

A Comparative Study of Some Plays by Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg- A Reinterpretation of Gender Issues

By

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CERTIFICATE FROM THE SUPERVISOR

This is to certify that Md. Mahbub Siddiqee (Session: 2015-2016, Reg. No. 147) has submitted his dissertation to me and I find it acceptable and ready for examination. I recommend it to be sent to the examiners for their reports.

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Declaration

I humbly declare that this dissertation is original, and has not been submitted or published partially or fully for any other diploma or degree at any other University.

The research work was conducted at the Department of English, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, under the supervision of Professor Dr. Kazal Krishna Banerjee, Department of English, University of Dhaka.

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I am grateful to all those who have made me familiar with letters, words and thoughts.

Dedicated to

My respected guide

Dr. Kazal Krishna Banerjee

All my efforts would turn into some mere waste of time without this noble soul's cordial counseling.

Abstract

The study aims at reinterpreting gender issues through a comparative study of the plays by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) and Swedish playwright August Strindberg (1849-1912). It goes through the similarities and dissimilarities of their plays; different 'ism's used in their plays have been discussed as well. Necessary definitions have been provided as per requirement. Moreover, the study tries to view their plays from some unconventional points of view. For example, Henrik Ibsen's plays are commonly regarded as the mouthpiece of Women's Rights Movements, and those are used to spread feminism's standpoints worldwide. This research tries to check the authenticity of such claims. On the other hand, August Strindberg is infamous for his so called 'misogynistic' writings. The study investigates into the credibility of such conventional blaming. Mainly, two plays by each of the playwrights have been chosen to conduct the comparative study. The plays are: *Ghosts* (1881) and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) by Henrik Ibsen, and *The Father* (1887) and *Creditors* (1888) by August Strindberg. Besides, references have been taken relevantly from some of their other plays. The study gives notable attention to 'Female Power' that comes frequently at Ibsen and Strindberg's plays. Above all, with the help of different arguments, discussions and references, the study tries to set newer points of view to evaluate Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg and gender issues.

Table of Contents

Sl	Topic	Pages
01	Introduction	01
02	Purposes	02
03	Importance	02
04	Gender and Sex	02-03
05	Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)	03-17
06	August Strindberg (1849-1912)	18-34
07	Reviewing the plays	34-68
08	Gender in Ibsen's plays	68-99
09	Gender in Strindberg's plays	100-137
10	Ibsen vs Strindberg	138-145
11	Reinterpretation of gender issues	146-154
12	Conclusion	155
13	Bibliography	156-163

1. Introduction

Henrik Ibsen is often regarded as the ‘father of realism’. On the other hand, August Strindberg is considered to be the ‘father of modern Swedish literature’. They lived in the same era, and both of them enjoyed popularity; but in matters of writing, they were considered each other’s enemies. Sometimes one of them wrote something to attack the other. For example, August Strindberg wrote a short story named *A Doll’s House* (1884) to criticize Henrik Ibsen’s famous play *A Doll’s House* (1879). While writing the play *The Father* (1887), August Strindberg was undergoing conjugal conflicts. He brought different charges against his wife. He even suspected that he was not the real father of the children born to his wife. He regarded the character of Hjalmar Ekdal in Henrik Ibsen’s play *The Wild Duck* (1884) as an intentional attack upon him; because he believed that Ibsen viewed him as a weak and pathetic husband. Number of such examples is not few. In spite of having such enmity between them, it has to be accepted by all that both of them contributed to shaping of the form of modern drama. This research explores them to find similarities and dissimilarities regarding gender-related thoughts in their works. Thus, it tries to set a convenient ground for reviewing gender issues as well.

2. Purposes

- To reinterpret some plays by Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg
- To analyze the plays from new points of view
- To compare and contrast some of their ideas;
- To examine feministic and antifeministic claims regarding the playwrights

3. Importance

The study will shed light on less-discussed issues regarding Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. Some of their plays will be reinterpreted. Hence, it is expected that the result of this study will be beneficial for those who work with gender issues, and who have interest in Ibsenian and Strindbergian plays. It will add newer thoughts to gender studies.

4. Gender and Sex

The word 'Gender' was first used as a distinctive term by sexologist John Money in 1955. Later, in 1970s, Ann Oakley introduced it to feminism (Hossen 7). 'Gender' and 'Sex', albeit used regularly as to be the same, are two different phenomena. Therefore, the terms deserve much attention to be defined properly. 'Sex' is biological, whereas, 'Gender' is social: "'Sex' is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. 'Gender', however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine'. (Oakley 21-22)

'Gender' can be understood as a social relationship between men and women. From its use, in gender studies, it is found that gender-discrimination occurs when society determines apparent distinctions in the role of its male and female members. Hence comes another idea called

‘Gender-Boundary’ that refers to the line, drawn by society, between men and women.

Commonly, it is regarded as a hurdle to achieving gender-equality.

All the mentioned thoughts come frequently in Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg’s plays.

This study will discuss on the issues in relevant places. But, at the very outset, it is essential to create an outline of the two playwrights’ life and works.

5. Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)

Henrik Ibsen’s plays make audience/readers curious about the playwright; because the plays touch different levels of human thoughts. Sometimes the playwright may seem to be an advocate of matriarchy; whereas, the very next scene may challenge the former position. So, this study requires a thought-provoking analysis of Henrik Ibsen’s character.

5.1 Mastery over human psychology

As a social being, a human has to look for the best possible ways to adapt him to society. Every society has some particular ways of taking and tackling its members. So, individuals of a certain society have to know how they can fit themselves into society. The way an individual takes is always somehow different from that of others, because the choice of ways depends on an individual’s potential and personality. One’s personality can be influenced by his potential, or the potential may shape one’s personality.

From time immemorial, society has been creating distinct roles for men and women. A man or a woman has to know and perform those roles accordingly. Therefore, it is never possible to know exactly why a man acts as a man, or a woman as a woman. There are two types of obstacles in fitting one’s self into a society. First one comes from within. The latter comes from the outside. There is always a continuous conflict between these two- inside and outside-forces. Understanding a person’s psychology means knowing how the person deals with the

forces. It also makes one familiar with the power-relations in a society. The word 'Power' is used here in the sense that every relationship or position holds some amount of power. This power may be used positively or negatively, depending on the mentality of the person who holds it. A writer must have sound knowledge about all these complexities of a society, in order to write on gender issues. Henrik Ibsen developed good ideas about social structures, and created characters in his plays following those structures. He wanted to measure the inner potentiality of his characters. As a part of this measurement, he studied human psychology with huge attention. Thus, he advanced with a thorough knowledge about the psychology of his characters. He was successful in this regard, thanks to his superb observation skill. Fredrik Engelstad writes in an essay, "There is no doubt that Ibsen was a great psychologist, and many of his plays presuppose psychological insights to be fully understood." (cited in Bandyopadhyay 08). In the same essay, Engelstad says how Ibsen developed this skill. He continues as follows:

The salience of power in Ibsen's worldviews and his self-searching attitude converges in an interesting way with the requirements of the craft of the playwright. Trained in the genre of the political courtly drama and Scribean *piece bien faite*, Ibsen learned in his formative years how to build an elaborate plot.
(cited in Bandyopadhyay 08-09)

Ibsen had to understand why people behave differently in different situations. The period of his writing gender-related plays was a period of Women's Rights Movements. As a consequence, playwright Ibsen had to look deeply into the movements' demands. He wrote many gender-related plays as the outcome of his observation. But, we should not forget his other works where problems like patriarchy, social awareness, or pure romanticism were illustrated. Robert Ferguson writes very clearly about Ibsen's different phases of writing. There we find Ibsen as a

multi-talented playwright. Ferguson says, “Like the burning nationalism of his youth, the pan-Scandinavianism of the middle years, the pan-Germanism of his later years, and probably even the mysticism of his last years, feminism was only a phase he passed through passionately but swiftly.” (cited in Bandyopadhyay 04)

So, it would be very unjust to label Ibsen as a playwright for the feminists. Ibsen himself was very aware of this unjust labeling. He suspected that women would use his plays in favor of their movements, and thus they would misguide the audience. We know about Ibsen’s suspicion from Robert Ferguson’s comment: “Ibsen feared, and not without reason, that his work was going to be appropriated by feminists for their own doctrinal ends.” (cited in Bandyopadhyay 04)

5.2 The man who nurtured neutrality

Ibsen wrote according to his own wishes. He did not write anything to please others, or to satisfy the surroundings. Whatever he wrote was the result of his sincere thoughts and understandings. It was possible as he could feel the urge from his soul. Catherine Ray writes in an essay: “Ibsen belongs to the class of authors who cannot be driven to produce by the force of outward circumstances; even the want of the bare means of existence failed to urge him when the spur of transient inspiration had ceased to stimulate.” (Ray 51) This statement strengthens Ibsen’s unbiased position as a writer. If we look into Ibsen’s plays, we will find him as a fastidious director who thought a lot about stage-directions. Through his presentations, he would like to fit his works into reality, i.e. he wanted to create realistic situations in his plays. It is the audience whose duty is to check why or whether Ibsen’s works are realistic. But, we should keep in mind that reality-like incidents are not real as a matter of fact. There are some incidents which might have not occurred in reality, or which could have been accepted as real if they really had occurred. Here remains Ibsen’s mastery as a

playwright. Through his tricky language sometimes he would stage such situations which were misinterpreted by the audience. Ray concludes the essay saying:

Ibsen by no means sins in the excess of idealization, a temptation too often leading others to sacrifice truth. With an inexorable determination which becomes almost savage, he drags out every feature and fault in a character. (Ray 54)

Ibsen's plays demand greater understandability from the audience. He knew very well that his controversial subjects would be criticized harshly, but nothing could stop him. Women welcomed him cordially; whereas, men detested him acutely. Nevertheless, there were some women who did not like Ibsen for his gender-related plays. All these created a controversial position for Ibsen in his own country. We know mass people preserve great esteem only for those who win prizes or prestige internationally. So, Ibsen did not receive warm reception- as it was received by Nobel laureate Bjornson- from his countrymen. Although Bjornson himself respected and followed Ibsen, the commoners could not value Ibsen properly during his lifetime. Ibsen nurtured his thoughts in solitude.

Ibsen was social in comparison with Strindberg, but as a whole he was not a very social being; or it is better to say that he could not become a social being, as most of the people could not understand him. Ibsen's messages would reach only those people who thought over his ideas, who read his writings 'with care'. This is true for present day readers as well. Havelock Ellis says about Ibsen as the follows: "The ideas and instincts, developed in silence, which inspire his art, are of the kind that penetrates men's minds slowly. Yet they penetrate surely, and are proclaimed at length in the market-place." (Ellis 76-77)

Ibsen worked with truth. He actually redefined truth through his works. To him, truth is not anything to observe, rather something to extract. Truth comes from conflict. From this

realization, Ibsen presented different types of conflicts in his works. His aim was to come to the truth that lies beneath. But his search for truth was misinterpreted by many. He was thought to be a playwright who provoked people regarding gender-issues. Fortunately, there were some critics who could read Ibsen correctly. Thanks to their positive criticism, Ibsen gained success in redefining truth. F.W. Kaufmann wrote in this regard, "Ibsen succeeds in supporting his major idea that truth is not a possession but a constant struggle against external and inward obstacles." (Kaufmann 22)

In Ibsen's plays, we find this constant struggle in Ellida's journey to 'free will', Wangel's hesitation to or not to leave Ellida, and Mrs. Alving's plan for erasing her husband's reminiscent. There were continuous conflicts in these characters. There were conflicts in other characters as well; and in real life, there are conflicts in us. Thus, we all are submerged in conflicts. But these conflicts are not similar or the same in different persons. So, revealing one absolute truth that is equally applicable for all is an impossible task; because different people come to truth through different type of conflicts. For this very reason, it is unwise to judge Ibsen from one certain point of view only. Kaufmann states how truth changes its position. In his essay, he describes Ibsen's thoughts about truth. There we find Ibsen saying, "... truth never is a possession, but a constant effort to find the appropriate response to every given situation which demands a decision, and that truth, once it is generalized and accepted as valid without reexamination in the light of the new situation, is already disintegrating and in danger of becoming a falsehood." (Kaufmann 22)

To Ibsen, truth was a synthesis. He believed in Hegelian pattern of a dialectical evolution. In 1877, at a banquet in Stockholm, Ibsen delivered a speech. There he said, "... the death of contemporary ideals will give rise to the realization of the Third Empire, in which classical beauty and Christian truth will find their synthesis. (cited in Kaufmann 21) .

As he redefined truth, Ibsen had thought-provoking ideas about freedom as well. To him, freedom was not a goal; rather it was a journey. One has to understand the idea of freedom first. For example, if women demand some rights only as a part of their freedom, they will never be able to achieve it, because freedom is not anything to achieve, it is something to undergo. First of all, women should identify the obstacles. Then they can try to remove those obstacles through their education, thoughts and contributions. These activities can signify their real freedom. But, if they think that they would earn freedom demanding rights, they will never be able to achieve it; because demands may change in course of time and situations.

Fulfillment of one demand creates path for another. Thus, it becomes a habit, and the person who demands ceaselessly cannot even understand when he/she loses his/her capability to create something new by his/her own effort. In a nutshell, 'freedom' is a state of mind. It enables one to think and behave independently. It inspires to create space for one's own, not hurting others' dues. On February 17, 1871 Ibsen wrote a letter to Brandes. In the letter he observes about freedom in the following way: "I shall never consent to identify freedom with political liberty. What you call freedom I call liberties; and what I call freedom is nothing but a constraint, active acquisition of the idea of freedom." (cited in Kaufmann 21)

5.3 Ibsen was confident in bringing newer ideas on stage

Ibsen knew very well that his new thoughts would face opposition. But he was confident even in his bad times. He believed that the thought which comes as a synthesis can be relied on. Therefore, he never stopped bringing newer ideas on stage. Nora's exit or Ellida's demand for 'free will' was something totally new to the audience. Ibsen did not explain why he brought those new ideas. But, he said why those new ideas were important. Those were important because the definition of importance also changes with time. As a part of keeping pace with

trends, Ibsen felt the urge to bring something new to the stage. This does not mean that he spread propagandas among people. So, he can be at best called a harbinger of change.

Ibsen knew very well that popularity based on the opinion of the masses can never become anything significant. Most of the times, masses play the role of followers. So, it is a bad idea to attempt for satisfying the masses. This type of attempt means going backward. Ibsen explains this position in a letter to Brandes on June 12, 1883. There he writes taking reference from his play *An Enemy of the People* (1882): “Within ten years the majority may have reached the position which Dr. Stockman held during the assembly. However in those ten years the doctor has not come to a standstill; he again will be ten years ahead of the majority. The majority, the masses, the multitude will never catch up with him; he can never have the majority for himself.” (cited in Kaufmann 21) This statement can easily fit into present days. Ibsen wrote his plays more than a century ago. He used synthesis of his time. We should view his plays from 21st century-point of view. That would clarify many of our confusions.

Ibsen himself never believed in ‘one size fits all’ theory. He believed in variations and changes. Human mind changes with time. Ibsen expected that human beings would be able to cope up with changes. He indicated towards every sector of life through this statement. Gender is one of those sectors. If we read Ibsen carefully, we will find him writing on diverse issues. For example, in *An Enemy of the People* (1882), he exposes the unconsciousness of the masses regarding social issues; in *The Pillars of Society* (1877) he criticizes politicians. Thus, we find different aspects of Ibsen’s works. He did not want to destroy all the established ideas as Strindberg did. We know that Strindberg once said, “I want to turn everything upside down to see what lies beneath; I believe we are so webbed, so horribly regimented that no spring-clearing is possible, everything must be burned, blown to bits, and then we can start afresh... .” (“Quotes by August Strindberg”). Ibsen took a different course. He believed that destruction

would bring further destruction. So, the best way is to transform the established ideas into new ones; and to do that, human beings have to change their ways of thinking. On December 20, 1870 Ibsen wrote a letter to George Brandes. There he commented on the necessity of new ideas. He said how new ideas should create their own paths. That was the time when Franco-Prussian war was going on. So, Ibsen starts with criticizing politics, and then comes to a general ground where change should come, “Liberty, equality, fraternity are no longer the same things they were during the days of the guillotine of blessed memory. That is what the politicians do not want to understand, and therefore I hate them. People want only special revolutions, revolutions in external things, in politics, etc... What is important is the revolutionizing of the human mind...” (Kaufmann 20)

5.4 An experimenter and his treatment from people

Ibsen took human mind as a field of experimentation. Earlier we noticed his urge to revolutionize human mind; but to grasp this idea fully, first we need to clarify the word ‘revolution’. Revolution means bringing changes in a special way. But this change must be qualitative. For example, water remains as water when it is boiled upto 99 degree celsius. But, it turns into vapour when boiled at 100 degree celsius. So, increasing temperature even upto 99 degree celsius is not a revolutionary change. But increasing temperature from 99 degree celsius to 100 degree celsius is a revolutionary change; because, this change of temperature changes the state of the matter. The explanation clarifies that popular use of the word ‘revolution’ stands on a wrong ground. We have to change ourselves from within. Ibsen suggested applying this mentality in all walks of life, but unfortunately nowhere he had been quoted properly. Even today he is quoted partially. As long as his ideas are helpful to boost up any particular movement- like Women’s Rights Movement- his plays are used as references, but when careful studies show Ibsen’s gender-neutral position then the opportunists do not pay

any heed to the new points of view. Therefore, Eric Bentley in his essay 'Henrik Ibsen: A Personal Statement' writes the following: "He seems not only old-fashioned but even wrongheaded to those who assume that life begins after integrity has been surrendered to a party, a class, or a state." (Bentley 14)

In a society there are few people who do not surrender themselves to any party, class, or state. So, it is quite normal that Ibsen would not be treated equally by all. In reality, it is better not to be welcomed by all; because when someone is accepted by all, it simply means that that particular person does not have any recognizable character, he changes color whenever it is necessary. Apart from that, there works a politics of acceptance. Eric Bentley observes: "General acceptance implies only a cessation of hostilities, not an active interest in an author; to be accepted is the first step toward being ignored." (Bentley 11)

Thus, confusions regarding Ibsen are actually good things to understand him better. But, here comes the reference of Strindberg again. Ibsen was not only detested but also praised by many, whereas Strindberg was mostly detested. Women considered Strindberg their enemy, because he was bolder than Ibsen. Moreover he hit gender-issues directly. Ibsen raised questions through which gender issues could be viewed from different points of view, but Strindberg did not bother about questions. He attacked the views he disliked. So, taking Strindberg's play *The Dance of Death* (1900) as reference, Stephen Whicher said:

Ibsen's plays do not weigh down the spectator in the manner, for instance, of Strindberg's *Dance of Death*. The closed world of dark fjords and heavy middle-class interiors that repels Ibsen's casual readers opens, on greater acquaintance, into deeper vistas in every direction, upward, outward, and downward. If the grand landscape crushes in, it also draws out, and always does both with maximum force." (Whicher 169)

It has been already claimed that both Ibsen and Strindberg were more advanced than their time. It is never possible to measure exactly how much advanced they were, but it can be easily understood from their works that they were not perceived well by the people of that time. The misunderstanding continues even today. So, it can be claimed firmly that we are yet to reach the two maestros. Stephen Whicher concluded his essay- 'The World of Ibsen'- saying, "It may be that as time goes on the great Norwegian dramatist will have more to say to us." (Whicher 173)

5.5 Ibsen on his own plays

Understanding a piece of literature depends on readership. A single piece of literature may convey multiple layers of meaning, depending on the mode of readership. It may give a totally different meaning to the very audience in the second reading. With the passage of time, an individual receives newer experiences that may change his mentality. So, with the change in mentality, one observes the same thing in a different way. Thus, change is the law of reality. In this ever-changing reality it seems quite illogical to label a playwright, like Ibsen or Strindberg, as the mouthpiece of Women's Rights Movements, or simply as misogynist. E.M. Forster says, "Most people are romantic at twenty, owing to lack of experience. As they grow older, life offers various alternatives, such as worldliness or philosophy or the sense of humor, and they usually accept one of these." (Foster 174)

If we would ask Ibsen how to understand his works, we would get a very interesting answer. Ibsen wrote to Bjornson about his works, "My book is poetry, and if it is not poetry, then it will be." (cited in Foster 174) We know that a poem may have multiple meanings. Hence, Ibsen's works cannot stick to one simple meaning only. Ibsen had knack for nurturing multiple characters in a single play. We notice that the characters of his plays were provided with scopes for growing up individually. Ibsen thought about each and every character of a play. For

example, in *Ghosts* (1881) we are made familiar with the mentality of Mrs. Alving, the Pastor, Oswald, Regina and even the dead captain. We observe how the characters created different ways for themselves. Mrs. Alving plans to make an orphanage, Oswald dreams to roam abroad, the pastor wants to save Mrs. Alving from defamation, Regina refuses to go with his step-father, and her step-father designs a pub near sea shore. Thus we can peep over all the characters in Ibsen's plays, because he had distinct thoughts for individual characters. In context of the social boundary, individuals play differently. Unlike Strindberg, Ibsen had subtle plan for the characters. As a result, we find natural, well developed characters who flourish in their own ways in Ibsen's plays; whereas, Strindberg did not have organized thoughts about his characters. For example, in the play *The Father* (1887) we can know, to a limited extent, about the mentality of two characters only— The captain and Laura. Although there are many other characters in the play, none of those has got any scope for development. The characters like Noejd, the nurse, or at least the doctor could have been developed more. Here lies a great difference between Ibsen and Strindberg. About Ibsen's subtle thoughts on characters, Leo Lowenthal says, "Ibsen is obsessed by the dilemma of how to maintain the integrity of the individual under the impact of the prevailing social atmosphere." (Lowenthal 149). Ibsen himself says about it as the following: "The fault lies in that all mankind has failed. If a man claims to live and to develop in a human way, it is megalomania. So, to conduct one's life as to realize one's self— this seems to me the highest attainment possible to a human being. It is the task of one and all of us, but most of us bungle it." (cited in Lowenthal 149)

5.6 On 'Home' and 'Family'

Ibsen had unique ideas about home and family. In Leo Lowenthal's essay we see, "For the eighteenth century novelists the home was a stabilizing force in a mobile world" (Lowenthal 143). Even today many novelists and playwrights consider marriage as a happy ending for their scripts. All the struggles of the protagonist end at marriage, and it is the readership's duty to imagine what may happen in the family life. Most of the times, readerships create phantasies. But, Ibsen and Strindberg started from the point where others stopped at. They thought and therefore brought the harsh reality of life on stage. Thus, they actually made their plays free from illogical incidents. People normally criticize the piece of literature that seems to be relevant to real life. Theatre is a mere source of entertainment for most of them. They like to see their phantasies on stage. So, Ibsen's and Strindberg's plays received criticism from diverse walks of life. About Ibsen, Lowenthal says, "Ibsen's plays, however, do not stop at the threshold of family life; on the contrary, it is precisely there that they begin." (Lowenthal 143)

In the same essay, Lowenthal refutes another blame imposed on Ibsen. It is normally said that Ibsen draws the picture of wicked and weak husband only to focus on women's miserable conditions. But, Lowenthal brings strong evidences to nullify this charge. Ibsen considered the social status of the characters very carefully, and therefore he presented them on stage as required by the social settings. As a part of this technique, sometimes some weak husbands are presented by Ibsen. But we should notice his attempt at presenting weak wives as well. He created many women characters that were either weak or wicked. So, the mentioned charge should be dismissed from now on. Lowenthal says, "Weak husbands such as Tesman, Alving, Helmer, or Allmers fail their wives and drive them to distraction. Ibsen is not partial to either of the sexes; weak wives like Aline Solnes, Irene Rubek, or Gina Ekdal have a similar effect." (143).

We will stick to Lowenthal for some more references in order to know Ibsen from some other points of view. There are always two major streams about Ibsen. One stream regards him as a liberal playwright, whereas the other stream finds him as a conservative playwright who used the stage to support Women's Rights Movements. Lowenthal also takes a side. But, he has logical grounds in favor of his side. About Ibsen, he comments, "Ibsen is a true liberal. Nonetheless he emerges as one of the most severe critics of his age." (139)

5.7 Categorization of Ibsen's plays

Ibsen's works are so diverse that it is quite impossible to confine him to few categories. It is rather true that Ibsen erased boundaries all through his life. T.S. Eliot once said, "A play should give you something to think about. When I see a play and understand it the first time, then I know it can't be much good." ("T.S. Eliot Quotes"). Once something is understood, there remains no confusion to categorize it, but confusion arises from not understanding and most of the time it leads to misunderstanding. Ibsen took himself to the height that was not possible to touch at the first time by most of the audiences.

Sometimes Ibsen's plays may be regarded as nothing but the expression of frustration. Caroline W. Mayerson cited from Eric Bentley to compare some Ibsenian plays with T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). There we become familiar with a new point of view to judge Ibsen: "The characters, like those in the other plays of Ibsen's last period, are the living dead who dwell in a waste land that resembles T.S. Eliot's." (Mayerson 137)

Ibsen's plays do not give answer to any question prevailing in society or family life. His plays are famous for raising questions. The plays compel us to think about the meaning of relationships and thus to think about the justification of our lives. It is a very dangerous brain-game, because if you cannot handle it properly you would become mentally tired and

frustrated. Sigmund Freud said, “The moment a man questions the meaning and value of life, he is sick, since objectively neither has any existence.” (cited in Raphael 122). In *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), we notice Ellida looking for meaning of life in the guise of ‘free will’. Through a logical presentation it can be showed that there was actually nothing called ‘free will’ to Ellida, because she showed contradictory behaviors regarding ‘free will’. This actually made her mentally sick. Ellida could have overcome her sickness if she could believe that she had got what she wanted. Similarly, Mr. Alving and his son Oswald, in the play *Ghosts* (1881), looked for the meaning of life. They also became mentally sick in search of it. None of them could overcome the sickness; because they did not get their desired object in any form. Thus, Ibsen’s plays teach us how to make life meaningful. We have to achieve it through the way we live in. We have to create meaning of our works. If we look for it through alienated paths, it would lead us to greater pathos only. In this way, Ibsen’s plays tell us a lot about the other spheres of life. If we read him as a gender-biased playwright, overlooking these significant messages, that would be a matter of great regret.

Ibsen’s works give us scope to compare him with great Greek playwrights. The plays go into such a depth of humanpsychology that we become bound to reexamine those. Francis Fergusson in the essay “Ghosts; The Tragic Rhythm in a Small Figure” says, “Mrs. Alving, like Oedipus, is engaged in a quest for her true human condition; and Ibsen, like Sophocles, shows on-stage only the end of this quest, when the past is being brought up again in the light of the present action and its fated outcome.” (Fergusson 111)

Thus, Ibsen’s mastery takes us closer to the greater treasures of world history. There we find Ibsen as a playwright who remained neutral regarding gender issues. It is clearly apprehensible that Ibsen thought about positions, and not genders.

5.8 The Realist

Ibsen nullifies the illusions of human life. Human beings run after illusions, and become frustrated when those are exposed. Due to the disclosure, they lose the charm of life. Ibsen makes us aware of such conditions through characters like Nora, Regina, Mrs. Alving, Oswald, Ellida etc. We can learn the futility of illusions, and get courage to choose the right path suitable to us. Thus, Ibsen establishes the truth. According to John Northam, “One does not die for illusions if one recognizes them for such.” (Northam 107).

Ibsen redefines power. Normally we consider men powerful and women weak; but Ibsen shows the futility of such conventional considerations. He shows how position- not gender- makes a person powerful. We observe a position in comparison with the other positions. John Northam says, “We judge a man’s heroism by reference to his opponent, David in relation to Goliath.”(92) We see the opposite position of Mr. and Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* (1881). There, we find Mrs. Alving so much powerful that she can control the entire family, she can erase all the reminiscences of her husband, and overall, she can influence her son’s decisions. Again we notice the powerful position of Ellida in comparison with Wangel. There in *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), Ellida’s power is recognized by the entire family. Thus, Ibsen presents a subtle web of power irrespective of gender. Northam finds Ibsen as a great dramatist who got unparalleled mastery over human psychology and society. He opines, “Ibsen is so vitally important to us, for he seems to me to be the only dramatist to have created great tragedy out of a society that can still be called fundamentally modern.” (92)

6. August Strindberg (1849-1912)

This part of the study is going to view August Strindberg from diverse corners. Mainly, it will try to understand the reasons of misconceptions regarding Strindberg. While doing so, most of the characteristics of the playwright will be discussed in comparison with Henrik Ibsen.

