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## A DISCOURSE ON HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN 'A DOLL'S HOUSE'

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### Abstract

This paper makes an attempt to analyse the socio-psychological aspects of human relationships that unravel in the play. Man-woman relationships between Rank and Nora, Christine and Krogstad sound compatible though socially challenged because socio-cultural conventions of the institution called marriage have not yet affected these relationships. What constitutes the relationships between Nora and Rank, Christine and Krogstad are natural instincts of man-woman love and values like mutual trust, respect, empathy. The discussion here is not limited only to man-woman relationships but also to human relationships at large. Human relationships of Nora with Christine and nurse Anne are based on values like love for fellow beings, empathy, kindness and mutual respect. Nora stands empathetic to even Krogstad. Nora leaving home while Christine yearning for a home to live in suggests need for better configurations in the existing system of marriage and family rather than abandoning the institution called marriage fully. The paper tries to show how the human relationships of Tovarld based on his snobbishness stand in contrast with those of others in the play. Thus, the paper intends to change the focal points of play to Chirstine, Rank, Krogstad and tries to understand what makes up the play from new perspective.

Keywords: human relationships, socio-psychological aspects, love, mutual trust, mutual respect, empathy.

### Introduction

The play has been seen by many scholars in feminist orientation though the author doesn't claim it so openly. One cannot deny the strong feminist sensibilities in it. 'A Doll's House is a representative feminist play. It deals primarily with the desire of a woman to establish her identity and dignity in the society governed by men. The play portrays the disillusionment of a wife about how she has been dominated and how her basic right-her right to be someone-has ruthlessly been destroyed in the name of love by her husband'(Bhat). Some scholars have attempted to explore human relationships as the major concern of the play. 'A Doll's House" is the

ideal of human relationship based on mutual partnership, mutual responsibility, faith and confidence. It declares that a relationship like a marriage is false if not based on love. Thus, the play is about freedom and the urge of every person to discover his or her true self'(Jha). However, above studies revolve round only the marital relationship of Nora and Tovarld. The present paper tries to explore perceptions of human relationships by Christine, Nora and Rank as result of maturity attained through certain predicaments and trauma of their lives. Psychoanalysis of Dr. Rank is also tried here.

**Discourse on Human Relationships in the Play**

A Doll's House is a play dealing with human relationships. Seen from another perspective, the play unravels human relationships as a major theme. Dr Rank who knows that he is about to die in few days has made an attempt to smother his talk on his illness before Tovarld because of his repulsion towards such matter, does share his fear of approaching death before Nora. He shares it with Nora because she has an empathy to hear it. At this fag end of his life, he does want to leave some footprints behind. The fact that he has remained unmarried might be haunting him. He suffers from loneliness. He is haunted by loneliness specially at such a painful moment of his diseased life. Perhaps it has, now, dawned on Dr Rank that he needs to find essence of life in enduring human relationships. Therefore, he wants to fill the void of his life with a meaningful relationship. However, he does know that it is not easy to have one at this moment of his life. Caught in dilemma and psychological chaos as a result of loneliness, fear of death, he does express his love for Nora.

Relationship does not just mean living together sharing a common house and being dependent on each other financially. Here are other sort of relationships between Nora and Doctor Rank, Christine Linde and Krogstad. Emotional and psychological compatibility that Nora and Christine show towards Rank and Krogstad respectively is the result of their maturity about human life. Rank needs a kind of warmth in his human relationships which is supplied by Nora. Doctor Rank who is badly seeking meaningful relationship with Nora finds himself much too uncomfortable when he thinks Christine Linde is going to occupy the space given by Nora to himself. Even Christian Linde also feels the same about Rank. Both Rank and Christine Linde are badly searching for someone who is trustworthy and deserving for a relationship. Having been a widow for three years, left neither any income nor atleast a child behind to live with by the husband, Christine Linde openly states it before Nora that one needs somebody to live for, work for. "No indeed. I only feel my life unspeakably empty. No one to live for anymore. That is why I could not stand the life in my little backwater any longer". (20)

She also states it to Krogstad. "But now I am quite alone in the world- my life is so dreadfully empty and I feel so forsaken. There is not the least pleasure in working for one's self. Nils, Give me some one and something to work for."(79)

