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THE WAY OF THE WORLD' IS THE REFLECTION OF ATTITUDES AND MANNERS OF THE 17TH CENTURY ENGLAND SOCIETY

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Abstract:

'The Way of the World' is a comedy written by William Congreve. It is in the form of comedy. It reflects the attitudes, manners of the aristocratic society of the 17th century England society. The Way of the World offers a vast vista of contemporary social morality. The Way of the World is considered to be one of the most remarkable works of Comedy of Manners. The main target of the writers of Comedy of Manners was the social follies prevalent in their time. Comedy of Manners is primarily satirical in its approach. The Way of the World contains satirical elements, including the elements of love, marriage, treacherous persons, romantic dialogues, wit and humour; which are essential ingredients of Restoration Comedy. The Way of the World: A Mirror of its Time The Way of the World is most suitable example of Comedy of Manners. Actually, this comedy contains almost all the qualities of a Restoration Comedy. The characters of Mrs. Fainall, Mirabell, Mrs. Marwood and Mr. Fainall give a clear picture of the moral impoverishment of their contemporary society. Domination of Intrigues in Contemporary Society In the Restoration society there was absolute dominance of intrigues and conspiracy. Witty and Humorous Dialogue The most remarkable feature of the comedies of the Restoration Period is the use of witty dialogues and The Way of the World contains this feature in a unique manner. The Way of the World presents a vast - vista of contemporary Restoration society. It satirises the follies of the people of upper class of society Through this William Congreve gives the message to the readers to change the society which is corrupted morally and to enrich the corrupted society and to re-establish the lost peace and prosperity.

Key Words: Comedy of manners, attitudes, manners, aristocratic, love intrigues, morality, satire, humour, ridicule and moral peace and prosperity.

Introduction:

'The Way of the World' is a comedy written by William Congreve. It is in the form of comedy. It reflects the attitudes, manners of the aristocratic society of the 17th century England society. The dramatist has reflected the realistically the social follies of the contemporary society. It is the most suitable example of Comedy of Manners.

Objectives:

To know about the comedy of manners.

To know about the attitudes and manners of the 17th century English society.

To know about the morality.

Scope of Study: In this paper William Congreve's Comedy 'The Way of the World, is referred to make under the readers.

Methodology: To prepare this paper secondary data is used and an analytical method is used

The Way of the World offers a vast vista of contemporary social morality. The Way of the World is considered to be one of the most remarkable works of Comedy of Manners . These comedies of Manners were quite in vogue during the Restoration period . Some of the distinguished personalities of the Comedy of Manners were Wycherley , Etherege , Congreve and Vanbrugh . Special Characteristics of Comedy of Manners Although Comedy of Manners became very popular because of its artistic presentation , the chief speciality of this form was related to its technical aspect . The main target of the writers of Comedy of Manners was the social follies prevalent in their time . Comedy of Manners is primarily satirical in its approach . The Way of the World contains satirical elements , including the elements of love , marriage , treacherous persons , romantic dialogues , wit and humour ; which are essential ingredients of Restoration Comedy . The Way of the World : A Mirror of its Time The Way of the World is most suitable example of Comedy of Manners . Actually , this comedy contains almost all the qualities of a Restoration Comedy . It presents a vast vista of contemporary social morality and principles . This play maintains a satirical tone from the beginning to the end . It gives us valuable information about the sophisticated class of society in England at that time . How they were involved in their life style ; and how woman of that period were crazy about fashions and love - affairs , such sort of things have been brilliantly depicted in The Way of the World . Moral Impoverishment It is very clear after the study of The Comedy of Manners that the Restoration period was devoid of moral values . When we go through The Way of the World we get a clear idea about the moral backwardness of the society . The characters of Mrs. Fainall , Mirabell , Mrs. Marwood and Mr. Fainall give a clear picture of the moral impoverishment of their contemporary society . It looks very when Mirabell suggests Mrs. Fainall to marry Mr. Fainall in order to conceal her pregnancy , because she had an illicit love - affair with him . It is very surprising to note that Fainall inspite of his awareness of Mrs. Fainall's extra - marital affair , doesn't take it very seriously . Although when he speaks to Mrs. Marwood he reacts to his wife's behaviour and calls himself a cuckold . The Illicit Love - affair of Mr. Fainall with Mrs. Marwood When we minutely observe the play The Way of the World , we notice that Mr. Fainall ignores the treachery of his wife because he is no way better than her . He has an extra - marital affair with Mrs. Marwood . But , when this immoral affair is exposed he faces it without any feeling of shame and puts his arguments in order to defend himself . We can judge the moral degradation of Mrs. Marwood that inspite of maintaining love - affair with Mr. Fainall she is also involved with Mirabell . Here we can laugh at Mr. Fainall's condition , because he thinks himself an over - intelligent fellow and fabricates intrigues for others but he is himself being deceived by his wife and Mrs. Marwood . The Affectations for Fashionable Society The Way of the World , depicts a wonderful picture of the affectations of the people particularly women , in fashionable society . The author is very clear - minded when he portrays the inclination of women for fashion . He ridicules them for their obsession for fashion . We get a clearer picture when we read the " Provisio - scene " . Mirabell presents a broad analysis about women's habit of visiting theatres without their husband's consent , extra - marital affairs and tea parties and so many other habits which were in vogue in fashionable circle of that society .

