Female Empowerment and Henrik Ibsen

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PREFACE

Henrik Ibsen, one of the leading modern playwrights, studies seriously the social problems that arise out of the marginalisation of women in the male-dominated nineteenth-century Scandinavia. His dramatic art exposes an in-depth exploration of familial, social, cultural, economic, political, psychological, and sexual harassment being faced by women at every sphere of their lives. He presents characters (e.g. Nora Helmer, Rebecca West, and Hedda Gabler), as powerful women in his plays. The playwright hopes to bring to light a new dimension for women for whom he has been severely criticised by critics and scholars in many countries of the world.

This book focuses on Ibsen's plays about his attitude towards female subjugation, marginalisation, subordination, oppression, and sexual violence in the nineteenth-century Scandinavian bourgeois society. It depicts the everyday problems of women, including conflicting senses, dilemmas, rights and suffrage of women for centuries. It aims to highlight manifold aspects of women through concentrating on his three major plays (e.g., *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *Rosmersholm*). It makes a thorough study of the gradual change in Ibsen's treatment of women in different phases of his literary career. It examines Ibsen's skills in exploring powerful women, both in their spheres and about the people around them. Therefore, the book has been designed into eight chapters:

The first chapter introduces the whole idea of the book through a brief discussion by referring to different literary critics and scholars. It focuses on the three powerful female characters (e.g., Nora Helmer, Rebecca West, and Hedda Gabler). The second chapter unveils the socio-economic and political status of women during the nineteenth-century Scandinavia. The third chapter demonstrates the socio-economic and political empowerment of women. The fourth chapter sheds light on the biographical sketches and literary works of Henrik Ibsen. The fifth chapter aims to offer Nora's quest for power. This chapter describes how Nora

Helmer appears as a symbol of nineteenth-century Scandinavian feminism. It tries to foster Nora's revolutionary spirit by referring to critical comments made by relevant critics. Finally, it makes a comparative study between Nora Helmer, Clytemnestra, and Miss Julie through Ibsen's plots and characters. The sixth chapter attempts to indicate the elements of power and love through the character of Rebecca West who has been presented as a modern woman. It aims to explore Rebecca's erotic passion, her affairs with Rosmer, and her victim of sexual harassment in the patriarchal society. It demonstrates a comparative study between Rebecca, Nora, and Louka with a view to characterising Georg Bernard Shaw's and Henrik Ibsen's treatment of women. The seventh chapter deals with the analysis of Hedda Gabler's quest for power. It tries to investigate Hedda Gabler as a 'Demon' in one hand and Thea Elvested as a 'Darling' on the other hand. It aims to unveil the character of Hedda Gabler as a 'Life-Bearer.' It explores a comparative study between Hedda Gabler, Nora Helmer, Rebecca West, and Thea Elvested. The eighth chapter presents concluding remarks on the detailed discussion offered in the preceding chapters in brief.

Ibsen's women are found to survive and exert their presence in the society by playing their role as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, breadwinners, and maid-servants. Even though women fall victim to social restrictions, discrimination, and psychological conflicts, the female protagonists are found to struggle for power, freedom, and self-existence. For this purpose, this entire book tries to examine the female empowerment in the light of Ibsen's social problem plays.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Henrik Ibsen (20 March 1828 - 23 May 1906) is an influential nineteenth-century Norwegian playwright. Ibsen, one of the world's greatest dramatists, is considered the father of modern drama (Suleiman 2010) and one of the great supporters of women. He never calls himself a feminist, rather he is more a humanist. However, there are indeed plenty of feminist tendencies in his plays. Today, he is considered to be the greatest Norwegian author and is celebrated as a national hero by the Norwegians. There was a time when Ibsen was criticised and condemned not only in his contemporary Norway, but also in the continental Europe, particularly in the conservative bourgeois society. It was Ibsen who gave women vigorous and strong voices by portraying powerful female characters (e.g., Nora Helmer, Hedda Gabler, and Rebecca West). His female characters are the focal point of this book. Women's characters are pre-eminent in merit, intelligence, firmness, and integrity, in comparison to male characters. It can be said here that his plays deal with social conflicts, the dilemma of freedom and necessity, marriage problems, unwed motherhood and divorce, the hypocrisy of the church, career and family, freedom and fairness in the expression of salvation, vicissitudes of human life, universal rights, and suffrage of women in the modern age.

1.1 Chapter Scheme

Ibsen's women are evaluated by sexuality, self-conceited in appearance, and their agitation is caused by the demands of the bourgeois society in which they are found to encounter male partners. He wants to depict how women fall victim to sacrifice in spreading the predominance of power and freedom from the lower stage to the higher stage in the masculine

society. He is a forerunner in exploring the notion of a woman's self in gendered relationships in his social problem plays in which he aims to present an array of interesting female characters in the predominantly male society. Women, in nineteenth-century Scandinavian societies, were subjugated and marginalised by the patriarchal society. Here, I intend to explore how I have analysed the three pre-eminent female protagonists from three of his major plays. Therefore, I have divided my book into eight chapters:

The first chapter, entitled "Introduction," introduces the idea of "Female Empowerment and Henrik Ibsen" through examining Ibsen's portrayal of women criticised by different literary critics and scholars.

