora: and yet..? No, it's impossible! I did it for love's sake." (ADH Act-I p-32) she was trying to save her relationship. These steps show her concern about safety needs.

Fulfillment of Helmer's Safety Needs

As he has enough for his physical needs so he must move to the next. When Nora talks about loan here he counters "Helmer: that is like a woman! No debt, no borrowing" (ADH Act-I p-03) He is not in the favor of a life which is enjoyed with loans. Some other scene in play Helmer: "Suppose, now, that I borrowed fifty pounds today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me."(ADH Act-I p-02) "Helmer [reeling]. True? Is this true, that I read here? Horrible! No, no--it is impossible that it can be true" (ADH Act-III p-84) here he was feeling that his entire family, job and everything else are at stake. In that crucial moment he seems to have importance for her social and financial safety

Fulfillment of Krogstad's safety Needs

Krogstad; ananti protagonist character in the play; has an evil face in the start but later transforms into good spirit. He starts with Nora, "I have a small post in the bank and I hear your husband is to be our chief." (ADH Act-I p-18) Here he is trying to secure his job and financial needs; although at this stage he seems a shipwrecked person but he needs this job for himself and his children. Some more words justify it more clear "Nora: mrs. Helmer, you will be so good as to use your influence on my behalf" (ADH Act-I p-27) "I must try and win back as much respect as I can in the town." (ADH Act-I p-28) As well as he was facing all types of problems in the society like as no self respect no status no family, just a life but hand to mouth; but when it comes to his basic needs he takes stand and goes to any level as he feels threats for his basic needs.

Fulfillment of Nora's belonging needs

Nora confesses the saddest moment of her time with these words "Nora: I couldn't go and nurse him....i had my poor sick Torvald to look after. My dear, kind father—I never saw him again, Christine." (ADH Act-I p-10) These lines depict her love need for paternal family but prefer her husband to look after instead of her father and declares it saddest moment of life.

In some final scenes Krogstad threats her but she says "No, it's impossible! I did it for love's sake." (ADH Act-I p-32) This is the true reason of her act of forgery that she never wants to lose her love. She did it for her love sake.

Fulfillment of Helmer's belonging needs

In the start of the play when Nora comes home with a lot of things for family and meets Helmer, firstly he behaves so softly and gives her respect by saying "well but tell me, you extravagant little person, what would you like for yourself." (ADH Act-I p-03) Although he thinks that she has wasted a lot of his money but still he

offers her just for relation sake. "I give you, and then really you buy something for yourself." (ADH Act-I p-04) This respond is being seen very rare in the play but here Helmer seems to fulfill his love needs.

"Do you remember last Christmas? When Nora locked herself into the room for the three weeks before Christmas." (ADH Act-I p-06) He named those three weeks the dullest time of my life. It can be confirmed by his own words "It was the dullest three weeks I ever spent" (ADH Act-I p-06) All these words are confirming to me about fulfillment of love and belongings. In last scenes; at Christmas evening when Nora was wearing her fancy dress and Helmer feels blessed to have such beautiful lady alone at home Nora said "Don't look at me like that, Torvald" (ADH Act-III p-78) but he responds her in a loving tone "Why shouldn't I look at my dearest treasure?--at all the beauty that is mine, all my very own?" (ADH Act-III p-78) Such compliments from Helmer seem that he was fulfilling his love needs very well.

Fulfillment of Linde's belonging needs

Kristine Linde and Krogstad meet in the second half of the play, Krogstad blames her for betraying for. "We couldn't wait for you, Nils; your prospects seemed hopeless then" (ADH Act-III p-70) For Krogstad it is just fulfillment of Physical needs but for her it is the need of love and belongings. She sacrificed her own love for the sake of her mother and brothers. She proposes him again with the "Nils, how would it be if we two shipwrecked people could join forces?" (ADH Act-III p-71) Here she offers him in very apt words. "I want to be a mother to someone, and your children need a mother. We two need each other. Nils, I have faith in your real character--I can dare anything together with you." (ADH Act-III p-72)

Fulfillment of Nora's Esteem Needs

Esteem need is the second last stage in the pyramid of HN, from this stage Self-actualization is one bounce away to her. Nora was looking for the values, respects for her feelings, emotions and words. The factor of self-esteem in Nora's life is very prominent. In the very start it can be seen while her conversation with her friend. She was sharing her life secret to her with the words "I too having something to be proud and glad of. It was I who saved Torvald's life," (ADH Act-I p-14). At the time Christine was telling her about her sacrifices made to save her family and its needs. She was feeling proud of it. This situation bursts out Nora to reveal her secret to her close friend and she says she has also something to be proud and glad and I think this is the protocol, respect and tribute to herself; mentioned in the concept of HN and she is giving to herself in regard of her deeds for family. In this hard time she works with the great pleasure as her pleasure can be seen with her words "it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man." (ADH Act-I p-17) and her journey of self esteem ends with her husband. When she decides to leave Helmer forever; she responds with these courageous words "It is for that reason I cannot remain with you any longer" (ADH Act-III p-91).

