



## THE FARCICAL INCONGRUITY IN THE COMPROMISES ACCEPTED BY WOMEN TO MAINTAIN STABILITY IN SOCIETY: A *DOLL'S HOUSE* TO *THAPPAD*

DELONY MANUVEL

Research Scholar

K.R. Mangalam University, Haryana



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### Abstract

The compromises forced on women in subjugating and compelling them to sacrifice to please their male counterparts is sheer injustice. Simon de Beauvoir says in her book *The Second Sex* that one is not born a woman but rather becomes one. More than the biological or psychological facts it is the civilization that produces and determines the characteristics of a woman. The injustice, discrimination and inequality suffered by women is the result of the compromises that she is attuned to effectuate without question. This paper points out the necessity to curtail the pointless compromises made by the women and concessions enjoyed by the men without any acknowledgement. Two characters, one from Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and another from the Movie *Thappad* are presented to reveal the trauma associated with the compromises that are always relegated. Both the protagonists successfully fight the male dominated society to regain their self- esteem by not willing to compromise. Women should consciously put an end to the habit of settling for the average and should learn to put across their ideas and perspectives with confidence. Never settle for what is below your standard because of your gender.

The word compromise means the expedient acceptance of standards that are lower than is desirable. When a person is forced to settle for what is below their standard it is not a fair deal. It is a false assumption that compromises are fair and resolves problems. But the fact is that compromises in relationships usually resolves the problem of either one or the other but not of both the parties. Cooperation and compromise are two different things and often in a woman's case the society makes her believe that the compromises that she makes are part of cooperating. In cooperation the effort and sacrifice made are not one sided whereas in compromise it is taking advantage of one party. It is incongruous when in a relationship all that a woman does is surrender in the name of

compromise. This paper intends to unravel the incongruity in the compromises made by women and how and why society promotes this discriminatory outlook. These compromises play a huge role in the deep rooted one-sided patriarchal system of marriage based on gender inequality. The baseline of the argument proposed here is that there should not be any pressure on woman to continue in a marriage where there is no possibility of equality, dignity and respect. Women should be aware of the patriarchal forces across centuries that pressurize them to compromise pushing their own health, mental peace, aspirations and feelings aside. The compromises forced upon women in the name of culture and family traditions have come between their projected image and inner

happiness. It also promotes their image as less confident and unable to advocate their perspectives.

It can be seen that when it comes to issues related to a woman compromise and social intelligence are deliberately being mistaken. The society constantly praises the compromises made by women to maintain the status quo. It conveniently ignores the resentment associated with compromises that erodes the relationships and crumbles the self-esteem of the woman involved. A decision that arises from the need to compromise often puts one's happiness at risk. Compromises are often made out of fear. The need to feel safe solicits compromises that are not fair but lays foundation to future humiliations. The reverberation of the fear instilled in women right from childhood eliminates their freedom. Society, have always been dominated by the male and it was the regularity of the silencing of women that perpetuated and conserved the predominance of men in all aspects of the social life. This kind of preposterous stability of the society sabotages the mental stability of the women.

The chasm between the rights and privileges written and proclaimed in the law books and the reality of the life of a woman remains as great as it was two centuries ago. It is so evident that women were and are assigned a subordinate position that has made them more vulnerable to abuse and less able to safeguard themselves from discrimination. Even in this twenty first century the feelings of women are trampled upon nonchalantly as if it is the norm. American writer Kate Millet indicates that the patriarchy is a systemic bias against women." Under patriarchy, the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture, in regard to the female, were also of male design. The image of woman, as we know it, is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the "otherness" of woman. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and reference to

which the female is "other" or alien" (46-47). The otherness and alienation imposed on women obviously pressurize them to struggle hard to gain identity. Relegating women to the kitchen keeping the men away from the kitchen was a strategy adopted and maintained as part of the power dynamics. The round – the- clock attendance in the kitchen endorsed the patriarchal dominance and subjugation of the women. The formation of the idea that women belong to the kitchen and so naturally deprived of any opportunity for opinion or power was bred and ingrained in the society.

This paper focuses on the situations portrayed in Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" and Anubhav Sinha's 2020 Indian film "Thappad". The trivialization of the emotional trauma of Nora the protagonist in "A dolls House " and Amritha in "Thappad" remains the same irrespective of the divide of centuries between their generations.

It was nearly one hundred and fifty years back Henrik Ibsen staged his play " A Doll's House" where the heroine slams the door on the biased attitude of the society. The play was banned several times not because it's content was vulgar but because it questioned inappropriate treatment of the women. The male dominated society of the nineteenth century couldn't appreciate the idea of a woman walking out of a marriage where she is not treated as an equal. Nora and Torvald Helmer the leading couple of the play are happily married and just about to enter a new phase of their life with Torvald's promotion as bank manager. The situation takes a huge turn when Nora reveals to her husband about a signature that she had forged to get money to save him. Torvald who earlier claimed to sacrifice anything for Nora's sake explodes in anger on learning of Nora's offence. Torvald quickly disowns Nora and not bother to take responsibility of her action, which was intended to save his life. All that he cared for was his reputation and the picture perfect family life that was displayed in the society. Nora was expected to play the role of the obedient wife who was expected to please the men in her life. Torvald's indifferent and accusing attitude towards Nora makes her realize the tangential nature of her marriage. Unfortunate situations test the strength

of a relationship. Nora stood by Torvald during his period of illness but he doesn't reciprocate that support or understanding. This play also reveals how actually the husband is the sheltered one in the marriage but the projected image is that of the protected wife. The suppression of the feelings and emotions of the women is cleverly disguised as the necessary "tact" for a successful marriage. Allowing someone else to take control of your life is actually lack of intelligence but it is unfortunate that it is considered the duty and responsibility of a wife. The most depressing fact is that this irrational behavior is exhibited proudly as part of being socially intelligent. The dignity of being a human being is supposed to be earned by women whereas it is the birthright bestowed on men. Towards the end of the play Nora voices the sentiment of women across the globe when she says: "I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are- or, at all events, that I must try and become one." (51)

Maintaining instability for the sake of the unjustifiable and unearned stability of the men in the society is precariously followed without any dilution even in this century. The attitude towards women remains the same even in the twenty first century as it used to be in the Victorian era.