The Second Chapter, entitled "Socio-economic and Political Status of Women in the 19th-century Scandinavia", aims to discuss the socio-economic and political situation of women in the nineteenth-century Scandinavian countries, (e.g., Norway and Sweden). For this purpose, the chapter aims to look at the introduction of the whole book in 2. It tries to investigate the social status of women in 2.1, the economic status of women in 2.2, and the political status of women in 2.3. Concluding remark has also been discussed in 2.4.

The Third Chapter, entitled "Socio-economic and Political Empowerment of Women", presents the socio-economic and political empowerment of women. This chapter tries to shed light on the introductory section in 3. On the other hand, this chapter explains the definition of empowerment in 3.1 as well as the empowerment of women in 3.2. It tries to examine the social empowerment in 3.3 and the social empowerment of women in 3.3.1, respectively. This chapter contains the economic empowerment in 3.4 and the economic empowerment of women in 3.4.1 in different ways. This chapter consists of the political empowerment in 3.5 and the political empowerment of women in 3.5.1. Finally, this chapter aim to discuss the concluding remarks in 3.6.

Chapter Four, entitled "Life and Works of Henrik Ibsen," consists of the biographical sketch and works of Henrik Ibsen chronologically in brief. In this context, this chapter is divided into the following sub-chapters: 4. Introduction; 4.1 Ancestral Identity; 4.2 Biographical Discussion; 4.3 Literary Works; and Conclusion dealing with Ibsen's biography as well as literary works have been described in 4.4.

Chapter Five, entitled "Female Power and Revolutionary Spirit in *A Doll's House*," presents a detailed analysis of the play and its principal character, Nora Helmer. For this purpose, the whole chapter is divided into the following sub-chapters: 5. Introduction. This chapter tries to present Nora's quest for female power in 5.1. The chapter unveils the revolutionary spirit of Nora in 5.2. It depicts her character as a symbol of feminism in 5.3. There is a comparative study between Nora Helmer, Clytemnestra, and Miss Julie to highlight female power and protesting spirit of the powerful female protagonists in 5.4. The concluding remarks about the play, *A Doll's House*, and its female protagonist, Nora Helmer, are discussed in 5.5.

The fifth chapter attempts to evaluate Ibsen's document as a faithful picture of female domination in the patriarchal law and order. This text is considered as one of the most famous plays due to his epoch-making creation of Nora Helmer, who appears as one of the most powerful female characters ever created. Ibsen unveils the issue of female power through the character of Nora. He focuses on the image of contemporary female position in the male-dominated society in which women are discriminated and maltreated. Here, I have focused on the state of the nineteenth-century Norwegian bourgeois family. Ibsen wrote his play, *A Doll's House*, during the period when women were enslaved by their gender roles; certain restrictions were enforced on them. The play's conclusion makes it clear that while Torvald Helmer would object to divorce, Nora's act of alienating herself from the society, which is a radical step indeed. Thus, her exodus in the play's conclusion represents a brave and dangerous act.

I have tried to propose Nora's revolution and protest against the conventional system, order, and norms by referring to different critical comments made by critics (e.g., Wilson Knight, Rolf Fjelde, Hermann Weigand, and Bjorn Hemmer). In this standpoint, I agree with George Bernard Shaw who argues that the rising energy of the revolt of women stands against idealism. The influence of gender issues is found in Ibsen's own "Notes for the Modern Tragedy," in which he utters:

> There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different in woman. They do not understand each other but in practical life, a woman is judged by man's law, as though she were not a woman but a man. The wife in the play ends by having no idea

> of what is right or wrong; natural feeling on the one hand and belief in authority on the other have altogether bewildered her (Chilala, 2002, 109).

To the male gaze, a woman is deemed as an inferior being. She cannot decide alone on any crucial matters. She plays the role of traditional duties, as a mother, wife, and maid-servant. In other words, as M.C. Bradbrook argues, the play, *A Doll's House*, presents the conflict of two worlds, male against female: "The woman's world of personal relationship and human values against the man's world of legal rights and duties" (Bradbrook, 1946,109). Ibsen's preoccupation with women's causes turns into his being wrongly thought to be a member of the women's movement. Ibsen was never keen to join a movement of any kind during his life time.

