



THE CONCEPT OF “NEW WOMEN” IN IBSEN’S “A DOLL’S HOUSE” AND SHAW’S CANDIDA

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper I have made an analysis of two plays “A Doll’s house” by Henrik Ibsen and “Candida” by George Bernard Shaw, which had this similar message to convey. The plays are brought about for the ‘new thinking’ in the women. Ibsen had paved the way towards this thinking and shaw had brought the first wave of feminism with candida. The concept of ‘new women’ is questioned and criticized so I have brought them all together in this paper with both the sides of feminism and criticism. Lastly, I have concluded with self-understanding of the play which any reader will do after analysis of the plays.

SCOPE:

I have shown the contribution made by Henrik Ibsen with his work “A Doll’s House” along with the response made by George Bernard Shaw with his play “Candida”. Examining the similarities and dissimilarities of both the plays with special reference to the female protagonist “Nora” and “Candida”. The concept of new women is discussed relating both the plays and the feminist view is also taken under consideration along with that I have concluded the paper with my own analysis.

OBJECTIVE:

1. To introduce both the dramatists along with their contribution to modern theater.
2. To show the similarities and dissimilarities between the two-female lead “Nora” and “Candida” in both the plays.
3. To show the concept of new women.
4. To show the approach of feminism.
5. To show the criticism that are faced by both the plays.
6. To show the self-understanding of the plays.

METHODOLOGY:

1. Self-Reading of the Books.
2. Reading of various Articles.
3. Visual Adaptations of the Plays.

INTRODUCTION:

Henrik Johan Ibsen was a Norwegian playwright, theater director, and poet. He was one of the founders of modernism in theater and after being referred to as “the father of realism” along with that he was marked as one of the distinguished playwrights in the European tradition. He is the most frequently performed dramatical in the world after Shakespeare and by the early 20th Century “A Doll’s House” became the world’s most performed play. A Doll’s house is scathing criticism of the martial roles accepted by men and women which characterized Ibsen’s society. Ibsen paved the way to make a new thinking and chosen one of the unspoken matters of the society of London. “A Doll’s house” was published on 21st December 1879 and premiered in the royal theater in Copenhagen, Denmark in the language Norwegian. He was dealing with the subject of the awakening of a middle-class wife and mother. It is a Naturalistic/realistic play, problem play and a modern tragedy. The play became significant the way it deals with the fate of a married woman which was new at that time in Norway who has lacked reasonable opportunities for self-fulfillment in a male dominated world which had created a big controversy and it went beyond the theater and travelled to the world of newspaper and societies. Their play is counted as an baby step for modern day feminism.

On the other hand, George Bernard Shaw is known as the Irish playwright, critic, polemist and political activist. His influence on western theater, culture and politics extended from the 1880’s to his death and beyond. Shaw’s “Candida” was written in response to Ibsen’s “A Doll’s House” which also deals with the Victorian notions of love and marriage, and asking what a woman really wants from her husband. Candida was written in 1894 and first published in 1898 as part of his “Plays pleasant”. Shaw took a step further by using the psychological element to his play and here he presented the ‘man’ as a doll instead of ‘women’ like Ibsen once did. Whenever Ibsen’s play “A Doll’s house” comes into view one can’t overview Shaw’s “Candida” which is like a new step for a woman in this modern world.

SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES OF BOTH NORA AND CANDIDA IN THE PLAYS “A DOLL’S HOUSE” AND “CANDIDA”.

The plays “A Doll’s House” by Ibsen and “Candida” by Shaw are always taken under one roof due to their similar aspects. Both the play celebrates women and has linked to a problem in the end so both are counted as problem plays also. Ibsen has touched the line of feminism which later was extended by shaw with his “Candida”. They both raise the role of women in society. Both the plays have written in their center and who end are seen making decisions for themselves rather than thinking about others.

Now we are here to make some similarities among the protagonists of the plays “A Doll’s House” and “Candida”.

1. Nora and candida both are women so it is common for them to have all the womanly attributes in them. They both are married in the play and are mother of several children and both are only wives of their respective husbands other than any other occupation.
2. Both are intelligent enough to solve their household problems. For e.g. ‘Nora’ in the play “A Doll’s House” intelligently and bravely negotiated the loan to make Krogstad’s holiday possible for the wellness of her husband; she even forged her father’s signature. On the other hand, Candida uses her intelligence by the use of her feminine advantage and claims that she had been taught that by her husband.
3. Both Nora and Candida had to make a decision at the end of the play which is related to their marriage.

Apart from the similarities I have come up with a lot of dissimilarities.

