



HENRIK IBSEN'S *A DOLL'S HOUSE* AND R.K. NARAYAN'S *DARK ROOM* – AN APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

R.K.Narayan, the Indo-Anglican writer, had chosen limited arena for his literary empire. His main concern was about domestic nuisances that demanded keen observation and critical appreciation. His reaction to the surroundings have become the topic for his literary creations. Social consciousness was not his main criterion for description. His '*Dark Room*' though is not an exception, has revealed the author's response to the condition of women in Indian society. Narayan is never didactic in his tone. So he never tries to find fault with male chauvinism which is predominantly observed in the novel. He only brings in the feelings of middle class women of his time. The cry for freedom from the part of women has started long before and has gained momentum during his times. The concept of women liberty is of main concern in Ibsen's '*A Doll's House*'. Though these two works belong to different times, *A Doll's House* written in 1867, *Dark Room* in 1938, they do sing the same lyric of freedom of women. The treatment of the subject is different but the concept of financial liberty for women reverberates in both the works. This is a humble attempt to extract this hidden concept in the given works.

Key Words: Chauvinism Arthanaareeswara Agnathavasa. Emancipation.

INTRODUCTION

An author is a representative of his times. Even a romantic writer creates his own world only on the basis of his surroundings. R.K. Narayan is no exception to this phenomena. His Malgudi, though is an imaginary town, the inmates are the normal residents with usual mind set. The life depicted in his novels is the life of majority of the people of his times. Irony is the weapon with which he swayed the realities of the life. He did not prefer to philosophize the morals or rally against the atrocities rampant in the society. This very fact shouldn't be taken as an entity to measure his responsibility towards society. Artful presentation of the facts would really touch the hearts of readers, thereby would gain the attention from them. Narayan adopted this very technique in presenting the life of Savithri, the protagonist in the present novel '*Dark Room*'.

R.K.Narayan, being an Indian, takes the symbols which are predominant in Indian life-style. '*Dark Room*' is a place where unwanted junk is stored. The protagonist Savithri very often throws herself in the room and takes refuge there. She never tries to come out of the emotional state, which start dominating her original self and in a way spoiled her peace of mind. She instead enjoys sulking in the dark room. This is her regular way for heeling her pain of servitude. Ramani, the autocratic husband of Savithri is an archetypal of male chauvinism. He is a manager in an insurance company earning handsome enough income. He prefers to lead a comfortable life undisbursed by domestic compressions. He takes his wife to a doll that can dance to his tune. He never tries to regard her wishes or even try to think from her perspective. He simply considers her a sole to satisfy his wants. He

ignores to acknowledge that she is a wife, sharing equal portion of life.

Hindu epics have given great reverence to womanhood. There is a reference of "Ardhanariswara" highlighting the fact that women are ought to be given half the portion of life of a man (body and soul). Motherhood is another boon bestowed on the women which makes her a supreme creation of the God. Ramani fails to appreciate both the facets of Savithri. When he plans to take her to the movie, he rejects Savithri's plea to take children along with them. He does not try to understand her feelings and could not welcome her genuine craving as a mother. When he takes her to the movie, he feels proud for having a beautiful wife like her. This is to show the world that he had a pride possession. By this we can apprehend how he valued her. He did not even consider her as a human being but as a show piece which could be decorated and enjoyed for its beauty's sake. Savithri is one of his possessions like his four wheeler or managerial post in his office, that bestow him due respect in the society. She is ought to make herself ready to his demands. Even love making is his own choice, he is not considerate about her concern in the experience.

Savithri could bear all these atrocities by taking retreat in the dark room. The thought of rebellion is intimidated under the duties of a wife and a mother. Every time Ramani dictates her, she feels like retarding to him in equal voice, but takes back realizing that her voice couldn't dominate his, and he wouldn't show any concern to her opinions. She develops a pessimistic attitude towards him. A reluctant and indifferent attitude that kills her love towards him. In spite of this wretched state of affairs she stays in his house only because he provides social and financial security to her and children. She being a dependent woman does not venture to cross the threshold of the traditions and the house.

Savithri who has been trying to make this slavery as her destined fate, could no more consent to this when she comes to know that Ramani has gone to the extent of sharing her portion with a woman like

Shanta Bai, a personal secretary of Ramani. He chooses Shanta Bai as his next option after Savithri. He, who doesn't want to spoil his happiness with the burdens of the family, easily shifts his attention towards Shanta Bai. Shanta Bai is a free woman, unlike Savithri, who is tied on all sides by the bondages of attachment. She prefers to lead her life in the way she fancies. She doesn't mind in abandoning her family for the sake of her sovereignty. Ramani who could not accept this concept of freedom in Savithri readily heeds to the life style of Shanta Bai because he could enjoy the life without any constraints. Savithri unable to tolerate the situation moves away from the family for a short span of time. Her love for her children drags her back into the same house, making her a permanent resident of dark room. One significant line of thought which a reader has to observe is her brave step towards freedom. When she leaves the house, she rejects to take with her all the property that belonged to a man viz., the ornaments gifted by Ramani and even by her own father during her marriage. This obviously blows a clarion call for women's liberation which is resounded in the voice of Savithri.

"Things? I don't possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's or her son's. So take these too ...". She removed her diamond earrings, the diamond studs on her nose, her necklace, gold bangles and rings, and threw them at him. '

Savithri is denied of her genuine right towards her children. She could readily give up the prerogative and move away from the house feeling that she couldn't bear herself to be indebted to Ramani in any way.

