



Language, a Crucial Weapon of Patriarchy to Subjugate Women: Referencing from Ibsen's 'A Doll's House'

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the concept of 'subjugation of women in patriarchal society' through the lense of 'Feminist Literary Theory' and 'Language Politics', referencing with Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House". The main hypothesis of this paper is to demonstrate: how women's identity use to be violated and constructed by patriarchy, how women are not treated as societal capital but are commodified and how their human psyche is being constructed by male dominated society. Margaret Fuller's concept of 'Androgyny', Virginia Woolf's notion of 'women centric education', Simone De Beauvoir's concept of 'second sex', Elaine Showalter's concept of 'Gynocriticism' are being depicted here in this paper to evaluate Ibsen's strong feminist character Nora, protagonist of 'A Doll's House'. But the nuclear task of this paper is to distinguish how Language plays a crucial role to make women as 'second sex' or inferior sex to some extent. Through the Metamorphosis of Nora's character we will come to Know how she will break the chained convention of patriarchal society by dejecting her husband Mr. Helmer through the powerful language of 'silence'.*

Keywords: *Language Politics, Identity Politics, Androgyny, Second Sex, Human Psyche.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As this paper is dealing with Language politics that is a weapon for subjugating Women in society, we will try to dig out what is language at first. According to structuralism, language is sign which can be divided into two parts- signifier and signified. Signifier is the 'word or sound' which generates meaning, and the meaning is signified. There is no concrete relation between signifier and signified. For example the word 'CAT' means a small, domestic and playful animal with four legs ,one tail etc. But if we keenly observe it that between the word 'CAT' and it's meaning has no real connection but the connection is arbitrary. To simplify we can say that the meaning is socially constructed. We acquire the relation trough long use in society. Thus the word 'Woman' also generates a certain definition or meaning in our mind, we often consider women as inferior and weak but this mindset is also being constructed by society, cause language is dominant in constructing human mindset or psyche.



To make my argument more concrete, we will depict John Locke's philosophy of 'Tabula-Rasa' which means mind is a 'blank slate', a child born with a blank mind and gradually when s/he grows up, his/her mind starts being constructed through the gradual experience getting from family, environment and society. And dominantly language plays the crucial role for the gradual experiences and encounters, cause whatever we learn from our childhood, we learn through certain method of languages.

So, as human psyche or mindset is more or less socially constructed and the society we live in is male dominated patriarchal society, we can say that our mindset is constructed by the notions norms and regulations of patriarchal society.

Moving forward to Simone De Beauvoir, in her seminal work 'The Second Sex' she said that "One is not born a woman becomes one". Which means that a female child becomes a woman through her upbringing in male-dominated society and thus begins to believe herself biologically inferior to men, cause patriarchal norms and restrictions suggest so.

But the reality is, 'sex' is biological while gender is socially constructed or matter of 'becoming' in society. Patriarchy makes use of sexual difference so as to maintain inequality between men and women. But De Beauvoir said that women can take charge of their own choice. Instead of being the negative, inferior other or second sex, they can become subject in their own right. Like Ibsen's rebel female character Nora proved herself as equal by choosing her own choice, rejecting patriarchy's shelter.

To justify my argument which is women are not inferior or weak but equal with men in society, we will mention the concept of 'Androgyny' propounded by Margaret Fuller, it says - "There cannot be a completely 'masculine male' just as there is no truly 'feminine female' each contains a bit of the other." Both the male or female are equal, no one is more masculine not more feminine, no one is more stronger or weaker, but equal.

As language constructs human psyche or mindset, it also influences over our unconscious mind which constructs our behaviour and nature. According to feminist critic Juliet Mitchell, women's identity is determined by the structures she inhabits. She argues that laws of society and life are built into the unconscious, or rather that 'the unconscious mind is the way we acquire these laws.' She also argues that women is always defined as a lack thus they always become anxious about their lack. Their identity is born in state of anxiety and absence. While men are self determining and autonomous, they are never so. They became other of the men, another with a lack. And this sense of lack – unconsciously to consider themselves as a weak or fragile natured being.

Luce Irigaray's work 'Speculum of the other woman' and 'This Sex Which Is Not One's propose that women always lack a subjectivity in Western discourses because she constructed always as 'the other of the men', never as free subject with her own identity.

For language becomes a weapon of patriarchy, Virginia Woolf in her work 'A Room of One's Own' argued that patriarchal education system and reading practices prevent women readers from reading as women. They are constantly trained to read from the men's point of view. The language available to women is patriarchal and inherently sexist. But women author, having no other language at her command is forced to use this sexist language, a language that does



not capture the women's experience. To solve this problem Elaine Showalter talked about 'Gynocriticism' where they called for a different literary genre, criticism and world only related to women, their body and their repressed agony which will create their own language and literary sphere.