Nora can be deemed as a symbol of feminism who realises that she is oppressed by her colonial master, Torvald Helmer. She breaks away from the society to become a completely independent human being. Strindberg, in contrast, is a Swedish playwright and the protagonist in the play, *Miss Julie*, can be as a picture of what might happen if the traditional rulers and men of Sweden are challenged. Today, Strindberg's play, *Miss Julie*, appears to be dated, confused, and liberated. The play does not leave their children permanently scarred. On the other hand, *A Doll's House* is still relevant because women are found to liberate themselves from unequal and stifling relationships. Through the characters of the female protagonists, both dramatists have tried to depict their contemporary socio-economic picture of women. For this purpose, I have made a comparative study between Nora and Clytemnestra in one hand; Julie and Nora on the other hand by offering female empowerment in light of the critical comments made by critics and scholars, including Winnington Ingram and Professor Murry. At the end of this chapter, I have tried to make a comparative study between Nora and Julie with a view to fostering women's struggle, freedom, and self-identity.

Chapter Six, entitled "Love, Sexuality, and Power in *Rosmersholm*: A Feminist Study," aims to investigate introductory section in 6. This chapter tries to demonstrate the quest for female power in 6.1, whereas the character of Rebecca West has been presented as a modern woman in 6.2. It aims to examine the erotic passion and love in 6.3 and Freud's idea of Rebecca Complex in 6.4, respectively. There is a comparative study

between Rebecca West, Nora Helmer, and Louka in 6.5, and the concluding remarks have been discussed in 6.6 at the end of this chapter.

The sixth chapter analyses Ibsen's play, *Rosmersholm*, as a picture of the nineteenth-century Scandinavian middle-class women and social reality, and the political conflict and dilemma between the liberals and the conservatives in Norway. Through creating some powerful male and female characters, Ibsen wants to make his readers and audiences understand the fact that love is no different between the higher class and the lower class in the society. He stimulates his audiences and readers by following the dictum of love, how a woman can establish herself as a powerful being in her master's house. Thus, a woman fulfils her long-cherished dream of power by removing his wife, Beata, from Rosmer's life. There, she is found to obtain dominancy and power by motivating Rosmer and his wife, Beata. In this chapter, I have highlighted how a woman with her ready wit, prudence, and intellectual capability enables her to spread dominance, power, and ruling passion at Rosmer's home. I intend to make Rebecca's powerful motif through Ibsen's plots and characters. In this standpoint, I have tried to apply the critical comments offered by critics and scholars (e.g., Fredrik Engelstad, Beret Wicklund, and Trond Woxen), who express their different opinions concerning Ibsen's powerful female character, Rebecca West.

This sixth chapter evaluates Rebecca as a modern woman who tries heart and soul to establish her self-existence, self-freedom, and self-power. In this context, Astride Saether (1997) argues that a modern woman is free and financially independent with her life project as being influenced by the character of Rebecca; one of the new types of women in Ibsen's plays (Saether, 1997, 34-35). In this chapter, I have elaborated on the erotic passion and love of Rebecca over power and sexuality. What Ibsen shares is a vision of eroticism that extends into the world of unhappiness of civilised existence where unconstrained pleasure cannot co-exist with ethical consideration. Erotic passion sweeps on Rebecca like a storm upon an ocean. She is full of passion power and sexuality which she cannot resist or control. In this regard, I have accepted critical comments explained by the prominent philosopher, Carl Jung, to investigate her erotic passion and love. Moreover, I have wanted to unveil how Rebecca becomes a victim of sexual harassment caused by her adoptive father, Doctor West. Sigmund Freud dedicates himself to developing an interesting analysis of the

character-complexity of Rebecca, not only in her incessant fight to become the wife of Rosmer but in the terrible failure in death similar to that of her victim, Beata, the first wife of the Pastor, Rosmer (Gavlovsky, 2000, 104).

At the end of the sixth chapter, I have referred to three powerful female characters to provide the comparative study between Rebecca and Nora in the one hand and Louka on the other hand.

Chapter Seven, entitled "Female Power in *Hedda Gabler*: Demon, Darling, and Life-Bearer," begins with 7. Introduction. It aims to elaborate Hedda Gabler's struggle for power and domination in 7.1. It tries to present the character of Hedda as a "Demon", and the character of Thea Elvsted as a "Darling" in 7.2. This chapter aims to find out the character of Hedda as a "Life-Bearer" in 7.3. Finally, it aims to make a comparative study between Hedda Gabler, Nora Helmer, Rebecca West, and Thea Elvested in 7.4. The concluding remarks based on the character of female protagonist, Hedda Gabler, have been discussed in 7.5.

