



## Gender Equity and People's Conflicting Senses of Power: Analysis from Ibsen's "A Doll's House."

### Abstract

*This paper has attempted to carry out an Endeavour to find out a factual solution for the controversy, regarding gender that, power, domination etc., are not limited to people of anyone of the two genders. God has given both man and woman the privilege and ability to exercise their power. Power remains equally mixed up with man and woman. Henrik Ibsen (1 828-1906) ascended to the first ranks of European writers in the late nineteenth century. A pioneer of realism, he explores in his plays the essential alienation within the modern human condition. A Doll's House was not about female emancipation. What Ibsen meant was that the theme of this play was the need of every individual, whether man or woman, to find out the kind of person he or she really is. Mainly he focused on the contradictory attitude towards power and sexuality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Norway and more particularly the female desire for power as a consequence of this inequity. A careful reading of the plays of Ibsen clarifies that they are not about women's problem, they are rather about peoples conflicting sense of power, a problem of mankind in general". It was not Ibsen's desire to deal in his plays with so called problems. A short speech reflected his desire for individual liberty and self-fulfilment for all just for woman but for "mankind" in general. Ibsen rejected the gender approach to problems. He wanted us to look at humanity and human problem inclusively. He disapproved of looking at problems in exclusion or isolation. Ibsen also shows that, gender problem in his plays and in our society as well are man-made. The study finds that men and women are as complementary sources not opposing forces. Men and women are a combination. And this combination is the solution for all human problems. This is a qualitative study which is explorative in nature.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Power, Equity, Conflicting sense, Problem, Humanity, Combination.

### Introduction:

Gender, which is mixed up with sex, is purely a sociological term. Sex considers a biological difference between male and female, whereas gender is the effect of this socialization that is masculine and feminine. Gender discrimination is a belief which advocates such myths that, by nature male is superior, and the

female, inferior, and the one rules and the other is ruled. Men are endowed with power. To satisfy their masculine desire, they manipulate their power to control their opposites. They do this because of this false belief that males have more power than females. And on the basis of this assumption, gender roles are defined. Actually, nobody is a gender from the start. No boundary lines can be stay between genders. For Ibsen, women, like men has the same right. For establishing separate identity, Ibsen's aim was to see the world through human eyes. He considers woman as a human being before anything else. He dreamt a new world where women would be equal to men. Based on equity, transparency and love, their relationship will be established. Ibsen believes in the union of the two sexes. He does not believe in a system, where one group dominates over another.

Relevantly, Ibsen establishes the most important point that power is not gender-specific; it can be appropriated by anyone from either side of the gender. From Ibsen's plays, particularly "A Doll's House" it becomes clear that power in conjugal life inexorably swings to the female pole. Ibsen does not locate the root of the problem in man or woman alone, but also in the complex relationship of humans with social and economies forces. Ibsen considers, marriage is not only a sacred ties, not mere living together rather a man and woman should be considered as a perfect equal based on honesty and equity.

### **Problem Statement:**

Women constitute half of the world's total population. They are now-a-days, no longer confined within the four walls of a family. Like men, they are also taking part in all development affairs. But there is a common belief among the feminist that women are powerless. They are always victimized. And do not enjoy power as much as men. It is considered that males have more power than females. Actually Power is mostly economic and financial. Society is class divided. Power resides in wealth. And to hide and conceal the gaping difference in wealth and class, gender is highlighted and focused. To get this correct focus, we should appreciate Ibsen's rejection of gender difference. In the play A Doll's House we can see that Nora raised an oppressive relationship with a dominating father who subsequently hands her over to an oppressive relationship with a dominating husband. Same thing will be replaced by Nora's children as well. Many researchers have found that power is not gender-specific. It can be exercised by both male and female as well. Because nobody really a gender from the first. In this regard "Nari", a very relevant poem by Kazi Nazrul Islam has given the solution of the controversy.