6.1 A Freethinker

Unlike Ibsen, Strindberg was a free thinker. Ibsen observed society very attentively, and then came to a decision through a summation of the observations; but Strindberg had a society in his brain. He created norms, customs and laws for that society, and then compared it with the real society. Through this comparison, he could know about the lacking of a real society. Therefore, Strindberg was able to present unique ideas on stage. In doing so, 'Naturalism' was not sufficient to fit his ideas. This led him to create 'Greater naturalism'. Margery Morgan said, "It can fairly be said that this main body of his earlier drama was all written from the viewpoint of a freethinker, regarding all events and experiences as explicable, however complex and obscure their causal origins might be." (22)

Strindberg- not measuring distance between his thoughts and the real society- created structure of family and society on stage thinking what should be the form of those institutions. He did not write on various issues as Ibsen did. He was rather very selective in case of writing— be it a novel or a play. He was selective regarding the expansion of the characters of his plays as well. Therefore, we find very few characters- in Strindberg's plays- who developed fully. He put emphasis on some selective characters that controlled the plot and mode of the play. Strindberg himself knew that audience did not always like such selectiveness, yet he was determined doing so. He was in reality more selective than his playwright-image. Morgan said, "Strindberg's naturalism may have been more selective than he admitted, as it focused on

aspects of the new science which lent themselves to spectacular and intense dramatic action.”

(22)

When we watch Strindberg's plays or read his novels, we actually get the reflection of his own life. Ibsen is quite opposite in this regard. In most of the Ibsenian works, we find the author totally absent; only the characters carry the play to the end. On the contrary, Strindberg goes to his expected ending riding on his characters. Because of this frankness, he is disliked by many, but Strindberg paid little heed to others. He found the stage as the field for expressing his self, amalgamating with his revolutionary thoughts. Due to this continuous touch with reality, came in Strindbergian plays many bitter truths that were unknown to Ibsenian stage. We can take a reference from Strindberg's novel *The Confession of a Fool* (1893). It was so frank that the German translator of the novel got bewildered noticing such straight forwardness from any writer. So, he misinterpreted and wrongly translated the novel. This led to further anomalies. The wrong translation became very bold in its language. As a result, selling the book was prohibited in Germany by the attorney-general. Thanks to Schering's new translation, later the mistakes were corrected, and the ban on the book was lifted. This incident presents an image of Strindberg before us. About the book, I.E Poritzky says as follows:

It is an intense joy from an artistic point of view to follow the 'confessor' through the book, as he looks at himself from all sides in order to gain self-knowledge; ...We see angels and devils fighting in his soul for supremacy, and the divine in him stepping between them with its creative let there be! (Strindberg, "The Confession of a Fool" vi)

6.2 A Restless Soul

Strindberg would take quick and abrupt decisions in his personal life. It can be regarded as his strength as well as his weakness; because, he could not actually take planned steps. Since his early childhood, Strindberg had to undergo various volatile situations. His parents' marriage was legalized few days before his birth. This created a mental pressure on little Strindberg. At the age of thirteen, he lost his mother. In the mean time, he completed kindergarten and started feeling uncomfortable at schools. He went to Uppsala University for one term only; because, the slow pedantic methods at the University could not satisfy him. Then he returned to his own town and started teaching at a school. But teaching profession failed to attract him, because he felt the urge to do something else. So, he left the school and started studying medicine. This one too failed giving him mental peace. He felt he should go for histrionic arts. So, he took a new turn by joining theatre. In the first performance, he was given a role that had only one dialogue in the play. This seemed very insulting to Strindberg. He left the theatre and started preparing himself for some greater roles. Some days later, he was given a chance to prove himself. But he failed in the trial and the theatre authority advised him going back to the school of dramatic acting. This was simply unbearable. Being completely frustrated, Strindberg returned to his hometown. There he took his first suicidal attempt, but thanks to a friend, he survived at the last moment. The survival became an inspiration for Strindberg. Within a few days, he completed writing an entire play. All these nuisances took place before Strindberg reaching twenty-two. So, we can get a clear view that Strindberg led a chaotic life from the very outset of his career. These affected his later life. As a result, we do not find any planned treatment in Strindberg's plays, whereas Ibsen is famous for his organized thoughts.

Strindberg sought for truth all through his life. It is true that he wanted to destroy everything, but his sole aim in destructions was to get the truth beneath all. He underwent psychological

crisis, which is popularly known as his 'Inferno Period'. But, he never ceased his search. His continuous search developed some sort of mysticism in his later days. He became hopeless about life. In his last days, Strindberg said, "Pray but work, suffer but hope, keeping both the earth and the stars in view. Do not try to settle permanently, for it is a place of pilgrimage, not a home but a halting place. Seek truth for it is to be found, but only in Him, who Himself is "The Way, the truth and the Life." (cited in Uppvall 15)

Strindberg took a u-turn in his last days. The man, who practiced freethinking all through his life, became pious before death. In fact, Strindberg's entire life was full of controversy. So, we cannot be sure whether Strindberg would change his attitude, if his life spanned some more years. About Strindberg's last days, Axel Johan Uppvall wrote the following in his PhD thesis:

On May 14, 1912, his eyes closed in death. His last wish was that the Bible and a Crucifix should accompany him on his last journey, that he should be buried during the early hours of the day and not among the wealthy. Thus ended the pilgrimage of a man whose whole life had been devoted to the search for truth, of a soul that had doubted, blasphemed, despaired and suffered more intense psychic torments than most human beings, and who finally could write with a fair amount of conviction. (Uppvall 15)

6.3 An outspoken personality

Strindberg was straightforward in all his actions and beliefs. Because of being a playwright, he had the opportunity to speak for theatre from every possible ground. Normally, it is expected that a playwright would try to prove theatre as a very powerful and influential media. A typical writer would never try to belittle a printing-press; a typical poet would not be unromantic about poetry. But, Strindberg had the ability to think out of box. He never tried to exaggerate the greatness of theatre. He was rather very realistic in thought. So, he could utter very terse words about theatre in his essay 'Modern Drama and Modern Theatre.' There he said,

In the great civilized nations, with their philosophers and merchants, there has been no national drama for generation, and yet people have managed to survive, and even produced the greatest thinkers, statesmen and inventors of the age, which makes a nonsense of the traditional belief that the drama is the highest expression of a nation's civilization." ("August Strindberg: Selected essays" 73)

Since theatre was the means of earning for Strindberg, it may be expected that he should be a blind appreciator of theatre. But Strindberg was a person who was never aligned with any expectation. He spoke for his own self. He wrote plays to make his conscience free. He never cared for what people would think about him; he cared only for his own thoughts. So, we find Strindberg making the following comment on theatre: "The theatre is certainly not the most momentous or world-shattering of subjects, but it is an inexhaustible one and always capable of engaging attention and sustaining interest." ("August Strindberg: Selected essays" 73)

Strindberg could not tolerate superstition. He nurtured a scientific mind from his early age. So, he always tried to refute superstitious norms. According to many of his critics, this tendency affected his plays negatively. A playwright needs to imagine many things which may seem

apparently illogical, but Strindberg used scientific explanations in his plays. He believed that human beings use the name of God as a pretext to avoid their own duties. They also consider God a strong shelter to hide their weakness. Until revenge is impossible, they do not pray. We find his comment as follows, “Revenge is punishment in its primitive form; revenge is self-defense; revenge is a desire to restore a state of equilibrium in married life. Everyone wishes to be revenged, but not everyone dares to be, for revenge also calls forth revenge.” (“August Strindberg: Selected essays” 54)

Thus, Strindberg was straightforward in not his works and deeds only; he developed a strong position against hypocrisy as well. Keeping this stance unchanged, he does not find anything special in Ibsen’s plays. As Ibsen shows heredity in his play *Ghosts* (1881), Strindberg sees it as a normal movement of human civilization. In his essay, ‘Nemesis Divina’, Strindberg says: “In Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, a son repeats a deed that his father committed before him, but this same deed has probably been repeated by every normally constituted son in every age” (“August Strindberg: Selected essays” 50)

Such bold statements from Strindberg baffle us about his true attitude towards life. Sometimes he seems optimistic, whereas sometimes we become damn sure about his being a pessimist. Most of the short stories in his book *Married* (1884) present him as an optimistic person, because there we find the characters planning for future, correcting each other’s mistakes, and above all, the characters can laugh in joy. But, his plays like *The Father* (1887), *Creditors* (1888), *The Stronger* (1889), *Pariah* (1888-1889) etc. present the dark side of life. To be more specific, the plays present family-life as a curse. We ponder over the justification of creating a family of our own. So, we have to acknowledge the mastery of Strindberg on understanding and motivating human psychology. This very person can make us optimistic and- at the very next moment- pessimistic. Strindberg writes about it, “Life is just as black as the pessimists

maintain it, and just as bright as the optimists portray it. To maintain that it is either black or white is simply a logical blunder, for life is both.” (“August Strindberg: Selected essays” 50)

6.4 A critic of Marxism

Strindberg’s terse comments and demand for change present him as a socialist to many. But, Strindberg did not belong to any such idealistic group. In fact, he had some sort of embroilment towards socialism. He wrote, “Socialism was a manifestation of the impatience felt by a sensitive and badly brought-up generation, which lacked discipline.” (“August Strindberg: Selected essays” 44)

This was not an abrupt comment. Strindberg read Marxism very well. Then he dissected the subtle points included there. At the end of the day he became a critic of Marxism. This also became a strong reason why people could not tolerate him. Strindberg knew very well that criticizing Marxism would make him unpopular to many. But, we have already known about Strindberg’s stubbornness— “There, across the street, is a shoemaker with two apprentices. I know him. He was a poor worker and “exploited” by a master who gave him his board and wages. But instead of donning a silk scarf on Sundays and going to the tavern every evening, he saved until he was able to buy a sewing-machine. And so he became the master and has apprentices of his own. Are you willing to maintain that his machine belongs to the workers, and that he has stolen it? (“August Strindberg: Selected essays” 33)

Strindberg wrote this to nullify the popular Marxist proverb, “Property is theft.” We are not going to debate over the issue whether such explanation from Strindberg is rational or irrational. We would like to present Strindberg’s fearless personality through this quote. Marxism was very popular among the young generation, when Strindberg wrote this. It requires guts to make such explanation, standing direct opposite to a popular idea. This once

again proves Strindberg's straightforwardness. He even dared to criticize Marx himself. In the same essay, he wrote, "... since Marx was born in 1818 he was a romantic and an idealist with an inflamed, monomaniacally functioning brain, who could only see Capital as nothing but work, even though it is well known that it also arises from the free production of natural forces, and through thrift, and through highly developed intelligence, and through the accumulation of many individual sums." ("August Strindberg: Selected Essays" 32)

6.5 A 'Greater naturalist'

Being a 'Greater naturalist', Strindberg believed only in natural law and orders. He believed that nature has its own way of operation. Therefore, no idealistic movement- be it Marxism or Feminism, or anything- could satisfy him. He regarded these movements as 'The Battle of the Brains' i.e. using the power of rhetoric, leaders/workers of the movements win favor of the general people. But, if there arrives any new movement with better use of rhetoric, people would join the new force. So, the movements are nothing but some policy to possess and practice power. In the essay 'The Battle of the Brains' Strindberg wrote, "All political, religious and literary disputes seem to me nothing but the battle that an individual or party has to impose their views upon others by way of suggestion, in other words, to mould opinion, and that is merely the struggle for power which today takes place between minds, now that physical battles have fallen out of use. ("August Strindberg: Selected essays" 25)

Strindberg says more about taking control over others. Human beings are convinced in many ways. It does most depend on the rationality or importance of the contents; it rather depends on the way someone presents the contents. So, when we follow any ideal, we are actually motivated by the workers of that ideal. We may consider ourselves very rational and intelligent, but Strindberg- through his hardship of years- knew the mode of human's intelligent. This is the basic reason why Strindberg could not follow any ideal in his entire life.

In the essay ‘Battle of the Brains’, we notice Strindberg with his companion Schilf. He applies some common tricks to take control over Schilf’s thought, and thus shows us how futile the system of belief is! Let’s look at an excerpt from the essay—

When I wanted to feed his head with Hegel by way of reason and proof, it didn’t work, but when I used the magic formulae ‘all’ and ‘educated’, he yielded to a superior force. Later on that evening I demonstrated to him that it had not been proved that the earth was a globe. At first he laughed pityingly, but when I expressed surprise that he had not read Tyndall’s essay in the ‘Edinburgh Review’, he became diffident, and felt ashamed. What a tremendous power there is in a name, and what an effect authority has even on a modern spirit.

(“August Strindberg: Selected essays” 41)

From the notes used for the essay, we can know that John Tyndall (1820-93) was an Irish physicist and ‘Edinburgh Review’ was a famous journal spanning from 1803 to 1929.

Strindberg acknowledged that no such article, as he mentioned in the incident, was published in the journal. He used the names in order to make his statement believable, and it worked well. Thus, Strindberg once again shows that our beliefs do not prove anything.

Strindberg further shows that it is even possible to take full control over someone else’s thought-process. Through continuous conversation and nourishment of relationship, one can direct a man according to one’s own wishes. Theories play this type of role in our life. Thanks to lucid examples and technical use of rhetoric, theories take control over us. Unconsciously we allow those in our brain to strengthen their grip. Finally, they spread all through our brain and we lose self-control. We become some mere followers of theories. Strindberg explains the entire process with an excellent example, “It is generally known that there are hymenoptera

which lay their eggs in the bodies of the cabbage white's larvae. The eggs hatch and pupate, and the larvae are as huge as if they were in the family way. But when the time comes for them to give birth a host of hymenopteran emerge, while the larvae lie there with their empty skins.” (“August Strindberg: Selected essays” 42)

For this reason, Strindberg does not find any value of theories in life. In his plays, we never notice the presence of any theory. He believed that life can run in its own way. Theory does nothing but make life complicated. So, Strindberg tried to maintain natural roles and orders in his plays. He called it ‘Greater naturalism’. Family is considered by Strindberg as the natural outcome of human clans. He did not like the entry of any theory in family relationships. There will be always conflicts between opposite sexes, but it is unwise to take shelter in theories. About man-woman relationship, Strindberg would not use typical romanticism. He rather believed that one should create a family of one's own risk, because there will always be problems there. In any successful organization, there always stands a leader holding superior position. He takes decisions. He may sometimes need to be rude for the welfare of the organization. Since family is a social organization, it should have a principal character, and this is a natural order. Any attempt to destroy this order would bring indiscipline and anarchy in the family. Someone who does not find himself suitable to fit in this order should not make a family. He should be happy with friendship; because he is not able to handle the situation rising from the battles between opposite sexes. According to Strindberg's thoughts, husband and wife can never be friends; there may remain friendly relationship between them. To have friendly relationship and to be friends are not same. Normally, literature puts emphasis on this wrong ground that there should be friendship between husband and wife. As a result, newly married couples lose themselves in confusion. But, Strindberg frees his audience from such illusions. He says, “Friendship between people of the opposite sex is not as dependable as it is

between people of the same sex, in whom similar ways of thinking, habits and upbringing are a greater guarantee of compatibility. (“August Strindberg: Selected essays” 35)

6.6 The so-called ‘Bad boy’

There are readers and critics who misuse Strindberg’s thoughts. Quoting some of his terse opinions, they want to prove him as a misogynist. Strindberg himself had to face criticism and harsh behavior from many during his life-time. Already we have tried to refute such claims, but the more we get familiar with Strindberg, the more we dip into confusion about his real attitude towards women. In the essay ‘Woman-Hatred and Woman-Worship’ which was published in 1897, Strindberg wrote:

On looking back at my past life I discover that, ever since I became man, I have always lived in regular relations with women, and that their presence has aroused pleasant feelings in me, in so far as they have remained women towards me. But when they have behaved as the rivals of man, neglected their beauty and lost their charm, I have detested them by dint of a natural and sound instinct. (Hageby 158)

After getting such clarification, one should not further blame Strindberg anymore. In previous chapters, we clarified why Strindberg wrote against women. When someone speaks against medicine, it does not necessarily mean that one hates medicine; it rather suggests the person’s stance for a controlled use of it. The word ‘control’ may seem offensive and abusive to many. This type of people cannot tolerate Strindberg. But we should not forget that human beings became civilized, thanks to controlling their behaviors.

The number of critics is not few who blamed Strindberg as an alcoholic. According to them, Strindberg’s writings are nothing but some side-effects of taking too much alcohol. Thus, they actually tried to reduce Strindberg’s popularity so that people would reject him. Those critics,

actually, did not have pluralism in their own attitude. So, they failed to observe Strindberg from any accommodative point of view. If they could do so, they would be able to appreciate Strindberg. Lizzy Lind-af-Hageby refuted the above-mentioned blames in the book *August Strindberg, The Spirit of Revolt*. There we read:

The root of his 'wildness' cannot be found in the fumes of alcohol. There was a strain of the publicist and the agitator in Strindberg which found but an insufficient outlet... If Strindberg had met audiences face to face- like Bjornson- and been in actual touch with the people, his tongue would have lost its sting.

(156)

Strindberg did not have the habit of backbiting. Whenever he was accused of anything, or blamed for creating confusions, he took those as inspiration. He would respond through pens. He knew very well that anything could be refuted by good deeds. And actually he was honest in his thoughts. Many of his critics hailed Strindberg after the publication of his plays. Hageby writes in the introduction to the book, *August Strindberg, The Spirit of Revolt*, in the following way:

When public opinion was quite sure that Strindberg was evil, mad, and improper, when he stood convicted out of his own mouth of anti-social and satanic designs, he stayed the verdict by his own magic. He wrote more and more and there came from his pen artistic creations endowed with virtues... His mind held a garden of flowers as well as a pile of putrescence. (6)

6.7 A precise writer

Apart from being straightforward, Strindberg was very precise in writing. He never used any irrelevant word or sentence. He carefully avoided unnecessary details of any incident. He always left some rooms for his audience. Strindberg believed that he would write play for prepared audience who had ability to understand gross things. Therefore, giving unnecessary details would seem like a sly trick to move audiences' concentration from the center. We do not find details of stage-settings in Strindberg's plays. He would like to put emphasis on the message, and not on the media. This is another reason why Strindberg did not like Ibsen. Ibsen's long stage-directions irritated Strindberg. He regarded those as an attempt to show off. For this reason, rejecting Ibsen's style, Strindberg said, "With the aid of a table and two chairs the strongest conflicts which life offers could be presented." (Hageby 99)

We know about the two maestros' life-time conflicts. Most of the attacks were initiated from Strindberg's side. He had the habit that he could not keep quiet about the idea which he did not like. So, he openly criticized Ibsen. But Ibsen was very cautious about this. He never used words that can be used as an attack from his side. Sometimes- being moved by lots of comments- Ibsen responded to Strindberg's call with short comments; whereas Strindberg wrote a complete book of short-stories to attack Ibsen. Name of the book was *Married* (1884). It included a story named 'A Doll's House' which was a stringent reply to Henrik Ibsen's famous play of the same name. Strindberg criticized Ibsen through all other stories in the book. Even the story 'A Doll's House' had direct references to Ibsen. There Strindberg mentions Ibsen as a very illogical playwright. In the stories- 'His servant', 'Natural Obstacle', 'An Attempt to Reform', 'Married and Unmarried'- he criticizes Women's Rights Movements to such an extent that there was no doubt about his being a misogynist. Strindberg did not mind his critics. But he was never in a mind-set to dodge his own conscience. As, in reality, he was

not a misogynist he wanted to clarify his position in the preface of the book; but many of his readers overlooked the preface and misunderstood him. Criticizing Ibsen's Nora, Strindberg actually wanted to create another image of women before the women of that time. In this regard, Lizzy-Lind-af-Hageby writes:

The preface to *Married* contained views on the rights of women which, but for the general commotion, would have preserved the writer from the charge of uncompromising enmity towards the souls of women. After analyzing the cause of unhappy marriages in some epigrammatic pages, he slaughters the 'romantic monstrosity' which is Ibsen's Nora, and presents his scheme for the future regeneration of woman under the title *Woman's Rights.*" (76)

After the publication of the book there was huge criticism against Strindberg. Workers of Women's Rights Movements could in no way tolerate him; even the preface could not save him. He became an object that could neither be swallowed nor be digested. Workers of Women's Rights Movements were not educated enough to refute Strindberg in black and white. So, they took another way to defeat him. Strindberg's biographer Gustaf Uddgren mentions a very awkward incident in his book *Strindberg the Man*. Uddgren writes—

A comical incident thwarted the whole purpose of *Married*. A prominent lady took exception to it and ordered an action to be brought against it. This ought to have been directed, of course, against its "immoral tendencies," against the lack of respect with which the author speaks of Her Majesty the Mistress of the world, i.e. against those features which ten thousand emancipated housewives had found most objectionable in the book. If that had been done Strindberg would without a doubt have performed a much greater service with his book than he did. But

instead of this, the accusers twisted the whole matter by bringing action against *Married* for defamation of religion. (30)

Number of such examples was not few in Strindberg's life. He had faced even worse situations than this one. Actually Strindberg's bold presentation was not well-accepted by all. If we observe carefully, we would notice that there were writers and playwrights who criticized women and Women's Rights Movements more tersely than Strindberg did. But they were very technical in their styles. They used multiple layers in their plays. As a result, audiences could not get the subtle issues during play-time. But Strindberg's plays lacked any technique. He could not hide emotions. He contributed a lot for the betterment of women's conditions. But all those went in vain due to his straightforward and precise presentation. Like Uddgren, many other critics focused on Strindberg's respectful attitude towards women. This research claims that we should now come out of the misconception about Strindberg. Lizzy Lind-af-Hageby conducts a very authentic study on Strindberg's positive attitude towards women. The study says:

Woman shall be eligible for election to every occupation," Writes Strindberg; in marriage she is to retain her own name and not, as now, be a feminine appendix ignominiously tacked on to the man; she is to be master of her own body, and of the choice of motherhood. (76)

Such an extensive study gives answer to lots of questions about Strindberg. It actually proves that Strindberg was ahead of his time. He had respect and support for women; at the same time, he had the ability to criticize them, standing on a neutral ground. For keeping his neutrality, he claimed for a naturalistic theatre. He did find the theatre to be a place to conduct experiment. He considered it a medium to manifest truth. In doing so, he measured the distance between truth and real life. Thus, we again find a bold Strindberg who could not tolerate any misuse of

theatre. Here lies another reason why he detested Ibsen. He thought that Ibsen was spreading propaganda in favor of Women's Rights Movements using theatre as a medium. This seemed to him to be an insult to theatre. He wanted to use theatre as a medium to convey messages to audience for greater welfare of humanity. We notice Strindberg saying about Naturalistic theatre as:

Let us have a theatre, where we can be horrified by the horrible, where we can laugh at what is laughable, play with playthings; where we can see everything without being shocked. Though old, conventional laws may have to be broken, let us have a free theatre, where everything is admitted except the talentless, the hypocritical and the stupid. (Hageby 98)

Here another feature is added to Strindberg's boldness. He nurtured realistic views towards life and theatre. He could not separate life from theatre. Both of those carried similar significance to him. But, if we inquire into the fact 'what was the outcome of such boldness?' we would find that he found nothing in life. Actually, he had to lose most of the important things in life. He lost his wives, he had not very good relationship with his children, and he was rebuked, even threatened by the members of Women's Rights Movements. It is true that he had many supporters as well. But, Strindberg failed to maintain any good relationship with his supporters and well-wishers due to his boldness. About his achievement from life, Hageby comments—

He took upon himself the role of destroyer, he mocked men's religion and men's morality, he ridiculed propriety and poured bitter scorn on the social order.... He passed on, making enemies, breaking idols, desecrating temples. He sowed reality and he reaped hatred. (Hageby 5-6)

Thus, a genius' life ended in misinterpretation. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

Truth is tough

Yet I love it.

Befools it never.

(“Shesh Lekha”) (my translation)

Strindberg had this type of belief. After his death, “Maxim Gorki likened him to Danko, the hero of the old Danube legend, who, in order to help humanity out of the darkness of problems, tore his heart out of his breast, lit it and holding it high, led the way. The masses who mock and praise so easily, who crucify and raise idols with the same haste, seldom recognize their real friends.” (Hageby 9)

7. Reviewing the plays

The plays chosen for this study have been dissected, in different times, by many critics. As this study aims to create a new point of view, it is a must to review the chosen plays. In this part of the study, only relevant issues e.g. gender, power etc. have been used as tools to review the plays, and thus to make the study more specific.

7.1 *Ghosts* (1881)

Ghosts is a 1881 play that presents female characters from a conventional Ibsenian point of view. But the play can be reviewed from a different perspective to discover some hidden truths in it. It deals with issues like incest, religion, venereal disease, euthanasia etc. All these created controversy in Ibsen's time. But, ultimately, the play is considered to be one of the greatest plays by Ibsen. Maurice Valency, theater critic, said, “From the standpoint of modern tragedy *Ghosts* strikes off in a new direction. Regular tragedy dealt mainly with the unhappy

consequences of breaking the moral code. *Ghosts*, on the contrary, deals with the consequences of not breaking it.” (“Flower & the Castle Quotes”)

7.1.1 The rise of a matriarch

Mrs. Alving is a widow. Her husband was a captain who spent all his life in search of pleasure. Mrs. Alving did not have a happy relationship with her husband because of his ill character. He was a drunkard. Mrs. Alving tried her best to match with her husband, but failed in all attempts. She even escaped from the home and took shelter from Pastor Manders. But, the pastor refused her and convinced her to return to her husband.

The captain is dead now, and Mrs. Alving is seen talking to Manders about setting up an orphanage. Actually, the orphanage is going to be established spending the dead captain’s wealth; because, Mrs. Alving does not want her son, Oswald, to inherit his father’s riches. Earlier she sent Oswald to a boarding school so that he could not learn any bad manner from his father. Now she wishes to disinherit Oswald from his father’s property, because she believes that those riches may infect Oswald’s character. She even does not admit any similarity between Oswald and his father. Oswald is grown up now, and has returned home. Mrs. Alving wants him to be a mother’s son, not the father’s.

Manders: When Oswald came through the door there with that pipe in his mouth, it was as if I saw his father in flesh.

Oswald: Really?

Mrs. Alving: Oh, how can you say that? Oswald takes after me. (220)

Mrs. Alving does not know that Oswald has inherited syphilis from his father. In course of the play, audience can know it, but lots of things happen on the stage before that. For example,

Manders did not know about Mrs. Alving's unhappy life. So, he blamed her for all the problems—

Manders: Everything that inconveniences your life you've carelessly and irresponsibly thrown aside—as if it were baggage you could leave behind if you chose. It didn't agree with you to be a wife any longer, so you left your husband. You found it troublesome to be a mother, so you put your child out with strangers.
(226-227)

The truth is revealed slowly. Manders feels sympathy for Mrs. Alving. But, at the same time, one mention-worthy thing should not be overlooked. All the misbehaviors of Mr. Alving were faced bravely by Mrs. Alving, when Oswald was born. This shows the use of a child as a weapon at its mother's hand. A mother can use this weapon very strongly against the child's father. The late captain's activities were not supportable, but Mrs. Alving's changed position also reveals a very subtle truth existing in society:

Mrs. Alving: I had my little boy, and I bore it for him ... then I swore to myself: that was the end! So I took charge of the house- complete charge- over him and everything else. Because, now, you see I had a weapon against him; he couldn't let out a word of protest. (230)

Mrs. Alving turns into Oswald's mother from the captain's wife. This new identity is very powerful. In a family, it is the mother who controls the child more than a father does. Thus, a mother becomes the authority of the family. Man's controlling power, along with all the influences, ends with the birth of a child. In this play, Mrs. Alving gets something more than compensation from Oswald's birth. Now, after so many days of the captain's death, Mrs. Alving makes attempt to eliminate all the tokens of the dead captain. She wants to donate

everything to the orphanage so that the house as well as her son can become free from the dead captain's influence:

Mrs. Alving: (In a quiet, firm voice) and then this long, horrible force will be over. After tomorrow, it will really seem as if the dead had never lived in this house. There will be no one else here but my son and me. (232)

Later some dark sides of the late captain's character are revealed. He had an illegal physical affair with the house-maid. There a daughter was born. But when the servant was pregnant, the captain married her off with a poor carpenter. So, the daughter, Regina, did not know about her real father. In the mean time, the audience is made known about the background of Mr. and Mrs. Alving's marriage. It is known that Miss Helen's (Mrs. Alving) mother and two aunts considered Mr. Alving's bright prospects a good reason to marry or sell their daughter off. This act raises that Ibsenian question again: 'Are women nothing but products to be disposed?' Yes, women are considered products in our society, and it is done mostly by women. They do not try to make their daughters self-confident and self-respectful; they rather look for a strong husband for the girl. Now, in modern societies, women are more educated than the Ibsenian women. But, their mentality has not changed much. Rights cannot be given to anyone; it is to be earned by one's own worth and roles. But, women become rivals to other women when they try to raise their heads.

