



NARAJOLE RAJ COLLEGE

(NAAC Accredited 'B' Grade Govt. Aided College)
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SELF LEARNING MATERIALS

NAME OF THE DEPARTMENT :ENGLISH
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British Literature(fiction and nonfiction) :18th Century

Semester: II Paper: C3T

- *The Way of the World*
- **Structure of the Content or Unit Structure**
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Objectives: — This material helps you to understand William Congreve's seminal play *The Way of the World*. It also includes an in-depth analysis socio-economic and political condition of the then England. This unit puts a clear light on the life and works of Congreve. Above all this module helps the students to have a wholesome idea of the drama within its (module's) short periphery.

Introduction :—The restoration of British monarchy in 1660 also marked the revival of drama in England after the shutting down of the theatre in 1642. The 1660s and 70s playwrights like George Etherege and William Wycherley and William Congreve addressed a courtly audience with a new kind

of drama, characterised by witty dialogue , intricate plot and moral cynicism . The comedy of manners, as this kind of drama came to be popularly known , dealt with the lifestyle of the urban , aristocratic classes of English society and represented humorously the follies and absurdities of their social conduct. Sexual tension and intrigue , disguise and deceptions and inter-generational conflicts were some of the standard tropes employed in such comedies. The focus in such plays were on the superficial manners of the upper class characters they represented , rather than on their deeper emotions or the moral implications of their conduct. Towards the end of the 17th century , public taste turned against the open immorality of the comedy of manners and towards more genteel , sentimental middle class drama.

Life and Work : — William Congreve remains one of the most enigmatic figures of the Restoration Comedy of manners . He is important because of his unique positioning between two distinct attitudes and he is also enigmatic because of the conflictive nature of his lifestyle . David Thomas describes Congreve as "an elusive figure "whose passion for the theatre led him to completely withdraw from the theatre . In a similar way Virginia Woolf calls Congreve a "man of mystery , man of superb genius who ceased to use his genius at his height".

Congreve was born in Bardsey, Yorkshire on 24 January 1670, ten years after the Restoration period began in England. In 1664 , his father joined the army and moved to Ireland . His father was given a commission as a lieutenant in the Irish army and in the years to follow his family moved first to Carrickfergus in 1678 and then to Kilkenny in 1681. While in Kilkenny , he studied at Kilkenny College where he got a secure grounding in classical language and literature . In order to continue his studies he moved to Trinity College , Dublin in 1686. Congreve used his time in Dublin to strengthen his command of the classics as well as an opportunity to acquaint himself with the theatre. After the closure of Trinity College due to political pressures his father enrolled him as a student of law in the Middle Temple but he was not interested in legal studies. He came in contact with a group of writers who gathered at Will's Coffee House. Due to his excellent command of classical languages he got acquainted with Dryden who asked Congreve to translate some fragments from Homer for the volume entitled "Examen Poeticum"(1693) for which he was highly praised in the dedication of that particular volume of translations which also included a fragment translated by Dryden himself.

Although his first into the writing business was with the publication of a short novel called "Incognita" in 1691, he was not well known until 1693. The performance of his first major play "The Old Batchelour" in 1693 which was one of the best plays brought him instant recognition. The play was staged after slight delay at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. During the period between the writing of the play and performance he was allowed to be present for the rehearsal of the Drury Lane Company. It was during this interim period that he met Anna Bracegirdle would, the lead actress of all his important plays and also the model for many of Congreve's heroines. She played Araminta in "The Old Bachelor", Cynthia in "The Double Dealer" , Angelica in "Love for Love" and Millamant in "The Way of the World"

Very little is known about the private life of Congreve and consequently the exact nature of their relationship is a matter of speculation. It was true when Virginia Woolf says "no writer of his time and standing past through the world more privatey." According to a few eyewitness Congreve and Bracegirdle would regularly meet for dinner. She was later said to have responded to the advances of Congreve's cousin, Robert Leke, third Earl of Scarsdale who bequeathed a considerable amount of sum to her in his will. In 1705 he acquired a small political post and became Commissioner for Wines at

an annual salary of 200 pounds while at the same time suffering from various health issues. He suffered from gout and cataracts in his eyes that threatened him with blindness.