*"Who undermines you, woman, as a hellish broil?*

*Answer back that the first sin was not the woman,*

*but Satan, the man.*

*Or, what is sin-what is Satan- is neither man, nor woman:*

*It is asexual: so it remains equally mixed up with both of them."*



*I am not even quite clear as to just what this women's rights movement really is. To me it has seemed a problem of mankind in general. And if you read my book 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".*

*Henrik Ibsen.*

The speech, delivered by Ibsen in the Norwegian Women's Right League movement was very much humanistic. Actually he was a humanist. Ibsen had stood steadfastly by humanistic issues. Women's problem seems a problem of mankind in general. I think there is a problem that is about the peoples conflicting sense of power. Ibsen's heroines like, Nora, Mrs. Alving, Hedda and Rosmersolm exercise super power. Norwegian Women Rights League held in 1888, as many of us already know Ibsen himself said, "I am not even quite clear as to what the women rights movement really is. To me, it has seemed a problem of mankind in general. And if you read my books carefully you will understand this" True enough, it is desirable to solve women problem along with all the others: but that is not the whole purpose, my task has been the description of humanity". If we read Ibsen's family plays, we have the idea that it is not about women's problem, and that these plays are about peoples conflicting sense of power "a problem of mankind in general"

#### **Rationale of the study:**

It is known to everyone that, of course men and women are different. These doesn't mean that, they are not as different as day and night ,earth and sky, life and death, therefore, society elaborates the distinction between the sexes. The biological difference between men and women are amplified by culture, for example, make up, clothing's hair style, accessories etc, can give a strong expression of gender. Similarly, different ways of exaggerating gender difference. Surely, there is importance of the biological difference. But the gender roles are ascribed to men and women not depending on the biological differences only.

Throughout whole world women are much ahead of the time. Women constitute half of the total population. Like before, they are not subservient to their husband. They are no longer confined within the four walls of their parents or husband's house. They have come out from the kitchens and are working hand in hand with men in all the development programs run by the government. Like men, they receive higher education and becoming pilots, Doctors engineers, teachers, administrations etc. They are also valuable and have already proved their worth by this time. Their contributions in economic sector are much. Now men have realised that, keeping half of the population remain idle at home, true development of the country is never possible.

Some empirical research shows that while equality between men and women exists in society, economy grows faster, poverty reduction strategies work effectively and it becomes easier to achieve sustainable development. Research on gender equity, therefore, has significant importance to the policy makers, social workers, even for the politicians, in the present national and international context. This paper, therefore, would be an effective endeavour to establish woman's right not as a woman but a human. Thus, this research will contribute much to development.

### **Research questions:**

Every research work starts with a set of research questions. My inter research process is accordingly guided by the following questions: Broader question:

(a) Is disparity between men and women a man-made problem?

The sub questions:

(b) Is power gender specific?

(c) How gender has developed over ages through exercise of power.

### **Research objectives:**

Ibsen rejected the gender approach to problems. He wanted us to look at humanity and human problems inclusively. He disapproved of looking at problem in exclusion or isolation. I think that the creation of the world whatever great and beneficial for human beings, are shared fifty by men and fifty percent women. Both men and women exercise their power. Ibsen considers him an activist for mankind. He never calls him feminist, and he is more a humanist. Ibsen was concerned about all human rights in general.

So, keeping in mind the above idea, the key objective of my study is to show, that the disparity between men and women is a problem of mankind in general, that it is man-made.

Additionally, the study also aims:

1. To identify that power is not gender specific.
2. To show how gender has developed over ages through exercise of power.
3. To recommend some suggestions to change ones outlook that we should advocate more for human rights than women's right.

### **Literature Review:**

Literature on gender equity and female power has been reviewed much over times are highly informative. Following are some reviews, related to my topic by which I can find out the gap. I have analysed the works of others researchers and tried to focus on their gaps to carry on further exploration.

Kajol (2015) had exposed female power in a number of partially or fully femme fatale characters. According to him, Ibsen's domestic plays namely *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Ghost* explores particularly the female desire for power as a consequence of the inequity remain two genders, rather the imbalance of power within the patriarchal institution of marriage. He considers that power, domination etc. are not limited to people of anyone of the two genders. Power remains equally mixed up with men and women.

Sheila Hancock (1993) got the idea from Ibsen's dramas about their individual and collective oppression. Male and female as well possess "an active and energetic mind and each seeks some portion of power to compensate for the freedom they can never possess because of their gender. She thinks that the message regarding three plays particularly is clear. Power oriented generative sexual relationship can only vitiate itself in its perpetuation of sterility, rather than fecundity: destruction, rather than creation.

R.v Sampson (1966) says a human being's relationship with others should be either on the basis of love or on the basis of power. According to Sampson one cannot develop in both (love, power) directions. Domination and subjection is one kind of power. If this kind of power prevails in an individual, all human relation will be end in smoke. Sampson goes on to contend that Freudian psychoanalysis is deficient in its understanding of power since Freud himself failed to apply any serious thought to the tremendous effects.

