INTRODUCTION

Literature is the mirror of life. It artistically represents the society. Literature is an effective medium to know the culture, traditions, practices, feelings and beliefs worldwide and to contribute in the evolution of human civilization through poetry, essays, novels and plays. It has an indispensable impact on the society and vice-versa. English being the global language, literary works in English attracts the readers and writers throughout the world.

In this proposed research work, an intensive study will be done to elucidate and justify Social Realism employed by the renowned Norwegian dramatist and social critic Henrik Ibsen in his plays during the second half of 19th century to portray the contemporary burning social problems realistically with a view to reform the society.

Ibsen dealt with the school of realism and naturalism in drama and played a conspicuous role in popularizing the problem plays. He was a dramatist of social life and concentrated his attention on various problems of the people in his contemporary society. He found his material and inspiration in the world of everyday life affairs. He maintained a realistic attitude in his dramas consistently. It was his avowed object as a dramatist to deal with the actual facts and conditions of contemporary life, instead of making excursions into the realms of the fancy and romance. His work provides a vivid and fairly accurate picture of the conditions of the people in the society.

Realism in literature:

Among the various narrative techniques, Realism is an approach that attempts to describe life truthfully without idealization or romantic subjectivity. Literary realism is a manner and method of picturing life as it really is, untouched by myth, mystery, spiritualism, idealism or romanticism. As a manner of writing, realism relies on the use of specific details to interpret life faithfully and objectively. In contrast to romance, this theory is concerned with representing the familiar aspects of life though common characters and straightforward events. Often, fate plays a major role in realistic plays. A realist drama presents the subject matter truthfully, without artificiality and avoiding artistic conventions and strange supernatural elements.

Although realism is not limited to any one century or group of writers, it is most often associated with the literary movement in the middle of 19th century. Realism defined as ‘the faithful representation of reality’ was a literary movement which began in France in 1840s and then spread like wildfire through the rest of Europe. It was based on ‘objective reality’ and aimed to present daily activities and life among middle and lower class society without any dramatization and romantic idealization. Realism first showed itself in drama by employing real-life settings and costumes.

The ideas which opened the door for Realist Movement are:
1. Positivism
2. Darwin’s theory of Evolution and
3. Marxian political philosophy of equal distribution of wealth.

Radical concepts of Realism are:
1. Truth resides in material objects and is perceived to all five senses; truth is verified through science.
2. The scientific method—observation—would solve everything.
3. Human problems are the highest and are the home of science.
Henrik Ibsen as the pioneer of Realism:

In Norway, Henrik Ibsen is considered to be the father of modern realistic drama. In the early 19th century, the theatre of the Scandinavia (a region of northern Europe consisting of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) was basically unrelated to everyday life. The plays performed on stage manifested the taste of upper-class audience. The drama visualized the stage merely as a medium for pure entertainment, fantasy and romance. The people used to visit theatres not to see replication of life but for a type of melodrama or humorous mockery in which acting was highly artificial and unrealistic. Actors used to orate their lines to the audience instead of naturally performing the story. Still, Norway was curious to set up a separate dramatic literature and life. With this view, a theatre was established in Bergen in 1849 and the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen made efforts to present new lifelike drama. Thus Realism appeared as a social and political need. The aim of realist drama was to debate social issues to bring about social change rather than to charm the audience.

One of the hot subjects was the women's question. Women were deprived of liberty and many rights. They were denied the right to vote, could not enter politics, and were not authorized to have control on their own property. They did not have approach to higher education and were expected to spend their lives as wives and mothers or sisters. Novelists, playwrights and short-story writers were the first to advocate most of the reforms to improve the lives and economic situation of women.

In 1871, the Danish critic Georg Brandes delivered a series of lectures in which he called for a literary practice to debate the real modern problems and social issues. This lecture strongly motivated every progressive writer in Scandinavia, including Henrik Ibsen, to fall into the realistic line pushing aside other literary styles.