In 1714, with the accession of George I, his fortunes improved and he was made secretary to the Island of Jamaica at an annual salary of 700 pounds. During this time he had a sustained love affair with Lady Henrietta Godolphin, the eldest daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. It is believed that they also had a daughter together named Mary. Lady Henrietta was provided care and comfort to Congreve before his death in 1729. After his death he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Historical background:— The 17th century was a period of deep instability filled with constant ideological conflicts. During that period the major question is asked that whether or not the people are capable of self-government. Charles I came in conflict with the parliament which inevitably started the Civil War in the 1640's. The constitutional parliamentary rule came after a bloody Civil War between the supporters of parliament led by Oliver Cromwell who believed in the right of the people to self-government through parliament and the supporters of Charles I who believed in the divine right of the King to rule. The struggle began in 1642 and continued till 1646 it is important to note that the parliament at that point of time was dominated by the Puritan outlook. It is characterized by a set of stringent religious and moral concerns that take precedent over the old traditions and customs of the country. It was against this Puritan outlook that many of the major Restoration period dramatists such as Wycherley and Etherege were writing.

Restoration period began with the arrival of Charles II on the shores of England after the brief interregnum rule under Oliver Cromwell. The term 'restoration' is used to refer the reinstatement of the monarchy in 1660. After the restoration of monarchy and the reopening of theatres in 1660, the writers found a sudden release from the stifling pressures of puritanism. The excesses of this period are mirrored by major comic dramatists such as Wycherley and Etherege. After Charles II, James II (his brother) came into power. Due to the authoritarian measures adopted by James II believed in the divine right of the kings to rule. His daughter Mary and his son-in-law, William of Orange were recalled to overthrow him. In 1688, James II was overthrown and a constitutional monarchy was brought into rule the country. This event is called the Glorious Revolution or The Bloodless Revolution of 1688.

The political instability, the uncertainty that existed during the earlier part of the Restoration Period was no longer applicable to the period after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The political uncertainty percolated into the sphere of social relations or specifically the relations between two sexes. Congreve lived in a much more stable period where a meaningful, stable relationship was possible. *Mirabell* and *Millamant* are representative of this kind of a view.

In this time the middle classes grew economically and began a moral reaction against the aristocratic class and its excesses. During this time along with the debauchery presentation in restoration comedies there grew a sturdy body of Puritan literature. It was predominantly religious in nature which had a wider appeal as opposed to the restoration comedy of manners dependent on wit. It was as part of this alternate movement that John Bunyan published the first part of "The Pilgrim's Progress" in 1678 and the second in 1684. It was as part of this middle class puritanical culture that Jeremy Collier launched a fierce attack on the Restoration Comic writers by publishing "A Short View of the Immortality and Profaneness of the English Stage" in 1698. This was the reason Congreve finally stopped writing after "The Way of the World". The literature soon gave way to Sentimentalism and thus came end of the restoration comedy of manners.

Restoration Comedy of Manners :— The restoration comedy of manners could be divided into two phases : early restoration comedy and late restoration Comedy. Although Congreve borrows much from the early restoration comedy, his works also encapsulate the social and intellectual attitudes of the later restoration era of which he was a major writer.

1. The early restoration comedy started immediately after the return of Charles II to England and the reopening of the English Theatres. The period could be said to have started with the publication of Dryden's "The Wild Gallant "in 1663 followed by his most successful comedy " Marriage a la Mode " in 1671 . Dryden is followed by two major restoration comedy of manners writers who produced some of the most well - known comedies of that period -George Etherege and William Wycherley. George Etherege started with "The Comical Revenge " (1664) which "observe[d] sexual intrigue across the different classes" While also providing the stock characters of the restoration comedy of manners. He followed it with "She Wou 'd if She Cou 'd " in 1688 and what is considered to be his best work "The Man of Mode " or "Sir Fopling Flutter (1676) marked by a sense of objective detachment which also incidentally marks the end of the first phase. Another major writer of this period William Wycherley in his major plays " engage in biting, sardonic ridicule of hyprocrisies and affections"(XVII). His first play "Love in the Wood " was performed in 1671 followed by some of his most famous comedies "The Country Wife" in 1675 and "The Plain Dealer" in 1676 both providing a darker vision of the restoration period society.
2. The period of later Restoration comedy begins with the performance of Congreve's first comedy, "The Old Bachelor" in 1693 after the Glorious Bloodless Revolution of 1688 which changed the political landscape of England. Two more important dramatists of the time were Vanbrugh and Farquhar. They were both contemporaries of Congreve Whose plays explored the " repercussions of disastrously unhappy marriage. There major plays were " The Provok 'd Wife "(1697) and " The Beaux Stratagem" (1707) respectively. But it was Congreve who was representative of this age. What he brings out in his plays is the possibility of preserving human values in an imperfect world.

