



## FEMINISTIC FREEDOM IN IBSEN'S *HEDDA GABLER*: AN ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Henrik Johan Ibsen, a celebrated playwright, shone in the nineteenth century literary sky of Norway. His reputation as realist spread in his own country and abroad after publication and dramatization of his prose plays. He introduced different themes and techniques in his plays which his readers and audience eulogized and are followed and accepted by the playwrights of next generation. He presented the Norwegian society so realistically that draws the readers' attention and he was the first man to show that high tragedy could be written about ordinary people and in ordinary prose language. This article attempts to recapitulate feministic freedom in Hedda Gabler, a master piece written by him.*

**Keywords:** *Feministic Freedom, Insolence, Dominance, Deceitful Love, Carefree Attitude*

### INTRODUCTION

“Hedda Gabler” (1890) is undoubtedly a classic play of Henrik Ibsen, depicts feministic freedom throughout the plot. Critics allude that Ibsen favours female, feministic freedom and their triumph in some of his prose plays. Nora in the play “A Doll’s House” and Hedda in “Hedda Gabler” prove that women have their own identity and liberty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian society. Nora leaves her home, three little children and even her husband to have her own freedom and will not want to be subservient to her husband throughout her life. But Hedda’s case is completely different from Nora, who is a domineering individual from the beginning to the end. She prefers to be independent but not be under the dominance of any male member from Tesman to Judge Brack. That is why she commits suicide to be free from the clutches of her male counterparts.

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Apart from Hedda, the dramatist takes two other female characters i.e. Miss Juliana Tesman , George Tesman's aunt and Mrs. Elvsted , Hedda's schoolmate and Eilert Lovborg's beloved in his later part of his life. Both the women play sacrificial role and are responsible individuals for their nobility generosity and helping attitude for George and Lovborg respectively. Ibsen portrays the two female characters in such a superb way that diverts readers and audience's attention from Hedda.

There is no faint hint of pride , jealousy, ego, vanity and coxcombry in their appearance and behavior. Ibsen confines feministic freedom to them where as he multiplies Hedda's excessive liberty that leads to her own doom. Though Hedda is the protagonist, she fails to evoke pity and sympathy in the readers' mind when she ends her life. Thus she is an utter failure who can not struggle against life's odds and oddities. She is unable to realize that life is full of trials and tribulations. On the other hand Juliana Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted shoulder their duties and responsibilities for betterment of others and discharge their role as Juliana a true aunt to George, and Elvsted as a true friend and beloved of Lovborg.

Ibsen instills in Hedda all opposite characteristic features of a woman from the very start of the play. She is a general's daughter and is not properly reared to maintain her role like a woman who will play a faithful and dedicated role for her family. She is well educated ,sophisticated and ultra modern but lacks nobility, modesty and decorum that is utmost necessary on the part of a woman. She marries George Tesman for social security and financial need and being agreed to social pressure after going beyond her marriageable age. From the outset her general father has given her complete freedom . As a result Hedda has ignored social convictions and taboos and become a young girl without conscience and polite manners. She remains mean, envious, insolent and cruel who protests against other's peace and bliss. She is what she is because she is her father's daughter. John Northam depicts Hedda's vicious qualities in the following manner:

She has nothing- no respect for husband, no likings for love, no joy for maternity, no relationship, not even such as that offered by Brack, that she can enter into. And her state fills her with the kind of reckless, dangerous exasperation displayed at the beginning of the Act-1. Hedda is not bored; she is tortured by the knowledge that she has no vocation.(P.156)

From the above sentence it is pertinent that she neither enjoys her conjugal happiness nor her maternity. She rejects the relationship offered by Judge Brack . She ignores and neglects her wifely duties and is hesitant to maintain proper relation even with Aunt Julia who is instrumental for George's rearing and eligibility for professorship. It is a strange and unbelievable matter that Hedda dislikes her motherhood and hates to give birth to her baby. She pays deaf ear to her husband's several requests to behave politely with Aunt Julia, is a



matter of great sorrow and surprise on the part of a married lady. Her audacity and insolence cross all limits when she says to George in the following dialogue:

*TESMAN . Yes , that I will. And there is one thing more you could do that would delight her heart.*

*HEDDA. What is it ?*

*TESMAN. If you could prevail on yourself to say du\* to her. For my sake, Hedda? Eh ?*

*HEDDA. No, no . Tesman- you really must n't ask that of me .I have told you so already. I shall try to call her "Aunt" ; and you must be satisfied with that.*

*TESMAN. Well, well. Only I think now that you belong to the family, you- (PP.11-12)*

Ibsen gives excessive feministic freedom to Hedda in her different stages of life. Her feeling of anger and jealousy as if it were her inherent qualities. After Hedda's meeting with Mrs. Elvsted, a schoolmate shows an unconvincing friendship between the duo. Hedda tries her best to remind the latter of the intimate relation between them. But Elvsted retorts that she always pulled her hair. Once she said, she would burn it off. All such past incidents indicate that Hedda was a school girl horror. She shows her envious attitude and cold behavior towards Mrs. Elvsted when she comes to know that there exists growing intimacy and confidence between Lovborg and Elvstead .

Hedda is suspicious and jealous of the relation between Elvsted and Lovborg. She deals with the latter in such a way that she is getting closer to Elvsted. But it is pivotal to observe the deceptive friendliness between Hedda and Elvsted. Hedda's surprising curiosity to prove and pry Elvsted's relation with Lovborg. She is also scornful of the way ,Elvsted uses her power over such a genius person like Lovborg. Her untiring and needful concern to know the power of Elvstead and the depth of love and likeness between Lovborg and Elvsted provides a solid base for argument and sows seed of serious suspicion in Hedda,s mind.