1. In “A Doll’s House” Nora is represented as a doll and in Candida men is represented as a doll which is marked as a major difference between both the plays.
2. Candida’s intelligence is granted to be the absolute one as she had smoothly handed the situation which she and her husband had to face for a third person namely Marchbanks who claims to love candida but on other hand Nora’s intelligence couldn’t be counted as an absolute one as she couldn’t take decision smoothly like Candida and leave her children and husband and even her pretty house which already gives us the hint of her unhappiness but emerges as a fully independent women who rejects fake union of her marriage and burden of motherhood.
3. Candida is able to maintain her presence in her husband’s heart that he couldn’t even think of losing her, for him every wife should be like candida and she need not think much to discuss anything with her husband but Nora has to be very careful to get assumed by her husband.
4. Candida got a chance in her life in the name of Marchbanks, a young poet who fell in love with her who is much senior to him. He is far more handsome than her husband but still chooses her husband among them, saying that she will choose the weaker one and keep her husband being always grateful to her decision. On the other hand, Nora didn’t get that chance in her life which is again one of the major differences between both women in the plays.

THE CONCEPT OF NEW WOMEN.

The main focus of both the plays is for the awakening of the women and to make them feel the bitter realities which we thought to be gifted to them in the name of marriage and children. What if the woman is not ready for marriage and if she is married but not sure about being a mother that early in her marriage, But in this question how many times can we really find answers or if it even happens in reality. No woman has got their own rights to make decisions for themselves. Their lives are ruled by men and are suppressed under a society which favors men's decisions. Not only men but women themselves are their own enemies who themselves support male ideology in the society.

This play wanted to bring out the women who are hidden from themselves and society in the fear of being not liked by others. Whenever a women watch the play "A Doll's house" or "Candida" they get stirred not by its theatrical effectiveness but also something rarer, heightened awareness of the condition in which they live what the play brings to them is what that man could no more treat their wives as skylarks. Torvald Helmer's belittlement covered by affection remains Characteristics of male attitude towards the female in America today . Surface conditions can be changed but the essence of the relationship for most couples remains disturbing like what Ibsen depicted one hundred years ago.

Now the most controversial question of inequality between men and women is only raised because of the unequal states of women in society in respect to men in society. Anything which is counted as manliness is a sin for a woman. She has no rights to even dress herself beautifully at least for herself for e.g. Nora who is the play "A Doll's house" says that I buy cheap clothes but my husband couldn't find that she does that for her welfare of her household and even adds that he would not like her wearing cheap dresses which will hamper his status in front of others. The economic dependency is the core reason for the inequality between men and women. The women remain economically dependent on their husbands and have to ask for everything they want. The problem will only be overcome if the women earn for themselves and utilize their own talents in earnings and no longer have the fear of lending money from their husbands. We can here take a small example from the play "A Doll's House" where Nora's wish for money for Christmas and her husband Torvald's denying her this independent choice. Money here represents freedom, because it can be spent on goods or pleasures, or saved or used to free oneself from financial worry. Again, one more incident we can keep in count about Nora taking debts for husband wellness and managing a trip to Italy all by herself but wouldn't inform her husband even though that was for his own good.

The breaking of stereotypes of the male dominated societies where ideologies are taken into granted it any respect of the society. Female minds are overlapped with male justifications. The women can't raise their own voices in the matter. In modern times this problem is taking shape in a minimal manner as women of modern day are educated, self-dependent, employed and mainly outspoken. The change could be possible only if one needs it. In many parts of the world still women are the objects in the hands of men. They think that is the way of life and never thought of changing. The English literature had different aspects regarding society and took the matter of gender equality quite seriously. The plays in the dramatic arena had tried their best to set an example and the heroines of the play become the role models of the women. Performances are always successful in molding human thoughts because the effects of the play are felt because it is the reality in which a woman is living. If we again get back to the characters of the play where she uses her habitual use of irrational means to persuade her husband, she is dependent on his judgement. Ibsen says that there is no problem with her but the problem is only because she is a woman and not taken seriously by society or by her husband. Her husband addresses her still as a child which means her maturity lacks in front of him, again if we take Candida who has better conditions than Nora may be because of the time lapse that have brought a bit change into the mind of people that she better choose her husband and children and her married life as she thinks that it is her duty as a woman is not seen with pure eyes. Her need and importance was felt only after she was approached by another man and she got the chance to win her husband's heart but Nora didn't get that chance nor did she act like she ever wanted to stay anymore in that unhappy marriage and burden of motherhood.