Manders: No one's responsible for the outcome. At least there's this to be said:

Your marriage was carried through with very respect for law and order.

Mrs. Alving: (at the window) yes, always law and order! I often think they're the root of all our miseries on earth. (235-236)

Ibsen's plays are renowned for bringing changes against established laws and orders. Similarly, Strindberg's plays intend to break the established ones. But none of them can be taken for granted unquestionably, because a society cannot run without a certain structure. Laws and order create that structure. There always remain some gaps in that structure, as there are people from different mentalities and backgrounds. A playwright's responsibility is to raise question against those inappropriateness. He/She creates characters from the culmination of real life and imagination. Critics should not fantasize over those characters. Rather the questions should be examined closely and carefully. Helen's mother and aunts valued Mr. Alving's riches only; they did not look into his moral character; because a man is judged by his wealth, whereas a woman is judged by her beauty. Both parties use their capital to manage a better future. But, women's capital is less worthy in comparison to that of the men; because beauty does not last long. So, women need to educate themselves in order to make a better pair in a society. In Ibsen's time, women were not educated properly. So, they did not have equal rights in family or society. Guardians at that time wished to tame a prospective man for their daughter. Thus, they tried to create a balance in society, but this system created further anarchy. Mr. and Mrs. Alving's case is a glaring exemplar in this regard.

7.1.2 Question about prototyping

Who is the representative of men— Mr. Alving or Manders? Commonly, Mr. Alving is regarded as the representative. But we should not forget that Manders too has a significant role in the play. He worked as an adviser to the family. He even took a stern decision when Mrs. Alving wished to leave the house with him.

Mrs. Alving: It was a crime against us both.

Manders: That I entreated you by saying, “Woman, go home to your lawful husband,” when you came to me distracted, crying, “Here I am, take me!” Was that a crime?

Mrs. Alving: Yes, I think so. (239)

So, Mrs. Alving cannot claim to be a very chaste woman. We cannot be sure how far she would go, if Manders would not resist her. In fact, men and women both are stirred by natural instincts. It is the law and order that control them. So, a system should not be blamed only for having some hard and fast rules. We do not know what would happen in absence of those rules.

Next, we become familiar with a tricky idea coming from Engstrand—the carpenter who married the house-maid impregnated by Mr. Alving. He wants to launch a rest-house where the sailors from the sea would have some entertainments. He wants to get Regina there to entertain the sailors. But Regina refuses the proposal. Engstrand then feigns as if he preserved a great affection for Regina. But audience can understand that all these are some mere attempts to use Regina in the business so that it boosts up fast. But, in spite of all the attempts, Regina refuses the proposal; because she still does not know about her birth history. Ibsen, thus, shows a conventional way of using women as products. Even a fatherly figure does not hesitate to do so. But only men should not be accused of such mentality. Mrs. Alving’s mother and aunts did the same when they married off their daughter. They looked for financial prospects only. So, it is the position that shapes human behavior. Behavior is normally gender-neutral.

7.1.3 An urge to control instincts

The next Act, Act-II, in *Ghosts* reveals a love affair between Oswald and Regina. Actually they were half brothers and sisters. So, their marriage would not be legal in society as well as in religion. Since they did not know about their true identity, they did not hesitate to fall in love. This shows how instincts are compressed by social and religious norms. Science has now proved the detrimental effects of a sexual relationship between brother and sister. So, instinct may lead one to infinity, but it is the social norms that set the boundary to keep the entire society healthy.

Oswald introduced Regina as his beloved and wished to leave the house with her; because there was the absence of 'joy of life' in the house. At this sort of situation, Mrs. Alving tries to reveal the truth, but Manders opposes. There is another undercurrent in the situation. The audience can feel that Oswald's father, Mr. Alving, felt the same thing— absence of 'joy of life'. Actually, when someone creates a family, he/she has to think about the other members. Neither Mr. Alving nor Mrs. Alving did that. Hence there remained a joyless environment in the family. A feminist critic would find Mr. Alving responsible for this; whereas a misogynist critic would find Mrs. Alving. But it is never possible to come to a decision from outside; because there are tons of silly issues that create the mode or milieu of a family. Only proper awareness of all the members can solve such problems. Whoever you are, a critic or a commoner, you are nothing more than an audience in someone else's family.

When Mrs. Alving attempts to disclose the truth about Regina, the surroundings fill up with smoke. The orphanage burns. Thus, the Act ends with a hue and cry.

7.1.4 Mrs. Alving: A manifestation of 'Female Power'

The next Act, Act-III, is the last act of the play. Here Mrs. Alving discloses everything to Regina and Oswald. Regina leaves the house. In the mean time, the audience gets a clue that Manders might have burnt the orphanage; because, Mrs. Alving did not want to keep any trace or token of Mr. Alving. She wanted to make the family free from Mr. Alving's influence. For this very reason, no insurance policy was done earlier for the orphanage. With the burning of the orphanage, all the reminiscences of Mr. Alving vanish. This can be considered as a sign of female power. Women can give birth; similarly they can take everything from one's life. Such a potentially energetic part of the human species should never be considered weak.

When Regina leaves the home, Oswald bursts into tears before his mother. He laments for the absence of 'joy of life' in the house. He also informs that only morphine can give him some relief from pain. But it would also cause him death. Mrs. Alving does not agree to give it, but Oswald's condition makes her compelled to do so:

Oswald: I never asked you for life. And what is this life you gave me? I don't want it! You can take it back! (274)

7.1.5 Importance of balanced relationship

Mrs. Alving's tears cannot resist Oswald's death. Oswald finally dies in lamentation and his last words are like this—

Oswald: (sitting motionless, as before). The sun- the sun. (276)

Thus the sunless, joyless life ends in turmoil. And the play shows how an imbalanced relationship between husband and wife can affect the children. Conventionally, marriage is a social contract to produce children, and husband-wife relationship symbolizes a debtor-creditor relationship. Each of them thinks about his/her own self only. As a result, a ghost-spirit always roams around the house.

7.2 *The Lady from the Sea* (1888)

This play, as we know, circles round Ellida Wangel— the second wife of the district physician Dr. Wangel. She is of almost the same age of Dr. Wangel's daughter. So, there is a mental gap between husband and wife. Besides, Ellida does not have enough maturity to be herself. She is unable to take decision with her free will. She lived in an area surrounded by sea. Her father worked in the lighthouse. There she met Dr. Wangel who was in search of a second wife, after the demise of his first wife. He liked Ellida and they got married.

7.2.1 Tale of an isolated wife

From the beginning of the play, we find Ellida to be a very quiet character who does not speak much even with her husband. With the passage of time, audience can know about her past.

Ellida and Dr. Wangel had a child, a boy child, some years back. The child did not survive long. After its death, Ellida takes shelter at the corner of the house. She actually does nothing but take a long bath in the sea. There is an unnatural distance between the husband and wife. They do not share a bed. Ellida is free from any kind of duty— be it at home or outside. Dr.

Wangel asks her several times about the reason of her upsetness, but in vain. Finally, Ellida admits that she had some sort of love-affair with a stranger who worked in a ship and was accused of murdering the captain of that ship. Ellida claims that she was hypnotized by that stranger. She noticed nothing but the open sea in his eyes. The stranger took a ring from his own finger and another from Ellida's, and tied those together. Then he threw the tied rings into the sea and declared themselves as husband and wife. He left the place thereafter, and promised to come back as soon as possible. In the total process, Ellida had nothing to say or protest. She was a mere object. Days pass, but there is no trace of the stranger. In the mean time Wangel reaches there and woos Ellida. Ellida's father gives his consent. Ellida does not protest as well. Years later, Ellida gives birth to a boy child. Unfortunately the child dies. Then Ellida makes herself alienated from the rest of the world. She recalls that the child had the eyes similar to those of the stranger. After all these confessions, Ellida expects shelter from Wangel. Wangel listens to all these very attentively and promises to help his wife. In a conventional society, Ellida's case is not regarded as anything significant. A person, be a male or a female, may have love-affair with others before marriage. Normally these are overlooked after marriage. But, this play brings a different scenario. Here the husband listens to the problem carefully and looks for solutions. But by including Ellida and some other female characters in Ibsen's plays, Janet Garton comments, "All are passionate women who, it could be argued, have got themselves involved with the wrong man." (106)

So, when a husband co-operates his wife, it becomes a wrong match. Surprisingly, if the husband would torture the wife, it would be a wrong match too. Thus, feminists' comments can never make a good match between a man and a woman; because, always the man is unsuitable.

7.2.2 Tricky use of 'Free will'

The stranger comes to Ellida in the next act. He requests her to go back with him. Ellida can't bear the stranger's eyes. She cries to Wangel for help. This time the stranger says that he is not there to create any force; rather, 'coming or not coming' depends entirely on Ellida's free will. Ellida becomes very astonished and pleased at the stranger's words. Never before, she thought about 'free will'. She had no idea about this. So, now she wants to exercise her 'free will'. She tries to take a decision of her own free will and informs Wangel clearly about this. We should not forget that this very Ellida did not have any will, let alone 'free will' when the stranger created an engagement with her. Ellida just dedicated herself to the stranger. But now she is considering 'free will' a very significant thing. It is better to identify this as a trick from the stranger; because, he knows very well about the conventional structure of society where it is seemingly impossible to take someone's wife from him. The stranger had to undergo trial, if he would try anything like that. Hence he played a trick to get Ellida with least effort. He does not really have respect towards 'free will' or towards pure relationship. He is a pure dictator. In her letters, Ellida had several times denied the stranger's engagement, but he did not pay any heed to those. He did not even want to know about Ellida's wishes. He accomplished his plans only. Thus, all through the play, the stranger is a very tricky, selfish character. He would create force if there were any scope to take away Ellida directly from Wangel. Being unable to do that, he changed his course, not the mentality; because, we notice him ignoring Wangel. He even brings his pistol before Wangel. All these important clues slip through feminist critics' eyes. They can only find Wangel to be a 'patriarch' who considers his wife a doll.

7.2.3 Man: Always worthless!

Ellida has super influence over Wangel. She can make anything done for her by Wangel. She enjoys queen-like facilities at her home.

Eliida: (after a short pause) Isn't it lovely to sit here?

Arnholm: I think it's lovely now.

Ellida: We call this place the summerhouse. My summerhouse, because I had it built.

Or rather Wangel did— for my sake. (605)

This is one of the many examples Ibsen set in his plays to show women's power over men.

Many more examples can be brought to show a man's being at the beck and call of women.

Men are like Sisyphus who labors all the day but gets zero at the end of the day—

Arnholm: Do you often sit here?

Ellida: Yes, most of the day.

Arnholm: And Wangel?

Ellida: Oh, Wangel goes back and forth. First he is here with me, and then he's over with them. (605)

Not only Ellida, Dr. Wangel's daughters also have made him a service-provider. But after rendering all the services required, a man becomes unsuitable. If a man neglects his duties, he is termed as 'undutiful'. When these duties compel him to be rude, then he becomes a 'manifestation of patriarchy'. Thus the blame-game comes, and continues.

7.2.4 A scope for feminists

In the course of the play, Wangel tries to resist Ellida. He wants to keep the stranger away from Ellida. Dr. Wangel is much senior to Ellida. So, apart from being a husband, he is like a guardian to her. He is familiar with the course of life that is totally unknown to Ellida. And above all, a relationship gives some amount of rights. So, a husband can assuage a wife from some unsuitable ways. Since the wife is in a sort of trance, she may find this forcefulness to be a torture. But it's the critics, especially the feminist critics, who distort the meaning. They blindly go to women's side, not considering the justification of their position. Thus, extremism takes place in society. An incident can be explained from different points of view. The best one, which is less harmful but more beneficial for both parties, should be chosen.

...

Arnholm: You! (lowering his voice.) Does that mean— ? Do you— not really love your husband?

Ellida: Yes, yes! With all my heart, I've learned to love him! And that's just what makes it so terrible— so baffling— so utterly inconceivable—! (614)

Here we find Ellida's declaration about her love to Wangel. But later we will find this very Ellida accusing Wangel of marrying her without her consent. She even claims that earlier she had sold herself to Wangel. This type of false statements becomes very important to feminist critics, and they pick up this type of sentences, forgetting the contradictions.

7.2.5 The message overlooked by many

At the end of the play, Ellida gathers mental strength to refuse the stranger. She overcomes her fear and starts living happily with her family. Wangel truly loved Ellida. Therefore, he was ready to sacrifice anything for her. When Ellida wanted to exercise 'free will', Wangel could not understand what she actually meant. He only knew that he would do anything for Ellida. Actually, freedom cannot be given. One needs to achieve it. So, when Ellida wanted to take freedom from Wangel, it was her fault that she did not know the real meaning of freedom. Ibsen showed how a lady from the sea could become a lady of the land. The essential thing is 'freedom' which is to be gained by a woman herself. This should give feminist critics a lesson that women's rights cannot be given, it is to be earned by women's own roles.

7.3 *The Father* (1887)

“*The Father* demonstrates impatience with the detailed accumulation of information about a character’s heredity and environment that naturalism, as defined by Zola, required.”

(Strindberg, “Miss Julie and Other Plays” 14)

The play consists of a few characters only, of which two play major roles— the captain (Adolf) and his wife (Laura). ‘Whether to send the daughter to a boarding school or to educate her at home’, is the central conflict of the play. Laura wishes it not to be done, but the captain plans for it. He tries to establish his own decision. Being failure in her initial attempts, Laure chooses a tricky way— she creates confusion in the captain regarding his fatherhood of Bertha (their only daughter). The captain feels defeated this time. He finds himself totally ruined. This shows how a woman can play the trump card even after remaining in a seemingly feeble position. She knows the weakest point of a male person, and can win over him by attacking at that point.

7.3.1 **Man: A drudge of the family**

The play starts in a room where the captain was sitting with his brother-in-law (the Pastor). Both of them were scolding the servant (Noejd) for his illegal affairs with a servant girl. In this scene, Strindberg gives a hint to the audience about the justification of the play’s name. Noejd had an affair with Emma who became pregnant. But Noejd refused to take responsibility of the child; because, he knew that Emma had love-affair with some other men too. That is why he could not be sure about the child’s identity, i.e. about the identity of its father. He points out that a man can never be sure about his fatherhood. It is only the woman who knows about the child’s identity. Noejd’s comment is mention-worthy in this regard: “And sweating your whole life away for someone else’s child, that’s no joke!” (73)

In the next scene (ACT-I, Scene-III), the captain's family-life is highlighted. Captain is found to be a very unhappy person in conjugal life. He is the only male member in the entire house. Apart from his wife and daughter, he has to take care of his mother-in-law and an old nurse who had nurtured him in his childhood. All these women try to influence the captain in their own ways which make him confused in his own family. The women are not strong-voiced, but they can use subterfuges to get the desired objects, e.g. Laura cannot rebuke or put pressure on the captain, but she raises such a suspicion in captain's mind that he becomes mentally sick and yields to Laura. Captain's mother-in-law uses subtle tricks to make the captain work for her. Thus, the captain's life becomes full of burdens.

The scene continues with the discussion between the captain and the Pastor. Captain tries to justify his decision about sending Bertha to a boarding school— "I don't want to be my daughter's pimp, that's all— bring her up for marriage and nothing else. Then she'll have a hard time of it, if she remained single. On the other hand, I don't want to put her into some man's career, which requires years of study, because if she does decide to get married that would only prove a waste of time." (76)

7.3.2 Authority: A gender-neutral obsession

The captain is a free-thinker. He does not plan to influence his daughter; rather, wishes to make her free from the suffocating environment of the family. But his wife (Laura) cannot lose her control over Bertha. So, she wishes to keep Bertha at home. This point shows how human being longs for authority. Everyone wants to have the controlling power in one's own hand. It never depends on gender, rather on position. Commonly the male members are seen having the authority in a family, but we should not forget that the females also enjoy power that is practiced in different ways. They control the children and create a powerful position in the

family. In fact, for this very reason, there remains a never-ending conflict between a man's mother and wife.

In the next scene, the captain and Laura confront for the first time in the play. The first confrontation helps the audience to guess about the mode of their relationship. The captain was counting money when Laura interrupted. Captain can smell the reason that Laura has come to take housekeeping money. This is a very familiar scene in the family. They do not have anything else, except these family matters, to talk about. The captain asks for an account of expense. A part of the conversation can speak a lot:

Laura: You want accounts now, do you?

Captain: Of course I do. We're in poor shape financially, and if things should come to a head, we'd need to produce them. Otherwise our creditors could sue me.

Laura: It's not my fault if we're badly off.

Captain: That's just what the accounts will show. (79)

The captain was unwilling about a new tenant but he could not stick to his decision. This shows how women in a family make their decisions prevail. When asked about the reason why the captain agreed to take the new tenant, he said:

Because you wouldn't let me eat in peace, sleep in peace, or work in peace until you'd got him here. You wanted him, because your brother wanted to be rid of him, your mother wanted him because I didn't, the governess wanted him because he was a pietist, and old Margret because she'd known his grandmother from

childhood. That's why we took him; and if I hadn't done so I'd be in the madhouse now, or lying in the family grave. (79)

It is one of the reasons why the captain insisted on the decision of sending Bertha to a boarding school. The captain is the manifestation of modern male figures in a family. He is shown to be very rude and strict, but there are reasons that make him to be so. Male figures are dominated at the end of the day. Decisions taken seemingly harshly are pulled down slowly by the female counterparts. Therefore, in some cases, males have no other choice but being strict. Adolf in the play portrays this truth.

After the initial brawling, comes the point again: 'Whether Bertha will be sent to a boarding school or educated at home'. Captain insists on sticking to his decision. Meanwhile Laura changes the topic and asks about Noejd (the servant). The captain exonerates Noejd's love-affair with the servant girl, and says that a man can never be sure about his fatherhood, it is only the woman who knows the identity of the child's father. Laura uses this point as a weapon against Adolf and wins the battle between sexes.

The next scene contains conversation between Laura and the family doctor. The doctor inquires about the captain. Laura tells a bunch of negative things about her husband. She informs that the captain buys all kinds of books. She also says that he examines other planets through microscope. This shocks the doctor and he doubts the captain's mental state. Later it was found that the captain watches other planets through spectroscope. Laura's plan is to prove her husband to be an insane, because this would help her in exercising power in the family, she would be able to control her daughter and thus the entire family. This is a very horrible picture about modern families, where relationship between the husbands and the wives are nothing but battle between sexes regarding authoritative power. The husbands exercise power overtly, whereas wives do that covertly.

7.3.3 Agony of a father

The captain is found talking to the nurse who requests him to come to a settlement with Laura regarding 'Bertha's education' issue. She wants that the captain would be sympathetic—

Nurse: A father's got other things to think about besides his child, a mother only has her child.

Captain: That's precisely it. She's only got the one burden but I've got three, including hers. (88)

Strindberg is very realistic here. We all become very emotional when issues like 'children' or 'family members' appear. But in reality, the head of the family has to think about all the family members. So, sometimes he may consider them burdens. Though he does not ignore his duties and responsibilities, he may lament sometimes for the loss of valuable times. This very thing is seen in society – women lament loudly that they spoil their careers for the sake of the family. They forget that the husband has to sacrifice more than at least one person in the family. This scene once again reveals the captain's position in the family.

Captain: But now, at the crucial moment, you betray me and go over to the enemy.

Nurse: Enemy! (89)

Captain indicates Laura as an enemy. And, with this, battle between sexes becomes even more vivid. Then the audience is introduced to Bertha. Bertha complains against her grandmother that she wants to hurt Bertha. Actually, Bertha is kept under control through gossips about spirits. Feminists have a common complaint against 'patriarchy' that it keeps women within four walls making them afraid of the outside, and thus patriarchy controls women in a family.

But this scene shows that it is a common practice, regardless of genders, to make someone afraid in order to control him/her sufficiently. This depends entirely on the position. This very scene is important also to show how position compels someone giving attention to others.

Captain : Will you ask her [Laura]?

Bertha : No, you must ask her, nicely, she does not take any notice of me! (93)

The captain does not pay attention to Laura; and Laura does not pay attention to Bertha. Thus we can see how attention changes when position changes. It is not the males who consider themselves superiors, the females also do the same.

7.3.4 Men's helplessness in a family

Laura encounters Adolf again and makes him confused about his fatherhood. As the captain claims his authority over his child, Laura takes the point raised earlier by the captain: She is sure about her motherhood but how can the captain be sure that he is Bertha's father? She instigates the captain through her words, "Suppose I was willing to endure everything, to be driven out, despised, anything just to keep my child and bring her up. Suppose I was telling the truth just now when I said that Bertha is my child, but not yours! Suppose... ." (95)

This one strike is enough for the captain. From the outset of the play, we find him very much disturbed due to family affairs. Laura takes the chance. She knows the captain's weak point and timely hits there. Now the captain loses control and screams. This shows Laura's real character.

Laura: Why try to fight with a superior enemy?

Captain: Superior?

Laura: Yes! It's strange, but I've never been able to look at a man without feeling I'm his superior. (96)

This scene also shows a universal truth about women's thought process.

Captain: can you tell me how you women can treat a grown up man as if he were a child?

Nurse: I suppose, it's because you're all born of women, every one of you, big or small. (97)

Thus Strindberg shows why women shouldn't be regarded as inferior. In fact, they never consider themselves inferior. In a family the male members are the victims of mental torture that goes unseen.

7.3.5 Gender-Balance

Laura is found talking to the family doctor again. The doctor drags out the matter that Laura hides captain's important letters so that he cannot make himself busy with those. This disturbs the doctor, and he says:

Doctor: ... You must know how painful it is to have one's dearest wishes frustrated, one's will thwarted.

Laura: Don't I just! (99)

That means Laura has undergone the same sufferings. This shows that in a marriage-relationship, both parties have to suffer. Albeit they suffer differently, at the end of the day the sufferings are more or less equal. August Strindberg tries to show a balance in man-woman relationship. In a conventional marriage, where the partners are tied together to produce children only, this kind of sufferings are very common experience. There remain different

subterfuges as well. For example, Laura hides many things- especially those go in captain's favor- while talking to the doctor about Adolf's insanity. She hides the matter that she created confusion in the captain's mind; she rather says that she simply does not know how the captain got absurd ideas about his fatherhood. Children too are not free from sufferings. When Bertha inquires about her father's illness, she is answered affirmatively, i.e., she is made prepared to accept her father's mental disorder.

When Adolf returns home, he seems little-bit eccentric as he questions the nurse about the identity of his daughter's father. This shows that the captain is heavily moved by the shock he received from Laura. Later Adolf asks similar questions to the doctor. He also asks some scientific questions through which he becomes sure that there is no scientific way to be sure about fatherhood. This strengthens Adolf's confusion. In this scene, we also get a reference from Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghost*:

Doctor: ... and you know, when I heard that Mrs. Alving going on about her dead husband, I thought to myself, 'It's a damned shame the man's dead!'

Captain: Do you think he'd have spoken out, if he'd been alive? If any man rose from the dead, do you think he'd be believed? (107)

Though Strindberg had personal conflicts with Henrik Ibsen, he went through Ibsen's works. And this time we can see how the maestros' thoughts became parallel to some extent.

7.3.6 Battle of sexes

Adolf and Laura's encounter again. Adolf is found very meek now. He looks for a mere insurance of his paternity. He begs Laura's kindness that she would declare him as Bertha's father. This would help Adolf get some mental strengths and peace in life. In exchange, he

would never ask anything else from Laura in rest of his life. But their expressions show clearly that they always consider the relationship as a battle:

Laura: So you capitulate?

Captain: No, I propose an armistice. (109)

The battle continues. And they try to defeat each other in every possible way. Thus, in a battle between husband and wife, words are the weapons. Both of them try to use the weapon whenever any petit chance is there. They know very well that there remains no affection between them, but they have to run the relation for the sake of their children. Since, conventionally, marriage is an institution to produce children; they let the institution run on. It does not matter at all whether it is run happily or not.

Laura: Why didn't we part in time?

Captain: Because the child bound us together, until the bond became a chain.

(110)

At a point the captain cries loudly. It surprises Laura. It seems that a man should not cry. We know, a woman cries easily and gets sympathy from others. But our society does not permit a man to cry. It seems odd when a man cries. One can get relief from sufferings through crying, but society has created invisible laws that a man should not cry, as if a man is free from sufferings. Actually, this is another pain that a man cannot express his pains. In spite of all these, Adolf cries loudly which proves how much pain he gets when he is made confused about his fatherhood.

In the mean time, Strindberg lets his audience know something about Adolf's past. Adolf was an unwanted child. He was not nurtured properly in childhood. Therefore, he had some sort of

attraction towards motherly love. After his marriage, Laura's care and caress made him feel like an obedient child to Laura. That was a very enjoyable time to Adolf but not to Laura; because a woman wants to see her beloved as a man. If the man becomes childlike, the woman takes control over him. She wants to hold the control forever. Thus man-woman relationship is a ceaseless battle of control.

Laura: Yes, that's how it was, and therefore I loved you as my child. But you know, I suppose you noticed it, every time your feelings changed and you stood before me as my lover, I felt ashamed. The ecstasy I always felt in your embrace was followed by pangs of conscience, as though my very blood felt the shame.

The mother became the mistress— ugh! (113)

A woman is best in her motherly nature. There she is kind and affectionate. She loves and cares. As a matter of fact, these performances provide her with the power to control. A mother loves and controls. A child is loved and controlled. But a mother in the role of a wife cannot love fully as she cannot control fully. So, she looks for authoritative power. Children are lovable because they are controllable. But a fully grown up man cannot tolerate these. So, he is despised by his wife.

Captain: ... Do you hate me?

Laura: Yes, sometimes. When you act the man. (114)

Thus, the deadly battle goes on. This is the eternal scenario. It was in practice before Strindberg's time, in his time, and it is going on at present as well. Children become victim to this battle. Meanwhile, both men and women fight for authority. The battle will not end until mutual respect is developed.

7.3.7 It's all about family-politics

Laura: ...You can go now that you've seen my intelligence is equal to my will—
not that you wanted to stay and acknowledge it. (116)

After such a bold order from Laura, the captain throws a burning lamp at her.

Laura and the nurse talk about the horrible environment in the house. They're afraid about the captain's upcoming activities. Actually this is the situation before the burst of a volcano. Dirty family-politics starts over the issue. The pastor comes to his sister (Laura) and asks about Adolf. Laura hides her part where she made Adolf agitated and made him compelled to throw the lamp. She rather says that the captain intentionally threw the lamp at her face. Pastor can smell the rat there, yet he takes his sister's side:

Pastor: Well, well! I shan't say anything. After all blood is thicker than water!
(119)

Moments later the pastor shows the meanest picture of family-politics. In a family, the battle does not take place only between husband and wife. There are other enemies as well. As the pastor says:

Pastor: ... You know, I've always regarded him as a tare among our wheat. (119)

So, it is position that creates rifts. Patriarchy has little to do here. The entire system revolves around taking control. Finally, Laura discloses her plan that she is going to prove Adolf to be an insane person. That will help her taking control over the family. For achieving that power she does not even hesitate to spoil her husband's life. So, as per the doctor's advice it is decided that the captain would be tied with a straight-jacket. But the problem arises about selecting the person who would do that. The doctor chooses the nurse to accomplish the work,

because she is the only person who is believed by the captain. Initially, the nurse refuses but later accepts the duty as others would hurt the captain in case of tying him with the straitjacket. Noejd promises to help if it is required.