Ibsen presents matriarchal power and domination more than traditional authority through his portrayal of the character of Hedda, whom critics regard as one of the most powerful and domineering women. I have tried to expose Hedda's quest for power by referring to critical comments made by critics and scholars (e.g., M.C. Bradbrook, Williams Raymond, Georg Bernard Shaw, James McFarlane, Edmund Gosse, David Thomas, and William Archer). Asbjorn Aarseth (1997) comments that some critics do not acknowledge that an evil or destructive woman like Hedda can be found in real life, whereas several female commentators think that Hedda is not at all improbable. Hedda is such a woman who has her deepest female instincts perverted and dislocated and is made to breathe air where all her peculiar faults come out as big, stinking, poisonous flowers, and who, in the end, kills herself. Calling Hedda a demon reflects her manipulative, cold, and destructive tendencies. Throughout the play, she expresses deep dissatisfaction with her bourgeois life and marriage; manipulates others, particularly Thea and Lovborg, for her own amusement or to exert power; ultimately contributes to Lovborg's downfall and death — and then tries to romanticize it. On the other hand, Thea Elvsted is soft, compassionate, and driven by emotion. She risks everything — including her marriage and social standing — to help Lovborg; inspires Lovborg's greatest intellectual

work through her loyalty and encouragement; and is sincere and kind, a foil to Hedda's cold calculation.

In the seventh chapter, I have tried to signify Hedda as a "Life-Bearer" through the critical comments made by Elenore Lester and Sigmund Freud. Lester (1978) points out that Hedda's demand for control becomes perverted into physical violence– asserting Hedda and even Thea Elvested as feminist icons (Innes, 2003, 93). Hedda has been portrayed as a symbol of castrator, penis-envy (pistol), frigid, unresolved Electra complex and lesbian tendencies. I have tried to present how Hedda has been portrayed as a paradigm of female power and dominance, rebellious personality, self-sacrificed soul, and unfeminine desired woman. Thus, I have made a comparative study between Hedda, Nora, Rebecca, and Thea to demonstrate their rebellious spirit.

The eighth chapter, entitled "Conclusion," analyses Ibsen's women. This chapter focuses on the characters of Nora Helmer, Rebecca West, and Hedda Gabler through Ibsen's plots and characters. It depicts how women are determined to struggling for power and self-identity despite victimisation within the patriarchal structure and practice.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the book, and knowledge of feminist literary criticism, I have formulated and posed the central research question to be explored and addressed in this book. Here, the central research question is as follows: What types of women are presented as the powerful female characters in Ibsen's three major plays (e.g., *A Doll's House*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler*?). While addressing this central research question, several minor questions have also been raised, which are the following:

1. How were the socio-economic and political status of women represented in Ibsen's times?
2. How are women portrayed in Ibsen's plays? In what ways do Ibsen's women struggle for power, freedom, and self-identity in the traditional society?
3. In what ways does the nineteenth-century Scandinavian bourgeois society constrain or restrict women?

1.3 Research Methodology

This book is based on literary research being conducted on Ibsen's treatment of women. The relevant literature is the only source of information for the preparation of the book. Another worth noting point in this context is that for documentation, Chicago citation style has been followed strictly. I have collected primary and secondary materials available in the library, market, and the internet, and following the advice made by different literary experts at home and abroad.

1.4 Potential Significance

This book provides an analysis of Ibsen's plays in light of his attitude towards female subjugation, marginalisation, and oppression in the nineteenth-century Scandinavian bourgeois society. The book looks at different critical works on feminism. It makes use of the revolution of Ibsen's treatment of women and critical evaluation of women. It also deals with everyday problems of Scandinavian bourgeois women, including societal conflicts, dilemmas, rights as well as suffrage of women in the society. This book aims to focus on power, love, revolution, symbol, and sexuality by referring to the powerful female characters (e.g., Rebecca West, Hedda Gabler, and Nora Helmer). It tries to make a comparative study of the powerful female protagonists to highlight the social status of women in modern times.

1.5 Conclusion

Ibsen's women are presented as powerful characters who are nevertheless constricted by the gender norms of nineteenth-century Norway. Women are treated as mere household objects whereas men are the breadwinners of the family. This book discusses how gender roles play a crucial role in Nora's character which makes her leave her husband and children. On the other hand, Hedda Gabler is a vindictive and jealous woman. She has no love and respect for her family members. She is found to burn Eilert Lovborg's manuscript which is deemed as Thea's offspring. Hedda represents the upper-class women of that time, putting up a facade

of being the ideal woman when in reality her desires are quite different. The play almost entirely follows Hedda and her interactions. It is Ibsen who has given women vigorous and strong voices. His female characters are eminent in merit, intelligence, firmness, and integrity, in comparison with male characters. He never explicitly identifies himself as a feminist but some of his speeches and acquaintances prove that he is concerned with society and family. Thus, Ibsen's portrayal of women has been explained to show their domineering spirit.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE 19TH-CENTURY SCANDINAVIA

2. Introduction

The Second Chapter, entitled "Socio-economic and Political Status of Women in the 19th-century Scandinavia", throws light on the socio-economic and political situation of women in the nineteenth-century Scandinavian countries, (e.g., Norway and Sweden). In this regard, the socio-economic and political aspects of women have been interpreted in 2. Introduction. This chapter depicts the social status of women in 2.1; whereas, the economic status of women has been explained in 2.2. It also demonstrates the political status of women in 2.3 and the concluding remarks in 2.4, respectively.