*MRS.ELVSTED. Yes ! When he wrote something, we always had to do it together.*

*HEDDA. Like two good friends, then.*

*MRS. ELVSTED. (animated) Friends ! Yes, fancy , Hedda- that's what he called it too ! (P.16)*



From the above dialogues it is clear that dialogue reveals Hedda's past nearness to Lovborg. That why she is intolerant of the intimacy between Elvsted and Lovborg and shrewdly plans to end such a romantic bond between them. Hedda already loses her nicety, tenderness, kindness and friendliness when her general father has gifted her with his two pistols with them she plays to kill her boredom and loneliness.

Hedda is a woman of strong will and infallible grit. She does not bear that Lovborg will be her husband' rival in connection with professorship and academic publication. Lovborg's manuscript gives an opportunity to satisfy her insatiable fury and revenge. George finds it and handovers Hedda for safekeeping and wants it to return it to Lovborg according to his requirement. On the other hand Hedda becomes more furious and revengeful to destroy the manuscript, a joint effort known as their brainchild. Likewise she desires to mar the growing intimacy between Lovborg and Elvstead. She burns Lovborg's manuscript to put an end to her husband's rivalry with the latter concerning professorship.

Hedda's past discloses her love affair with Lovborg. He passionately loves Hedda but it is snapped before it will get matured. Hedda breaks up the tie of love leading Lovborg to drink wine excessively to forget the affair. Mrs. Elvsted's timely relation with Lovborg to change him into a normal man with his academic proficiency. But when he comes back to Hedda, she tries to seduce him again, brings more troubles and predicaments for him. As result he becomes more demoralized and discouraged to live his life delightfully. She is the sole cause of destruction by providing him with one of her pistols and encourages him for a beautiful death. She says to Lovborg to commit suicide is the best solution of problems in life. The following dialogue illustrates her motivational and inspirational words for Lovborg's suicide.

*HEDDA. No, wait ! I must give you a memento to take with you.*

*LOVBORG. (looks at her). This ? Is this the memento ?*

*HEDDA. ( nodding slowly ) Do you recognize it ? It was aimed at you once.*

*LOVBORG. You should have used it then.*

*HEDDA. Take it - and do you lose it now.*

*LOVBORG. (Puts the pistol in his breast pocket). Thanks.*

*HEDDA. And beautifully , Eilert Lovborg. Promise me that ! (P.59)*

Thus Hedda is the main cause of Lovborg's suicide. She being the reckless lady without pity and sympathy for her past lover, she never hesitates to provide the pistol to Lovborg keeping in her mind to kill two birds with one arrow. Hedda is always jealous of other's happiness



and prospect when she comes to know Lovborg's closeness and growing intimacy with Elvsted. She does not tolerate it rather it shocks her inexplicably. On the other hand she can not bear to see Lovborg as a professor for which her husband will be deprived. Hedda's ruthlessness, coldheartedness and unsympathetic attitudes to others show her excessive feministic freedom in her character that ruin Lovborg's academic career and finally his life. Hedda is least worried and without any moral scruple for Lovborg's untimely demise.

It is surprising that Hedda maintains her relationship with three men i.e. George Tesman, her husband, Lovborg, her past lover, and Judge Brack simultaneously. Hedda tries to control and manipulates George's life. She dominates George and is henpecked by her from the beginning of their marital life. She is rather unconventional, irresponsible woman who ignores social taboos and discusses with Judge Brack about her honeymoon trip freely.

George Brack always seeks opportunity to take advantage of Hedda's carefree nature. After Lovborg's suicide he tries to blackmail Hedda and threatens to put her in trouble as she has provided her pistol to Lovborg. But she is a lady of iron will, adamant nature and insolent behavior. So she does not care about the threat given by Judge Brack. Throughout the plot she behaves with others in such a rude manner so that it hurts them, gives shocks and surprise even to her husband. Apart from she thinks that she is general's daughter and acts, talks as well as deals with that is incompatible social norms and traditions. Eventually she decides not to give in to Judge Brack who will blackmail and control her life thereafter. She is a stone hearted woman without pity, sympathy, empathy, love, affection, respect and care for others. Her dialogue with Judge Brack who shows her ruthness and rudeness.

*BRACK. Well, fortunately, there is no danger, so long as I say nothing.*

*HEDDA. (looks up at him). So I am in your power, Judge Brack. You have me at your back and call, from this time forward.*

*BRACK. (Whispers softly. Dearest Hedda-believe me – I shall not abuse my advantage.*

*HEDDA. I am in your power nonetheless subject to your will and your demands. A slave, a slave then! (Rises impetuously). NO, I can not endure the thought of that! Never! (P.76)*

Hedda's ego, pride, excessive freedom, daring decision force her to take drastic steps and finally she commits suicide with her own pistol without caring for her husband and her own life. She has never performed her wifely duties towards George like Nora. She leaves her home, her children and even her husband to seek her own identity, to live a life of her own but Hedda ends her life to be free from Brack's dominance and control. It is obvious from the



conversation with other characters that she is not happy with her conjugal life. She not only abhors Judge but also her baby in her womb. After Lovberg's suicide George and Mrs. Elvsted come forward to restore the former's manuscript and work together. The growing intimacy between them creates suspicion in Hedda's mind and she is intolerant of this relation. The relation supplements for Hedda's suicide undoubtedly. This article shows Hedda's feministic freedom from the start to the end of the plot.

She takes her own decision ignoring social taboos and the responsibilities of conjugal life. Henrik Ibsen sketches Hedda's character with subtlety and complexity that is rare to find all feministic traits rather excessive freedom in her, who is instrumental for Lovborg's and her own suicide.

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