Hours later the captain enters abruptly, being burdened with lots of books. He takes references from classics that a man can never be sure about his fatherhood. He refers to 'Odyssey' where Telemachus suspects his mother's chastity. Finally, he comes to the decision, "A man never knows anything, he only believes." (123)

The captain exchanges some eccentric talks with all. He even admits that he has gone insane. He recalls all the sweet memories with the family members. Also the painful memories are brought up at the same time. At a point, he utters the lamentation of all married men, "Mad I may be, but how did I get that way? It doesn't concern you, it doesn't concern anyone." (124)

The next scene is very significant in context of the play. Here Bertha is seen talking to her father. Previously we found Bertha very affectionate to her father but this scene reveals a different Bertha who cannot tolerate his father's misbehavior with her mother. Actually, Bertha has been made so. In conventional society, a child is made to believe that mother is always right. In case of any conflict between the parents, a child normally takes its mother's side. The captain's throwing a burning lamp at Laura has been presented differently to Bertha. She has been made to believe that father wanted to hurt mother intentionally, though we know about Laura's mischievous plan. Bertha now rebukes the captain for being rude to her mother. She even says that her own father can never be rude with her mother. Though she really does not mean it, the captain takes it seriously and wants to know whether Bertha knows about her real father. This sort of insane talk continues. With all these, the captain reveals the true nature and reality of family life.

Actually, everyone is at risk of being captured. When one cannot go with such capturing he becomes helpless. The captain says to Bertha: “Your mother wanted to eat me, but I didn’t let her... . To eat or be eaten! That is the question! If I don’t eat you, you’ll eat me.” (126-127)

In a family, the parents have to fight for their existence even against their children. So, the captain and Laura both wish to control Bertha according to their own ideologies. If they don’t do it, they will be devoured by their child’s ideology. Strindberg shows superb craftsmanship in bringing such subtle issues to light. But it is presumable that a child like Bertha fails to grasp the inner meaning of the statement. So, she yells thinking that her father wants to kill her. Other members of the family take it seriously. The nurse starts her duty to tie Adolf with the straitjacket. She reminds him of his childhood when she caressed the captain. Thus she succeeds in her duty but asks for forgiveness from the captain as she was compelled to do so. The captain laments heavily for believing a woman. He calls Noejd to give some punishment to the Nurse. But Noejd refuses to do anything against a woman.

Noejd: God bless you, captain, but I can’t. I just can’t! Half a dozen men,
yes, but a woman... .

Captain: What’s special about them? Haven’t they lain hands on me? (129)

Women are considered weak. So, they get graces; whereas, men are punished indiscriminately. In the conventional structure of the society, women are kept away from dangers considering them to be very specials. In the meantime, their wickedness is overlooked. Even after committing serious crimes, women are excused. August Strindberg showed us such tricky things in many of his works, but this one is special; because this has been shown within a family only. When we try to understand man-woman relationship in context of society, or in

some greater contexts, lots of loopholes remain unchecked. Being a small unit, a family can be examined very carefully to see the loopholes. Strindberg has done that very skillfully.

Scene Seven takes the audience to the nature of present day marriage. Now-a-days there exists a sheer competition between the husband and the wife: “In old days a man married a wife, now he forms a business partnership with a career woman or moves in with a friend. And then he seduces the partner or rapes the friend.” (130)

Strindberg wrote the play in 1887. It seems to be relevant even to the present world. The captain continues heated conversation with all. At one point, he is asked whether he wants to see his child. The captain refuses, saying: “A man has no child; only women have children.” (132). Slowly, the situation goes out of control. The captain does not care for anybody anymore. He only knows that a man has nothing of his own in the world.

The next one (Act-III, Scene-VIII) is the final scene of the play. The captain stops breathing. Laura starts calling the doctor but in vain. The captain passes away. Apparently it does not hurt anybody. When Bertha comes running to Laura—

Laura: My child! My own child.

Pastor: Amen! (133)

Thus the play ends with Laura’s full control over her child. Laura’s brother, as a Pastor, acknowledges it. That means, family-politics and the politics of position create their own ways. In these ways, no one is known as man or woman, rather everyone is known as a character. Whoever can exercise more power, in whatever form, he/she wins at the end of the day.

7.4 Creditors (1888)

August Strindberg mentioned *Creditors* as his most mature work. The one act play presents only three characters before the audience. All the characters are indebted to one-another, i.e. all of them are creditors in an essence. It is the audience's choice whom they would decide to be the supreme creditor; but, by no means, can they reject any of the characters.

7.4.1 A good boyfriend turns into an idiot husband

The entire play takes place in a summer hotel beside sea shore. There we find Adolph who was a painter some days back but now has decided to shift concentration on sculptures. Adolph is the husband of Tekla—one of the three creditors in the play. Actually, Adolph is Tekla's present husband; because, she was wedded to another person earlier. Tekla's first husband, Gustav, is seen gossiping with Adolph in the parlor. Gustav has come here in disguise with a specific purpose. He plans to take revenge on his wife. As a part of the plan, he now manipulates Adolph who is an alienated character, and spends most of his time working in the parlor:

Adolph: Once I used to have men for friend, but I thought them superfluous after I married, and I felt quite satisfied with the one I had chosen. Later I was drawn into new circles and made a lot of acquaintances, but my wife was jealous of them – she wanted to keep me to herself: worse still- she wanted also to keep my friends to herself. And so I was left alone with my own jealousy. (12-13)

Thus, Adolph becomes a henpecked husband; but now he is not on a very good term with Tekla; because Tekla has other friends as well. Gustav takes this as an opportunity. He tries to sort out Adolph's shortcomings. At the time of their discussion, Tekla was away from the parlor. So, Gustav technically exposes Adolph's complaints against Tekla. Audience is made known that Tekla does not like Adolph's ideas anymore. She finds Adolph to be an idiot. In the mean time, it

is also known that Tekla authored a book where her former husband had been shown to be an idiot. Thus, Strindberg's suggestion is very clear here: when a boyfriend becomes a husband, he turns into an idiot; because, he cares for his wife too much. And because of being an idiot, the husband is no more liked by the wife.

7.4.2 A former idiot to a present idiot

Gustav changes his tactics within few moments. Now he creates suspense about Tekla's outings. Adolf believes Tekla so much that he takes Tekla's side. But that proves him to be more nervous before Gustav—

Adolf: But why isn't she ridiculous when I stay out all night?

Gustav: ... While you are trying to figure out why, the mishap has already occurred. (18)

Gustav's attempts continue from different angles. He has definite plans to make Adolf helpless, so that he (A) begs for his (G) help. But Adolf shows sincerity to his love. Although he speaks ill of his wife, the very next moment we find him soaked in love her. So, Gustav says, "Do you know, my dear friend- I hate to speak of it, but you are already showing the first symptoms of epilepsy." (24) Gustav even prescribes a treatment to this problem. He suggests alienation from all sort of daily affairs which of course includes separation from Tekla. But, Adolf does not give his consent to this. He considers this an 'upset' to their married life.

Now Gustav takes another course. He asks about the child that was born to Adolf and Tekla. He creates suspense about the child's birth-identity, but Adolf once again nullifies the suspense. With some concrete logic, he establishes the truth that he was the child's real father. So, it was another failure for Gustav. He takes a new turn. He raises questions about women's

love and thus wants to show Tekla's love towards Adolf as something insignificant. He says, "I hope you will excuse what I'm saying— but woman's love consists in taking, in receiving and one from whom she takes nothing does not have her love. She has never loved you!" (32)

Adolf is much shocked at this definition; yet, he does not really agree that his wife lacks love for him. But, Gustav is not a person to give in. He now tells Adolf about the way he made love with Tekla. Actually, it is Strindberg's strategy to make the audience informed about the way Adolf and Tekla came closer. It is known that Gustav, as a husband, was very sincere to Tekla. He tried to bring out a freethinker out of her, and somehow he succeeded. But the process he underwent presented him as an idiot before Tekla. In her book, Tekla mentioned her former husband (Gustav) as an idiot. Her book got tremendous success.

7.4.3 Marriage: 'A clear cannibalism'

For some specific purposes, Gustav went abroad, leaving Tekla alone. In the mean time, Tekla developed a love-affair with Adolf. They played brother-sister to show it as an allowed relationship. Ultimately they got wedded and Tekla gave birth to a child. Still they addressed themselves as brother and sister. Regarding this Gustav says: "... for protection they played brother and sister. And the more their feelings smacked of the flesh, the more they tried to make their relationship appear spiritual." (34) This is an indirect attack against Adolf. He becomes mentally weak and the weakness spreads to his body. To add an insult to the injury, Gustav now discloses the secret of Tekla's book. He says that Tekla's potential has not developed a bit after the separation from her former husband. This is an indication that Tekla's book was actually written by his former husband. Now, according to Gustav, Tekla is taking control over Adolf too. She is taking Adolf's good virtues and thus turning him into an idiot. Adolf cannot help admitting this. He becomes more nervous. Gustav takes the chance, as he

says: "... this is clear cannibalism... . The savages eat their enemies in order to acquire their useful qualities. And this woman has been eating your soul, your courage, your knowledge."

(39) We found a reference to 'cannibalism' in *The Father* (1887) too. There the captain compared all the relationships to cannibalism. Here it is compared to husband-wife relationship. Thus, we can come to a decision that relationship that bears expectation is a sort of cannibalism, according to Strindberg. It also reminds us about the universal battles prevailing in societies. One has to stick to his decision with much confidence and strength; otherwise, he would be devoured by others' thoughts. One may change/modify one's attitude, but that must come from the inner self.

7.4.4 Female power: 'The hypnotizing power of skirts!'

Strindberg considered husband-wife relationship as an enmity between two persons. Like other plays, *Creditors* (1888) presents that Strindbergian view once again. In his personal life, Strindberg was not happily married. His first wife Siri Von openly criticized Strindberg for several times. So, he had a very negative idea towards marriage and man-woman relationship. However, Strindberg had very negative consideration about women too. He criticized women in his different works. In this play, he is seen criticizing women in Gustav's guise. At one point, Gustav expresses his grudge against women, saying, "Have you ever looked at a naked woman? oh yes, yes, of course! A youth with over developed breasts, an under-developed man, a child that has shot up to full height and then stopped growing in other respects; one who is chronically anemic: what can you expect of such a creature?" (45)

Gustav mentions female power as 'The hypnotizing power of skirts!' (45)

The criticizing goes on. At one point, Adolf gives in. He agrees to obey whatever Gustav says. Now Gustav initiates a very tactful plan. He proposes to Adolf to make a normal conversation

with Tekla after her arrival; meanwhile, Gustav would hide himself in the next room. Hearing the conversation, he would decide what would be better for Adolf.

Now, the audience is made familiar with Tekla for the first time. She is a smart, wonderful, middle-aged lady. Her charm still reminds one of her attractive youth. Tekla and Adolf are seen continuing conversation addressing themselves as brother and sister. Since Adolf was influenced by Gustav, he throws harsh comments to Tekla, like: “You’re a little devil- do you know that?” (62) Tekla does not take it seriously. She rather makes fun of it, and tries to maintain the situation. Her sudden kisses and caresses make Adolf forget, for a while, about Gustav. But, within a moment, he comes back again and starts darting at Tekla. Tekla now defends herself and claims that someone else is influencing Adolf—

Tekla: Well, I’m not afraid of the women-it’s your friends that fill your head with all sorts of notions. (66)

Although Tekla is sure about Adolf’s love towards her, she fears that other men’s ideas may influence Adolf; because, she herself once deceived a man. This has made her afraid of deception. Therefore, she wants to keep Adolf away from his friends. We can understand that Adolf is habituated with such comments, but this time the result differs, as he was influenced by Gustav in the meantime. So, he revolts and creates noise in the parlor, but it is Tekla’s flirting that makes him calm. Adolf then expresses his passion towards Tekla again. He is actually jealous regarding Tekla’s former husband, although he has never met that guy. Tekla makes her position clear to Adolf for the time being. Here Strindberg again shows his attitude towards women. To him, women are valuable only to perverted men.

Adolf: ... Why do you play that kind of game?

Tekla: It is no game. I want to be admired-that’s all!

Adolph: Yes, but only by men!

Tekla: Of course! For, a woman is never admired by other women. (76-77)

7.4.5 'Love' in Strindbergian view

Strindberg's characters are realistic, but they are not found in real life as they appear in the plays. They need to be modified. For, Strindberg presented them so rigidly that they do not match entirely with real life situations. The characters utter bold sentences manifesting the playwright's bold thoughts. It is the audience's responsibility to make the characters fit for real life situations. Actually, Strindberg did not produce sentences checking their suitability in day-to-day life; he rather added much momentum to the sentences to charge the so-called 'real life situation'. Hence we find Adolf saying what a man may not be seen saying in real life—

Adolph : To love like a man is to give; to love like a woman is to take. – And I have given, given, given.

Tekla: And if I have taken anything, this proves only my love for you. A woman cannot receive anything except from her lover. (82-83)

Thus, man-woman relationship gets a very negative tone in Strindberg's plays. In most of the cases, the sentences go in favor of the male characters and women are presented as selfish, cruel and avaricious creatures. As feminists are found blaming men for all the unpleasant incidents in the world, Strindberg does the opposite. He finds women as the key to destruction of everything. Obviously this type of overgeneralization cannot expect any sympathy from society, but it is true that Strindberg's stance can be granted as a counter attack to feminists. It also attacks intellectuals, like Henrik Ibsen, who are commonly considered the mouthpiece of Women's Rights Movements. When Strindberg and Ibsen are brought together, a synthesis

comes out from the thesis and antithesis. To Strindberg, women do not deserve respect due to their selfish behaviors. They do not regard their husbands as partners; rather they consider them (husbands) as children who need to depend on their mummy. A woman does not like to marry the person she loves; she likes to marry the person who can be controlled easily. On the contrary, a man loses everything when he depends entirely on his wife. In the play, Adolf repents for loving Tekla— “You were a shoot sprung from my stem and you wanted to cut yourself loose before the shoot had put out roots of its own, and that’s why you could not grow by yourself. And my stem could not spare its main branch.” (90)

After such a serious dialogue, audience may expect a serious conflict between the husband and the wife. But Strindberg changed the course, for he had a different plan for the play. He plans to initiate something more debatable in the arena of gender-study. After such a passionate conversation, Adolf begs pardon from Tekla, because he feels helpless without Tekla’s care. As Tekla touches Adolph’s forehead, everything is forgot.

7.4.6 A world of debit and credit

Gustav listened to Adolf and Tekla’s conversation from the adjoining room. Actually, this was a part of his plan. He was supposed to hear everything between Adolf and Tekla. And moments later, Adolph was supposed to take Gustav’s place when Gustav was supposed to take Adolph’s position. So, Adolph goes to the next room and Gustav comes to the room, as if he hadn’t noticed anything.

Now, Gustav faces Tekla for the first time in the play. It is Tekla who starts the conversation. Gustav’s personality surprises her. We find that she even feels love for Gustav. But, Gustav says that he has promises to keep to another woman. This hurts Tekla; she does not give up though. Their conversation goes on. Meanwhile, they can hear some awkward sound from the

next door. In a point, both of them feel sorry for the past they had left. Tekla even proposes for a reunion. Gustav acts as if he liked the proposal. He embraces Tekla which is noticed by two visitors. Then Gustav discloses everything. He actually came to take his revenge on Tekla. Here Strindberg fits one of his views towards man-woman relationships in Gustav's lips, "... for woman, you know, is the man's child and if she is not, he becomes hers and the world turns topsy-turvy." (108)

So, it's all about taking control over the other. In Strindbergian world, there is no place for tenderness, no place for sacrifice. It is a world of debit and credit.

Gustav reveals the entire story now. In the meantime, Adolf is found dead. He could not bear the conversation between Gustav and Tekla. Gustav says: "I came to take back what you had stolen, not what you had received as a gift. You had stolen my honor, and I could recover it only by taking yours. This, I think, was my right— or was it not?" (122)

The curtain drops with Gustav's departure. Gustav departs from the world where there is nothing called real love. There are only debtors and creditors.

8. Gender in Ibsen's Plays

In this part of the study, it will be discussed how gender-issues came in Henrik Ibsen's plays. Through the discussion, a newer point of view regarding Ibsen's plays will be tried to establish.

8.1 Gender in *Ghosts* (1881)

James Joyce said about Henrik Ibsen, "It may be questioned whether any man has held so firm an empire over the thinking world in modern times." ("The Father of Modern Drama")

Henrik Ibsen had a knack for studying human mind. In Ibsen's days, Scandinavian countries, like the rest of the world, did not acknowledge equal rights for the females. But, the situation

was changing keeping pace with other parts of Europe. In 1854, Norwegian women were given the right to inherit property. Henrik Ibsen was 26, and his first play *Catilina* (1848-1849) was published in the meantime. He used the pseudonym Brynjolf Bjarme. That means he had not got a strong backup at that time to publish works in his own name. So, it was not even possible to bring *Catilina* (1848-1849) on stage. His first play performed on stage was *The Burial Mound* (1850). It received little attention. So, Ibsen was still passing his formative years. He was a very good observer who could sense the changing trends. Like European women, Scandinavian women were becoming aware of their rights. As a result, the number of divorce was increasing day by day. Most of the writers and influential personalities were blaming women for this situation. Actually, they were not able to think of the opposite sex, since their thoughts were confined to the conventional boundaries. Ibsen had the capability to think out of box. He started thinking over the subtle issues of relationship. He pondered over gender roles as well. Consequently, plays like *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886), *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), *Hedda Gabler* (1890) were written and produced.

Norwegian women gained the right to control their own property in 1890s. It can be assumed that Henrik Ibsen's plays played great role in this regard. Since Ibsen started a new trend, he received lots of reactions. Most of those were negative. But, those negative reactions made him known to a greater range of people. Women started considering Ibsen a well wisher. Consequently, they arranged discussions- on various occasions- on his plays. They mostly used those plays that seemed to be in favor of them. Thus, there occurred a general misunderstanding that Ibsen wrote only for women.

After the industrial revolution, there was change in every sector of society. Lots of manpower were needed to run the industries properly. Only men-force was not enough to operate all the

machines. So, it was obvious to bring the women-force out of the cocoons. In reality, from time immemorial, there was little distinction in work of the male and female of the working class or the so called lower-class people. They had to toil for survival. So, women from these classes were seen working outside with men. They had little or no restriction on their movements, because they had to satisfy hunger first. But, the problem always surrounds with the middle-class families; because, they have to maintain lots of social norms. They somehow manage breads staying within the boundary drawn by those norms. So, they have to create rituals to preserve the bread. They have to beautify their home as a part of their social status and prestige. Their women are also regarded as a part of their prestige. So, they beautify their women as well, and keep them inside the home. But, Industrial Revolution came as a strike to middle and lower-middle class. In past days, women of these classes could earn, and thus contribute to their families through handicrafts. But that source of income was threatened by the revolution. So, it became a challenge to the middle and lower middle-classes to feed the entire family with male members' earnings only. Besides, due to the absence of any effective contraceptive, a standard family had around 5 to 6 members. To meet the both ends, women of those classes had to leave the kitchen and join the workforce. But this was not applicable for upper-middle class and higher class women. Working outside with men was like an insult to them. But they were being educated to keep pace with the modern trends of the world. Gradually they were making themselves familiar with the rest of the world. Thus, there was a huge change in the entire women-folk of that time. Lower, lower-middle class and some middle-class women had already joined the outside workforce, and thus changed their attitudes. On the other hand, women of the higher class families changed their attitudes after being educated. This changed attitude in women created a change in internal family affairs. There arose conflict between husband and wife, and number of divorce increased. Henrik

Ibsen's plays fueled the conflicts; because, women found Ibsen supporting their demands. As a result, they unconsciously ignored the subtlety of Ibsen's plays.

Ibsen's most talked play *A Doll's House* (1879) has not been chosen in this study very purposefully. This is the play which has been dissected so much that Ibsen, to some readers, has become known as the author of this play only. They categorize Ibsen keeping the messages of this play. In addition to that, Ibsen is judged by many critics entirely on the basis of this play. But Ibsen's thoughts are well-reflected in many of his other important plays. So, in this study the plays *Ghosts* (1881) and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) have been chosen to free Ibsen from the categorization established earlier. Even after being quite careful in choosing Ibsen's plays, it is found that most of the feminists simply reject anti-feministic readings of Ibsen's plays. For example, in the book, *Ibsen's Women* (1997), Joan Templeton says, "*Ghosts* had to be written. After Nora Mrs. Alving had to come." (146). Templeton here indicates *Ghosts* (1881) to be another weapon in the hands of the feminists; because, in the play Mrs. Alving was not in good terms with her husband. And the husband was shown as a lecherous person. In the same book, Francis Fergusson, American theorist of drama and mythology, places some backgrounds of Ibsen's writing *Ghosts* (1888), "It was first planned as an attack upon marriage, in answer to the critics of *A Doll's House*. ... Mrs. Alving should have left home twenty years before, like Nora in *A Doll's House*; and that conventional marriage is therefore an evil tyranny." [110] Halvdan Koht, one of Ibsen's biographers, opines: "Mrs. Alving is in reality nothing but a Nora who has tried life and her inherited teachings and who has now taken a stand." ("Critical Essays Theme of Ghosts")

While theorizing in this way, these people unknowingly lose the scope of grasping Ibsen wholeheartedly. Ibsen was never blind to any specific gender. He wanted to show the problems of mankind. This research tries to see and show Mrs. Alving from a different point of view.

Mrs. Alving's discussion with the Pastor provides us with a scope of examining female power in a family. Mrs. Alving's husband, i.e. Mr. Alving, developed an illegal relationship with the maid servant. Mrs. Alving told Pastor Manders, "I had my little boy, and I bore it for him— at least until that final humiliation, when my own maid—! Then I swore to myself: that was the end! So I took charge of the house— complete charge— over him and everything else.

Because now, you see, I had a weapon against him; he could not let out a word of protest."

(230) So, it is not correct to think that women tolerate silently. In reality, they always go for more dangerous counter attacks. This is actually the characteristics of the inter-acting classes. They wait for suitable scopes. Reversely, it is illogical to theorize that women are dangerous creatures and they can destroy a family. That type of theorization makes a critic similar to blind feminists. So, it is better to observe the situation carefully.

In the play (*Ghosts*), it is seen that Mrs. Alving's husband never loved her. This is the first element of gender study in the play. The husband was found making extra-marital affairs. In such a situation a wife could have quarreled with her husband, or she could have left him. But Mrs. Alving took a third step that would ensure her son's better future. So, Mrs. Alving's sacrifice is obviously mentionworthy. But, at the same time, it should be acknowledged that she is not a helpless woman. If she is considered to be a prototype of wives, then it is right to say that wives have powers; and that power should never be underestimated. All the wives do not take steps as Mrs. Alving did; similarly all the husbands do not make illegal affairs with housemaids as Mr. Alving did. So, Ibsen did not intend to come to any decision that Mrs. Alving was another Nora. He neither wanted to create another Helmer out of Mr. Alving. He showed Mrs. Alving as a character who had sufferings dissimilar to that of Nora's. The stance she took could have been taken by any unhappy wife. Kajal Bandyopadhyay- in his book *Female Power and Some Ibsen Plays*- comments, "In a family or any other organization

authority or command goes whenever there is a major lapse, true or perceived, and that it doesn't lie permanently with individuals of any gender." (89)

8.1.1 Power: a gender-neutral phenomenon

Ibsen shows how power becomes a gender-neutral phenomenon. The amount or kind of power depends solely on position. Depending on gender, the way of wielding power may vary but the amount does not. Mrs. Alving knew about the power of her position. She also knew how to use that power in order to reach her goal—

Manders: And for this man, you're raising a monument!

Mrs. Alving: There's the power of a bad conscience.

Manders: A bad— ? What do you mean?

Mrs. Alving: It always seemed inevitable to me that the truth would have to come out someday and be believed. So the orphanage was meant to spike all the rumors and dispel the doubts. (230)

Even 'a bad conscience' has potential and it is so powerful that it can silence all rumors. So, which description can be suitable for this? 'Female power' will be an incomplete term for this. But, in most of the cases, women are found in such 'uneasy' positions. A patriarch will define the excerpt as a token of women's trickery. A feminist will extract male-domination. But the present study wants to read this excerpt as a conflict between two classes where the dominated class plans to win over the situation through struggle and perseverance.

Initially, Mr. Alving was seen as the dominant character in the family. He did not care for Mrs. Alving's choices. But, Mrs. Alving too was not less dominant to some extent. She takes decision to send Oswald, their only son, to a boarding school. She does not care for Oswald's

choices. She even wants to possess his mind. She does not want her son to get anything from Mr. Alving. She says to the pastor, "Everything my son inherits will come from me, and no one else." (231). Actually, every individual is a potential oppressor waiting for opportunities.

Society assigns different roles to men and women. This differentiation is the result of evolution over years. Keeping the question- whether these roles are justified or not?- aside, let us rather put emphasis on understanding how this differentiation works. Superficially, it may seem that rules of societies are created in favor of men. But, the rules do not always satisfy men only, because those were created considering the possession of power-positions. We know from Newton's third law: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." So, any whimsically taken action, be it by man or woman, brings destruction for the both parties. Mr. Alving's undisciplined life ultimately ruined the entire family. On the other hand, Oswald's falling in love with his half sister- Regina- took place, as he did not know about Regina, due to his staying at a boarding school in his childhood according to Mrs. Alving's decision. Thus, it shows that power is not men's possession only. This recalls Michel Foucault, who said, "Power in modern society is capillary in its flow, and continuous.... Power therefore is not always exercised through rules and coercion. It becomes effective through a complex web of relationships." (cited in Joseph 93) And power remains in every stage of this complex web. As a result, we can say that women are not as powerless as the feminists try to establish by accusing the patriarchal males, or by using clichés like 'male domination', 'patriarchy', 'male chauvinism' etc. Again, women are not as crooked as most of the male members of a society opine. Women act according to their positions in relationships. Actually, everyone (male/female) acts according to his/her position in a relationship. And every position distributes some amount of power among other positions.

8.1.2 Gender-Equity

After conducting a thorough study on the distinctive features of Ibsen's plays, Robert Ferguson comes to the conclusion that in Ibsen's plays "...male characters accept their inability to achieve their goals as a deep-rooted failure of personality, whereas the female characters in Ibsen are more likely to blame the system for their failure." (264)

Feminists commonly reproach Helmer- in *A Doll's House*- for keeping the children away from Nora. This very practice is found in *Ghosts* taken by Mrs. Alving. She sends Oswald to a boarding school only to evade his possible contact with his father. But the feminists remain silent in this regard. If any of them is to opine on this issue, he/she would start raising finger at Mr. Alving's moral lapses, totally forgetting Mrs. Alving's illegal proposal to the Pastor. Thus, to feminists, women are always above criticism. This type of bias can never be an outcome of any authentic probe. This leads only to another extremism that aims to establish matriarchy. Whenever there is extremism, be it patriarchy or matriarchy, it fails creating a balance in society. In the mentioned scene, Mrs. Alving is seen doing the similar thing that is done by Helmer in *A Doll's House*, but she is excused only because of being a woman. The feminist critics say about 'gender-equity', but they themselves do not maintain it in their thoughts or works.

Now, let's judge the act from a new point of view— it can be said that parents are always conscious of their child's well mental and physical development. They try to ensure it by providing the child with healthy atmosphere. If one of the parents- be a father or a mother- is engaged with unfair means, the other tries to keep the child away from the unhealthy atmosphere resting in the family. It is a policy followed by sentient guardians. So, this can by no means be an example of gender discrimination. If we view Helmer and Mrs. Alving from this new point of view, we can understand that Henrik Ibsen actually tried for a balance.