2.1 Social Status of Women

In 1840, Norwegian women were considered to be inferior beings in the patriarchal society. It was impossible for women to enter into any agreements, debts, or even control their own property. They were not entitled to any training or able to be considered for any government job. As for single women, they could request to be placed into employment under the authority. On the other hand, on the wedding day, married women transitioned from living under the authority of their fathers to under that of their husbands. They had few rights; and could not own property; could not vote; did not have legal rights to their children; could not work outside their home; and were generally dominated by their husbands. During the nineteenth century, women were found to work in the textile mills and the tobacco factories, which were reserved for their employment. They worked in the food industries and jobs requiring little hands. But, they did not work

in heavy industry. In 1845, a significant step towards female emancipation was made with the enactment of a law that granted single women legal majority at the age of twenty-five. This change meant that, upon reaching that age, women would no longer require a legal guardian.

Although new laws did not revolutionise the status of women, barriers were being crossed regularly and rapidly. The formal equality of women with the male partners became almost complete in the space of two generations. In 1854, the law, on the royal succession granting full equal inheritance for both men and women, was passed after severe debate and resistance. In 1863, a new law was passed on the age of majority that succeeded in 1865: women attained the age of maturity at twenty-five years in comparison with men. Widows, as well as women who were divorced or separated, were granted legal majority regardless of their age. In 1869, the age of majority was reduced to twenty-one, though it was done without consideration as to whether it was defensible for women. The committee of law used to have believed that women matured more rapidly than men, stating the fact that their age was very suitable for them. In 1866, a law was passed, establishing free enterprise so that any man or woman could obtain their licenses in cities.

Legislative reform to reduce barriers to female participation in the society outside the home commenced in Norway before the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1839, unsupported women over forty years of age were granted the right to qualify as master craftsmen. In 1842, widows and wives got themselves separated from their husbands, and spinsters who had been granted legal capacity by the royal decree, were allowed to get themselves engaged in trade and commerce. In 1854, women were given the same inheritance rights as men; where previously, a sister inherited only half as much as her brother. Gradually, in the following years, further activities once reserved for men were opened to women. In 1860, they were allowed to support themselves through handicraft and craftsmanship in the same conditions as men. In 1869, unmarried women were granted full-legal capacity at the age of twenty-one. Married women, on the other hand, remained under their husbands' guardianship until 1888. The educational background of women was found to have improved. In 1882, women were admitted to the upper levels of secondary education, and two years later to the university and most other professional schools (Heffermehl, 1972, 630).

The Norwegian Association for Women's Rights was founded in 1884. One year later, an Association for Women's Suffrage was organised. Those associations were formed during a decade being marked by political and social unrest in Norway. The labour movement began gaining real influence in politics. Women initiated their own occupational and political associations. In 1895, the first women's political organisation was established, such as, the Social Democratic Women's Association. Like the nonpolitical feminist organisations, that association worked for women's right to vote. Women with personal incomes of a certain size were given the right to vote in local elections in 1901. Six years later, in 1907, women were permitted to vote in parliamentary elections and to hold political office. In 1913, Norway became one of the first nations in the world to ensure women to universal suffrage. General suffrage had been granted to men in 1898 (Heffermehl, 1972, 630).

Women had been admitted to educational institutions since 1884. They were granted the right to become practicing lawyers and prosecuting attorneys in 1904. The parliament passed a statute granting women the right of recruitment to government positions, except military, clerical, diplomatic, and cabinet posts. Social restrictions were maintained until 1938 while the statute was replaced by a new statute specifically recruited women to all government positions, with the sole reservation that they could not be appointed ministers in the State Lutheran Church if the congregation voted against women ministers in principle (Heffermehl, 1972, 631).

While women were achieving their gain in political and employment rights, they sought changes in interspousal relationships. A statute on marriage passed in 1888, and granted married women legal capacity and the right to manage their earnings. Separate ownership of property by married women was also facilitated. But, joint ownership remained the most common form of property regime. Marriage equality was not established until 1927 when a statute on property relationships between husbands and wives made women partners with equal rights and responsibilities.