Mill (1991) Believes in the union of the two sexes. He thinks that, gender inequality gives birth deficiency. Mill perceives inequality as the main impediment to the furtherance of civilisation. According to Mill the subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human development. It can be replaced by perfect equality, where will be no power or privilege on the one side, or disability on the other.

Mitsuya Mori (1984) In "Ibsen's family drama," Mitsuya Mori places ideas about power. He admits male power. But In *Doll's House* power is transferred from husband to wife. Something happens in *Hedda Gabler* also. In the process of this transfer, power also slips out of the husband's hands and into the wife's. He added that both power and authority are completely on the side of women. In this regard about Nora's power Mitsuya Mori writes "Nora rejects Helmer's authority and she accepts her authority in the end".

Bertrand Russell ((1938) another philosopher, writes in his famous book "Power" where he shows female power and more about powerlessness of women. But in the chapter 2 titled, "leaders and followers" of the same book writes something quite compensating "A woman who enjoys power in the management of her house is likely to shrink or cannot enjoy the sorts of political power which a prime Minister enjoys. He also says that women also have their own areas of power and that a woman also enjoys power". Russell indicates that a woman is rarely a prime minister is because she consciously "Shrinks" from that sort of political power.

Judith Butler (1990) In “Gender Trouble” writes that nobody really is a gender from the start. She declares gender not to be something performed, but something “performative”. Judith says, When we say gender is performed we usually mean that we have taken on a role or we're acting in some way and that our acting or out role playing is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world. To say that gender is performative is a different because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects”

Naomi Wolf (1992) Though a feminist, composes a different voice among feminist. Her book, Fire on Fire, is full of claims about female power. In this regard the “introduction” of this book is very meaningful “Men punish the weak while women punish the strong”. This means that usually man exercise power over women who are weak by nature, while women exercise power over men who are strong enough. By this statement, it is clear that, female considered weak, also exercise power.

Chinweizu (1990) An African writer, written a book titled, Anatomy of female Power: A Masculinity Dissection of Matriarchy, Chinweizu, “shows how women dominate men and always dominate man. A paragraph from the second chapter, titled “Womb”, “Kitchen” and “Cradle” control centre of female power.

*“Every day 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. His bride exploits his nostalgia for his mother's set and manipulates him for his future wife's. Thus it is that mother, bride and control a man everyday of his life by playing on his changing needs for womb, kitchen and cradle”*(Anatomy of Female Power. 1990:17)

### **Research Gap:**

From the above reviews it is clear that, though their papers are highly informative, researchers are very much familiar to their thinking. There is a gap among them. Some admits male power and some female. None of these works have focused on both powers. I think power, domination etc, are not limited to people of any one of the two genders. Ibsen in his plays shows the in the vices in the clerical society, where surplus of money, wealth and time conspire to the corrupt a man spiritually. Actually power is mostly economic and financial. Society is class divided. Power resides in wealth. And to hide and conceal the gaping difference in wealth and class, gender is highlighted and focused. To get this correct focus, we should appreciate Ibsen's rejection of gender difference. And this is the idea, Ibsen believes regarding gender. Actually there is no difference between men and women except biological difference. And the problem of inequity remaining the two genders is a problem of humanity. This paper aims to highlight this particularly.

### **Conceptual / Theoretical framework:**

This study provides the background which guides the research. This study is not only based on an existing theory regarding gender. Gender discrimination is totally a myth advocating that by nature male is superior, and the female, inferior, and the one rules and the other ruled. In this belief, it is also considered that men

are endowed with power to control their opposite to satisfy their masculine desires. According to the gender role, males have more power than females. This is the existing theory regarding gender. “A Doll’s House” is about one thing and one thing only; power—the distribution of it: the getting and holding of it. Based on this theory, I have established my theory that power is not gender-specific. Power, domination is not limited to any one of the two genders.

Michal Foucault deserves attention in this context for his sensational idea about power. He places the idea that power is everywhere and comes from everywhere.