8.1.3 Reviewing the archetypals

With the advancement of the play, we are informed that Mrs. Alving sought for love and protection from Pastor Manders, but failed due to Manders' disagreement. So, who is the prototype of a man— Mr. Alving or Pastor Manders? Feminist critics normally vote for Mr. Alving, completely forgetting Manders' strong stance. This again proves the futility of the conventional feministic readings. What would be the consequence of the Pastor's accepting Mrs. Alving? It remains as another question to be answered by the feminist critics.

All through the play we observe Mrs. Alving accusing her husband of different misconducts. Is it possible that Mr. Alving had no virtue and Mrs. Alving was all-virtuous! When she could perceive the relationship between Oswald and Regina, she was very surprised. But, Oswald declared, "Then it struck me that in her was my salvation, because I saw how the joy of life was in her." (256). This statement reminds Mrs. Alving of the environment that prevailed over the house during her husband's lifetime. Mr. Alving, too, felt the absence of 'joy of life' in the house and hence sought for it outdoor. Mrs. Alving also recalled that she had nothing to perform except some predetermined duties in the house. So, she too was feeling the absence. She admits to the Pastor that she had no opinion about her wedding with Mr. Alving. Her mother and aunts arranged her marriage, finding Mr. Alving a person with prosperous career. Hence, according to Mrs. Alving, she was wedded to a prosperous career, not to a well-known, lovable person. This reveals another secret of the construction of our family structure. Here prosperity precedes personality. And women play great role in such construction. They plan to ensure their daughters' prosperous future, not happy future. When these daughters become mothers, they do the same to their daughters. So, is a male solely responsible for creating 'joyless' family life? This study emphasizes that women have equal share in making an unhappy family. The following excerpt will be just to add to the emphasis—

Mrs. Alving: Your poor father never found any outlet for the overpowering joy of life that he had. And I'm afraid I couldn't make his home very festive, either.

Oswald: You, too?

Mrs. Alving: They'd drilled me so much in duty and things of that kind that I went on here all too long putting my faith in them. Everything resolved into duties— *my* duties and *his* duties, and— I'm afraid I made this home unbearable for your poor father. (267)

Thus, a family becomes joyless, when all or most of the members of a family become 'duty'minded only, forgetting the share of 'joy' in our life. But, Joan Templeton misses Ibsen's subtlety as she says, "... for no matter how 'joyful' Mrs. Alving had made her husband's home Oswald's condition would not have changed a whit." (cited in Bandyopadhyay 96). Kajal Bandyopadhyay refutes Templeton by saying—

Templeton does not get Ibsen's bigger message of how whole places or societies during a historical period, and not exactly individual males or females, may lack the taste for 'joy of life'. Regina, for example, constitutes an example in *Ghosts* itself of an exceptional female individual possessing the nerve for appreciating or indulging in 'joy of life'. (97)

8.1.4 Neutrality in creating Mrs. Alving

Ibsen makes Mrs. Alving realize her own shortcomings. These are normally overlooked in conventional readings. But, Ibsen tried to focus on the problem only; he had no intention to criticize any specific gender. In the play, we find Mr. Alving to be a doomed character- at least according to Mrs. Alving- who destroyed the family's happiness. Previously, it had been shown in this study how the share of the act of destruction goes equally to men and women. Now, it's time to check whether Ibsen showed any self-realization in Mrs. Alving in order to

clarify his neutral position as a playwright. We see Mrs. Alving saying, “I never should have covered up Alving’s life. It was all I dared do then— not only for Oswald, but to spare myself. What a coward I was!” (236) The statement testifies to how Mrs. Alving acknowledges her own share in the act of destruction. We noted Mrs. Alving as an enlightened woman who was familiar with the 19th century European culture. She had also studied some other branches of knowledge. So, we can guess that she had the mentality to accept truth. She could have been happy, if she had wedded someone of her own kind. But, she had not been given any scope to do so. As a result, she was compelled to create a ‘joy’less family.

We know that *Ghosts* (1881) was written almost two years after *A Doll’s House* (1879). We do not know either whether Nora became happy leaving her husband and children. We do not know whether she could establish herself as an independent woman. But, we can guess lots of situations in case of her staying with her family. Now, we can look for the result of our guess-works in the case of Mrs. Alving. Though there are lots of differences between Nora and Mrs. Alving, we can consider their positions to be evaluated similarly, only for the sake of judging wives’ conditions in a family. There we do not find anything very interesting. Unlike Nora, Mrs. Alving stayed at home, but failed to earn happiness. So, we find Ibsen experimenting on relationship from different points of view. He did not come to any conclusion to such experimentations. He kept the possibility open for audience to make a gist of the plays differently. J.W. McFarlane, after observing Mrs. Alving minutely, suggests—

Her attitude to marriage and to the relationship between men and women moves from a general condemnation of the loveless, dutiful relationship.... She is compelled to give drastic revision to her ideas of duty.... The most devastating aspect of it all, however, is that her own son is destined to serve as proof that the

past cannot be put away by a mere act of will, no matter how prodigious. She cannot run away from the past as Nora could run away from home. (xiii-xiv)

Let's consider Mrs. Alving as a human being, forgetting her state of bearing any specific gender. As a human being, everyone has some shortcomings. Sometimes the faults become so grave that they overreach all the virtues, but sometimes they are excusable. We are studying Mrs. Alving again to determine whether she had any deficit in self-knowledge. We know Mrs. Alving as an enlightened woman who had studied modern arts and writings. But, there is difference between bookish knowledge and real-life knowledge. Mrs. Alving had enough of the first one, but lacked in the second case. She failed to create any balance in the family. It is unnecessary here to question about Mr. Alving again, because nowhere in the study Mr. Alving has been supported for his deeds. Here we are focusing on Mrs. Alving only; because, we would like to know whether she, as an individual, had the ability to renovate the relationship. We see that Mrs. Alving failed to make a bridge between her bookish knowledge and real-life experiences. As a result, she failed to develop herself as an individual. Eric Bentley says in "Henrik Ibsen: A personal statement" in the following way— "Mrs. Alving, reader of books, has come to know many things; she has not come to know herself. She is not too much an individual, as Manders thinks, but too little." (13)

In Bentley's another comment we find him criticizing the mentality of the nineteen thirties generation. There what he said seems to be appropriate for Mrs. Alving as well. He said, "We didn't realize to what an appalling extent the motive force of our reforming zeal was fear of the self, a failure to face the self." (cited in Bandyopadhyay 103)

This makes clear how an unhappy family was created in *Ghosts* (1881). Ibsen did not intend to criticize men or women. He neither criticized the so called 'patriarchy' or 'male chauvinism'. In fact he just intended to bring some problems, in man-woman relationship, to light. He did

not even take any initiative to solve those problems; because, same problems may arise differently in other individuals' lives. He left the solution to audience; because, he knew very well that a playwright's duty is neither to create nor to solve any problem. His duty is to present a problem before audience. Leo Lowenthal in *Henrik Ibsen: Motifs in the Realistic Plays* mentions Ibsen's own thought in this regard, "... Is it not an inexpressibly great gift of fortune to be able to write? But it brings with it great responsibility; and I am now sufficiently serious to realize this and to be very severe with myself." (156) Ibsen performed- at least tried to perform- his duties properly. But, the feminist critics made Henrik Ibsen the mouthpiece of Women's Rights Movements; and hence interpreted his plays according to their own wishes. If we look at the comment of Eric Bentley on Ibsen's subjectivity, we can understand well how neutral Ibsen was. Bentley wrote—

He [Ibsen] believes the motive itself to be an objective fact, and in a strict sense, the primary fact—the one to start from. He would never have written a play about the rightness or wrongness of chamberlain's policy, but he might well have written one about whether the man indeed had good motives, whether his conscience was healthy.... Naturally, then, he seems not only old-fashioned but even wrongheaded to those who assume that life begins after integrity has been surrendered to a party, a class or a state. (Bentley 13-14)

8.1.5 Relationship between Genders

The present study has not been confined into husband-wife's relationship only. Previously it had been said that Ibsen's intention was to look into problems, not to solve those. So, this study has been expanded into other relationships as well. For example, the relationship between Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders deserves more attention. Mrs. Alving looked for shelter from the Pastor, who could not provide that because of his religious views. Then the two developed a sort of friendly relationship. They exchanged their views and experiences. Thus the Pastor unconsciously became a shelter for Mrs. Alving. Even Mrs. Alving herself could not understand that. But the relationship went on. Here the important point is the Pastor's unlikeness with Mrs. Alving. It is noted that Mr. and Mrs. Alving were not in good terms, due to their dissimilar mentalities. Mr. Alving looked for 'joy of life'; whereas, Mrs. Alving was afraid to look for that. She knew only about duties. This developed a very cool relationship between them, and it continued deteriorating till the last breath of Mr. Alving. But a good relationship is noticed between Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders, in spite of their different mentalities. What was the secret of this good relationship? We know that marriage is a social institution. It had been invented as a means of creating inheritors and securing personal properties. The problem lies with the expectations circulating around this social institution. When a man and a woman enter into a new relationship, getting socially married, there is little scope to discover new things in the relationship. The couple is bound to perform the duties imposed by society. There is little scope for 'trial and error' method. As a result, the couple is busy in knowing what to do and what not to do. This practice weakens the soft passions of both the parties. So, with lots of dissimilarities, they stay together only to perform social rituals. Mrs. Alving and the Pastor were not bound to perform predefined duties. This provided them with the opportunity to know each other. The Pastor could know about Mrs. Alving's sexual

starvation, whereas Mrs. Alving could know about the Pastor's unwillingness to satisfy her physical need. The relationship could have stopped there. But it continued with the differences, only because of the expectationless mode of the relationship. Finally, we see that nothing about Mrs. Alving's family is hidden to the Pastor. He even knows Regina's birth secret. The following part of the text stands as a proof of it—

Regina: ... May I ask, Mrs. Alving, if Pastor Manders knows all this about me?

Mrs. Alving: Pastor Manders knows everything. (268)

This shows how frequent Mrs. Alving has been with the Pastor. However, it will be unjust to claim that all expectationless relationships are happy. Let us consider the relationship between Mr. Alving and Joana (the house maid). That too was an expectationless relationship. Unlike Mrs. Alving and the Pastor, Mr. Alving had physical relationship with Joana. But we do not recognize it as a happy relationship. What can be the possible reason of it?— Mr. Alving's perversion?— Surely not. There was no urge to know each other.

Thus, we can opine that man-woman relationship depends on both party's heartiness regarding the relationship. It develops through mutual respect. It is unwise trying to prove them equal or to eliminate dissimilarities. In fact, dissimilarities create individual identity which is the beauty of a relationship. Moreover, mutual respect encourages both to think about the other and to come to a path which can be treaded easily by both. Similar idea was found in Robert Frost's famous line, "Good fences make good neighbours" (Frost 908).

8.1.6 Possessiveness— a feature common to both genders

This part of the present study would show how Ibsen showed 'possessiveness' as an inherent trait with people of both genders. Commonly critics (especially feminist critics) determine Helmer, in *A Doll's House*, as a possessive character who wants total submission from Nora.

Frequently they use clichés like ‘male chauvinism’, ‘patriarchy’, ‘sexism’ etc. and blame men for nurturing those. They also praise Ibsen for showing how women are dolls in men’s houses. But Ibsen was actually honest in his writings, and never tried to go by bias between men and women by imposing any bad quality on any certain gender. In *Ghosts* (1881), we see Mrs. Alving bearing the same feature that Helmar had in *A Doll’s House* (1879) —

Osvald: And I know how much you care for me, and I have to be grateful to you for that. And you can be especially useful to me, now that I’m ill.

Mrs. Alving: Yes, I can, Osvald! Can’t I? Oh, I could almost bless this illness that forced you home to me, because it’s made me see you’re really not mine; you still have to be won. (270)

We see a possessive mother in Mrs. Alving who even appreciates her son’s illness, as it has brought back the son. So, it is not men only who are possessive due to their so-called ‘male chauvinism’; it is the position that makes one possessive. A man’s possessiveness can be avoided simply by leaving him. We see Nora doing that in *A Doll’s House*. But a mother’s possessiveness cannot be avoided without death’s intervention. We find this taking place in *Ghosts* (1881). Thus, in a so called ‘patriarchal society’ women’s possessiveness can be fatal to men. Nigerian writer Chinweizu’s Observation in his book *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy* can be mentionworthy in this regard—

Everyday of a man’s life, he is subject to the dictates of womb, kitchen and cradle. The first set to rule him belongs to his mother; the second belongs to his wife. The first rules him in his vulnerable infancy; the second in his ambitious adulthood. (17)

Let us not be so harsh like Chinweizu, but it is true that a woman plays a very ‘power’ful role in a man’s life. Unfortunately, this powerful position or possession does not attract feminist critics’ attention.

8.2 Gender in *The Lady from the Sea* (1888)

Ibsen showed his mastery over gender-related issues in the play *The Lady from the Sea* (1888). It has some dimensions that have commonly not been discussed much, because such discussions may go against feminists. But, this study is going to shed lights on the play from multiple corners, so that we can extract some new points of view from the play.

8.2.1 ‘Gender Studies’ is not a study on women only

About Ellida in *The Lady from the Sea*, Rebeca in *Rosmersholm* (1886) and Hedda in *Hedda Gabler* (1891) British feminist Janet Garton says, “All are passionate women who, it could be argued, have got themselves involved with the wrong man.” (cited in Bandyopadhyay 120)

The statement conveys a wrong message to readers. It is the feminist critics who always find problems in men only, as if women were created faultless. Whatever the incident is, feminist critics are always there to find the man, involved in the incident, as the criminal, and to demand compensation for the woman. But this type of blindness leads only to battle of sexes. This study’s main purpose is to step aside from this blindness. Opposing Garton’s comment, it can be easily said that there were passionate men in the plays who got them involved with the wrong women. But we do not wish to make the battle lengthier, and we wish to come out of any bias. So, in this part of the study, all the characters of *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) will be dissected to come to a gender-neutral comment and to show that Ibsen actually kept himself above gender bias.

Previously, we observed some critics trying to prove *Ghosts* (1881) as the continuation of *A Doll's House* (1879). Similar type of attempt is found in some other critics as well. For example, Toril Moi tries to complete the incomplete definition of marriage given in *A Doll's House* (1879) and *The Lady from the Sea* (1888). She finds the second play as the completion of the first one. Moi says, “*The Lady from the Sea* returns to the question left unanswered by Nora: namely, what constitutes marriage?... *The Lady from the Sea* closes investigation of marriage that began in *A Doll's House*”. (297)

This comment seems gentler than other conventional comments. But, here too we notice discussion from women's point of view. So, do gender-studies refer to studies from women's point of views only? The feminists criticize society to be patriarchal. Quite interestingly, they forget their contribution to limit gender-studies to matriarchal studies only. We should consciously avoid these extremisms.

In the last reference, we noted Toril Moi finding the meaning of marriage from a woman's point of view; but what about a man's? Conventionally, Strindberg is well known for focusing on men; but Ibsen's plays too can be viewed from a man's points of view. Such reviewing would bring women's flaws before audience. This study intends to discuss the flaws as those appear in social relationships. It does not have any plan to attack any particular gender; because that would derail the study from its true purpose.

8.2.2 Man: negative in any case!

In conventional discussions about *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), Dr. Wangel is shown as a 'spineless' man. But it does not seem to be a justified comment. Dr. Wangel is a character totally opposite to Helmar. He never opposed anything of his wife's. So, when a husband deals strictly with his wife, he is considered a 'dictator', but when he deals softly he is called

‘spineless’. It means, the conventional feminist critics are never in a mindset to evaluate a male character properly. By any means, they will show the male character as a negative one. Kajal Bandyopadhyay makes a very interesting investigation in this regard—

He [Dr. Wangel] goes on providing a lot of sensibility and accommodation: suffers from a long privation in sex and even agrees to arrange for Ellida’s living at a place by the sea which would mean his abandoning his profession. But critics, living in the oxygen of feministic ideas, do not go to mark any of the disconcerting and egoistic stances with Ellida. Dr. Wangel goes to the length of even “inviting Ellida’s old friend Arnholm for a visit, believing him to be a former suitor who might revive her spirits”. May be this is where the question of his alleged ‘spineless’ness arises. (124)

Ibsen several times advised readers to read his plays carefully, because his plays have many eye-openers which do not catch attention at the first reading. Previously it had been shown how feminist critics found Dr. Wangel as an improper match for Ellida. But, careful reading of the play shows a totally different scenario. If we look at the discussion between Ellida and Arnholm, we notice Arnholm declaring Ellida as an improper match for Dr. Wangel:

Arnholm: Wangel is such a good man. So honest, so genuinely kind toward everyone—

Ellida: (with warm affection). Yes, he is!

Arnholm: But to me, the two of you seem different as night and day.

Ellida: You’re right. We are. (605-606)

Thus, we see, Ellida too knows about the difference, but conventional critics do not.

Ellida did not love Dr. Wangel. She married him to forget the past that she had described to Arnholm as ‘madness’, and to secure her future life. Ellida’s love was preserved for the stranger. In this regard, she can be contrasted with Mrs. Alving who too had no affection for her husband. But, Mrs. Alving was unhappy as her husband did not think of her. Here, in *The Lady from Sea* (1888), Ellida does not think of her husband, and she does not find any ‘joy of life’ in the family. She, like Mr. Alving, looks outside. She never thinks of her husband’s two daughters as well. Still she is excused by the feminist critics, but Mr. Alving is not. This study does not claim to excuse Mr. Alving, rather it claims that one should not be excused for one’s sex. Ellida confessed to Arnholm that whatever she did with the stranger was ‘foolishness’ and ‘madness’. She also says that those activities cannot seem to be meaningful to a ‘sensible man’.

Arnholm: My dear Ellida— there’s no other way: you’ve got to tell me everything.

Ellida: All right! At least I can try. How would you, as a reasonable man, presume to account for— (608)

We notice this very Ellida demanding ‘free will’ to prefer the stranger to Dr. Wangel. And the feminist critics raise finger at Dr. Wangel for threatening the stranger. Thus, as per the feminists’ choice, if a woman chooses to continue with her once ‘foolish’ activity, she should be considered right. If a woman neglects her duties to her husband, she should be considered right. And, thus whatever she does, she should be considered right. On the other hand, whatever is done by her counterpart should be considered wrong. This type of bias only creates hindrance to a proper study of genders.

8.2.3 All the sympathies are reserved for women only

Ellida does not seem to possess a consistent thought process. Her thoughts as well as decisions change overnight. She does not have control over what she says. In the play, we find her saying totally reverse things. Before demanding 'free will', one should prove to have the ability to utilize that 'free will' properly. A person who does not know the significance of free will, he/she simply misuses it. This excerpt will be very helpful to prove this—

Arnholm: You! (Lowering his voice) Does that mean—? Do you— not really love your husband?

Ellida: Yes, yes! With all my heart, I've learned to love him! (614)

We see this very Ellida again saying that she had sold herself to her husband. So, which decision can we come to from these contradictory utterances? Can we, anyhow, be sure that she would not declare to possess immense love for anyone else in future? One thing we can decide unanimously is that Ellida was undergoing severe mental stresses. So, she could not stick to any decision. In this type of situation, she was in need of kindness from her family, and it was well provided by her husband. In a family, this type of mental stress may be faced by any of the family members. The other members should come forward to take care of the ailing person. Unfortunately, our critics stay only beside the female victims. Mr. Alving was a similar mental patient, but we did not notice any critic by his side.

8.2.4 Husband: the doll in a house

The Lady from the Sea (1888) is not a mere brain-child of Henrik Ibsen. It had a background in reality. Ibsen took the plot of the play from a woman who was one of his very close relatives. It proves Ibsen's dealings with the problem of real or living humankind; because, in real life he did not support the woman's trickery. To reveal the similarity of the play with Ibsen's relative's case, Roberst Ferguson wrote in *Henrik Ibsen: A New Biography*—

The Lady herself, and her dilemma over whether to stay with her husband or leave with the former lover who arrives to claim her back, both derive from his mother-in-law Magdalane Thoresen. She fascinated Ibsen with her instincts, take chances, take lovers, trusting life and being rewarded for her trust by survival. *The Lady from the Sea's* basic situation derives from an episode in Thoresen's early life, which she later described in a letter to a friend. (332-333)

For making a close comparison between Ibsen's relative and Ellida, this letter is worth mentioning. The letter goes as follows—

While studying in Copenhagen I met a young man, a wild, strange character, a pure child of nature. He studied with me, and I found myself bowing in the dust before the power of his monstrous, demonic will. He could have taken me over, bound me into life of love with him- I still believe this. He let me go, perhaps he regretted it later... . I have never regretted that he let me go, for because of that I met a better person and have lived a better life. But as I say, I have always known that he could have taken all the love that is inside me and made it slower and bear fruit. So my days are full of a sense of loss and longing, a reaching out here a

reaching there, always reaching for a shadow. And the power of this love did not vanish with the years but only grew.

When my dear and noble husband called me to be his wife and the mother of those five poor children who ran around his heels, he was already aware of almost regrettable circumstance of my unruly life, for this was my own responsibility. But that which was gone, that which was lost, when I was so ignorant, without protection in the world, the thing I just couldn't handle, nor trust anyone else with. I asked him to look on this as a closed book and to judge my character solely as a result of his struggle and if he found me worthy of him to regard all the rest wiped out. And he did. Had he not, he would still have beaten his head against the wall: I would forever have remained silent as the grave. (333)

This letter of confession says about the real-like background of the play. Sometimes we skip minor incidents in a play considering those to be very dramatic and hence unimportant for the real life. But this letter forbids us to do so in the case of this play. That means, we have to observe the play very minutely to get its real worth and to extract a reinterpretation of gender issues from it. In the letter, the lady is always the winner. She expects forgiveness from her husband, when she knows that she can make her husband beat his head 'against wall' through her silence. She is well aware of the power of her silence. Her silence means sexual starvation of her husband, and she could demand for anything from her husband in that circumstance. Husbands are found to be rather helpless in such regards by their wives. Wives know how to keep their husbands in grip or control. They wish their misdeeds to be overlooked by the husbands; but in their turn they cannot overlook the latter's slightest slide. Thus husbands are mere dolls who do not know how subtly they are controlled in a house.

8.2.5 A relationship requires responsibility

While discussing *Ghosts* (1881), we mentioned the importance of position. We said: it's the position that makes someone do something. There we found Mrs. Alving's mother and aunts who compelled Miss Helen to marry Mr. Alving. They thought about their daughter's bright future. In *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), we observe a similar action from Ellida's father. He thought Dr. Wangel would be a good husband for his daughter. Ellida obeyed her father. Here Ellida's father takes Helen's mother and aunts' position. So, one particular gender should not be made responsible for matrimonial problems. A society that does not allow parents' meeting with the boy/girl who is going to be married may undergo matrimonial crisis. This problem can be solved by broadening the mindsets of parents. To view gender issues from a different point of view, we have to first think about different roles of the family members and consider the amount of power every role holds. In addition to that, we need to check the mindsets of role-players. At the same time, it is also true that after a certain period an individual is responsible for his/her own performance, i.e. he/she has to act calculating even many minimal issues. It does not matter much what his/her family background was. So, Mrs. Alving, Ellida, Mr. Alving and Dr. Wangel all can be cross-examined irrespective of their family background. That type of study can be claimed to a gender-neutral study. Our study is doing this very thing from the beginning. Now we know, Ellida gave her consent to marry Dr. Wangel and they had a child some days after marriage. Ellida found similarities between the eyes of the child and the eyes of her former lover. This made her nervous. She became totally indifferent to her family. Dr. Wangel tried his best to solve the problem. He even shifted to a new place. He had to face difficulties to continue his profession, due to taking such decision. But all went in vain, since Ellida was not recovering and she alleged that Dr. Wangel had bought her from her father. We

find Toril Moi very straightforward in this regard. She did not hesitate to accuse Ellida of ignoring her duties as a wife. Moi says—

The Wangel's newborn son died three years before the play opens, and since then, Ellida has lived in her own fantasy world, completely withdrawn from family life.... Ellida spends her time taking sea baths and dreaming about the ocean and about the stranger, a mysterious sailor and murderer, to whom she feels bound as if in marriage. (295)

There are few critics who speak so honestly as Moi in this case. Actually, Ellida failed to make an individual of her. She neglected all her duties to the family according to her own decision. It seems that she had a very strong position in the family. But later we find this very Ellida becoming completely willless before the stranger. She acted as if she had no independence at all. These contradictory behaviors actually prove Ellida's selfcenteredness. None but a selfish person can act in one such way. Everyone has a past. But one who cannot control the past that engulfs the present should not be regarded as a moderate person. Dr. Wangel had a past as well. He is never seen making comparison between his late wife and Ellida. He is not even seen to scold Ellida for anything. If he had expected anything from Ellida, making comparison with his dead wife, that expectation could have brought immeasurable pain for Ellida. Dr. Wangel did not do that, but Ellida did. So, she must be accused of this act. Toril Moi says appropriately—

If we cannot acknowledge our own limitedness, our finitude, we will not be able to acknowledge the existence of others. Ellida knows no boundaries. To her the ocean is boundless, and so is the stranger.... Ellida's achievement is that she comes to realize that she has the power to defy this will not by mobilizing some super human effort of resistance, but by choosing finitude. (305)

If we accept Moi's comment, we have to further acknowledge Ellida's indifference towards the value of a relationship. A relation is a median way that demands sacrifice from both parties.

Dr. Wangel sacrificed his job, his own environment, his late wife's memories, and many other things. But Ellida did not sacrifice anything willingly. Finally, she did not go with the stranger not because she started loving Dr. Wangel, rather she had not that courage to leave the protected nest created by Dr. Wangel. She could not go for uncertainty with the stranger. So, Dr. Wangel should be praised for his sacrifice, for his love towards Ellida. But Ellida's activities, by any means, cannot be justified. Toril Moi continues her dissection of Ellida as follows—

She is unable to acknowledge the separate existence of others; she takes refuge in melodramatic fantasies about the stranger's revenge so as not to have to acknowledge death (the death of her baby); she avoids sex as not to have to acknowledge sexual finitude. The result is a sense of being completely lost, an increasing sense of isolation from human community, a convention that she is fundamentally unable to make herself known. (306)

8.2.6 Caring husband (mis)interpreted as 'weak' husband

In the last scene of *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), we notice Wangel's greatest affection towards Ellida. Unfortunately, he is labeled as a 'weak man' by many critics. But our study identifies Wangel's act as greatness; because, he wanted Ellida to be happy. If he had thought about his own self and his children's interests, he would not have allowed the stranger to enter his home. But he wanted Ellida's happiness only. So, he allowed the stranger and let him face Ellida. He also stopped taking any decision about her. He did not know whether Ellida would go with the stranger or stay with him. He possessed the type of great mind that can sacrifice everything for beloved's happiness. Critics who label this sacrifice as 'spinelessness' do not

have, we guess, any well-structured argument. They are in a fixed stance to oppose the males— no matter whether he is right or wrong, great or mean. Let's cast a glance at the scene:

Wangel: (in quiet pain) I see it so well, Ellida. Inch by inch you're slipping away from me.

Ellida: Oh, yes, yes— I feel it— like black, soundless wings hanging over me.

Wangel: There's no other way to save you. At least, not that I can see. And so— so I agree that— our contract's dissolved. Right now, this moment. Now you can choose your own path— in full freedom. (685)

We see Wangel trying to save Ellida in every possible way. He does not expect anything from Ellida in exchange. Actually, from the very beginning of the play, we do not find Wangel expecting anything from her. He did not expect any care or nurture from Ellida. Even he did not expect Ellida would look after his daughters. On the contrary, Wangel's one daughter's craving for Ellida is vividly visible. In spite of all these, Wangel did not force Ellida to stay at home with him. He could have shot the stranger. But he did not do that, because that would hurt Ellida. So, he is seen to be caring not only for Ellida, but also for what Ellida loves. But, we do not find anything like this from Ellida's side. This is sheer hypocrisy in a relationship. If Dr. Wangel had behaved like Ellida, feminist critics would not have hesitated a bit to accuse him. Since they could not detect any evil in Dr. Wangel, they certify him as a weak person. Toril Moi is rather tolerable in this regard:

If Wangel deserves Ellida, it is because... he realizes that when it comes to human relationship, love is far more important than absolute knowledge.... The love that is here being acknowledged has nothing to do with the romantic absolute. It is

finite and human, and certainly will not rescue us from failures and misunderstandings... (308-310)

8.2.7 It's all about combined effort

We have already found that most of the activities done by Ellida are totally insane. So, Wangel himself could have taken decision on Ellida's behalf. It was unwise to leave such a crucial decision with Ellida, because, she could have chosen the stranger. We do not notice any rationality in Ellida's activities. But, above all, it is at least clear that she did not have any affection for Dr. Wangel. Again, it is not quite clear whether she had any real affection for the stranger as well; because, we notice from the following excerpt that she did not have any concrete idea about the stranger—

Wangel: Not so strange, actually. There's a new image in you now, shaped out of reality— and it's eclipsing the old one so you can't see it anymore.