In the Labour Party, women were found to establish cooperation with the non-socialist female organisations in the suffrage question. Fernanda Nissen (1898) wrote, in *Social Democrats* based on working women within the upper-class society, which women had done so much for

the cause of female suffrage. Nissen even excused Key Success Factors (KSF) for having, in dejection over the slow progress made by causes, accepted the idea of limited suffrage for women. Although the working-class women could not accept that income ought to identify their right to vote and had no sympathy for the rich upper-class women. Nissen also argued that the women's section of Krisdania Labour Party asked the non-socialist women's organisations to take part in the suffrage procession on 17 May 1898. The party received a negative reaction from the organisations except the KSF. The Labour Key Success Factors (LKSF) gave as the reason for its refusal that it did not want to support any particular political party, while NKF responded that there was a little support for the idea among its members and that its programme did not deal with the issue of the female suffrage. From 1903 onwards the KSF did not participate in the processions (Blom, 1980, 11).

Women did not follow the same strategy to achieve the right to vote. They associated with the non-socialist parties had often, in their efforts to acquire an education and a socially acceptable occupation, had to force their way into areas that were occupied by men. On the other hand, women were inclined to emphasise the fact that the suffrage was a conflict between men and women. They associated with the Labour Party in the different position. To work in domestic service or a factory did not require training skill. The need for the income such women could earn so that it could be so great that there was no discussion about their right to work. Non-socialist women organised themselves in interest groups outside the framework of the political parties, while social democratic women formed an organisation within the Labour Party (Blom, 1980, 8-9). The KSF demanded women's suffrage on the same conditions as men, a demand which meant, up until 1898, that female suffrage would be limited by certain income qualifications. The association contained a few hundred members and was active through meetings, petitions, and appeals to the parliament (Blom, 1980, 9). For many centuries women living in Europe were treated as if they were less intelligent than men. Laws and traditions showed that women did not share the same:

> We have no food for our heads (nothing to think about), no food for our education, civil rights and jobs as men. hearts (nothing to inspire Many

> intelligent women found this situation hard to bear from the protest quoted on the right (Macdonald, 1999, 6).

In 1800, women were not permitted to go to schools, colleges, and universities. Without education, they could not train as doctors, dentists, lawyers, or scientists. They could not become priests or church leaders. They could not serve in the armed forces and could not be the members of the parliament. Many of them could not vote. Married women had no right to own property unless they were widows. In most countries, divorce was almost impossible, even if husbands were violent or lunatic. The reason was that women could not earn much money, they found it difficult to live independently and usually had to rely on their fathers or husbands for their support (Macdonald, 1999, 6). But, some women expected more than that. They wanted to be involved in social and political change. They found ways to make their opinions known, through their relationships with men. Wives discussed politics with their husbands, and mothers advised their sons. They wrote books or drew up petitions, protesting against women's unfair treatment. But, they were often laughed at, or ignored (Macdonald, 1999,7).

For centuries, parents in Europe made their daughters to marry men from families of similar wealth and position. A single woman under thirty years could not have arranged marriages less common, could not go anywhere unaccompanied, or be alone most parents still insisted that there in a room with a man who was not a relation. They allowed their daughters to daydream about men they disliked. But, some parents thought about romantic love, and supervised pressure on their daughters to marry closely and only allowed them to meet them telling stories about the miserable young men from families like their own lives being led by lonely old maids (Macdonald, 1999, 14).

Poor women were less free to marry for love than women from rich families. Although they met men, such as male servants, tradesmen, farm, or factory workers and delivery boys; they could not afford to follow their hearts. Women's wages were so low that the family required a man's wage to pay for accommodation, food, and clothes. Working women hoped to meet men who were hardworking and had a steady job; they would grow to love one another after marriage. If a woman did marry purely for love, and not for practical reasons, she risked a life of poverty, homelessness, and hunger (Macdonald, 1999, 15). Women were responsible for maintaining

the household. It was their job to hire servants and keep everything in order. Working-class wives usually had to find work to bring in more money. But, they were still expected to do all the household chores and to look after the families, husbands, and children. They often sent their days without food and proper clothing so that their husbands and children would have enough to eat and could keep warm (Macdonald, 1999, 16). Wives, in most European countries, had few legal rights. However, the law gave husbands rights over women, including the right to beat and imprison them, and to control their children, money, and property. Women could not live apart from their husbands and were treated unfairly if they claimed a divorce. In 1800, women campaigned for reforms in the law so that they would be treated equally like men in the patriarchy (Macdonald, 1999, 17).

Old women were the most vulnerable group of people in the society. They had few people to help them and no one campaigned for their rights. They tended to age faster than men as they had given birth to children. They were thought to be old when they were forty years old. Many women were active even though they became old. But, other women became feeble, ill, and unable to work. On the other hand, men were not affected by old age in the same way because they owned property and earned higher wages. It was easier for the old men, such as widowers, to marry younger women who would look after them in old age. Poor widows were the least likely a group of people to remarry (Macdonald, 1999, 18).