Now, come on, children, get up! Let us get out'. She tried to go near the children. He barred her way. Don't touch them or talk to them. Go yourself, if you want. They are my children'. They are yours, absolutely. You paid the midwife and the nurse. You pay for

their clothes and teachers. You are right. Didn't I say that a woman owns nothing? She broke down, staring at their fidgeting forms on the beds. 'What will they do without me?'

'A Doll's House' by Ibsen is also spun with the same concept in a different way. Nora is the wife of Helmer, a bank manager. She is a devoted wife and a mother. She loves Helmer so ardently that she envisages his world to be hers. She could not think anything beyond this realm. Helmer also loves his wife and cajoles her with different pet names. She feels these premises of her house hold to be her own domain. She tries to satisfy Helmer in every possible way. Her love towards him is so earnest that she tempts to resort for unlawful way of forging her father's signature to get a loan for Helmer's treatment. She is scared of Krogstad's threatening not because of the fear of her guilty being exposed but because Helmer would disquiet a lot about it, that would destroy his peace of mind. She instead of thinking of her own safety thinks from his side and tries to make his life comfortable. This indicates that she had absolutely ignored her own self trying to find herself in him. She only could imagine herself as a particle gyrating in an orbit created by him, being the nucleus. She is absolutely alone in her own sphere. She doesn't have identity and could not perceive her character conspicuously. She becomes a parasite always depending on his emotions. Even for a fancy dress competition, she expects his assistance indicating that she doesn't have the individuality to stand up to the situation. She always tries to think from his point of view which makes her restless for even a small disruption that would spoil the domestic compatibility between them.

Nora's faith on Helmer gets shattered when he abuses her of guilt. The feeling that haunted Nora is Helmer's pathetic plight which made him miserable and a reliant on her. She believed that Helmer would feel dejected if he were to know that he was the reason for such abject condition in which Nora was thrown. This is an example of passionate devotion of hers towards Helmer. She couldn't expect that Helmer altogether would try to escape from the situation and make her stand alone.

Helmer had his own empire wherein Nora is only one of the subjects. He had other prior considerations which made Nora only a second option. Nora was foolish to think that Helmer valued her more than everything in this world. When she comes to know that Helmer had other priorities, she comes to realize the price of her sacrifice. She couldn't bear to mean it a sacrifice because she was innocent of this loss. She could then realize what actually she lost in her life, becomes conscious that hers was 'A Doll's House'. Helmer had merely considered her a doll and had lit a pyre to her individuality and freedom in the guise of love.

Nora. You have always been so kind to me. But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been.

Nora had to live with Helmer with feeling of gratitude as if she had really committed a crime. It is not Helmer who really excused her but Krogstad's act of kindness which made her life tolerable with Helmer which she is not at any rate ready to accept. The two protagonists can be put to a comparison. Savithri abandons her house and the jewels given by her husband and even by her father to show her aversion towards the security given by a male to a female as a perfunctory of male domination, which they do as a charity to women and expect her obedience in all cases. Nora is more or less thrown in the same situations. Though the conditions are different, she also stands at the same cross roads like Savithri waiting for the mercy of Helmer. Entire life of hers appears to be false and meaningless when she finds that she had no other rescue than Helmer. Her own world appears strange for her as she never ventured to travel for herself. Even her father had never tried to teach her to walk on her own, rather made her to follow him blindly. This has made her absolutely hopeless about her destiny, always depending on someone like her father or Helmer. Both of them have snatched her freedom in the name of love.

Nora. I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which--I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman--just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

She deliberately forgoes her right to bring up her children. She feels that she is not a right tutor for them because she herself had not proper education in the matters of self-reliance and freedom. She had to make herself fit to hold the responsibility, only then she can think of making the way for the children in her life.

Nora. Indeed, you were perfectly right. I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now.

Both Helmer and Ramani are happy in their domains despite their mates' despondency towards their lives. Ramani commands Savithri to leave the children and challenges to take care of them even without her. Helmer also prevents Nora from bringing up the children as he feels he could take care of them better than her. This confidence is lacking in both Nora and Savithri. They simply walk out when they are commanded to sacrifice their due right of motherhood. Both of them prefer to abandon their legitimate right.

Nora. It is no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will take with me what belongs to myself. I will take nothing from you, either now or later.

Savithri being an Indian women values Indian sentiments and can understand the significance of motherhood. So she readily sacrifices her rights as a women to fulfill the duties of a mother. The Agnathavasa of hers, of course, does not teach her a lot about her life but makes her to understand that there is no way left for her than to compromise. Nora being western in temperament could gauge her situation better than Savithri, moves away, giving up her rights as a mother, just to understand and enjoy her rights as a women, wherein she can educate herself to live on her own, potent enough to manage her life.

Nora. Indeed, you were perfectly right. I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now.

Thus Savithri and Nora stand as pioneers of women's liberation in their own way. East or west women is women, unless she puts a step forward for her advancement nobody helps her in emancipation. Ibsen and Narayan tried to impress this in their own way, leaving the conclusion in the hands of the reader. The ending doesn't appear an ending but a beginning for a different itinerary. Narayan though is not a feminist writer or had any empathy towards this ideal had indirectly horded the attention of the readers towards this concept. An observant reader is ought to perceive the subtle aspects which are undercurrent in the writings of the authors. This would help the authors to gain relevance with the contemporary writers, who address such issues in their works. A research directed to bring in such nuances would enhance the scope of the works and their writers.

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