### Who has power? Foucault rules.

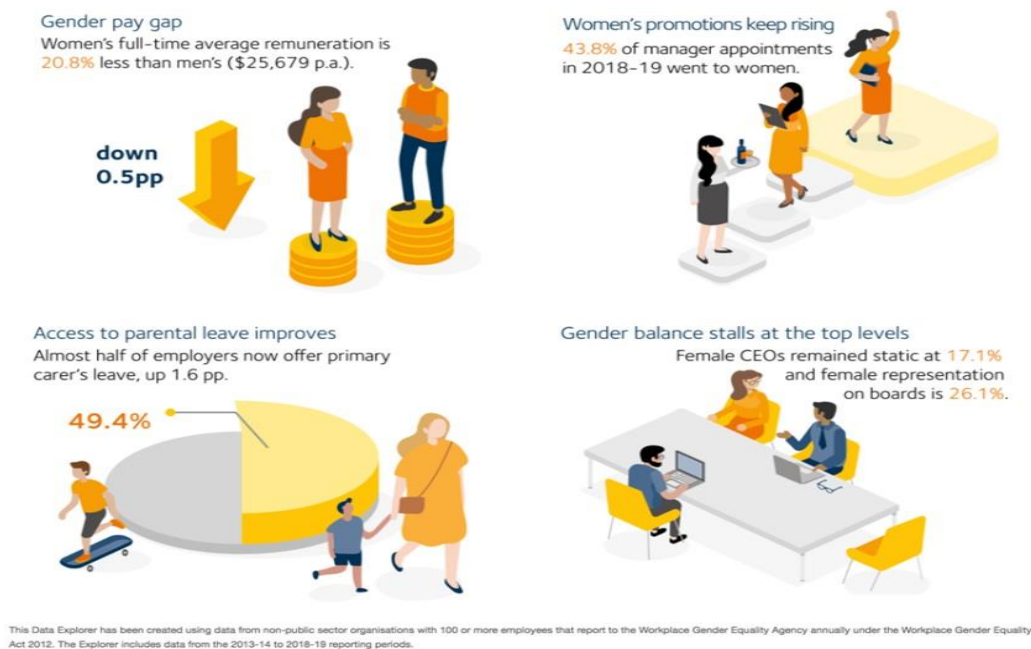


FIGURE -1 FOUCAULT’S POWER THEORY:

Foucault, in his power theory challenges the idea that, power is wielded by people or group over another, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere”.

So, in this sense, power should exercise neither by an individual nor by a group. Instead, it's a kind of “meta-power” or “regime of truth” that pervades society. Its aim is to constant flex negotiation. Foucault is gender neutral. He believes in the freedom of people. He is closer to our idea of female power because of his looking power in a comprehensive and close manner. For Foucault, power has a dual nature: In one side it limits possibilities for individual and creates one the other hand .Power is opposite to domination. Power does not support domination and subjection. Power allows the exercise of freedom. Where there is power relation, there is no possibilities of resistance at all. He does not support in a system of domination exerted by one group over another. He believes that, both husband and wife is the representative of a house. Men and women are considered as complementary sources not opposing forces.

## Figure-2 Law of Polarity.



Antithesis or the balancing of opposites is the law of nature-night with day, light with darkness, the sun with the moon and the male with the female. Man and the woman must balance with each other for their mutual fulfilment. However; a satisfactory adjustment can be achieved when men and women recognise essential “otherness” of each other. This human relationship has been formed as a theory that is “Law of Polarity” or the reconciliation of opposites for self-fulfilment.

### Research Methodology:

The paper mirrors a rigorous exploration in the area of gender equity and female power particularly by studying existing literature, information and data recorded in different sources. This study is qualitative in nature that includes primary and secondary sources to gather pertinent information. For the convenience of the reader, the textual analysis has been used also to accomplish this paper.

### Findings and Discussions :

Ibsen rejected the gender approach to problems. He wanted us to look at humanity and human problem inclusively. He disapproved of looking at problems in inclusion or isolation. Once the Norwegian Women's Right Movement invited Ibsen to know the role and the position of the women played by Ibsen through his plays. In reply to the warm reception accorded to him. He answered which made them Surprised. Ibsen said, " My task has been the description of humanity",

He said that "I am not a member of the women's Right Movement league: Whatever I have written has been without any thought of making propaganda. I have been more the poet than the social philosopher



than people generally seem inclined to believe. And do not work for women's right movement. I am not even quite clear as to just what this women's right movement really is. To me it has seemed a problem of mankind in general. And if you read my books carefully you will understand this. True enough it is desirable to solve the women problem, along with all the others but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity" What Ibsen quoted above has made and clearly very conditional. He has proved to have a much deeper understanding of the problem with both men and women. To re-quote, he has said, "To me it has seemed a problem of mankind in general. About Ibsen's family drama namely A Doll's House, Hedda Gabler, Ghost where no doubt we can see male authority. But in these three major dramas where transference of power from husband to wife. In the process of this transfer power also slips out of the husband's hand into wives. Both power and authority are completely on the side of women, and Ibsen's dramas strengthen women's power and authority in the family.