A few women dared to violate social custom while they became desperate. They stole food to feed their children or ran away from husbands because they were brought up by them. When women were the victims of abuse, they were often blamed. There was a rumour that women were bad wives to deserve such treatment. They became outcasts, along with divorced women, unmarried mothers, female beggars, and criminals. Female children, being born out of marriage, were thought to be wicked (Macdonald, 1999, 22). On the other hand, women broke social norms for different purposes. They demanded to set themselves free. Revolutionary women became well-familiar throughout Europe. Wherever they lived, they worked hard to make themselves and their families clean. Wealthy women employed servants to clean their homes and wash and iron their clothes. Ordinary women had to perform their tasks themselves. Sometimes, poor working-class women

took in washing from other families or had cleaning jobs to maintain their livelihood (Macdonald, 1999, 29).

Rural women married wealthy men who led the country. They had several different comfortable lives. But, they had many jobs. Before they got married, they had responsibilities. After women married the owners of large farms and vineyards, they were found to take care of their families, husbands, and children. They worked hard to earn money and to manage servants for domestic chores. In the smaller farms, women became the breadwinners if the farmers' wives were often in charge of her own their husbands who fell ill or were injured at farm-based businesses, such as keeping bees' work. They were found to work at home, such as, for honey, and making butter and cheese, lace-making, embroidery, plaiting straw to make hats, cleaning feathers for quilts, and collecting twigs to make brooms. But, brook jobs were based on their traditional role of providing food and home comforts for their husbands. They were found to work as waitresses, barmaids, and cleaners in pubs and hotels. They took in washing and ironing, and let rooms to lodgers. Even though the work was exhausting, men thought it as unimportant and unskilled so that women who did such jobs were paid poor salary. But, new job opportunities were provided for women at offices and markets (Macdonald, 1999, 33).

The American feminist and literary critic, Elaine Showalter (1990), argued that unmarried women existed in Norwegian societies. From the mid-1800s unmarried women began to be considered problem to an ever-increasing degree in Europe. The problem was thought of emerging from the generally destabilising and unhealthy changes accompanying industrialisation and urbanisation. It was deemed as a sign of an unhealthy society out of tune with nature. The concern about unmarried women was also triggered in the part by the demographic imbalance that resulted in the surplus of women in the urban areas. The years from 1875 to 1930 stood out as a period in Norwegian history with a particularly low marriage rate and a particularly high incidence of unmarried women in the population (Hellesund, 2008, 23).

The first chairman of the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights (NKF), the liberal politician, Mr. Hagbard E. Berner, claimed that there were 99,000 women in Norway (out of population of about 2 million) in 1880 who were classified as daughters and family appendages living at

home. As a rule, they had little education and few opportunities to earn a decent income. The combination of gender and social class excluded the middle-class daughters from occupation. Women had no choice but to be supported by family members, a solution that was often highly unwelcome to both the unmarried woman and their families. The often-difficult living conditions were in stark contrast to the values of the middle-class daughters' upbringing (Hellesund, 2008, 23). Reflecting on the significance of marriage in the nineteenth century, Ragna Nielsen, an educator and champion of women's rights, was herself divorced. In this context, Nielsen uttered:

> Old romantics smile with embarrassment, when a woman plainly states, that her only wish is to find a husband. But what else should women have as the goal of their lives? Naturally, that was the only thing they dreamt of, to get married. With marriage came life's meaning, significance, and esteem–with the unmarried state material and spiritual poverty, insignificance, and scorn (Nielsen, 1904, 4).

From this statement, it is found that the major concerns of women were found to be discriminated and maltreated in the patriarchal society.

The situation of women in Scandinavia became a subject of debate in 1854 when Norwegian daughters were first given equal inheritance rights to sons. In the same year, two Swedish economists (e.g., Eli Heckscher and David Davidson) focused on peasant women and maid-servants like the household beasts of burdens and the slaves of men. The erstwhile sociologists, including Eilert Sundt, were very concerned with women's situations and pointed out that though women of the middle classes were spared from drudgery, they were alienated from the functional activities. They were either more intimate servants or decorative hothouse plants. If their fathers and husbands were rich enough to keep them in indolence, they were given better formal education. But, they were separated from the world and lives by the Chinese wall of proprieties which served to frustrate any desires for active self-expression (Hossain, 2016, 2-3).

A female individual was assigned to duties and obligations which were directed by the patriarchy; whereas men used to dominate the masculine society. On the other hand, women had to be obedient and subservient. They were usually bound in matrimony, functioning as either

toys or tools to serve others. In serving such tasks, obligation was embedded in their social and female identity while their identity as human beings with the right to happiness, and freedom was almost completely sacrificed. In such a patriarchal social framework, women were represented by the set of self-sacrificing and subservient attributes. Those who broke away from traditional norms were labelled with deviant, rebellious, or even demonic. They had to suffer from that labelling as the victims of the male-dominated society for their rebellious spirit. They had gone through their persistent pursuit of emancipation, freedom, and bitter struggle to regain their identity and power as human beings (Hossain, 2016, 2).