Coming into the textual analysis of 'A Doll's House', through the Metamorphosis of Nora from a childish and frivolous wife to a matured and sensitive woman, we come to know about the hypocrisy of men's love towards wife, the significant role of language which strengthens the plot, suffering of Nora and at last her transformation which breaks the chain of patriarchy. At the beginning of the play, we have witnessed Nora in a very jovial and playful mood, 'humming a tune and in high spirit', who is being addressed as 'my little lark', 'my little squirrel' by her husband. This is how Helmer, Nora's husband treats her lovingly. But keenly observing the politics behind using these compliments is nothing but a trick to subjugate her. 'Little lark' and 'Little squirrel', these symbolize that women are always considered as fragile and small domesticated animals or dolls like a person's property. Helmer regards himself as the master of her. During the play Helmer attempts to direct her into his conception of a perfect wife. He expects her to dance around and sing all day long. He uses some nicknames to teach her his idea of necessary moral lessons- "A song bird must always have a clean break to chirp with...no false notes!"

Helmer's constant referral to Nora as his 'little one' or 'little girl' reflects the atmosphere of subordination more appropriate to a father than a husband. His names for her are often preceded by 'little' showing that he sees her as a child; he does not see her as his equal. He tears his wife down, rather than encouraging her to think of herself; he manipulates her thought process to believe that she is coming to terms with her needful nature. She declares that "Everything I think of seems so silly and insignificant" Helmer- "Does my little Nora acknowledge that at last?"

Every step of Nora's life was monitored by her husband, even she could not eat macaroons by her own wish. Mr. Helmer questioned her if she ate macaroons, she answered - "I should not think going against your wishes" this proves she also somehow accepted her husband's authority over her.

Nora was feeling the sense of bliss for having a perfect happy married life with husband and children and blessed with enough money to enjoy Christmas. She was fond of money, "It will be splendid to have heaps of 4 and not need to have any anxiety, won't it?" Though this sense of bliss didn't stay for long after her dreamy happy life being confronted with harsh reality. When Mr. Helmer was ill, Nora played a strong role for which she succeeded to save her husband. She was bound to do forgery just to save her love. Thought she earned money by hard work and nearly pay the loan completely. Nora could not share these things with her husband because she felt it could hurt Helmer's male ego which ultimately would harm their happy married life. She said - "And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly Independence to know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now,."



Even for Nora , earning money and paying the loan was a ‘manly thing’ to do, “...it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money, it was like being a man’. This proves that women also have the capacity to work , to be the breadwinner and to be independent individual. Nora was secretly proud of herself but could not express it to her husband, cause she knew that patriarchal would not appreciate her for replacing their place.

Though Nora and Helmer was a happy married couple but there was a big emotional gap between them. Nora could not feel the comfort to bloom herself completely to Helmer, though she could express herself a little bit in front of Dr. Rank. Even when she was the victim of Krogstad's blackmail, she could not seek her husband's support but became afraid of him. Through her violent ‘Tarantella’ dancing we came to know through what kind of intense mental traumatic suffering she is going. But still as a partner she could not have her husband’s support. At the end of play, Nora's world was shattered when Helmer accused her for Krogstad’s blackmail though she did everything only for saving his life. Little earlier of the final scene Helmer promised Nora that he would never let her be alone but hypocritically Helmer reacted the opposite when found himself in crisis. Ironically after being rescued when Krogstad’s sent back the documents ,he wanted Nora back but that was the ultimate situation when Nora took the brave and strong step not to come back to her husband but chose to deject him and let him be free –“ I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me. It is for that reason that I cannot remain with you any longer.”

She understood how she had been wronged, subjugated and controlled - “ I have been greatly wronged, Torvald – first by papa and then by you.” She found out the fakeness of her father and husband’s love for her, she understood how her individual identity was violated by them. - “;I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste.” She was being controlled as a doll by her father and husband also - “ He called me his doll – child ,and he played me just as I used to play with my dolls...you and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.” Nora understood the need for individual identity in life.

She came to realize that she was only merry not happy of her married life. She felt the craving to establish her own identity- “ 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.” She started consider herself as human being before being a wife or mother. She set Helmer free and snatched her freedom metaphorically –“I set you free from all your obligations”, she stepped forward towards a new journey to educate herself, to discover herself,to establish her own identity.

To conclude, let us reflect the ending of the drama while Nora left Helmer behind- “The sound of a door shutting is heard from below”. This scene has a great significance,it seems that Nora freed herself from the cage of patriarchy at the same time locked the patriarchy behind. The only thing remains there is ‘ silence' which is a powerful language, tells everything to Helmer and as well as readers that women are not inferior or weak but equal.



2. REFERENCES

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