A Doll's House is considered to be a feminist play. In 1878, a note from Ibsen, where he writes "In an exclusively male society a woman cannot herself, where laws drafted by men and also judge feminine conduct from male point of view. But a careful reading, it is apparent that "A Doll's House" is a play about female domination. In a shocked state Nora says,

*"Torvald, I realised that for eight years, I had been living with a strange man and that I had bore him three children, Oh, I cannot bear to think of it---I could hear myself to little pieces" ( P- 230) If the 1st two acts of the play examines carefully it reveals that the role of Helmer's little skylark and squirrel is one, in which he casts her and which she self- consciously plays." (quoted from text)*

Nora assumes always a childlike pose with Helmer, "I would never dream of doing anything you did not want me to: I never go anywhere without your help" – appears in a highly ironic light. Because Nora forged her father's signature in order to secure a loan to save Helmer's life and that she has done for example, "secret copying work in an attempt to pay of the note" Here we can see a conscious sense of self within Nora Helmer. It shows the reversal of values in Nora's character.

Nora has a great secret for saving her husband from disease. It makes her proud and happy. She possesses complete power over her husband because she saved his life. Nora, told her friend that early in her marriage, her husband's life was threatened by overwork and exhaustion. An extended trip abroad saved his life. She says "Oh, yes, I've something to be proud of. It was I who saved Torvald's life." By saying this Nora challenged God. Here Nora shows her super power that she has the ability to save human life.

To collect money Nora forges her father's name who was a guarantor on her promissory note, where Nora has promised to pay out in full amount borrowed from Krogstad. But the problem is the date appears to be in another hand. It was written in a bit sloppily that indicates that the endorsement of the

note took place three days after the signatory's death. Forging her father's signature indicates her over submission to patriarchal power. Ironically Nora shows her fake loyalty to her husband always that a wife cannot borrow without husband's consent (P,135)

An unpleasant trait of Nora's character is her tendency to tell lies. She denies that she has eaten macaroons or jam: she denies that Krogstad had paid her a visit: she tells Mrs Linde that she had got the money for the trip to Italy from her father. Nora tells Linde that she is aware of Helmer's sense of power. She even pitted Helmer. It was both her love and pity to Helmer. She even laid and thus shows audacity. To collect money from Krogstad Nora adopts many dirty plans. The background behind the money collected from Krogstad, was totally illegal. That it was not love with Nora for Torvald but also pity (which is inverted power).

Another big sense of power is her attractiveness. Nora thinks due to her attractiveness she can collect money; she says "There are all sorts of ways. I might have got it, after all I am quite attractive" (P-160), it reveals to us that Nora left no stone unturned to make Torvald go to the south to save his life. Nora hides a particular plan, a great secret for future.

Another plan, Nora hid is that she capitalized her beauty and leave it to her husband when she would growing older. It was an investment. But opposite things happen during the climate exchange with her husband. We find that making sentimental claims of sacrificing "honour" and what not about it.

*Torvald: But no man would sacrificed his honour for the one he loves,*

*Nora : Hundreds and thousands of woman have.*

Nora shows her real power over both her beautiful appearance and youth on the one hand and saving of her husband's life, on the other hand. Nora tells Mrs. Linde about a particular plan of divulging her "great secret" at a certain future time, Mark, Nora's words here very carefully.

*"Well - One day perhaps, but not for a Long time, when I'm not pretty any more, No, you must not laugh, what I mean of course, is when Torvald is not as fond of me as he is now - When my dancing and dressing up and reciting do not amuse him any longer. It might be a good thing, then, to have something up my sleeve ---. (breaking off). But that nonsense- that time will never come. Well Kristina what do you think of my great secret? Am I still no use? (2006,P-2)*

Another power that was wielded over Torvald when Nora ensures a job for Mrs. Linde at Torvald,s bank. Nora was not sympathised with Mrs. Linde rather she showed her own power to a secure a good job for her friend Linde. Nora considers her husband to be very powerful and respectable person as well. Through her speech she wants to make it clear to everybody that her husband is very much powerful in the bank. It shows only Nora's actual subordination.