The doubts naturally lurk in Krogstad's mind whether it is really the selfish ends of Christine what drives her to accept Krogstad whom she had rejected once in favour of better chances. The fact is that she has become a new woman with all that she has undergone in life. Her rejection of Krogstad in past was not for her selfishness either but for the survival of her poverty-ridden mother and dependent brothers. The following words of Christine are noticeable. "I want to be a mother to someone, and your children need a mother. We two need each other."(79). She wants someone to live and care for. It's not selfishness of hers that drives her to accept Krogstad. But, she wants to find meaning with her longstanding capacity to earn a livelihood by living for someone. Dr.Rank is also in similar sort of search for meaning for his existence. As he is sure of his imminent death he atleast wants to prove that he is living for someone. "And not be able to leave behind one the slightest token of one's gratitude, scarcely even a fleeting regret- nothing but an empty place which the first comer can fill as well as any other".(62) May be it is a psychological crisis more severe than that of Christine. Perhaps the love of Rank is a form of 'sublimation whereby (his fear of death) any repressed matter is promoted into something grander or noble'(93,Barry). Thus, it maybe an escape mechanism from harsh reality. Therefore, he is unable to continue his longstanding implicit flirting with Nora any longer. Now when Nora says 'Tovarld Would never for a moment hesitate to give his life for me', Rank does say "Nora, do you think he's the only one who would gladly give his life for your sake? (62)..... I was determined you should know it before I went away....You can trust me as you would trust no one else."Though his intents can be sensed by Nora in implicit level, he doesn't want to stop until he makes his mind clear by explicitly telling her (managing all interruptions of servants and Tovarld in the study room) that he loves her. Consoled by Nora that Tovarld can't do

without him (talking about Rank's imminent death), Rank suddenly says, "yes but you?".

Nora: "I'm always tremendously pleased when you come."(64)

Rank: "It is just that, that put me on the wrong track. You are a riddle to me. I have often thought that you would almost as soon be in my company as in Helmer's"(64)

See the urgency in Rank's intense reply to Nora in the above words. Psychoanalysis of Rank's conditions suggests that perhaps he is passing the stage of 'repression which is the forgetting or ignoring the unresolved conflicts, traumatic past or present events so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious' (Barry,93).

It is Rank's wish to demonstrate that he was in love with Nora and was living for her. It may not be fully physical desire that Rank is entertaining, rather it is his wish to live atleast as sweet memory in somebody after his death. All said and done, maturity of a man who knows futility of human materialist accomplishments makes him spread love for others. It may have gone a bit astray in case of Rank as a result of his strange personal predicaments.

When Tovarld is expected to own the mistake of Nora, his response as a husband is "But no man can be expected to sacrifice his honour, even for the person he loves."Over the course of the play we learn Nora sacrificed her own father, her education, and, by forging the signature, her good name for Torvald. The fact that he is unwilling to do the same for her reveals a significant imbalance in their relationship. But despite of all the ill-reputation of Krogstad in the eyes of the society, Christine does know him well and accept him unconditionally. "I have faith in your real character- I can do anything together with you".(79) What the reader finds in Nora and Christine is love for others. Love for others is one thing which makes one's life noble. One is reminded of the words from Tolstoy's story What Men Live By "I have learned that men live not by selfishness, but by love.....( ) .....All men live not by

what they may intend for their own well-being, but by the love that dwells in others."

The discussion is not limited to only man-woman relationships. The kind of intimacy Nora has developed with the nurse Anne speaks volumes of it. Nora puts her arms round nurse Anne's neck while expressing her gratitude for being mother to a mother less child like her in past. "You were a good mother to me when I was little"(48). Nora's way of conducting herself never makes Christine feel otherized/inferior. Christine's sincere response for Nora's as well as Krogstad's plights look natural. Even Krogstad's manners sound genuine. Tovarld's decision of firing Krogstad from his job does not arise out of his concern for Christine's plight but because of his rigid class/ superiority consciousness which cannot tolerate subordinate Krogstad's casual friendliness. Close examination of Nora's response to the plight of her school mate Christine and that of Tovarld to the plight of his schoolmate Krogstad reveals the difference in the ethos of their human relationships. Informed by Tovarld that Krogstad forged someone's name, Nora replies, "Isn't it possible that he was driven to do it by necessity?"(44) Empathetic Nora could understand Krogstad better than his school mate and colleague Tovarld who is an utter snob not having any real life experiences. Human relationships of Nora and Christine with other fellow beings are based on values like love for fellow beings, empathy, kindness and mutual respect.

### Conclusion

The paper, through the analysis of the above relationships, finds out that Nora, Christine, Rank, Krogstad, even Anne do live, to a certain extent, by the love for fellow human beings. Though much of analysis here is focused on man-woman relationships, the discussion is about how human relationships in general unravel in the play. Nora leaving home while Christine yearning for a home to live in suggests need for better configurations in the existing system of marriage and family rather than abandoning the institution called marriage fully. Personal ego supported by deep-rooted gender and class consciousness of Tovarld has caused all the harm witnessed in his human relationships in the

play. Against the natural relationships of other characters, Torvald's relationships sound much hallow and contrived.

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