Restoration Theatre : — In September 1614 the theatres were closed by the Republican government. The restoration of monarchy in 1660 lifted with the ban of play houses. Due to the gap of almost twenty years the theatres of the restoration period are differentiated from the theatres of the Elizabethan era. During the restoration period there were two major companies - the Duke's Company owned by Sir William Davenant and the King's Company owned by Thomas Killigrew.

A number of changes and innovations ensued in the English theater with the erection of these two companies. Among them the significant was the introduction of female actors to the English stage overturning the old convention of employing boy actors to play female roles. Some of the major female actors of the period were Anne Bracegirdle, Nell Gwynn, Katherine Corey, Elizabeth Barry and others. Another significant change was related to the design of the theatres . The pits of these new theatres were fitted with benches with maximum seating capacity. On either side of the pit, the stage-boxes were fitted with the theatres. Another change was the emphasis on spectacle which led to an increased use of distinct sceneries and machines.

On the other hand ,the audiences constituted mainly of the aristocratic elite. This was due to the puritanical middle class avoiding the theatres as being immoral and the lower class people finding the

fees of entrance which was then one shilling too expensive. Restoration Comedy is believed to have catered to \this affluent leisured classis. According to Emmet L. Avery and Arthur H. Scouten the restoration comedy did not consist of a single class as believed. According to the diary of Samuel peppy, he was delighted when the playhouse was dominated by wits and disappointed if the audience consisted mainly of the lower-class people. It proved that people of both classes attended the playhouse.

An Introduction to “The Way Of the World ” :— "The Way of the World" is possibly the subtlest and the greatest of the restoration comedy of manners if not the greatest comedies produced on the English stage. Although Congreve did not completely cut off his ties with the theatre even then, it is considered to be the last play wrote. For example, he commissioned to write the text of masque entitled "The Judgement of Paris " . He was also involved with another contemporary restoration dramatist, Vanbrugh in the planning of a new theatre and opera house in the Haymarket. "The Way of the World "is often looked at as a compromise between what Anne Barton calls " an old order and a new" for the audience of the early restoration comedies of Wycherley and Etherege weren't the same as the audience of the 1960's , a period in which all the plays of Congreve were performed. During the reign of Mary and William, all of his plays were conceived and staged after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, for a London audience far more subdued and conservative.

In "The Way of the World" the compromise that Congreve achieves between the cool disenchantment of the Restoration and the emotional warmth of the eighteenth century certainly makes the play unique. In the earlier restoration period all the conventions are found, somehow overturned in order to depict a new and changing society of the post -revolutionary of the 1690's . In earlier restoration comedies, by reworking many of the conventions, Congreve was trying to emphasize the fact that there is a place for honest relationship based on mutual trust. For example, the character of the wild gallant introduced by Dryden and which became the staple of restoration comedy was also reformed in "The Way of the World". Mirabell epitomized the reformed rake whose sole aim is to find a meaningful relationship consisting of honesty and commitment. Finally, he manages to find that relationship with Millamant, who herself is multifaceted and complex in nature. It is Mirabell, the truemwit who ultimately manages to keep the society together. He is the "cohesive force that keeps society together" by rescuing it from the disruptive influences of the fools and the villains.

The image of the gallant is transformed in this play. For example , the conflict between the individual and the society is a common theme found in restoration comedy and as such is also palpable presence in "The Way of the World ". The difference is in the tone. The tone of the earlier restoration comedies were satirical , harsh and pessimistic while the tone in The Way of the World is much more optimistic.

Key Facts : The Way Of the World

- 1. Title - The Way of the World**
- 2. Written - late 1699 to early 1700**
- 3. Place of writing - London**
- 4. Published - March 1700**
- 5. Literary Period - Restoration Period**
- 6. Setting : London, in Wishfort's house**
- 7. Genre : - Restoration Comedy**
- 8. Protagonists : Mirabell and Millamant**

9. Antagonist : Fainall

10. Climax : Act V, scene 1

The title :— "The Way of the World " is a preposterous expression meaning the way people behave. However in the Restoration time , the expression the way of the world expounded adultery which was a common behavior in society especially in theatrical Restoration Comedies.

"The Way of the World " is one of the best known and most characteristics of Restoration Comedies in terms of plot, tone and themes . Restoration Comedies are typically described as worldly which means something cynical , sophisticated and witty . This genre deals mainly with immoral or amoral sense of the world to be rejected by the Romantics. A century later in poems such as Wordsworth's sonnet " The World is Too Much with Us " to which the title of the play refers.