Ellida: Do you think so, Wangel?

Wangel: Yes. And it's shutting out the sick fantasies, too. (660)

Ellida can be darts- after this excerpt- with lots of criticisms; but that would be a very typical attempt lengthening backbiting only. So, let's consider another view that the play is about a Doctor and his mentally challenged young wife. The doctor tries to recover her with every possible effort, but cannot succeed without his wife's cooperation. Though most of the critics would not accept such a simple explanation, this study would like to add this to many other explanations. It considers the play's conflict to be a common problem which may arise in case of any couple. And it shows that a problem can be solved properly only when husband and wife both use their efforts simultaneously.

8.2.8 'Free will'— outcome of insanity?

Most of the critics appreciate this play for the concept of 'free will' in it. They also hail Ibsen for bringing such a significant issue on stage. Ending of the play satisfies these critics, as it shows a woman practicing her free will. A very valid point is always evaded by them. They never ask themselves whether Ellida really had any idea about 'free will'. Urge for freedom comes from one's inner self; but the play shows that Ellida came across this phrase- 'free will'- from the stranger. She could not apply this idea in the stranger's case, she claimed for it only in case of Dr. Wangel. The relevant excerpt is as follows:

Wangel: (rising). Then these five, six years we've lived together— have they been such a total waste?

Ellida: Oh, you mustn't think that, Wangel! I've lived as well here with you as anyone could hope for. But I didn't come into your house by my own free will.

That's the thing. (663)

So, Ellida decides not to acknowledge her marriage with Dr. Wangel, as there was no 'free will'. She rather justifies her first marriage with the stranger as a real one. If we look back, we can see that Ellida had no 'free will' during her first 'marriage' as well. The stranger tied two rings together and threw that into the sea. Ellida could not even understand what happened. The stranger did not ask for her consent. Thus, we find Ellida in an equally vulnerable position during her first informal marriage with the stranger. Ellida had more conversation with Dr. Wangel, before their marriage, than she had with the stranger. So, from every possible point of view, Ellida had more space with Dr. Wangel than she had with the stranger. Therefore, when Ellida drops phrases like 'free will', 'false marriage', these prove nothing but her mental incompetence. This can be criticized very harshly. But this study does not have any intention to

hurt any gender. It claims only that this incident is a proof of an illness that may occur to anyone- be a man or a woman.

8.2.9 Attraction towards the horrible

Ellida had a secured life with Dr. Wangel who was always very kind to her. Wangel never accused her of anything. He never compelled Ellida to do anything. On the other hand, the stranger could not secure his own life, as he was bearing charge of a murder. We find him compelling Ellida to marry him. Moreover, he is very terrifying for Ellida. Probably, he is a 'strong' character according to the critics who find Dr. Wangel to be a 'weak' character. Despite all the evils, Ellida longs for the stranger. Does it mean that women love to be terrified? They love those who make them compelled to do something? They love the 'strong' characters who can't guarantee a secured life for them? And, above all, they love to criticize those who do not terrify them? The supporting excerpt is—

Wangel: At least at that time you knew something of what kind of life you'd be taking on. But here, with him? Just consider! What do you know about him?

Nothing! Not even who he is— or what he is.

Ellida: (staring into space) It's true. But that's exactly the horror of it....

Wangel: (comes closer) Tell me, Ellida— what do you really mean when you speak of the horror?

Ellida: (after a moment's thought) It's something that— terrifies and attracts.

(665-666)

So? What conclusion can we come to?— If a man sacrifices his joy of life for a woman, he will be neglected by that very woman and criticized by other women (critics). If a man terrifies a woman he will be loved by that woman, and many of his faults will be overlooked by other women (critics). This may sound harsh. But no rational being can support Ellida in this regard.

But, for establishing a gender-neutral point of view and for evading battle of sexes we may consider this another insane activity by Ellida.

We can mark another binary opposite mental state in Ellida. This very Ellida, who is insisting on Dr. Wanger for granting her ‘free will’ and presenting lots of big talks, admits that she had no free will in case of the stranger. She was obliged to obey the stranger. The excerpt is—

Wangel: I see. So that’s how you got engaged?

Ellida: Yes. He said I must.

Wangel: Must? Had you no will of your own?

Ellida: Not when he was near. Oh— afterward I thought it was utterly incomprehensible. (626)

We have already had lots of references to Ellida’s contradictory behaviors. So, this excerpt does not require further explanation. It stands as another proof of Ellida’s mental incompetence!

8.2.10 A playwright with a third eye

All the discussions hitherto tend to come to a single decision that Ibsen should not be considered a feminist-writer, and his plays should not be used to satisfy any particular gender’s narrow viewpoints. This maestro actually had a third eye to evaluate gender-related issues. His plays can be used to understand the problems, but solutions to those problems may vary from relation to relation. Ibsen would think scientifically and always give priority to natural orders. He had a great study on the balance management between genders. Most of the so-called theories could not satisfy him. So, he invented newer ways to look into the matters. Several times he urged for ‘careful reading’ of his plays, because he believed that only a careful reader could grasp his plays’ messages. We would like to finish this section of our study with reference to Ibsen’s own comment on his writing. He said:

None of the conclusions science has reached so far satisfies me. I have therefore formulated my own personal, independent theory of nature. In my view both the theologians and the natural scientists are too deeply embedded in a one-sided view of things. 'Nature' is not something as material as many people seem to think. As for what lies behind it all that is the great riddle, the temporary secret—temporary, in my view, because I live in the hope that the evolutionary process will little by little impart the great secret in a process involving complete and liberating recognition. (cited in Ferguson 331)

9. 'Gender' in Strindberg's Plays

This section of our study will discuss how 'Gender' comes in Strindbergian plays. Besides the selected plays, relevant references will be taken from some of his other works.

9.1 The Father (1887)

In *The Father* he [Strindberg] created a kind of Laboratory situation in which he explored certain possibilities inherent in his own deteriorating marriage to his first wife, Siri Von Essen, who he had married in 1876, and whose career as an actress foundered after the births of their children and the years spent abroad with the demanding and hypersensitive Strindberg.

(Strindberg, "Miss Julie and Other Plays" 15)

Thus, *The Father* is a play which is unique in its own way, in spite of having similarities with the playwright's own life. August Strindberg being a greater naturalist, once said, "Literature ought to emancipate itself from art entirely and become a science." (Strindberg, "Miss Julie and Other Plays" 14) Although this study does not assess any such demand, as literature creates value through literariness, and it will lose its attraction if it becomes a science, discussion in this part will be started with a scientific study of the play.

9.1.1 A scientific study of the play

To conduct a gender-neutral study of the play, at the very outset, we would like to make an investigation into the causes of conflict between the captain and Laura. The commonly accepted finding is that both of them wanted to influence Bertha, their daughter, in their own ways. They wanted to establish their own ideas and thus to create a stronger position in the family. We will discuss this later, but before that we need to know why both of them wanted to

hold one such position. We are going to try to conduct a scientific study as Strindberg wanted. We will try to understand how both of them, the captain and Laura, were psychologically ill. Firstly, we will discuss the captain's psychology.

A young contrarian, bearing nick name Justin7Shin- cited in Justin7Shin.wordpress.com- finds the following complexities in the captain: Oedipus complex, Paranoid Personality Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Insomnia, Disorder and Post-Traumatic Disorder. Let's have a deeper look into the complexities. Here we will see how the young contrarian discovered the captain--

i. Oedipus Complex

The captain had unusual thoughts regarding his wife—"I thought I was making myself whole when you and I became one, and therefore I let you rule. In the barracks, on the parade ground, I was the one who gave the orders; with you I was the one who obeyed. I became part of you, looked up to you as to a higher, more gifted being, listened to you as if I were your foolish child." (113)

The captain imagined his wife as his mother and enjoyed her rulings. But this did not sustain for long. He appeared as a husband and desired sexual pleasure from the woman he previously considered mother. His mental consideration fails against physical desires. The conflict leads to another problematic state namely 'castration anxiety'. He says – "When I thought you despised me for my lack of masculinity, I sought to conquer you as a woman by being a man."

(113)

The captain feared that his wife would not like sexual intercourse with him, since they had a sort of mother-son relationship. When the captain proceeded for the intercourse, he thought that he would not be able to satisfy his wife, because he considered his wife superior to him.

This inferiority complex compelled him to impose his decisions on his wife. He wanted to get pleasure of being superior and older. He wanted his decisions to be obeyed by the other members of the family. With all these, the captain wanted to show himself as a mature person. But due to mental inferiority, he did not know how to deal with the partner. Apart from seeing the conflict between the captain and his wife as a battle of sexes, we can consider it to be an outcome of their mental complexities.

ii. Paranoid Personality Disorder

Person suffering from this problem cannot trust anyone around him. In addition to that, he develops suspicion of others. In the play, we find the captain mistrusting everyone around him. He cannot think anyone his friend. Furthermore, he thinks that others will do harms to him. We observe him saying-- "You are not my friend, Margret" (89). Or, "There's a web being spun about me here, and that doctor's no friend of mine!" (89)

The captain has developed some fixed ideas depending on his studies and thoughts. He cannot come out of that circle. He also tries to justify his previous thoughts by his further readings. All his plans and programs circulate round a fixed centre which we cannot justify, since the captain never expresses himself clearly-- "It's all here in these books, every one of them. So I wasn't mad! (123)

Once he is suspicious of his paternity, he looks into thousands of references to strengthen his thought. He reads the Bible, Odyssey, Russian literature and lots of other things. It can be guessed that he did not find everything in favor of him. But we find him extracting only those things that go in his favor. With all those things, he comes to a decision that satisfies his suspicion—

Captain: Is it true that if you cross a zebra with a mare, you get striped foals?

Doctor: [surprised] That's perfectly correct.

...

Captain: In other words, paternity can't be proved. (104)

These activities prove that the captain was suffering from Paranoid Personality Disorder. So, it was very easy to inject any suspicion into him. His wife, Laura, took this chance. We can suppose that Laura would know about this problem, thanks to her long staying with the captain. We do not see Laura directly refusing captain's paternity to his child, but technically she used the scope and succeeded in her plan.

iii. Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Post-Traumatic stress Disorder, Insomnia

The Captain says, "I have worked and slaved for you, your child, your mother, your servants; I've sacrificed career and my prospects; I've been racked and scourged; I've gone without sleep; my hair has turned grey worrying about your future, all so you might lead an untroubled life and spend your old age enjoying it once again through your child." (111) This statement shows the captain as a Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) patient. He was not habituated to leading a normal life. So, he had anxieties of different kinds. Apart from that, this anxiety disorders may be some early symptoms of Post-Traumatic stress Disorders (PTD), because we should not forget about his profession. Being a captain, he had to take part in battles many of which cost him health. His rages with his wife, as the outcome of which he threw lamp, or his attempt to kill his daughter, can be seen as the result of those disorders. He himself acknowledges in the statement that he has sleeplessness, which is simply a proof of his being a patient of insomnia. And we know that insomnia can result in heart diseases as well. So, a person suffering from so many problems cannot always act normally. This study, hence, claims that the captain was suffering from mental distress from the outset of the play.

Now, we are going to conduct a study on Laura's mental health.

Laura

Laura is the type of character we call 'Femme Fatale'. We find her to be a character striving for power and possession. We may also certify her as a person who knows how to use the especial power that Kajal Bandyopadhyay terms as 'Female Power' in his book *Female Power and Some Ibsen Plays*. Laura would know how to influence male-mindsets. We will conduct a different discussion on that point later. But now we would like to dissect her mentality.

The problems we find by analyzing Laura's character seem to be symptoms of Anti-Social Personality Disorder, Megalomania and Possessive Personality Disorder.

i. Anti-Social Personality Disorder

The other name of this problem is psychopathy. Laura's character meets all the criteria of this problem. For example, we find in her coldness, calculating nature, shallow emotions, narcissisms, grandiose self-image, manipulative personality, secretiveness, sensitivity to criticism, paranoia, despotic/authoritarianism, compulsively lying personality etc.

The first thing that initiated a conflict between Laura and the captain was whether Bertha would stay home or go to a boarding school. Laura wanted Bertha to stay home. Critics may find motherly love in this, but a subtle analysis shows that Laura actually wanted her child to be a subject to her rule. She wanted her child would be an effective tool to increase her influence in the house; because, if the daughter stays at home, she will respect her mother, she will learn whatever her mother teaches, and with these lessons she will support her mother. We find Laura saying, "Do you really think a mother is going to let her daughter go and live among evil-minded people who'll tell her that everything her mother has brought her up to believe is nonsense, so she'll despise her mother for the rest of her life?" (94)

We also get acquainted with her grandiose self-image, narcissism and superiority complex from some of her statements where she clearly claims her to be the superior-- “Why try to fight with a superior enemy?” or, “... I’ve never been able to look at a man without feeling I’m his superior.” (96)

These types of proud statements should not be overlooked by a critic. None of these was used as a funny statement in the play. These were uttered seriously, and Laura stated these words very meaningfully. So, we can obviously regard these as symptoms of her illness.

Laura lies intentionally to succeed in her plan. And the plan was to hold the power-stick of the family. She knew very well that the captain would be a hindrance to her success. So, she did not hesitate to eliminate the captain from her way. She forgot about all the duties of a wife, because she considered the captain her competitor. She even did not think twice before challenging her husband:

Captain: You’d have to prove I wasn’t the father!

Laura: That would not be difficult! Do you want me to? (95)

A thorough analysis of Laura’s character shows that she actually deceives through her words. She spoke in such a way that the captain was compelled to be suspicious about his paternity. It is true that Laura did not say anything straight about the captain’s paternity, but she created the field. Later she claimed that she did not know anything, and it was the captain who suddenly went mad suspecting his paternity. So, the lady who has such calculated criminality can never be a mentally healthy person.

We also notice lack of morality in Laura. She justifies her action on the basis of others’ comments. If the others cannot accuse her, then she can consider herself innocent. This shows that she had lack of conscience that led her to commit a heinous act. The supportive lines are—

Laura: Accuse me if you can!

Pastor: I cannot.

Laura: You see! You can't, and so— I'm innocent! (120)

So, when people cannot blame her, she simply finds herself innocent. All through the play, we do not find any expression of remorse from Laura's part. It means that she was proceeding according to her plan. She was not even sorry at the time of her husband's death. These prove her to be nothing but a psychopath.

ii. Megalomania and Possessive Personality Disorder

The play vividly shows Laura's aspiration for power. She longs for the power of ruling. She knows the importance of power. Therefore, she wishes to possess it by hook or by crook. We can single out this statement by Laura, "Power, yes. What has this whole life-and-death struggle been about if not power?" (110)

The patients who suffer from megalomania show the following symptoms, they

- have an exaggerated sense of self-importance.
- have a sense of entitlement and require constant, excessive admiration.
- expect to be recognized as superior even without achievements that warrant it.
- exaggerate achievements and talents.
- become occupied with fantasies about success, power, brilliance, beauty, or the perfect mate.
- believe they are superior and can only associate with equally special people.
- monopolize conversations and belittle or look down on people they perceive as inferiors.
- expect special favors and unquestioning compliance with their expectations.

- take advantage of others to get what they want.
- have an inability or unwillingness to recognize the needs and feelings of others.
- be envious to others and believe others envy them.
- insist on having the best of everything.

(“Narcissistic personality disorder”)

All these symptoms are to be found in Laura. We will discuss the characters of this play from some other points of view as well, so we are not going to bring example of each symptom. But, a careful reading of the text verifies this claim. And apart from megalomania, Laura suffers from Possessive Personality Disorder (PPD) too. In the last scene of the play, we find justification of this claim. We see the captain, Laura’s husband, breathes his last. At that moment, Bertha enters the scene. It was normal to console the daughter. But we notice Laura possessing her daughter, “My child, my own child.” (133). This type of possessiveness is not natural for a mother. It rather suggests mental sickness of the mother.

We know that Strindberg had interest in human psychology along with occult studies. So, it is not unnatural that he would write a play on psychological challenges. He once said, “We are all Lunatics.” [“A Young Contrarian”]

After studying human psychology, Strindberg found madness in everyone. So, it is also not unnatural that he would like to see the after-effects of that madness. He wanted to show how that madness affects different genders. So, in the play, we find a battle of brains.

9.1.2 Strindberg's own comment

It would be unwise to consider the captain a prototype of men, and Laura a prototype of women, because this is a very experimental study. In a letter to Axel Lundegard, a young Swedish writer, Strindberg wrote, "It seems to me as if I'm walking in my sleep, as if my life and writing have got all jumbled up. I don't know if *The Father* is a work of literature or if my life has been." (Strindberg, "Miss Julie and Other Plays" 16)

This study claims *The Father* (1887) to be a masterpiece that analyses human psychology and the effects of psychological collapses on different genders. In this way, it becomes a play dealing with genders. However, our study does not look for any misogynistic element in the play.

9.1.3 Analysis of the positions

In this part of this study, we will analyze how social and familial positions become important in the play. We conducted similar study in case of Ibsen's plays. Now it is time for Strindberg.

At the very beginning of the play, we notice a meeting among the captain, the servant (Noejd), and the Pastor. The issue is very common: Noejd would not marry Emma (the house maid) since he was not sure whether he was the father of Emma's upcoming child. This makes the base of the play. We become acquainted with the society of that time. We can know the role of marriage in that society. Since the scenario is not very different from today's, we can relate it to any incident of the present day as well. In our society, a child is a personal property. Father and mother both claim it to be his or her own. They educate a child in order to carry their legacy. As a result, whenever there is any petit suspicion about the identity of a child, none wants to take care of it. We can notice its male version in Noejd's speech, "Oh, if I knew I was the child's father, yes. But you see, your reverence, that's something a man can never know.

And sweating your whole life away for someone else's child, that's no joke! I'm sure you and the captain both know what I mean!" (73)

We find a female version of this proprietor-mindedness in Laura when she makes the captain confused about his paternity, "Suppose I was willing to endure everything to be driven out, despised, anything just to keep my child and bring her up. Suppose I was telling the truth just now when I said that Bertha is my child, but not yours!" (95)

So, whom should we blame— a man or a woman? None wants to take the other's responsibility, whereas everyone tries in his/her own ways to own his/her private property with cent percent authority. As earlier we showed Ibsen to be a gender-neutral playwright, we can do the same in Strindberg's case as well. August Strindberg, commonly known as a misogynist, actually tried for changes using an angry tone. He wanted a balance in family relationship. In this regard, Strindberg said, "I have shown that perfect bliss is impossible, I have shown that woman under present conditions has often not always become a toad on account of her education. I have thus attacked the education of the female, church, marriage, and the liberty on the part of the men to play the paramour; consequently I have not attacked women, but rather present conditions." (Uddgren 28)

This statement is enough to nullify some critics' claim of Strindberg's being a misogynist. The following excerpt is for them who still have confusions. Here Strindberg praises women's inner strength and states in a clear tone as the following: "Woman does not need my defense. She is the fashion and therefore she is the mistress of the world. And the freedom she now demands is the same freedom demanded by all men. This we must acquire as friends, not as enemies, for as such we will get nothing." (Uddgren 28)

It shows that most of the critics/readers had not the ability to make out Strindberg's arguments. They labeled him as a 'misogynist' only to hide their incapability.

9.1.4 Some itching facts

In Act-I, Scene-IX, we notice the revelation of a truth that may not sound sweet; but it happens like this:

Nurse: Master Adolf! What is all this?

Captain: I don't know. Can you tell me how you women can treat a grown man as if he were a child?

Nurse: Don't ask me. I suppose it's because you're all born of women, everyone of you, big or small.... (97)

Regarding *A Doll's House* (1879), we find critics claiming women as dolls at men's hands. That was an imposed situation in the play. But, Strindberg shows how naturally women consider men to be children. Most of the times, Strindberg's writings went in favor of men, because he did it intentionally. He composed those as a response to Ibsen's plays which were popularly interpreted as the mouthpieces of Women's Rights Movements. Strindberg's translator and the writer of the book *Strindberg The Man* writes—

He [Strindberg] began his attack by indicating that if the feministic movement of that time was bent on liberating woman in such a way that she would grow more and more like a man, then the movement had strayed from the right path. There must be a difference between man and woman, for if all humanity should become masculine, such a state of affairs could have but one consequence: the downfall of the human race. If woman did not wish to submit to motherhood, the human race naturally could not continue. (26)

So, a critic should be very careful, while conducting gender-studies in case of Strindberg's plays. Strindberg, however, was surely influenced by his personal experiences, but that does not necessarily mean he that took revenge on women through his writings. He rather wanted to save the human race. He wished others would learn from his anguishes. Most of the times, his tone was very aggressive, as he was not a cool-headed person. But a good critic never limits himself within the tone of a literary piece, he tries to look in deep for further important issues.

We are now paying attention to another catchy example of Strindberg's sharpness—

Nurse: A father's got other things to think about beside his child, a mother only has her child.

Captain: That's precisely it. She's only got the one burden but I've got three, including hers. Don't you think I'd have been something more in life than an old soldier if I hadn't been saddled with her and her child? (88)

It is very difficult to defend such bold statements. Like this one, Strindberg used lots of other statements in favor of men; because, number of critics providing women with favor was never few. Such critics are always warmly welcomed in the arena of critical theory. On the contrary, there is hardly any critic who thinks for men's share. Because, these critics are never welcomed cordially; rather, they have to undergo humiliation. Strindberg too had to face insult from people of different classes, but he never lost the courage to reveal the truth.

Let's cast a glance at another incident where Laura, being frustrated in a debate with the captain, asks the reason of not leaving, and the captain gives an answer that might not be expected by many—

Laura: Why didn't we part in time?

Captain: Because the child bound us together, until the bond became a chain.(110)

Normally, children are considered blessings from the almighty, and soft words are used to refer to them. But Strindberg went into the deepest of relationships and came up with such a result that may be regarded as a sin to many. In this incident, we cannot blame the man only. Both of them were responsible for making the relationship intolerable.

It is true that many couples have to acknowledge imbalances in their relationship only for the sake of children. Typical literary pieces present this as a noble sacrifice from the parents. But they do not have the guts to reveal the pain and sighs of the couple who had to go with such imbalances. Strindberg obviously and enviously possessed that guts. He even went to the extent where he disclosed a very fragile emotion that remains unnoticed to many couples. In a remarkable scene, we find the captain admitting his soft corners to his wife and getting justification of his fear about their relationship. Strindberg showed how the relationship between husband and wife suffers due to some reasons that cannot be expressed clearly in words—

Captain: I sought to conquer you as a woman by being a man.

Laura: Yes, but that was your mistake.... love between the sexes is a battle.

Captain: You always had the advantage; you could hypnotize me so that I neither saw nor heard, but simply obeyed. (113)

Where normal eyes notice conflict between genders, Strindberg notices conflict between personalities. Even change in personality did not evade his careful eyes. A person does not

always remain the same person. Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same person.”

9.1.5 Greater naturalism

As human being changes, his mode of problems changes as well. Personality can be changed as the outcome of any changed position. Therefore, Strindberg mostly concentrated on position. He goes even further by setting harsh realities on stage. The following can be a very glaring example:

Captain: Just one more about realities. Do you hate me?

Laura: Yes, sometimes. When you act the man. (114)

A wife may not speak in this manner in real life. But Strindbergian women speak in this manner. Similarly, a husband may not confess so easily to his wife. But Strindbergian men do it. Strindberg named this harsh revelation as ‘Greater naturalism’. He said, “Greater naturalism is the naturalism which seeks out those points where the great battles take place, which loves to see what one doesn’t see every day, which revels in the conflict of natural forces, whether they are called love and hate or rebelliousness and sociableness, and which cares not whether a thing is beautiful or ugly as long as it is magnificent.” (“Strindberg and the Greater Naturalism”)

Strindberg’s statement gives clue to some important issues:

- Great Battle: It refers to the relationships in a society; for example, relationship between a husband and a wife, relationship between a Mother-in-law and a Daughter-in-law, etc.
- Incidents that do not occur every day: Such incidents include misinterpretation of any act or thought, family crisis, divorce, etc.

- Conflicting natural forces: Love, Sex, Anger, Sorrow, Passion, etc.
- Length of magnificence: As long as an individual can contribute to a relationship.

Strindberg felt that 'naturalism' had an intention to present everything naturally, i.e. as anything happens in real life. But, this simplification failed to satisfy Strindberg; because, 'naturalism' does not take the audience to anywhere. For this reason, he used the dialogues that superseded natural boundaries. Evert Sprinchorn says, "Echoing Zola, he [Strindberg] averred that the theatre had reached a crisis, that conventional intrigue drama was dead, and that only psychological drama could hold the interest of modern audience." ("Strindberg and the Greater Naturalism") Therefore Strindberg presented the psychology of different genders. Audience would not even know what would go through their world of thoughts.

Strindberg's plays set a mirror before us. There we notice our own psychology and feel a great shock. It is difficult for most of the critics and commoners to absorb that shock. As a result, they oppose Strindberg, and blame him as a misogynist. Being disturbed by conventional theatre, Strindberg said, "Theater has long seemed to me, like art in general, a kind of Bible with pictures for those who can't read or write; the playwright is their lay preacher who explains the current middle-class thinking in ways that won't strain their brain capacity." ("Theater; The Disturbing Truths Told by Strindberg") Strindberg hit that capacity of brain. It results frequent misinterpretation of his plays, which yet failed to bend him. Strindberg neither wanted to be an enchanter, nor wanted to mesmerize his audience with emotional dialogues. He considered theatre a court where audience come to get the touch of truth. We know truth is often bitter in taste, and Strindberg was not an exception. He said, "Everyone is calling for the joy of life; theater managers demand we write farces, as if the joy of life resided in being ridiculous; we

must paint human beings as if they are all suffering from St. Vitus' dance or idiocy." ("Theater; The Disturbing Truths Told by Strindberg")

9.1.6 Family

In *Ghosts*, Ibsen wanted to show how 'joy of life' becomes important in family life. Its absence may lead a family to astray. He further showed how the urge for 'joy of life' runs generation after generation. Strindberg evades this issue. A family does not always consist of husband and wife's mental conflict only. There may remain some other characters too which are very influential to lead a battle between sexes. All these create a complex web of family-politics that should not be overlooked by a great playwright. When we conduct a gender-study, we should not, therefore, focus the study on the husband and wife only, because they are influenced by others.

Our frame of thoughts develops gradually from childhood. Our surroundings create this frame. In *Ghosts* (1881), we find Mrs. Alving immensely influenced by her mother and aunts' thought-patterns. In *The Father* (1887), we notice the Pastor influencing Laura, and this act of influencing is vice versa. So, any specific gender cannot be blamed for creating problems in a relationship. This study is going to show that society too is not solely responsible in this regard. Relationship brings expectations. None is ever sure about the mode and amount of his own expectations, let alone others'. Therefore, it is never possible to build up a problemfree relationship with another person. But, a person can influence another person to increase or decrease the problem. In *The Father* (1887), the Pastor influences his sister Laura a lot. He also acknowledges Laura's influence. Together they plot against the captain—

Pastor: Well, well! I shan't say anything. After all, blood is thicker than water! ...

You know, I've always regarded him as a tare among our wheat.

Laura: [with a brief, suppressed laugh, then quickly serious] And you dare say this to me, his wife?

Pastor: My God, you're strong, Laura! Unbelievably strong! (119)

After such an intriguing incident how can the feminists blame only men for oppressing women through marriage? It seems that marriage is a social institution that most of the time fails to develop a healthy relationship between husband and wife, due to bloody family-politics.