Apart from this, when Millamant puts some conditions before Mirabell for their marriage, one observes that she talks about her habit of sleeping late in the morning, receiving letters from her well-wishers, writing them replies even after her marriage, entertaining her visitor and she tells Mirabell that she doesn't want any interference on his part in her activities. It shows that how fashion was dominant in the upper class of society. Further we see that wearing tight dresses was very much in fashion in that period. So Mirabell warns Millamant that she can't wear such type of garments during the time of pregnancy because it might cause harm to the forthcoming child. Congreve is very successful when he describes the fashionable society of that period. He tells us about Cabal nights, when women of the upper class of society assemble and gossip about various scandalous affairs. Anyone can imagine the craze for fashion in the Restoration Period when Lady Wishfort appears on the scene. In spite of being an old lady of fifty-five, she is very serious about her make-up and chides her attendant because of inefficiency in the art of make-up. The affectation for fashion was so acute in Restoration Period that everybody was under its 'grip', there was no age-factor for this obsession. Even an old lady like Lady Wishfort tries to keep herself maintained like a young girl. Further the feeling of vanity and jealousy was very much prevalent among the women of Restoration society. In course of the study of the play we notice that Mrs. Marwood is very jealous of Millamant although it is justified, because she has a deep inclination for Mirabell. However, it has been mentioned as an inevitable fact of Restoration Comedy but truly speaking, it has been a weakness of women in every age. Domination of Intrigues in Contemporary Society In the Restoration society there was absolute dominance of intrigues and conspiracy. Men and women were deeply involved in plotting and scheming. Such kind of intrigues were in vogue and young men wanted to marry rich women in order to acquire maximum fortune. In *The Way of the World* we find that Mr. Fainall is not very much interested in Mrs. Fainall. He doesn't love her but he marries her only to acquire her property. He also wants to usurp the whole property of Lady Wishfort on the basis of an illegal document, but we notice that Mirabell foils his attempt and saves the property and reputation of Mrs. Fainall and Lady Wishfort.

Mirabell pretends to be in love with Lady Wishfort in order to marry her niece Millamant. Mrs. Marwood and Fainall both fabricate an intrigue to exploit Lady Wishfort and similarly, even Sir Wilfull too, joins Millamant in an intrigue when he declares that Millamant is ready to marry him. So we observe that the Comedy of Manners of the Restoration period is packed with intrigues and conspiracies. William Congreve has handled these elements with mastery and presented a clear picture of the age before its readers. Witty and Humorous Dialogue The most remarkable feature of the comedies of the Restoration Period is the use of witty dialogues and *The Way of the World* contains this feature in a unique manner. False wits and fops are other elements which dominate the comedies of the Restoration Period. They always try to exhibit their capability of using witty dialogues and pass vulgar remarks to prove their false wit. Congreve is remarkable when he exhibits this capability. He has portrayed the characters of Petulant, Witwoud and Wilfull only to maintain this trend. Witwoud and Petulant are actually a false wit. We find a beautiful display of witty dialogues in the conversation of Petulant, Witwoud and Sir Wilfull. When Witwoud doesn't want to recognise Sir Wilfull simply because he comes from the countryside, Sir Wilfull loses his temper. But Witwoud says, that it is not the fashion here to recognise relatives, then Sir Wilfull replies by saying that fashion is foolish; and Witwoud is not better than a fop. The dialogues of Petulant and Witwoud are full of humour elements: Petulant: "Witwoud, are you even an attorney's clerk? Of the family of the Furnivalas, Ha, ha, ha!" Witwoud: "But that was just for a while. Not long, not long. I was not in my own power then. An Orphan and this fellow was my guardian". Further when Witwoud talks to Mrs. Marwood he says to her that Petulant is my good friend but when he contradicts me I also contradict him. Petulant says in reply that if they are not in good mood then if Witwoud calls a black colour black then he (Petulant) certainly contradict him and calls it blue. So an overall study of the play shows that as a Comedy of Manner, *The Way of the World* presents a vast-vista of contemporary Restoration society. It satirises the follies of

the people of upper class of society . In a nutshell , it can be maintained that Congreve has proved his capability and presented a true picture of his contemporary society in The Way of the World .

Findings:

Come to know about the culture of the England society of 17th century.

Come to know about the degradation of the morality of the contemporary society.

Suggestions:

To come out of the morally degraded society.

Try to re-establish the peace and prosperity in the society.

Conclusion:

This is how William Congreve has reflected all the characters realistically. Each character of this comedy reflects the attitudes, manners and follies of the 17th century England society. Through this William Congreve gives the message to the readers to change the society which is corrupted morally and to enrich the corrupted society and to re-establish the lost peace and prosperity.

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