Nineteenth Century Nora of Henrik Ibsen or the ultra modern multitasking Amrita or Netra Jaisingh of Thappad, the fear of being singled out and labeled invariably still hangs in the air. The irony lies in the fact that still a movie like Thappad is relevant. It is a contradiction and vulnerability of women exposed at its peak to admit the fact that even today we need such movies termed as "a slap on the face of patriarchy". A lady who doesn't tolerate a slap from her husband is categorically accused of exaggerating a minor error. The family and relatives in their keenness to safeguard the stability of the marriage convince the woman to get over it. The trivialization of such insults is the foundation of dismissing rape as "boys will be boys" comments. What hurts more is the society's inclination to alienate the victim. Amritha the leading character in the movie "Thappad" recounts how on the day when her husband slapped her nobody stood by her side. It is a depressing truth

that even when you are wronged just because you are a woman the people surrounding you will have the audacity to lecture you. A woman's marital status and conduct certificate from her in-laws are appraised more valuable than her self-respect and dignity. When a woman stands up for herself and voices her concerns the society belittles it as mere ranting. Standing up for oneself and what is right is actually part of social intelligence. Conveniently the society shrouds the subjugation with adornments such as considerate, sensitive, polite and understanding. The scope for normalizing violence and atrocities against women takes root from this kind of clever camouflaging.

In an interview with senior journalist Barkha Dutt, the leading actress of the film Taapsee Pannu said "All the time. Everywhere I get to see the sacrifice of women being normalized. I will rarely have examples for those who will not do this or see that they have an equal right in marriage." The actress also refers to a comment that she came across recently which states that in marriage a couple becomes one but not equals. The sacrifices women make regarding their studies, career, health, dignity and self-esteem is ignored by the society. All through her childhood and teenage years a girl dreams of a successful career just like the boys of her age. The society stereotypes women's dreams as being a good homemaker or good mother for its benefit. The male dominated society's alienating the female voices that dissent carry on through generations consistently. According to playwright Marco Calvani "gender equality still stands among the biggest human rights battles yet to be fought". Calvani refers to a custom in Scandinavian society wherein invitations contained a postscript: "Please do not talk about "A Doll's House." In the 2020 movie "Thappad" this same feeling is echoed by brushing off the husband's slapping the wife as 'just a slap'. The convenient feigning of unawareness of the trauma a woman undergoes is the major foundation of the society for ages. Society has conditioned women to be submissive and yielding enough to make adjustments and compromises to assure the stability of the marriage.

The ridiculous nature of the compromises expected of a woman reminds one of the words of Albert Camus: "I am well aware that one can't get along without dominating or being served. Every man needs slaves as he needs fresh air. Commanding is breathing- you agree with me? And even the most destitute manage to breathe. The lowest man in the social scale still has his wife or his child. If he's unmarried, a dog. The essential thing, after all, is being able to get angry with someone who has no right to answer back." These lines clearly prove how marriage and family system reduces women to a non- entity by encouraging subjugation.

Social Intelligence is the kernel of human relationships. Social Intelligence is the sum of an individual's awareness of the society and of himself. In 1920 Edward Thorndike defined social intelligence as the "ability to understand and manage men and women and boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations". The muddle arises when the ability to understand and respond accordingly is mistaken for compromise. Purposely weakening your grip when you know you are right to maintain peace or conserve the ego of the other party is not wisdom. To liberate women from the preferential and unbalanced compromises they undergo one has to have the courage to say like Nora "Let us sit down and discuss" and like Amrita one should say "just a slap but he can't hit me". The more consciously a woman feels that she is a human being just like a man, the more sharply she understands the politics of the subjugating compromises that she is conditioned to make. The compromises made by women actually compromises their individuality and self-esteem. To escape the aftereffects of the tutelage of the male centered family and society it takes time and a lot of effort from the part of a woman. It is an excruciating process against which the society makes every attempt to demoralize, demonize and alienate the women. A woman's self-respect takes a nosedive when she is ready to compromise, be it her ideas of family life or her aspirations regarding her career. Compromises erode the passion and life out of one's self. It is evident that women have to make a conscious choice so that not they fall into

the pit of compromises dug by the society to make them feel less worthy. Loyalty is not synonymous to slavery and one should not allow what is unacceptable to become acceptable in the name of loyalty. Societal perception regarding the sacrifice and compromise expected from women has to change. For the change in perception men have to shed their urge to control and dominate. Both men and women have to break away from the traditional mold of their upbringing and move ahead without fear of societal alienation and retribution.

Silence is considered approval so women have to raise their voice against this kind of compromises expected and squeezed out of them. It is the fear of offending the men in their life that forces women to compromise silently. But it is high time that each woman understood that for the greater good of the society and the future generations and for themselves demonstration of their feelings honestly is the best. Bring it up.

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