Wife's relatives maintain a distance with the husband, whereas husband's relatives can never consider the wife to be one of the family members. Thus, marriage becomes a formal relationship to satisfy sexual desires and to produce children. A very relevant statement is found in *A Dream Play* (1901). The statement is, "It's terribly hard to be married... harder than anything else. I think you have to be an angel." ("August Strindberg Quotes")

Thus, it is the family that has not learned yet how to support a new family created by one of the members of the former family. A gender-study cannot succeed until eradication of such mean mentality. Our families do not teach us to respect the relationship between a man and a woman. Strindberg's view towards family is stated in his novel *The Son of a Servant* (1886), "Family... the home of all social evil, a charitable institution for comfortable women, an anchorage for house-fathers, and a hell for children." ("August Strindberg Quotes")

Normally, a playwright is never as much naked in statement as Strindberg was. Due to such nakedness, many critics judged Strindberg to be an insane playwright. His inferno period stands as a strong clue to those critics. We know Strindberg underwent a series of psychotic attacks between 1894 and 1896. He was even hospitalized due to those problems. But, we should also keep in mind that most of his major works were completed before that time. Some examples should be brought here for authentication of this claim. His novel, *The Red Room*,

which brought him the title ‘Father of Modern Swedish Literature’, was published in 1879. His first major play, *Master Olof*, was composed in 1872 and premiered in 1881. Some of his other famous plays are— *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888), *Creditors* (1888), *The Stronger* (1890), *Pariah* (1890), *The Outlaw* (1881). In addition to that, Strindberg wrote a play taking experience from his inferno period. The play’s name was *Inferno* (1897). Such a playwright who had the ability to write plays about his own mental tiredness, should not, to any extent, be regarded as ‘an insane playwright’. We can rather say that Strindberg was ahead of his time. Consequently, critics of that period could not grasp his ideas and ideals. Critics of the later days did not toil further to discover Strindberg. So, the present study thinks that it is high time we should reevaluate August Strindberg.

9.1.7 Strindbergian man and woman

Conventional studies on *The Father* (1887), describe the captain as a very selfish person who does not have a soft corner for his own family. But, a careful study of the play shows that the captain was a victim of family-politics. The following excerpt deserves mention:

Pastor: You realize, Adolf, that you’re insane.

Captain: Yes, I know that well enough. But if I could treat your crowned heads a while, I’d soon have you locked up too! Mad I may be but how did I get that way? It doesn’t concern you, it doesn’t concern anyone! (124)

This excerpt shows the helplessness of a husband in a family. Normally, a husband is supposed to perform the role of a breadwinner. He is also supposed to be accused by feminists for oppressing his wife, since he is a part of this ‘patriarchal’ society! His personal sufferings remain hidden under all those accusings. He may misbehave with his wife, but that’s not the only truth. He may be a victim of situation that remains unnoticed by many. Silently he faces

mental tortures by his wife, or mother-in-law, or some other members of the family, and one day he bursts in anger. Then it becomes a noticeable incident to all. Strindberg tried to bring this truth into light. But he had a very soft corner for women as well. He could not tolerate the misinterpretation of man-woman relationship. He attacked feminist's movements because the activists of the movement frequently and, most often, stubbornly attacked men. Strindberg, therefore, wanted a balance. His translator and interviewer Gustaf Uddgren commented very rationally in this regard—

What lies between Strindberg's fight against all the outgrowths of the feministic movement is exactly this: he continually clung to the ideal of woman as wife and mother which he had formed in his youth... . What he attacked was partly Ibsen's false exposition in *A Doll's House* of man and woman in wedlock and which started a silly discussion about unhappy marriages in general and especially of woman as the one contrahent in wedlock who has been oppressed for centuries.

(28)

Previously, we had mentioned that Strindberg wanted to see friendship between man and woman. But, that is not possible due to an irrational attempt of making man and woman the same. We know beauty lies in variations. If man and woman become the same, they will lose interest in each other. In the name of modern education and gender-study, Women's Rights Movements are doing this mischief. Strindberg protested against such misleading ideas. After making lots of itching statements, we even find Strindberg wailing in a distorted situation. At the closing of *The Father* (1887), we notice the captain lamenting like this: "... . In the old days a man married a wife; now he forms a business partnership with a career woman or moves in with a friend. And then he seduces the partner or rapes the friend. Whatever happened to love, healthy sensual love? It died somewhere along the way. And what's the issue? Shares,

dividends placed with the bearer, with no joint liability. But who's the bearer when the crush comes?" (130)

Finally, in conclusion to the discussion of gender-issues in *The Father* (1887), we come to the decision that Strindberg revealed some crude realities of relationship in this play. He did not blindly support men or opposed women. Rather, he presented the situations very rationally. Actually in man-woman relationship, both parties want to establish his/her domination on the other. Their goal is same but tactic is different. So, Strindberg's attitude is very similar to that of the nobel laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore showing in his novel *Shesher Kabita*(1928), "The party that has chain in its possession uses it to chain the bird, uses might. Those who don't have chain, chain with opium, with deception. Though the chain-people chain up, they don't deceive; opium-people both chain up and deceive. Women's purses are full of opium; satanic nature ensures its supply" (cited in Bandyopadhyay 22) We find Laura deceiving the captain and confirming his death to establish her own rules in the house.

9.2 Gender in *Creditors* (1888)

Strindberg once mentioned *Creditors* (1888) as his ‘most mature work’. But, like his other works, this play was received as the brain-child of a misogynist. And still, this misinterpretation is upheld by many. We have already justified Strindberg’s gender-neutral role. To judge this play from a new point of view, we need to shed some more lights on ‘greater naturalism’. To clarify the idea, Michael Robinson, after a long discussion, wrote—

Strindberg’s ‘greater naturalism’ is therefore not a slice of life, nor even the carefully crafted expository method of Ibsen, in which the long reach of the past is uncovered in a present crisis; but instead the intense, immediate drama associated with what he called ‘the battle of the brains’ (hjarnornas kamp).

(Strindberg, “Miss Julie and Other Plays” 15)

‘Greater naturalism’ stands as something more than naturalism. The playwright who uses ‘naturalism’ has to think about the logical consequences. But ‘greater naturalism’ does not care about any aftermath, it directly looks into the fact. We may understand naturalism as a modified truth; whereas greater naturalism is a naked truth. Most of the people do not have the mental strength to accept or to tolerate the naked truth. As a result, a battle takes place. We know that newer paths are created as a result of conflict. Greater naturalism’s aim is to create a new path which is suitable for both genders. The existing paths were very much disliked by Strindberg. He, in fact, found those simply aimless. For all these reasons, he had to coin ‘greater naturalism’. In this regard, Strindberg said, “You are impossible. You are only a realist and therefore nothing happens to you.” (“Quotes by August Strindberg”) Strindberg did not even find naturalism helpful to understand complex relationships among human beings; because, one has to strike an object to understand its solidity. ‘Naturalism’ does not strike; it

does not have the ability to strike. It is a mere combination of some social manners only, but 'greater naturalism' strikes hard. Strindberg said, "A man with a so called character is often a simple piece of mechanism; he has often only one point of view for the extremely complicated relationships of life." ("Quotes by August Strindberg")

Strindberg wanted to see the 'extremely complicated relationships of life' from multiple points of view. He believed that the existing social structure was not formed logically. Society does not teach how to love the opposite gender; it teaches how to take something from the other. So, Strindberg took a different policy. He did not want to raise awareness through his writings; because that would be a lengthy process, he rather directly hit the social structure. To create a new structure, the existing structure should be destroyed first. Strindberg said, " I am a socialist, a nihilist, a republican, anything that is anti-reactionary!... I want to turn everything upside down to see what lies beneath; I believe we are so webbed, so horribly regimented that no spring-clearing is possible, everything must be burned, blown to bits, and then we can start afresh... ." ("Quotes by August Strindberg") This statement clarifies many confusions regarding Strindberg's boldness.

Creditor (1888) is the play where Strindberg used possibly his most bold and contradictory dialogues. It was and still is an easy prey to feminist critics. But this study will reveal the aim of Strindberg's boldness in the play. It will also show how Strindberg wanted to create a balanced society, destroying the existing one.

9.2.1 Women's indebtedness to men

The play tells us the story of a woman, her former husband (Gustav) and her present husband (Adolf). The play was written at the time when Scandinavian women started becoming aware of their rights. Some of them were excelling in literary arena as well. Women were being educated like men. So, the activists of Women's Rights Movements were becoming boastful. In the plea of Women's Rights Movements, they were underestimating men, and some of them even started insulting male members of the society. Thus, slowly the movement was advancing towards a new kind of imbalance. Strindberg protested against the imbalance in his greater naturalistic way.

Adolf is no more liked by Tekla, because everything has been taken from him. It is Adolf who helped develop Tekla's ideas about different things; but now Adolf is neglected, since he has become useless to Tekla—

Adolf: [After a pause] Yes. And it looked as if she especially hated my ideas because they were mine and not because there was anything wrong about them.(14)

Tekla was comfortable in plagiarism. She did not have that merit to write something significant. We know her former husband Gustav also taught Tekla a lot, and he was left when everything was taken.

'Tekla' was an intentional creation by Strindberg to show women's indebtedness to men.

Women at that time started claiming themselves as the superior (at least in few fields).

Strindberg wanted to show the way women were made educated. They owed a lot to men, but did not acknowledge. In the present world too, women are always busy accusing 'patriarchy' of all the problems they undergo. Well, suppose 'patriarchy' is abolished, then? Matriarchy

will take the place, men will suffer. Certainly this can never be a solution to gender discrimination. For bringing balance in a society, its members (men and women) have to be cooperative to each other. Women's Rights Movement's activists of Strindberg's time forgot this truth.

9.2.2 Women's attitude towards men

We noticed in *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), Dr. Wangel was mentioned as 'spineless' by feminist critics. This was done because Dr. Wangel allowed Ellida to do everything according to her own wish. It shows, a man is expected to be strict to his wife; otherwise, he will be called 'spineless'. But what will he be called if he is very strict to his wife? – 'Male chauvinist'. Women do not wish to see male chauvinists, they do not like 'spineless' males either. So, what do they want? They want to blame men. We mark Dr. Wangel's reflection in Adolf.

Adolf loves his wife. He is always ready to sacrifice everything for his wife. He is never strict and does not want to control his wife in his own way. Maybe for his kind-heartedness he is not cared by his wife. Adolf's liberal attitude is seen in the following excerpt of the text—

Gustav: ... You couldn't lock her up, could you? But do you like her to stay away whole nights?

Adolf: No, really, I don't.

Gustav: There, you see! [with a change of tactics] And to tell the truth, it would only make you ridiculous to like it. (17)

Gustav knows the mentality of women, because he has already undergone bad experiences with them. But, Adolf is different. He loves his wife in spite of his recent bad experiences. Therefore he says—

Adolf: But why isn't she ridiculous when I stay out all night?

Gustav: Yes, why? Well, it's nothing that concerns you, but that's the way it is.

And while you are trying to figure out why, the mishap has already occurred.

Adolf: What mishap?

Gustav: However, the first husband was a tyrant and she took him only to get her freedom. You see, a girl cannot have freedom except by providing herself with a chaperon – or what we call a husband. (18-19)

9.2.3 Men's deprivation

Women at that time had to depend on their family; to be more specific, on their husbands. But those women who claimed themselves as 'free women' did not admit their debt to their husbands. Thus, in the name of Women's Rights Movements, they were actually defaming men. It was quiet impossible to tolerate such anarchy by a revolutionist like Strindberg. He was passing a very bad time with his first wife, Siri Von Essen, at the time of writing *Creditors* (1888). He actually suspected his wife. In her part, Siri detested Strindberg immensely. Finally, they got divorced in 1891. Thus Strindberg got a firsthand experience of bitter man-woman relationship. Siri Von Essen was an actress. She had to maintain another life apart from her family. Although she reduced number of performances after marriage, she could never totally leave theatre. She maintained good relationships with many people outside her family. This created problems in their conjugal life. It was Strindberg who made Siri famous on stage through his plays. As a playwright and director, he liked Siri very much, but could not do so as a husband. Here we find a similarity between Tekla and Siri. Strindberg imagined himself as Tekla's first husband Gustav.

It is important to study the relationship between Siri Von Essen and August Strindberg for conducting a gender-neutral study on *Creditors* (1888). Strindberg and Siri loved each other

when there was a director-actress relationship between them. They tied knot in 1877. It is apparent that they were of similar mentalities, since both of them were theatre-personalities; yet, they had to separate themselves. It indicates that possession of similar mentalities does not guarantee happy conjugal life. There are lots of expectations in a conjugal life. Both parties expect from each other. Director Strindberg could not keep his former image as husband Strindberg. Similarly, actress Siri could not act well on the stage of family. Strindberg considered himself the giver and his wife the receiver. He thought he had given a lot to Siri when there was director-actress relationship. So, Siri loved him at that time, but now she does not, as his givings do not satisfy her now. We notice Gustav saying, “Woman’s love consists in taking, in receiving, and one from whom she takes nothing does not have her love.” (32)

9.2.4 Mutual understanding matters

We might have found the aforementioned sentence uttered by a woman if *Creditors* (1888) had been written by Siri Von Essen. There she obviously used the phrase ‘man’s love’. So, is it ever possible to come to any gender-neutral decision from literature? We can conduct subtle most studies, but can never reach a fare decision depending on any piece of literature only. Literature of different tastes helps create a broader outlook. Then we can create mutual understanding, thanks to the new outlook. Jerry Coyne is worth mentioning here. In response to Caitlin Moran’s statement, “Young girls should not read any books written by men” (“Why Evolution Is True”), Coyne said—

This is a woman who didn’t want her viewpoints challenged, nor to see the views of the half of the world that comprises of men. Her assumption is that all male authors are sexist and that their books distort the views of women... that’s bigoted and despicable; the form of feminism that sees men as the enemy from the outset and seeks to reinforce that prejudice by reading only books that keep her in her

space... the fute, in both life and books, is men and women together, with mutual understanding that can come only from learning about each other's thoughts.

("Quote by Jerry Coyne")

In *Creditors* (1888), none of the characters tried for mutual understanding. Gustav took the position of a teacher with regard of his wife. He never thought of learning anything from Tekla who was nothing but an apprentice. As a result, they failed creating mutual understanding. Later Tekla considered Adolf a nagging child. She learned many things from Adolf but did not acknowledge due to her super ego. A person bearing such ego can never develop mutual understanding with anyone. However, Adolf failed due to his extreme passion. He was never sure about his behavior with Tekla. Thus, all the characters became creditors to each other, but could not become good partners. In fact, Strindberg too could not become a good partner in his conjugal life. Therefore, he could sense the root of such problems. He admitted the fault of both parties; but he showed men's sufferings in the fullest on stage, because standing opposite to feminism, he wanted to create a stream that could collide with the stream of feminism and give birth to mutual understanding.

9.2.5 Similar thoughts in world literature

Tekla took ideas from Adolf. She also learned manners from him. But, after all these, she started neglecting Adolf. Strindberg compared this practice with cannibalism. We notice Gustav saying to Adolf—

Gustav:... . This is clear cannibalism, I think. Do you know what's behind that sort of practice? The savages eat their enemies in order to acquire their useful qualities. And this woman has been eating your soul, your courage, your knowledge.

Adolf: And my faith! It was I who urged her to write her first book. (39)

Strindberg's views towards women sometimes seem to be very insulting. It was, and still is, a common charge against Strindberg that he underestimated women in many of his writings, that he underestimated both women's mentality and their physicality. Let's see what is found, in this regard in *Creditors*—

Gustav: Have you ever looked at a naked woman- oh yes, of course! A youth with over developed breasts, an under developed man; a child that has shot up to full height and then stopped growing in other respects; one who is chronically anemic: what can you expect of such a creature? (45)

Clearly, it is a blow towards feminism. In such a situation where the former husband of a woman is talking to her present husband, and it is known that the former was ditched by the woman, it is normal that the former husband would use insulting words to the woman and, in a broad sense, to all women. We frequently notice in popular culture that women are accusing men of different charges. And it is a common practice by women to use insulting words to men. So, Gustav's statement can be taken as a part of the universal battle between sexes. It is unwise to fix this as Strindberg's attitude towards women. He can be rather praised for the craftsmanship of creating such natural situations in a play.

The very next part of the play shows Strindberg's prudence in gender-related thoughts –

Adolf: Supposing all that to be true how can it be possible that I still think her my equal?

Gustav: Hallucination – the hypnotizing power of skirts. (45)

One cannot omit natural laws. Naturally male members of every species are attracted towards the female members, and female members hypnotize the males using the charm of female sex.

They demand their desired things from male members, thanks to this charm. Kajal Bandyopadhyay in his book, *Female Power and some Ibsen Plays*, mentions this charm as 'Female power'. This power is more effective than any other form of power. A man may achieve control over regions through turmoil, but a woman achieves control over all those regions, including the man, simply by using her female power. Thus, hardship is needed to be a king; but to be a queen, feminine charm is a must. Kazi Nazrul Islam, famous poet of Bengali literature, wrote in his poem, "King controls the kingdom, queen controls the king" (64) (my translation)

There are thousands of relevant incidents in history and literature. In Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, we see king Oedipus accepting queen Jocasta's share in his power. A wife plays so much influence over her husband that even her relatives become the shareholder of the husband's power.

Creon: Well then: you're married to my sister, yes?

Oedipus: Yes, there is no denying that.

Creon: And do you give her equal power as a ruler here?

Oedipus: Whatever she may ask from me she gets.

Creon: And am I not a third, and equal to the two of you?

(Sophocles 36)

9.2.6 Different forms of women's power

The previous section confirms women's possession of either equal or superior power. Women can use that power positively or negatively. Generally, they are seen using this power when all other attempts go in vain. Thanks to this, they can easily reach their goals. Fredrik Engelstad's comment is very relevant in this regard, "Being a woman in a patriarchal society does not imply being powerless. In addition to exceptional gifts many women have an enchanting erotic

attractiveness with many similarities to charismatic power.” (293-294) Engelstad further says, “Power becomes particularly efficient when it is combined with emotions.” (294)

Women are renowned for their emotions. Strindberg found women’s emotion as another form of power. Wives’ emotions towards husbands work as long as they are benefitted physically and financially from the husbands. If the husband becomes incapable, wife’s emotion starts decreasing. In the play, Tekla does not feel attraction anymore towards Adolf, when Adolf becomes much amiable to her. She deprives him of sexual pleasure which is the key to wives’ rules. It is one of the major components of ‘female power’—

Tekla: ... as the husband is not capable of bringing the blood up to her head, he cannot hope to behold the charming spectacle. (73)

Tekla and Adolf are noticed playing the role of sister and brother even after their marriage. They were used to doing so before marriage, i.e., when Tekla was Gustav’s wife. At that time, Tekla felt sexual attraction towards Adolf, since they had a forbidden relationship. When Tekla left Gustav and went to Adolf, physical relationship between them became legal. Then Tekla found Adolf a charmless man. This sexual dissatisfaction made her disinterested towards Adolf. As a matter of fact, this dissatisfaction provides her with more control over Adolf. Similar thought crossed Ibsen’s head as well. He showed how sexual dissatisfaction plays key role in disturbing balance in a family. Kajal Bandyopadhyay’s book states it as follows: “He [Ibsen] was perhaps the first dramatist who expressed women’s sexuality as a factor in the disturbing balance of the family relationship. He had already implied in *Emperor and Galilean* that a wife’s refutation of the authority of her husband arose from her sexual dissatisfaction with him.” (12)

Thus, women enjoy power in numerous forms. But these remain hidden behind so-called 'patriarchy'.

9.2.7 Some serious shortcomings of women

Women's Rights' activists who charge Helmer for making Nora bereft of love of a family should keep Tekla's character in mind. Tekla is not the prototype of wives, but she satisfies all the criteria to be the prototype of women. Strindberg shows some serious shortcomings of women through Tekla's character. Critics may simply overlook the play claiming it to be a play by a misogynist. But, they should not forget that any piece of literature cannot be overlooked on such grounds or pretexts. In that case, feminist writers' writings can be kept aside. So, it is not a solution to come to any decision about any piece of literature on the basis of its creator's outlook or ideology. Rather, critics should look into the reasons why such a piece of literature was created.

Strindberg presents here another shortcoming of women that deserves serious attention.

Women are very much eager to be praised for their beauty. This is something different from 'narcissism'. A woman loves to be praised much by men, but when a man praises her beauty and tries to approach her, she yells mentioning this to be a mischievous act. She wants to befool her husband by her charm, although she does not love him. But a woman does not love to praise another woman—

Adolf: No, you upset me constantly by your coquetry. Why do you play that kind of game?

Tekla: It is no game. I want to be admired— that's all.

Adolf: Yes, but only by men!

Tekla: Of course! For a woman is never admired by other women. (76-77)

The word 'upset' in the above extract deserves attention. It shows the way a woman can torture a man. When women accuse men of torturing physically, men may accuse women of torturing mentally. Naomi Wolf is very relevant in this regard. In her book, *Fire with Fire*, Wolf writes, "Men punish the weak while women punish the strong." (xxviii)

Tekla punished not Adolf only, she punished her former husband Gustav as well. Still, we do not know how many men, in total, were punished by her; because, we noticed her flirting with other men too. Her complement to a young man indicates her sexual desire towards that man, "He had a pair of prettiest, sweetest moustaches, and his cheek looked like a peach- it was so soft and rosy that you just wanted to bite it." (72)

Tekla took a lot from her former husband. Then she punished him by going to Adolf. Now she is punishing Adolf and taking preparation to punish others. Such a character was urgently necessary for facing the extremism created by the feminists of Strindberg's time. In reality, there is no scarcity of 'Tekla's in our society. Naomi Wolf, therefore, urges to rethink about gender issues, "... female psychology and the conditions of women's lives have both been transformed enough so that it is no longer possible to pretend that the impulses to dominate, aggress, or sexually exploit others are 'male' urges alone." (xxviii)

It is, therefore, high time we examined women's behavior. No one is above lapses, but feminists' diction shows as if women were free from all errors. We know, "To err is human". Since feminist critics and activists do not find any fault in women, they actually consider women something different or above human beings. Thus, the feminist critics, in fact, insult their own selves. They are not only deaf and dumb to their own faults but also furious to those who find out negative aspects in women. Hence, they regard August Strindberg as their enemy. But Naomi Wolf did not concede to such blindness. She says in her book, *Fire with Fire*, "I will discuss why it is both empowering and moral for women to look honestly at the 'dark side'

with them, emerging now into light.” (xxviii) Strindberg did the same thing many years before Wolf. It is a matter of great sorrow that Wolf is not hated by feminists, nor anybody rejects her thoughts. But Strindberg had to undergo serious insults and oppositions, due to his so called ‘anti-feministic’ stance. Gustaf Uddgren comments very courageously in this regard, “They did not try to refute Strindberg’s logic with counter proofs and clear arguments. They probably felt that it was rather difficult to argue him off his feet. But they felled the altogether bold champion by a blow from behind. They declared him an outlaw by christening him ‘The Woman Hater’.” (29) Such labeling is a great barrier in understanding a playwright like Strindberg. This paper rather claims that Strindberg should be included in feminists’ studies so that they can understand where to stop and rethink.

9.2.8 Against extremism of all kinds

The common trend of divorce and the so called ‘emancipation of woman’ turned into some mere bubbles of words in Strindbergian society. Strindberg could guess the upcoming extremism. It is evident in Strindberg’s plays and writings that he never supported patriarchal extremism too. He rather hated it as he experienced a stressful childhood in a patriarchal society. He had severe ‘Oedipus complex’ surrounding his mother, but later he started detesting her due to some unavoidable circumstances. Thus, Strindberg gathered sorrowful experiences both from his father and mother. But, this did not create any bias or aversion in him to any specific gender. This rather helped him understand the gaps in relationships. An audience who was grown up in a normal family can never understand the subtle tone, Strindberg used in his plays, due to the audience’s lack of experience. Strindberg’s plays are normally not perceivable by women, because they regard Strindberg’s greater naturalistic approaches as personal attack. Uddgren rightly states, “Strindberg’s endeavor to appear as the defender of idealistic womanhood displeased all the emancipationists in skirts and pantaloons

who had started the ‘Doll’s House Cult’ and had set up as their high aim: The emancipation of woman.” (29)

In the plea of this ‘emancipation’, Women’s Rights Movements’ activists forget about their partner. They forget that when one from a couple continuously demands for one’s own rights only, the other person lacks personal rights. In *Creditors* (1888), Tekla thinks only about her personal developments. She takes good qualities from her husband but befool him when he was abroad. She befools her present husband as well, after learning good lessons from him. Thus, Tekla’s world is made of her own thoughts only. There is no space for others. This type of selfishness belittles the partner. Normally, men are accused of such selfishness. This paper shows that position makes one selfish. A writer, male or female, thinks about developing his/her career. He/she takes plots from his/her surroundings, and forgets those when necessity comes to an end. So, Tekla may be excused in this regard, thanks to gender-neutral study; but there are some issues, related to women only, that deserve minute discussion here.

We found the nurse in *The Father* (1887) considering the captain to be her child, and we found this happening in case of Laura as well.

Captain: I don’t know. Can you tell me how you women can treat a grown man as if he were a child?

Nurse: Don’t ask me. I suppose it’s because you’re all born of women, every one of you, big or small... (97)

We notice this tendency in *Creditors* (1888) too. Tekla considers Adolf nothing but a child:

Adolf: You hate me then?

Tekla: No, I don’t. And I don’t think I shall either. But that’s probably because you are nothing to me but a child. (87)

Thus, it becomes a feature owned by all women. Seemingly a man is a child to a woman in every respect, and a woman knows it very well. So, how can a mature person become oppressed by a child?

Husband and wife are committed to each other to observe individual's duties. Not that there remain good relationship between all husbands and wives. Society keeps them together with the help of some definite tools. Social norms, traditions, duties, etc. are added to these tools, which actually work as forces to create mutual understandings. Husband or wife has knowledge and experience that differ from one another. This difference is very essential to create a healthy relationship. Depending on husband and wife's knowledge and experiences, different types of relationships exist in a society. The mode of relationship in one couple is never comparable to others. For this very reason, it is never possible to declare any couple as ideal to all. But, it is possible to take lesson from their mistakes. Tekla did not learn from her former relationship. She separated herself after taking a lot from Gustav. She was going to make separation from Adolf as well, after taking her necessary ideas from him. We can mark that her first separation did not make Gustav happy, and clearly Adolf too was not going to be happy after the separation. But, the most important thing is that none of the separations could make Tekla happy. If she were happy, she would not look for newer relationships.

In Strindbergian time, women started becoming educated. Their level of education did not reach a point wherefrom they could live all alone and live out of the bondage of a family. But, their movements were demanding something like that. So, their movements reminded Strindberg of the adage, "A little learning is a dangerous thing". Women at that time were actually in need to be educated more, according to August Strindberg. So, that was a time to cooperate, but women revolted against marriage and chose the extreme way of separation. This marred the potential of both husband and wife. This subtle-most feeling is brought to *Creditors*

(1888) when Adolf says, “You were a shoot sprung from my stem, and you wanted to cut yourself loose before the shoot had put out roots of its own, and that’s why you couldn’t grow by yourself. And my stem could not spare its main branch, and so stem and branch must die together.” (90)

9.2.9 A wretched social reformer

Previously we showed how marriage can become a painful social institution due to expectations. Strindberg showed this with superb craftsmanship. When Gustav meets Tekla in Adolf’s studio, Tekla becomes attracted to Gustav again. This very person was left by her, but now she praises him for his good virtues. What makes this difference?— In a marriage there are lots of bindings, thousand of terms and conditions. Love cannot spring out of its core due to these formalities. So, it resides out of the formalities.

Tekla: You are a man of discernment. And I have never met anybody with whom I liked so much to exchange ideas. You are so utterly free from all morality and preaching and you ask so little of people that it is possible to be oneself in your presence. Do you know I am jealous of your intended wife!

