

Reflection Of Society In Literary Works Of Henrik Johan Ibsen

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Abstract:

The present research is framed to study the reflection of society in the plays and literatures of Henrik Johan Ibsen. The plays which depicts the convictions and culture of society in the period of 19th century. The aim of this study is to highlight the use of societal conventions in the plays of Henrik Ibsen to bring the realism in the world of theatre. This research tends to focus on the intension of reflecting realism in the work of Ibsen. It advocates the change Ibsen wants to see in the society which is why he never missed any single chance to mention about the limitation's society has imposed on people through different ways.

Keywords: Society, realism, literature, freedom, change.

Introduction:

Literature has always played a huge role in making people understand its contemporary society. In literature of any era the reflection of its society can be seen because society has always served numerous socially, communally and politically evil agendas to think and discuss about for bringing a revolution in the society and these agendas are chosen by the authors of the era as per their experience and interest to highlight it with ways of overcoming it and make the people change their perspective about it in a positive way. Literature has always left its impact on its readers due to which they feel the pain of reality which has harmed one particular section of the society after which they feel the need of change in that practice so that betterment can be brought in their lives.

This research paper is based on the study of Henrik Ibsen's literary works which is reflecting the social evils of his contemporary society. Henrik Ibsen (20 March 1828 – 23 May

1906) is a Norwegian playwright who is also considered as “the father of modern drama” because of his skills of reflecting realism through his works. He changed the concept of drama in the society which used to be melodramatic and idealized portraits before him. He introduced the realism in the world of theatre which brought a revolution and people started understanding the evil practices existing in the society and feeling the pain of it. His works pay very huge contribution in the betterment of society. The realism used by Ibsen to throw light on the difficulty in personal lives of people and his style of developing complex characters to justify it are admired by his audience and critics.

Societal norms and limitations exposed in Ibsen’s work:

Ibsen’s work represents one or the other social standards of the society. *A Doll’s House* (1879), *Hedda Gabler*, *The Lady from the Sea* represents the social limitations imposed on women by their family and society. *An Enemy of the People* is about ruining the future of a person who is truthful and loyal towards the betterment of society. Ibsen’s *Ghost* (1881) is making audience realize that how cultural taboos can make society suffer from transmission of deadly diseases.

In *A Doll’s House* Ibsen has portrait Nora Helmer, the protagonist so parallel with its contemporary society that the audience is able to relate the injustice done with women in the name of social norms, social expectations and restrictions all because of strong believe of the society in gender inequality. Nora is so over burdened with her roles and responsibility of husband and family that she finds no happiness in her family, the reason behind such feeling is also because she gets no recognition or appreciation for what she is doing and is taken for granted. With the progress in the play Nora realises that first person she is responsible for is herself and then comes the family and children. Nora leaves her house, husband and children in search of freedom and smashes the door behind while leaving in the climax of the play. This climax turned to be a shocking act by a woman for the audience of Europe.

Many critics wrote about it, like James Huncker observed, ‘that slammed door reverberated across the roof of the world.’ Modern, Errol Durbach said, ‘Nora’s past life dies in order to find independence. Her freedom and transformation are necessary.’

Hedda Gabler is also one of his drama which targets the social limitations imposed on women. It shows how Hedda Gabler is psychologically affected by these limitations of male dominated society that she has lost her personal happiness in life. Her desires also are limiting her in life. She has created a shell of superiority around herself just to pretend that she is not affected by anything and anyone whereas she wants control over everything and everyone.

Hedda: Then Life would perhaps be live able, after all.
[With a sudden change of tone.] But now my dearest
Thea, you really must have a glass of cold punch.

Mrs. Elvsted: No, thanks—I never take anything of that kind.

Hedda: Well then, you, Mr. Lovborg.

Lovborg: Nor I, thank you.

Mrs. Elvsted: NO, he doesn't either.

Hedda: [Looks fixedly at him.] But if I say you shall?

Lovborg: It would be of no use.

Hedda: [Laughing.] Then I, poor creature, have no sort of power over you?

She is so eager to free herself from all the compulsions of her life that she does not give a thought to her actions and has to suffer negative consequences of it. In this drama Ibsen wants to show that liberty from the unwanted limitations of the society is good but at the same time the decisions made for taking stand for the liberty, one should also reconsider their thoughts and action by keeping calm.

The Lady from the Sea is also portraying the dilemma through which women have to undergo in the society, the dilemma of choosing between family and love, the dilemma of choosing between freedom and marriage obligations. The leading female character of the play, Ellida Wangel feels trapped and oppressed in the male dominated world, but soon with her consciousness chooses to start her search for freedom through which she finds inner peace and satisfaction in life.

Ibsen has thrown light on an evergreen topic of being truthful in serving society through his An Enemy of the People in which the protagonist Dr Stockmann fights for truth against the public opinion and personal interests of powerful people and authority. For truth Dr Stockmann fights his own brother

Peter Stockmann who is also the mayor of the town. Dr Stockmann makes all the efforts he could to bring the truth to the public but the public gets manipulated and opposes Dr Stockmann and declares him An Enemy of the People. Through this drama Ibsen has shown how one has to face challenges when he stands against the norms of the society and how people react and choose wrong and right as per their convenience and personal prosperity over the truth, that how time being profit and interests is given priority than long run well being and good health.

Ghosts by Ibsen is covering a very sensitive matter. It has highlighted a taboo topic i.e. hereditary syphilis and targeted the social silence because of which such matters become stigma and people hesitate to talk about it even with their family, friends and doctor. Ibsen has tried to expose adverse effects of silence on cultural taboos and by doing so he hits hard on the contemporary society who also called this work of Ibsen immoral and shameful.

This way Henrik Ibsen's almost every work has covered one or the other social norms and limitations of the contemporary society to make people realize its side effect in near future which will not be in control of anyone and nothing more than repentance will be left with everyone.

Conclusion:

Ibsen has always addressed one or the other social issue existing in the society and proved himself to be a revolutionary playwright. His dramas have brought a new vision and perspective in the society. The societal norms which made the people gender biased and blind towards truth has been touched by Ibsen so that such social evils can be eliminated from the society someday. The realism he brought with his dramas and portrait characters, shocked his contemporary audience but sooner or later everyone realised the bitter truth of the society which is hidden in Ibsen's plays. He never compromised in the analysis of social issues through his work.

Ibsen's effort of confronting social norms and highlighting the taboos in society has forced his audience to think about their preconceptions and come out of it for bringing a change in society. Ibsen has been criticized for being feminist in his set and literature but he never bothered about it and continued with the breach of traditional theatrical settlements and bringing realism in theatres and exposing

social issues. He also made sure that his characters must not be compromised and must be complex so that his drama reveals Ibsen's fearlessness towards the social obligations.

Sooner or later the society accepted and adapted the work of Ibsen and its realism. In all his work he made sure to reflect the contemporary society, the way it is, without manipulating it or compromising with it.

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