According to Fisher, the term ‘Realism’ in literary studies refers to a style that attempts to describe life as it is, in the natural form without artificialization, idealization, subjectivity or exaggeration. In Norway, we can reckon Henrik Ibsen as the father of modern drama as well as the father of realism. He rescued English drama from artificiality He was a pioneer and leader in the drive for a modern deep-seated and realistic literature in the cultural life of Scandinavia. His plays attacked society’s traditional values and dealt with unconventional subjects within the form of the well-made play. He challenged the middle-class society values and formulated the basic rights and liberties of the individual. He is regarded as a social critic and agitator for women's rights. He rejected soliloquies and asides in his plays and, inspired exposition, causally related scenes and inner psychological expression. The environment of the play influenced characters’ personalities, and whatever characters did and whatever characters used revealed their socio-economic surrounding.

Social realism in the plays of Ibsen:

‘Social Realism’ is the subgenre of ‘Realism’ in which socialist and Marxist ideas are set forth in literature. In Social Realist plays, the real-life-like characters and events on stage debate contentious social issues with the sole intent to bring about social change rather than to charm the audience. The characters typically represent conflicting points of view within a realistic social context. A Social-realist play combines penetrating characterization with emphasis on topical social issues, usually concentrated on the moral dilemmas of a central character. Henrik Ibsen introduced social realism in his plays with the purport of more accurately simulating the ever shifting realities of the society through a range of dramatic and theatrical strategies.
The subjects addressed by Ibsen in his realistic social plays are: infidelity, sexual transmission of hereditary disease, euthanasia, women’s status, hypocrisy, deceit, boredom, falsehood, ostentation, war and business, and other issues of social life.

Ibsen's work is generally divided by critics into three phases:

• The first phase consists of his early dramas written in verse and modeled after romantic historical tragedy and Norse sagas. E.g. ‘Love’s Comedy’ (1862)

• During the second phase of his career, Ibsen wrote prose dramas on Social Realism to denounce social injustice. E.g. ‘The Pillars of The Society’ (1877), ‘Doll’s House’ (1879), ‘Ghosts’ (1881) and ‘An Enemy of the People’ (1882)

• In the third phase come the late prose dramas with modern realistic themes using considerable symbolism and metaphor. E.g. ‘Hedda Gabler’ (1890)

Ibsen’s Social-realist Plays:

• Pillars of Society (1877) - This play deals with the hypocrisy and deceit of a middle-class businessman resulting in his downfall. The bourgeois individual sells his love for economical advantages, and this ruins his family’s happiness. The play preaches us the importance of truth in our dealings with others.

• A Doll’s House (1879) - This tragic play deals with the wretched status of subservient women in society and their quest for self-identity and emancipation. Vexed Nora leaves her restricting and dominating husband Torvald and her children at the end of the play, to seek her liberty and education in the freer world outside.

• Ghosts (1881) - This play deals with the concept of the adultery of a father which is sexually transferred to the son in form of the incurable disease ‘syphilis’, necessitating euthanisation (mercy killing) of the poor victim.

• An Enemy of the People (1882) - This play deals with the solitude of a conscientious medical officer who publicizes his discovery of contamination of the popular Baths of the town despite the opposition of the selfish townsfolk. As a result, the people boycott him as an enemy of the town. The play debates the contemporary social problem of ‘tyranny of the majority’. The essence of Ibsen’s political ideals in this play is ‘one must do one’s duty and stand alone to face the whole majority’.

Some quotes by Ibsen:

“A marriage based on full confidence, based on complete and unqualified frankness on both sides; they are not keeping anything back; there’s no deception underneath it all. If I might so put it, it’s an agreement for the mutual forgiveness of sin.”

- Henrik Ibsen

“Money may be the husk of many things, but not the kernel. It brings you food, but not the appetite; medicine, but not health; acquaintances but not friends; servants but not faithfulness; days of joy but not peace and happiness.”

- Henrik Ibsen

“A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view.”

HENRIK IBSEN, From Ibsen's Workshop
“The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.”

- HENRIK IBSEN, *An Enemy of the People*