Fulfillment of Helmer's Esteem Needs

The character of Helmer can also be seen prey in this stage, but he has esteem just for himself. It seems in the sense of selfishness and ego. When Nora was trying to stop him about Krogstad; Helmer: "It is already known at the Bank that I mean to dismiss Krogstad. Is it to get about now that the new manager has changed his mind at his wife's bidding." (ADH Act-II p-47), these words are representing his esteem for Nora; while for her it was quite pleasant to do something for Helmer. Ibsen portrays him with the words "to let people think that I am a man to be swayed by all sorts of outside influence?" (ADH Act-II p-47) This is the major difference between Nora and Helmer's character.

In the finishing run between couple; Helmer receives a second letter from Krogstad and says "I am saved" and Nora just asks "And I?" (ADH Act-III p-86) still he orates that "that I have forgiven you, Nora; I swear to you I have forgiven you". (ADH Act-III p-87) This mental diversity creates the difference between Nora and Helmer and his esteem needs end with the line "but no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves." (ADH Act-III p-94)

Nora steps into Self-actualization

Nora the protagonist of the play is being portrayed here for finding herself in this sense. Final round starts with the harsh words between Helmer and his doll wife Nora "Helmer. No tragic airs, please. Here you shall stay and give me an explanation. Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand what you have done?" (ADH Act-III p-84) here Nora is in a deep darkness and disappointment but at the same time she realizes herself and responds him with very short line "Nora: yes, now I am beginning to understand thoroughly." (ADH Act-III p-85) She has started to understand the world; she was getting familiarity with the ways of life and the relationships. She realized that all her efforts to save relations were in vain. In this scene she steps into the level of Self-actualization when Helmer behaves abusively on getting Krogstad's letter. "Helmer: Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined all my future. It is horrible to think of" (ADH Act-III p-85) these words shatter and also awake her with the awareness of self. She was in a wait for a wonderful happening from her husband side, as she discussed with Christine. "Nora. How should you understand it? A wonderful thing is going to happen!" (ADH Act-II p-63) She thought that her husband will play role of superman. Instead of being shelter for her he puts the entire burden on her.

The bell rings and Helmer yells “Nora!--No, I must read it once again--. Yes, it is true! I am saved! Nora, I am saved!” (ADH Act-III p-85) it is last nail in the coffin and Nora is busted with just “And I?” (ADH Act-III p-85) Here she gets her goal of Self-actualization. Although here Helmer explains: “You too, of course; we are both saved, both you and I” (ADH Act-III p-85) but it’s too late. She has stepped into a new life stage named as Self-actualization. Here she realized one must live a life for oneself. Self-actualization is above and beyond of all physical, social and esteem needs. She feels that she was not living for herself. She was living as mother, as wife, as friend as a daughter, in these relations she has lost herself. First of all she has some sacred duties to herself as a human being. Later in the text she confirms this “Nora: Duties to myself.” (ADH Act-III p-92) She shouts at him and says “Nora. Sit down. It will take some time; I have a lot to talk over with you” (ADH Act-III p-88). Here Helmer was repeating the line “Nora, I swear it; I have forgiven you everything” (ADH Act-III p-87) It seems as “The pot calling the kettle black”. She is thinking that Helmer must request for apology but he is behaving in inversely. So that she starts “You alarm me, Nora!--and I don't understand you” (ADH Act-III p-88) “and I have never understood you either--before tonight.” (ADH Act-III p-88) She was yelling and talking in very harsh tone “you must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is a settling of accounts;” (ADH Act-III p-88) He is unable to understand her. Here she blames her father too. My father and you took me very wrong in each and every aspect of life. Her words are confirming this “I have been greatly wronged, Torvald--first by papa and then by you” (ADH Act-III p-89).

Here is the dying ceremony of the episode; He agrees with Nora’s allegations to some extent but releases a statement that play time is over and the learning session starts now. He thinks that he is still in a position to teach Nora but she stops her by saying “alas, Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you” (ADH Act-III p-90) Now I will educate myself and this is my only task in life that is why I am leaving your house, he also gets help from religion and says you have your sacred duties to your family and husband while “Nora: Duties to myself.” (ADH Act-III p-92) Helmer tries to add some more strength to his arguments and says no man in the world can sacrifice his honor; she springs up “It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done” (ADH Act-III p-94) and confirms her departure.

This is Nora’s move towards SA. Nora seems to be the victim of the stage as her situation tells us she is being seemed totally unusual. Nora was transformed into entire different lady who can yell on her husband, can bang the door and make him sit before her.

Conclusion

According to the first objective of the research, it is justified that HN can be used as a tool for literary analysis to understand Ibsen’s characters. Furthermore, HN is a tamable instinct of life which is common to all humanity and is a part of human nature. The very first observed thing is the disastrous impact of needs for the characters and the role of Self-actualization in it. Definitely HN seems gemstone tool for the life of all the Ibsen’s characters.

Needs are the ultimate motivations of all human actions. HN configures human behavior as it is the part of human nature. It generates in a human being, self-centered, ruthless, unkind, totalitarian, exploitative and egoistic conduct. Sometimes it turns him into selfish and hard hearted person like Helmer who can just think about himself in all the thick and thin of his life.

Nadine Gordimer; a South African writer, once she said “you are what you strive to become” this statement seems completely true after seeing Nora’s life through prism of HN.

In others words only one can meet this level in the life if he or she is meeting his/her all stages of needs. Self-actualization is the extreme high level of one’s esteem. As Maslow says “What a man can be, he must be”. (Maslow, 1975)

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