When Nora charged both her father and husband about making her whole life faulted and undermined with her which is nothing but power and domination. Nora claims:

*“You have never understood Me.-I have had great injustice done me, Torvald: first by father, and then by you. While I was at home with father, he used to tell me all his opinions, and I held the same opinions. He used to call me his doll-child, and played with me as I played with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house. I mean I passed from father’s hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your taste; and I got the same tastes as you; or I pretended to—I don’t know which--- both ways, perhaps; sometimes one and sometimes the other. Your father have done me great wrong. It is your fault that my life has come to nothing.”(2006: P-163) quoted from text.*

We can see Nora's sense of pride again when Krogstad threatens Nora that he will tell Nora's husband the “secret” of her lone. She says the following, “that would be a vile thing to do. (with tears in her voice) I have been so proud of my secret, I couldn't bear to have him here it like that - brutally and clumsily - and from you. Again she declares her love. I did it for love. Through her speech we can consider that, there were both love and pride in what Nona did for Torvald.

Nora's leaving house is an escape only. By this decision she deceives herself also. Although, at the end Nora admits her fault, and blamed the mail folk. She, all by herself takes a very crucial decision that affects her innocent children. She proposes Torvald a decision, which has never taken place between them. And it was totally funny. Nora says the following:

*“Our home has been nothing but a play room. Here I have been your doll wife. Just as at home I used to be papa’s doll- child. And the children, in their turn, have been my dolls. I thought it fun when I played with them, just as the children did when I played with them. That has been our marriage, Torvald” (2013: P-164).quoted from text.*

Finally, Nora unilaterally makes decision and left her children. She, out of her power raises her finger only against her husband and father. This is both ironic and tragic. Nora like the Greek tragedies has made the Doll’s house, a house of curse. Nora becomes blind to her own faults. If someone posts oneself against the world is perhaps considered as a demon. Rabindranath Tagore,very often, ascribed the false image of an ascetic. But sometimes he declared asceticism or any kind of withdrawal and renunciation not to be his path of Emancipation.

*“Deliverance is not for me in renunciation*

*I fell the embrace of freedom in thousands*

*Bonds of delight*

.....

*Yes all my illusions will burn into illumination*

*Of joy, and all my desires ripen*

*into fruits of love. (1971: P,8)*

### **Recommendations:**

Recommendations have been given on the basis of the findings of the study. It is revealed in the findings that gender is purely a sociological term and is the effect of socialization. Power, domination etc. are not limited to people of anyone of the two genders. Power remains equally mixed up with man and woman. But the problem is that it is easier to get diversity in all sectors regarding gender, but more difficult to drive a sense of inclusion in thought, behaviour and action. Through detailed discussion, a set of recommendations are formulated in accordance with the study objectives also:

Firstly, we have to change our outlook first because disparity between man and woman is a problem of mankind.

Secondly, we have to look at humanity and human problem inclusively.

Thirdly, we should disapprove of looking at problem in inclusion or isolation.

Fourthly, we should concern about all human right in general.

Fifthly, we should leave the idea that power is gender-specific.

Sixthly, we should advocate more for human rights than women's

Finally we should develop our thinking and believe in the term "Balance for better"

### **Conclusion:**

From the above discussion it is clear to all that, Ibsen considers both man woman as a human being before anything else. A Doll's House is a remarkable study by Ibsen about female power. Throughout the whole play we can see how Nora uses her erotic attraction as a means of exchange in her relationship with both Helmer and Dr.Rank. But this is not Ibsen's main theme. For him the main theme is the power, Nora exercises: she is more preoccupied with eroticism as a source fascinating, as seen in other plays of Ibsen. And Ibsen has proved to have a much deeper understanding of the problem with women and men, and his texts than it appears. To re- quote, he has said, to me it has seemed a problem of mankind in general (male and female). Critics admit that male authority is never doubted. But Ibsen's "A Doll's House and other major dramas as well shows transference of power from husband to wife. In the process of this transfer, power also slips out of the husbands hand into wives. Both power and authority are completely on the side of women. Ibsen's dramas strengthen women's power and authority in the family. Actually regarding gender Ibsen shows no problem. The discrimination made between two genders is a problem of mankind in general that Ibsen mentioned again and again. He wants to balance among all related forces at work in marriage or man-woman relationship. People should believe in the principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, or disability on the other. To get this,

we have to make diversity in all sectors regarding gender. And have to drive a sense of inclusion in thought, behaviour and action.

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