Both have different attributes of describing a new woman, one leaves everything behind and starts a new life and one gets the life polished and refined. Her importance was felt and she overcame everything and also made her husband guilty for life. But are we satisfied with the decisions that Nora and Candida made like "New Woman"? Maybe we as women would have to face different problems in life like characters in the play and so one decision will decide destiny. The Dramatist's have given wings to women in their way of thinking and taking absolute decisions in life. The concept of new women means the newness in thinking of women which should no more amalgamate with men and breaking conventionality.

THE APPROACH OF FEMINISM IN THE PLAYS:

Henrik Johan Ibsen came up with a risk of bringing the first ever real "feminist" character in the history of theater. The Norwegian playwright's reputation was made of scandal but soon it has become one of the most successful plays of his lifetime. "A Doll's house" became everybody's darling and was performed frequently in the theater. Ibsen had paved the way to feminism a very little bit though. His characteristics of Nora are the symbol of many other women in society who had unsatisfied marriage. Nora is taken just as a name of any women who had to face this in their day to day life. Nora was never taken seriously and always thought like a doll and even her husband addresses her as 'my child' which indicates her immaturity to take any decisions. Ibsen says that there is a belief that no woman could stand herself. His idea here is not to discriminate between men and women; rather he shares the ways

which could make a woman better in their life and they could understand that they are not only for being puppets of a men's household but they can be much more than one thinks of them. In the closing scene of the play "A Doll's house" Nora says that "I think I am a human being before anything else. I don't care what other people say. I don't care what other people write in books. I need to think for myself to her husband [from the play] which is Ibsen trying to bring in every women speech to stand for themselves rather than pointing fingers on the men that is what feminism exactly stands for the roots of feminism has been growth very deeply till present date. In response to Ibsen, Bernard Shaw wrote a play "Candida" where Candida means "Candid" thoughts and whose straight forward actions towards love, marriage and roles of women in nineteenth century English society. Candida is an embodiment of Shaw's feminism undermines the Christian, socialist and romantic ideals of womanliness. So it can be taken as the first wave of feminist movement. Where women are presented no more inferior to men and even though candida has the attributes of conventional women but her thoughts and ideals and playing with the situation make her the woman of today. The love triangle between Candida, her husband and young poet was broken by Candida herself by choosing her husband and confirming that she will go with the weaker one. This statement itself is a feminist one where women is seen to dominate the men with her beauty and intelligence and men are even happily accepting it as she is presented as the object of desire and her husband says that everyone should have a wife like candida.

Shaw had mastered the feministic approach in his play and gave Candida the full area to explore herself and be the woman of today and make herself equal with her intelligence.

CRITICISM:

It is argued that Ibsen had touched the holiness of the society. It was a matter of scandal for the people of the 19th century because according to them acts of breaking a marriage and leaving one's children is a matter of sin. Nobody here is keeping in mind the consequence in which 'Nora' the character of Ibsen's play "A Doll's House" had to leave her husband, children and her home. However, the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw found Ibsen's willingness to examine society without prejudice exhausting while he wrote the response to Ibsen's play "A Doll's House" in his play Candida where he had presented a different scenario of woman and brought the criticism into much higher space.

There are different criticisms which run for their play and many critics had many opinions related to this. Here I am stating a few of them.

Raymond Williams says that Shaw's plays are "criticism of life". In his book Drama from Ibsen to Brecht he made a statement that he avails himself of the vision in Candida and makes Marchbanks the man of genius and refers to the play as "the decisive reintroduction of a public dimension into a privatized mode. He also terms it as a 'bourgeois reintroduction' because the site of the private family room where the audience was allowed look at through a window like an observer and take note of how the mode of production that shaped significant immediate relationships.

There are many more critics like Peterson who say the lack of reconciliation has wide reaching consequences for the effect of the play within the world of readers. Who talks about marriage which had so much expectation influenced people of that time and how appalled some people were at Ibsen's Willingness to speak out about its flaws. Some critics, apart from them, supported Demokraten.

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CONCLUSION:

It was a result of a tough decision or selection which was made by Ibsen to take the concept of women in his play even though knowing the possibilities of judgement. The way which he paved fearlessly is polished by Shaw with his response after Ibsen's "A Doll's House". Candida became the epitome of Shaw's feminism. The dramatist is not only trying to bring something new to the English literature but along with that they are talking about the sensitive topics of gender equality. Being Male writers and keeping femaleness into their work is itself a major contribution. To think from a woman's mind is never done before so an ending like this had been never expected by the English audience. The women along with the performance are carrying back the courage to become like 'Nora' and 'Candida' and make appropriate decisions without thinking much about others and society. The 'New thinking' is what both dramatists wanted to spread among the audience.

IMAGES:



Scenes from the play "A DOLL'S HOUSE"





Scenes from the play "CANDIDA"



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