Gustav: And do you realize that I am jealous of your husband? (110)

This confession of the both proves formal marriages’ futility. Strindberg’s firsthand experience turned him into a social reformer. His inquisitiveness took him to the depth of social relations. To understand his reverence towards women, we should look into his interviews and essays. Then we can develop an overall idea about August Strindberg, and interpret his plays from a different point of view that is not akin to any typical point of view. To one of his interviewers Strindberg once said about his attitude and respect for women. The interviewer later wrote, “Strindberg has a totally different ideal from that of the emancipated mannish woman: the love of the good, cheerful housewife, the object of the husband’s and the children’s love- a woman

raised almost to the level of a Madonna, but who, because of the treasure she possesses in the home, bows before the mate and supporter of the family.” (Uddgren 26)

Marriage is a social contract. Both parties try to extract benefit from this contract. At the same time, both of them want to get the better position in this contract. This compelled Strindberg to opine as follows, “Love between a man and a woman is a war.” (“Quotes by August Strindberg”) Most of the times, Strindberg took men’s side as there was almost nobody who could raise voice for them. In Strindbergian time, it was becoming an easy way to prove oneself as ‘modern’ by speaking for feminism. In present days too, educated people feel embarrassed to speak about the flaws of Women’s Rights Movements. They think that it would present them as ‘backdated’ before others. But, Strindberg, more than hundred years ago, was more advanced than his time. He had the guts to say what he believed as true. He would say even against men, if he found any truth to be disclosed. But under the title- ‘misogynist’- Strindberg’s such ingenuity was kept hidden. We notice Strindberg’s openness in a dialogue between Gustav and Tekla. There we see, Gustav is saying how men want to take control over women and if they lose control, i.e. men are controlled by women, then there occurs serious chaos. Gustav says to Tekla, “... and now, when I am about to marry again, I have purposely picked out a young girl whom I can educate to suit myself. For the woman, you know, is the man’s child, and if she is not, he becomes hers, and then the world turns topsy-turvy.” (108)

We know that Gustav was not actually going to marry again; he was trying to create a situation where Tekla could speak freely to him. But, from this statement we could know what Gustav wanted from Tekla. He wanted total submission. Actually, this is wanted by both genders.

Family evolves like Charles Darwin’s theory, “Survival of the fittest.” Control goes to the hand that is fit to take it, i.e. who has a better position in society. This position is created through wealth, education, fame etc. So, it is a sheer waste of time to debate over the question— ‘Who

is superior?’ or ‘Who is more oppressed through a marriage?’. Strindberg solved this issue many years before the formal establishment of gender-studies. Unfortunately, he is always misinterpreted in popular gender-studies.

Strindberg strove to eliminate the darkness prevailing in Women’s Rights Movements. He wrote a book namely *A Book about Women* where he showed the hollowness of many of the demands of Women’s Rights Movements. His arguments were worth refuting with brains, whereas he had to face a charge of ‘defamation of religion’. Thus, when women could not answer Strindberg’s questions, they just stopped him. They also planned a way as if the next generation would not respect Strindberg. But, this study protests against such mean plans, and wishes that people who had wrong ideas about August Strindberg would read him with due respect, in order to reach a better understanding about him and the related issues.

10. Ibsen vs Strindberg

“Ibsen was sane, progressive and formal. Strindberg was neurotic, reactionary and fragmented. The two were arch enemies- but together they laid the foundations for modern drama”, Michael Billington. (“The troll in the drawing room”)

Ibsen kept Strindberg’s portrait in his study. He would call it ‘madness incipient’. On the other hand, Strindberg said, “My 10 year war against Ibsen cost me my wife, children, fortune and career.” (“The troll in the drawing room”) Thus Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg were involved in a battle of creativity in Scandinavian literary arena. George Bernard Shaw mentioned them as, ‘The giants of the theatre of our time’. (“The troll in the drawing room”) The giants could not tolerate each other. But their battle made Scandinavian literature blessed with powerful thoughts and provocations. Provocation in the sense that when Ibsen raised his voice for the benefit of women, Strindberg concentrated on exposing their faults. Meanwhile, a third stream came out of their confrontations. Many of their works were translated by Michael Mayer who once said, “Ibsen’s characters think and speak logically and consecutively. Strindberg’s dart backwards and forwards. They do not think, or speak, ABCDE but AGBZC.” (“The Master Builder and European Naturalism”)

In personal life, Ibsen led a very social life. He had good terms with his neighbors and people of different walks of life. He collected elements for his works from those walks. But, Strindberg willingly maintained distance from society; because, he could not tolerate social gatherings. Actually, due to his bad relationship with his wives, he somehow developed a misogynistic mentality, and this kept him away from women. This is an important reason why most of the Strindbergian women characters are negative. As Strindberg could not tolerate women, he could not tolerate the people who spoke for women. Hence he nurtured negative mentality towards Ibsen. Ibsen did not have hatred towards Strindberg. He rather considered

Strindberg a hot-tempered, maniac playwright who thought little before writing. From Ibsen and Strindberg's biography, it is known that Ibsen did lots of rough works before finalizing a drama, whereas Strindberg hardly looked back to his finished works. Once any writing was completed, Strindberg directly sent those to publishers. He did not even revise his plays.

Anisur Rahman, a Bangladeshi poet and playwright, wrote a play taking Ibsen and Strindberg's imaginary confrontation as its plot. Thanks to his staying in Sweden, Strindberg's homeland, for more than a decade, Rahman could collect lots of information on August Strindberg's life and struggle. In his play, *A Night Journey*, Rahman used the information with praiseworthy craftsmanship. About the two maestros' habit of writing, Rahman composed some exchanges.

There they go as follows:

Strindberg: Do you take a long time to write a play?

Ibsen: Three or four months. And you?

Strindberg: Three or four weeks.

Ibsen: How many drafts?

Strindberg: None... I don't even read the draft! I just send it to the publisher.

Ibsen: Do you not read it through?

Strindberg: My brain works like a non-stop machine.

Ibsen: What about inconsistencies?

Strindberg: I rely on the publisher.

Ibsen: Three drafts. It's a rule for me. ("The Night Journey")

Thus, Strindberg's works can be regarded as the publishers' works to some extents. There were many corrections, made by publishers, in his plays. Strindberg was totally unaware of those corrections. Another point needs to be evaluated regarding the authenticity of Strindberg's works. Many of his works were mere reactions to Ibsen's works. His personal experiences with

women also worked as major forces for his writings. Strindberg got married for three times.

His wives and span of married life can be shown as:

- i. Siri Von Essen (1877-1891)
- ii. Frida Uhl (1893-1895)
- iii. Harriet Bosse (1901-1904)

Apart from these relationships, Strindberg had relationship with a good number of other girls.

One of them was Fanny Falkner (1890-1963), who was 41 years younger than Strindberg.

Even this young lady did not have all sweet memories with him. Thus, Strindberg experienced bitter taste of relationship with women all through his life. The pathos started from his childhood. He had a severe Oedipus complex that framed his misogynistic outlook in childhood. Robert Burstein describes as follows—

He [Strindberg] adored his mother with a passion he was later to call with (astonishing frankness) “an incest of the soul,” and he hated his father as a powerful and threatening rival. . . . Since his mother had rejected him in favor of his brother Axel, he sometimes detested her as well. (62)

Strindberg’s later phases of life were some reflections of this trauma. He could never overcome this. He tried different paths and methods to deal with his internal tension, but in vain. He even learnt black art for a few years. But, unfortunately, that developed acute insanity in him. It is believed that Strindberg could not believe women, and it was vice versa, because of his continuous anxiety. He used those anxieties in his plays. In the play, *The Stronger* (1889), two women are seen gossiping in a restaurant. But, both of them are not equally eloquent. The married one is talking ceaselessly, whereas the unmarried woman is slowly becoming pale. Moments later, the married woman can guess that the woman she is talking to is her husband’s lover. Here Strindberg leaves a question before the audience to decide, ‘who is the stronger of

the two-- the silent woman who possessed another woman's husband, or the talkative woman for whom the husband fears to meet his beloved?'

Strindberg was always in a fuss regarding this type of question in his personal life. Hence, he could not continue in any of his relationships with women. Furthermore, he blamed women for all his failures in life. So, Strindberg's plays and other writings can be considered to be used as a shield for his self-condolence. At the same time, he had reverence for women, and this has been showed earlier in this study. Thus, Strindberg remains a mysterious character yet to be discovered.

Ibsen had weakness regarding women. During his adolescence, he had an illegal physical affair with a house maid who later gave birth to a child. Ibsen did not acknowledge his paternity to the child. He rather made himself busy with other family affairs. Unlike Strindberg, Ibsen passed happy years in early childhood. Later his family had to undergo severe economic crisis. All these made Ibsen a realist. His plays, therefore, try to reveal suitable issues that are important parts of day to day lives. He deals with the problems occurring frequently in family life, especially between husband and wife. That was a time when male writers were busy in praising women's beauty, ignoring their rights. Thus, whenever women came as a subject of any piece of writing, that literary piece would become a sort of folktale, i.e. women were to look after, to love, to make sexual intercourse, and to keep at home. But, Ibsen did not follow that trend. He gave strong will and voice to his women characters. As a result, his women can revolt, can protest, and, if necessary, can take stern steps. These, as a matter of fact, labeled Ibsen as a 'feminist playwright'. But, Ibsen never accepted such labeling; instead, he wanted to establish himself as a humanistic playwright. In 1888, Ibsen was invited to a festival arranged by Norwegian Women's Rights League. There he stated in his speech—

I am not a member of the Women's Rights League. Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more the poet and less the social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. I thank you for the toast, but must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for the women's rights movement. I am not even quite clear as to what this women's rights movement really is. To me it has seemed a problem of humanity in general. And if you read my books carefully you will understand this. True enough it is desirable to solve the woman problem, along with all the others; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity. To be sure, whenever such a description is felt to be reasonably true, the reader will read his own feelings and sentiments into the work of the poet. (cited in Bandyopadhyay 3)

Ibsen believed in individual's potentiality. The conflict is not between man and woman; it is rather between two positions or roles. To him, gender equality does not mean doing similar works by men and women. In fact, that type of attempt creates greater mayhem in a society. Everyone has to perform distinctive roles in a society. This distinction ensures unity. A family/society/state loses its ingenuity without variations. Ibsen says, "Different people have different duties assigned to them by nature; nature has given one the power or desire to do this and the other that. Each bird must sing with his own throat." ("Henrik Ibsen Quotes")

These distinctive duties come differently in Ibsen's plays. But it's a matter of regret that Ibsen has been misinterpreted for years. He has been made a mouthpiece of feminists' movements. To some extents, his plays can be referred to as some experimental works, but that does not indicate his bias for women.

Ibsen should be regarded as the master of relationship management; because, his plays make us think twice about relationships. On the contrary, Strindberg does similar thing in a dissimilar way. His plays accuse women of family-crisis and destruction of relationships. This also forces us to take a second look at relationships. We go back to think about the vulnerability of a relationship. We try to decipher the code Strindberg used in dealing with relationship between husband and wife. Anna Stenport, a professor of German language and literature at the University of Illinois, commented on Strindberg, "I believe that at the core of his writing, Strindberg was rebelling against those conventions, while at the same time trying to work out new paradigms for how men and women could coexist, especially in marriage." ("Strindberg frustrated by 19th century gender convention, scholar says")

So, confronting Ibsen and Strindberg, we see that Ibsen deals with the possibility of the women, whereas Strindberg deals with their problems. Thus, both the playwrights reveal some points which were overlooked for years by our domestic eyes. Stenport concluded about Strindberg as follows: "He's a fascinating person- mad and prolific- one of those authors that you feel you can never totally get a handle on." ("Strindberg frustrated by 19th century gender convention, scholar says")

After the release of *A Doll's House* in 1879, Strindberg's rise became a must. He started writing short stories showing husband and wife's significant roles in a relationship. In 1884, all those short stories were compiled into a book namely 'Getting Married'. All the stories revolved round family crisis; to be more specific, crisis between husband and wife. There Strindberg showed how the 'Doll's House cult' was a depthless provocation. He exposed men and women from every possible corner. He showed that men and women are dissimilar in every respect. But, when each of them performs his/her duties, they become equal at the end of the day. If women want to be equal to men by doing works like men, they will- in a sense-

insult their own worth. Both men and women's works are significant to create a happy family, and consequently, a balanced society. Strindberg thought that in the name of 'emancipation', women were destroying the balance in society. So he took up his pen.

Through his literary pieces, Ibsen created his position beside the first Norwegian Nobel laureate Bjornstjerne Bjornson. They were compared frequently. Strindberg was an addition to that. Thus, a comparison between Ibsen and Bjornson reads as follows and it includes Strindberg very relevantly—

Ibsen was the more significant and the more dangerous, for his Nora-morals had laid a very serious hold on all and were, at the time when Strindberg sat down and wrote his *Married*, in a fair way to be accepted as a sort of official individual moral code. Bjornson's glove-morals on the other hand fell down almost immediately on account of being absolutely unreasonable. (Uddgren 25-26)

Emerging as a writer, Strindberg could understand that stories or novels were not fit enough to oppose Ibsen's plays. He then started writing plays taking binary opposite plots to Ibsen's plays. Then plays like *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888), *Creditors* (1888), *The Stronger* (1890) etc. were written and staged. Strindberg initiated 'greater naturalism' in response to Ibsen's 'realism'. We know that Ibsen is called 'the founder of modern realism'. He used minute details of stage and costumes of characters. All these made his plays very realistic. On the contrary, Strindberg went beyond the depth of reality. He dealt with the issues that were present in real lives, but people as well as writers/playwrights did not utter those due to social pressure. Thus, Strindberg brought the silent conflicts out of real life onto stage. There we notice the male characters are speaking about their sufferings, about their misfortune, and, above all, their helplessness.

In spite of having visible oppositions between the maestros, they had similarities at least in one case: both had to face social pressure for their openness. Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House* (1879), was banned in many theatres. At the time of premiering in Britain, it faced severe protests. There were requests to Ibsen to change the ending of the play. Ibsen was compelled to keep the request, due to uncontrollable situations. His play, *Ghosts* (1881), was banned on the ground of containing incest and sexually transmitted diseases in it. Actually, audience at that time was not habituated to watching real-life-like plays. They expected something mythical or historical on stage. Besides, they expected that plays would show problems of the royals. So, plays placing commoners' lives, especially conflicts in commoners' lives, were not acceptable to them.

Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888) was banned in most of the European countries. His homeland, Sweden, did not accept it until 1906. Britain continued the ban till 1931. It shows how bold Strindberg's works are. Unlike Ibsen, Strindberg never changed any sequence of his plays; because, he was more stubborn than Ibsen. *Miss Julie* (1888) was the first play that separated love from sex. Previously sex was shown, on stage, as a romantic consequence of love. Strindberg first showed sex as a primitive instinct that takes place between lovers, and they may separate themselves after having sex.

Our entire comparison shows that both the maestros have been misinterpreted for long. Now, it is time to discover them from newer points of view.

11. Reinterpretation of gender-issues

According to a research conducted in 2019 by Global Institute for women's Leadership, "Three in five men (61%) globally acknowledge that gender equality won't be achieved in their country unless they also take action to support women's right." ("Global attitudes towards gender equality").

It indicates a positive change in the attitude towards gender-issues. It brings back another truth before us that mutual respect and proper unity between men and women can pave the way to achieve any goal easily. Commonly, women's rights movements identify men as the stock block. As a result, men lose respect towards the movements and their workers, i.e. the feminists and females. Since gender-inequality is a social problem, it affects all the members of a society. Being so, its solution should come through a combined effort of men and women. But conventional women's rights movements exclude men from their thoughts at the very beginning. They rather declare a war against men. This research strongly opposes such warfare. The war should be carried against those who create inequality and disparity. Women cannot be excluded from this charge. In many cases, one woman hinders development of another woman. The relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is a glaring exemplar of this. Normally, a mother-in-law finds everything, accomplished by the daughter-in-law, faulty, and it is vice-versa. The mother-in-law tries to dominate the daughter-in-law, while the latter always keeps a negative attitude towards the former. If the son comes forward for a mutual settlement, he becomes enemy to the both. This shows men's vulnerable position in family-politics. Very relevantly we can take a reference from August Strindberg's short story 'Compulsory Marriage'(1884). The central character of the story- Frithiof- was fatherless from early childhood. He grew up under the supervision of his mother, an aunt, and two sisters. Frithiof did not find peace in his family; because when he grew up, he could mark a mental gap

between him and his sisters. He failed in making love-affair with any girl, due to his improper mental development. He became victim of family-politics. The womenforce of the family chose Frithiof's cousin as his bride. Frithiof could not tolerate this, since he felt no love towards the girl. The womenforce did it intentionally, because they were afraid that a new girl would weaken their position in the family. In the story, we notice that they played wicked tricks to keep Frithiof away from the girls he liked. Thus, Frithiof became a prey to the women of the family. Finally, after lots of ups and downs, he loses mental stability and finds himself in a mental asylum. The last line of the story shows excellently how the conventional families ruin the members- especially male members- slowly. The line was: "He saw the cause of his unhappiness in the family-- the family as a social institution, which does not permit the child to become an independent individual at the proper time." ("Compulsory Marriage.")

The story can be an eye-opener. Male members of a society are oppressed too. They have sufferings that cannot be shared with others. When Women's Rights Movements' workers demand their rights creating processions, there remain men who cry unnoticed. Typical movements present a wrong scenario before us. 'Wrong' in the sense that the movements present incidents partially. They never present the actual scene where men are also oppressed by women in many cases. The movements bring examples that go in favor of women only. Their presentations want to prove that men all around the world enjoy rights depriving women. This type of overgeneralization need not be justified. But the number of such attempts is not few. We notice Andrea Dworking finding all men as violent. She did not try to classify men, or to look for greater investigation. Wherever there is violence, Dworking finds men responsible for it. She even blames male writers for creating violence in their writings. We can quote Dworking, "Men love death. In everything they make, they hollow out a central place for death, let its rancid smell contaminate every dimension of whatever still survives. Men

especially love murder. In art they celebrate it, and in life they commit it. They embrace murder as if life without it would be devoid of passion, meaning, and action, as if murder were solace, stilling their sobs as they mourn the emptiness and alienation of their lives” (“Andrea Dworkin quotes”).

There are feminists who go for worse. They do not hesitate to establish the idea that all men are culprits. For example, Diana E.W. Russel comments, “Most men have at least some predisposition to rape women,” (cited in Bristow 156). It would be regarded as mean mindedness, if any such rash comment was made by any common man. But the comment has been made by a female and it is upheld by feminists. Thus, extremism is going on in the guise of such movements. The movement we need now is: ‘humanism’ that would teach everyone, regardless of gender, to be a decent human being. A human being (in its purest sense) cannot do any harm to another human being. This single lesson is enough to create a balanced society.

There have emerged some new ideas to reinterpret gender issues. We are going to discuss those in brief here. Then we will show how this study differs from those ideas, and what it intends to claim.

At first we would glance at Judith Butler’s reinterpretation. She claims in an interview, “Gender is not performed, it is performative.” (Butler 00:03:01) By this she wants to free gender from sex. According to her claim, none should be predefined as masculine or feminine; rather the way, a particular person does anything, can be determined as masculine or feminine. In this regard she writes in her book, *Gender Trouble*, as: “When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.” (Butler 6) Butler even brings in references to clarify her claim. She refers to a song sung by Aretha

Franklin. The song says, “You make me feel like a natural woman.” Butler raises her point to the word ‘natural’. She says, Franklin could have said, “You make me feel like a woman.” But her addition of the word signifies something special. It implies that a woman does not always feel femininity. Similarly, a man may not always feel masculinity. Thus, according to Judith Butler, a person bearing any sex may perform like people of any gender. But, this type of classification does not really mean anything. It is very silly to waste time in defining gender in such an artificial way, whereas there are lots of other serious issues. In whatever way you define gender, it would not come to any use until and unless there grows respect towards genders. We should so work in this sector that we would teach our children to respect all genders. It is quite worthless to try changing common mentalities by altering dress-patterns. When a woman tries to be a man by changing attires, it is actually an insult to womanhood; because nature survives through variation. There are and should be differences between man and woman. Great things come from variation. Actually, for this reason, nature has created man and woman differently. Society takes this lesson from nature. So, it has created different gender roles. Woman should try to prove their worth, being a woman. That would glorify womanhood. Otherwise, it would mean that women cannot do great things, bearing their own identity. So, a woman should concentrate on gaining confidence that she can feel proud of being a woman. By focusing on such minor issues, feminists actually distract our attention from major issues like education, medicare, hunger etc. Caroline Wright criticizes Butler as follows:

I don’t believe that Butler ever offers a real solution to the problems that she names. She deconstructs status quo theories, yet never names a viable solution to rebuild them. Moreover, the audience is left with a ‘now what?’ How will her theories function in the real world? How will they collectively gather people for

social change? It is too individualized, too vague, and incredibly isolated from the whole of society. (“What are some criticisms of Judith Butler’s work?”)

So, Butler’s claim seems to be a fancy in a realistic world. The woman in Afghanistan, who has to survive counting every single day as a blessing that she has escaped the Talibans, or the slum-dweller woman in Bangladesh, who is worried over how to feed her children, can never be benefitted to any extent by Butler’s ideas.

There are criticisms against Butler’s proposition even by the feminists. They find Butler’s idea insufficient and inappropriate to develop women’s condition. This study, too, does not give its total support to Butler. But the reason this study opposes Butler is different from the reason mentioned by the feminists. This study thinks about the development of human society to which both men and women belong. It believes that Butler’s proposal spoils the uniqueness of men and women. Butler fails to realize the importance of fixed identity. Therefore, this study rather claims that the problem lies in our attitude, i.e. lack of respect of the members of society towards the gender identities.

Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg tried, through their gender-related plays, to change society’s attitude. Both of them were aware of their duties. Every member of a society has some duties to perform for creating a balanced society where there will be least discrimination. Here the phrase ‘least discrimination’- not ‘no discrimination’- is used intentionally; because except a utopian society, no society can be totally free from discrimination. There always remains some amount of discrimination in every society. The quality of an oppressor can be found in every human being- actually in all creatures. ‘Survival of the fittest’ is a natural law. Every creature maintains its survival through this law. Human beings apply this law in a moderate way, thanks to their education. So, it is proper education that can remove oppression- to a great extent- from a society. Man and woman both have equal rights to get education that

will teach them to create individual identity. Education develops a person's self-respect; at the same time, proper education teaches how to respect others. It teaches a man to be a man and a woman to be a woman. Finally, proper education develops mutual respect in both. Actually, creating self-identity is important not only to solve gender related problems but also to develop broad mindedness. A person, who is not properly educated, creates distinction even in man to man relationship. Very often we notice children bullying the shy or introverts. We know that not only girls but boys also become victim to bullying. This creates a life-long negative effect on the victims. Thus, the clash is not between men and women, actually it works between two classes: oppressed and oppressor. Education's real aim is to minimize the distance between these two classes. So, we should take a vow that we would utilize education properly in our life, and try to set examples before the young generation. This one step is enough to resolve almost all the gender related problems in a society. An enlightened person feels the urge to remove darkness through his enlightenment. In a letter to Bjornson Ibsen writes, "Is it not an inexpressively great gift of fortune to be able to write? But it brings with it great responsibility; and I am now sufficiently serious to realize this and to be very severe with myself." (cited in Bandyopadhyay 06)

The two maestros tried to create self-identity of the characters in their plays. Critics should not regard Nora, Helen, Ellida, or Rebeca West as women who are portraying women's problems. They are actually portraying problems of humanity. They reveal before us the gaps that create problems in relationships. But most of the times we fail to recognize those.

This study claims that a criminal should not be recognized or identified as male or female. A criminal's only identity is that s/he is a criminal. Commonly, feminists blame that men are rapist. But the truth is that all men are not rapist. Raping is a heinous crime. There are many other heinous crimes that are committed by women. But for those few women all others can

never be blamed. If we can understand this and be empathetic to others, there will be no necessity to run Women's Rights Movements.

Now it is time to develop Human Rights Movements that would put emphasis on ensuring fundamental rights to all. If Women's Rights Movements continue in the present manner which creates limitless enmity between men and women, someday there will evolve new movements called Men's Rights Movements, and then evils done by women will be brought into light.

Actually, women have a good amount of contribution to the anarchies created in family and society. But, thanks to Women's Rights Movements, their faults are overlooked. We can take reference from the observation of Kajal Bandyopadhyay, who has been working for years to establish a balanced study on gender-issues. Bandyopadhyay has minutely examined literary pieces of different languages and come up with proofs that the number of literary pieces dealing with women's lapses is not few. But, our mainstream critics very consciously avoid those pieces. Bandyopadhyay brings many examples in his book *Female Power and Some Ibsen Plays*. One of the examples is going to be mentioned here. In the example, we will find how Jeebanananda Das- famous Bengali poet, novelist, short-story writer- presents women's denial and withdrawal as their lethal weapon in the battle of sexes. Bandyopadhyay has mentioned an excerpt from Das' short-story 'Kinnarloke':

The Puja vacation was for one and a half month. Subodh had no work at either night or day. He waited for his wife every moment. Perhaps, with the daughter in the lap or perhaps all alone, she would appear and say, 'Hey, how are you?'

Subodh would say, 'Hey, I do not find you at all; You went and--- ' ...

All these are his imaginations... . At even a small sound, he turned his neck to check if Saraju had appeared. But, none was there, and a rat was running away....

(Bandyopadhyay 22-24)

We may also take reference from Nigerian writer Chinweizu, who dissected female power in his book *Anatomy of Female Power*. In the book, he shows women have more power than that of men. The following extract can be a good exemplar of Chinweizu's dissection—

In any case, even if no 'strictly matriarchal society' ever existed, that would not imply that female power did not exist. Authority is only one of the many types of power; and the wielding of authority is not necessary for the exercise of many types of power. Power without authority is neither unknown nor rare, as is recognized when it is said that someone is 'the power behind the throne'. Such obscurantist views from the organs of conventional knowledge suggest that female power has yet to receive investigation it deserves." (10-11)

Number of critics like Chinweizu is not few. Actually, extremism in the guise of Women's Rights Movements has outraged many scholars. Some of the famous quotes are mentioned here:

- Trigger warnings are the most ridiculous, patronizing and infantilizing creations ever to come out of feminism... But feminists adore trigger warnings because it reinforces the idea that women are ruled by their emotions, are incapable of recovering from trauma and are just generally hysterical nitwits unprepared to confront adulthood and reality. ("Quote by Janet Bloomfield")
- Society doesn't owe us anything. I don't need someone to pay for my female hygiene products to feel empowered. Can we work? Yes. Can we vote? Yes. Do we have the same rights and opportunities as men? Yes. What rights are they [feminists] fighting for? What are they specifically? What don't they have? ("Quotes by Hannah Bleau")
- Women's marches are a clever progressive divide and conquer strategy that not only turns women against men, but also turns women against each other in the guise of

peace and solidarity. It is a brilliant tactic to employ media propaganda to make privileged women feel oppressed and then program them to think that vulgarity, exhibitionism and emasculation is empowering (“Quote by Dawn Perlmutter”).

From the quotes above, we can feel the surge of an anti-feminist movement. This research supports neither the conventional feminism, nor anti-feminism. Naturally, men will stand against women, as feminism has turned men into enemies. Such battle between sexes can never bring any welfare to human civilization. So, it is high time we should change our attitude towards gender-related issues. Since Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg focused on the issues from different points of view, careful study of their plays can work as one of the possible guidelines in this journey of change.

12. Conclusion

A person's journey towards perfection starts when s/he becomes humble enough to think about her/his own mistakes. The conventional Women's Rights Movements lack this quality. It never speaks or even thinks of woman's flaws; rather it is always busy to teach men proper etiquette and manners towards women. It never says anything about self-correction. The typical movements show men as competitors, not as companions. It also considers family to be an obstacle race, not to be a relay race. A movement bearing such negative attitude towards everything can never be suitable for human civilization. So, this study suggests changes in typical Women's Rights Movements. Let the movements think about the scope of changes, but this study tries to show some loopholes, in man-woman relationship, reviewing some plays by Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, that we should try to fill up through cooperation between men and women. Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg contributed a lot to the modern theatre as well as modern thoughts. Their works deserve proper study, as many new dimensions can be added and latent meanings can be unfolded by this. The present study has tried to something like that.

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