2.2 Economic Status of Women

According to Ida Irene Bergstrom (2013), the European ideal concerning equality gradually became a Norwegian export commodity. The fight for equal rights was not necessary what led Norway to be at the forefront of equality. But, the Crafts Act of 1839 and the Trade Act of 1842 gave single women in Norway the opportunity to trade and provide for themselves for the first time. According to the so-called women's article in the Crafts Act, feeble women above the age of forty who were not able to provide for themselves in any other way were given the right to produce their goods. Following the Trade Act, women were given a limited opportunity to trade. Prior to those acts, such rights were reserved for men belonging to the certain rank.

There was a surplus of women in the cities. Between the years 1801 and 1835, the number of unmarried women rose by 42% on a national basis; whereas women from the lower classes worked and the peasant women were the important and integrated part of working lives on the farm, the unmarried and idle bourgeoisie women were the expensive burden both for the state and for their providing fathers. Between 1880 and 1900, the radical thoughts of women were found to be developed and women started to take on the new roles in the society. A few women were found to study at university. They were found to write the books and to participate in the public debate; and organised themselves in unions and associations.

Feminists (i.e., Camilla Collett, Aasta Hansteen, and Ragna Nielsen) were not always unanimous. For instance, they did not agree on any rights whether they should fight for immediate suffrage for all. Some women thought that it would be enough to improve the female financial situation. In this standpoint, I agree with Gina Krog who was radical and wanted immediate suffrage for all women, which led to the division of the Norwegian Women's Association. Krog founded new associations whenever she did not achieve a majority for her view. On the other hand, all men had the right to vote. When universal suffrage for men was introduced in 1898, the suffrage for women with a certain income level became an issue. The fact was that the suffrage for women was modified according to economy and class undermining the possibility of cooperation between women with regard to class and rank. The working-class women and the bourgeoisie suffragettes never really hit it off, neither in the nineteenth century nor after. Due to the transformation from the peasants to the industrial societies, the housewives and the providers became the new ideals for women and men. They had to abide by different role in society and were provided with unequal pay for equal work. The welfare state was founded on an understanding that men and women were different. But, they were equal (Bergstrom, 2013).

The economic condition of Norwegian women did not lend themselves to the formation of feudal system, though several kings did reward land to loyal subjects who became knights. Self-owning farmers were—and continued to be—the main pursuit of work in Norwegian agriculture. But, leading up to the nineteenth century farmers ran out of land available for farming. Many agricultural families were reduced to poverty as tenant farmers and served as the impetus for emigration to North America. Norway, after Ireland, became the country losing the most people to emigration in percentage relative to its population.

Women had few rights in nineteenth century Norway. They could not own property; could not vote; did not have legal rights to their children; could not work outside the home; and were generally controlled by their husbands. In 1884, the following statement was addressed to the Norwegian Parliament, *Stortinget*:

> do we dare, in such a serious matter, to remind [you] of the multifarious character of love; as a basis of enduring economic order, it is not well

> suited indeed. Nor is the proposal at hand sufficient, allowing the married woman to establish separate property if she likes. Then the claim easily would look like an offending exception, which the Woman most often wants to avoid[1] (Mill, 1970, 45-47).

The four authors (e.g., Bjornson, Ibsen, Lie, and Kielland) signed the statement. The serious matter, they were referring to, was a new marriage act admitting property and income rights for the married women. Later, John Stuart Mill's book, *The Subjection of Women*, was translated into the Danish language by Georg Brandes in 1869. It was found that poets regarded wives as bondservants of their husbands. (Mill, 1970, 47) Poets spoke in favour of separate property and income rights as the normal order of marriage. Not surprisingly, the majority rejected that the system when the Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1888. Separate property could only be drawn up by the separate marriage settlement. The Act marked an important milestone in the history of women's citizenship. Though radical ideas were rejected, married women became economic subjects. They were granted the disposal of their income and the right to make contracts in economic matters. Five years later, in 1893, the right was separately taxed following the separate property right. For the first time, married women were included in the basic civil right of economic liberty.

The reform did not solve the problems of married women's economic status. Their civil position was not equal either to married men or unmarried women. Though the husbands' right to dispose of the income and property of the families was reduced, the practical consequences of the reform were limited. Married women did not earn their own money, and did not have their property either. Since their husbands were regarded as the main providers of the families, the inequality was, constantly, reproduced in the following decades, through legislation, negotiated the settlements for payment, state policies relating to the distribution of income and other practices of the working-class women. The inequality between unmarried women and married women remained, leaving married women with few privileges in their own right as individuals. Their economic position was demonstrated when a marriage ended through death or divorce.

[1] I have collected the letters written by Bjørnson, Ibsen, Lie, and Kielland based on the subject of separate property for married women in 1884.