The title of the play foreshadows the theme of infidelity and deception which play an important role in the play .Finally, whose name suggests not only his character but also a general principle of conduct in the play . He is carrying a clandestine affair with Mrs. Marwood . Mrs. Marwood is a friend of Fainall's friend Mirabell. Lady Wishfort, Mrs. Fainall's mother attempts to prevent the marriage of Mirabell and Millamant but is tricked by Mirabell's disguised manservant into believing that he is the man the mother wants to marry. The title of the play is significant because , it is the Way of the World , of the Widows of the World that provides the play with a resolution. It was used in the first instance by Mr. Fainall to signify the unmasking of the characters and the actual relationship between the characters – “ why then Foible's Bawd , an Errant , Rank , Matchmaking Bawd , And l it seems am a Husband , a Rank -Husband ; and my Wife a very Errant , Rank – Wife , -all in the Way of the World.”

The Settings :— In this play the settings are also civilized . For example , instead of the tavern or the restaurant, the first act takes place in a chocolate house (so called due to the serving of chocolate as beverage). St. James Park is the setting for the second act . In earlier restoration comedies parks were usually meant for sexual adventures while in this play St. James park is just a place to have a walk. The indoor setting of the next three acts are in this play , limited to certain people and it does not become a meeting place for a wide variety of people which was the norm in earlier restoration comedies.

Characterization in The Way of the World :— In the play , the characters are as subtle as the plot is complex. In terms of the name of the characters one might find a connection between "The Way of the World " and Ben Johnson's "Comedy of Humours ". Humour is derived from medieval medicine , according to which the human body consisted of four fluids - blood, phlegm, choler , black choler. Each of these fluids are again related to the four principal elements by which the world was supposed to be controlled - hot (fire), cold (earth), moist (water)and dry (air). Accordingly, " a person's physical and mental qualities and disposition were held to be determined by the relative proportion of these fluids." . All the names in the play give a basic idea as to their characters. For example , the name of Wishfort is a contraction of ' wish for it ' which means that she constantly aspires for something she does not possess .In this case it is youth , beauty and lovers . Similarly Fainall would refer to someone who feigns all or pretends all the time. Witwoud would refer to someone who aspires to wit. Mrs. Marwood would refer to someone who wishes to harm.

Congreve's characterization was based on the characterization in the comedy of humours because the distance of the stage requires the figures to be represented something larger than life . The characters

are named according to their humours for the sake of the common audience . Another issue associated with the characters is their way of speaking. One is never as witty as is shown in the art of characterization . Here wit means the way of using language . It is expressed in word - play or the innuendo, epigram etc. The writer justified the use of wit by saying that the characters must be cleverer than the actual wits because if real speech is reproduced in the play then people would be bored to distraction. According to Dryden , wit is associated with decorum . This deviousness necessary to be a true wit is violated by the fools of the play whether it be Witwoud , Petulant or even Lady Wishfort.

Major characters: —

Mirabell :— The protagonist of the play, he is a fashionable, intellectual, and clever man . He is very popular with the ladies. He was Mrs. Fainall's lover before her marriage with Fainall . Now he is in love with Millamant. He is ready to develop a mature and true relationship. Though he wants to get married, he finds himself on the bad side of a quite number of other characters such as Lady Wishfort , Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood who invent plans of their own to ruin his chances to do so. However, he has a number of followers such as his servant Waitwell and servant's wife, Foible, and his former lover Mrs. Arabella Fainall who were ready to assist him in his plan to win Millamant , to save her dowry and defeat Fainall. He is quite generous toward this benefactor and helps each out of tough scrapes by using a combination of capital and cunning.

Millamant :—She is very fashionable and popular in London. She is beautiful, rich and squandered and could have any man she wants. In spite of her cruelty towards Mirabell , she loves him and is guarded him with her emotions. She is an independent woman who loves poetry. Though she is not romantically interested in Witwoud and Petulant , she spends time with them to make Mirabell jealous. She enjoys to keep Mirabell on his toes. In order to thwart Mirabella, she supports her aunt , Wish for in all things and does not initially offer much resistance to her aunt's proposition to marry her off, first Sir Rowland and then her cousin Sir Willfull. Then she agrees to marry Mirabell and sets multiple conditions to carry on her independent lifestyle which Mirabell accepts.

Fainall :— He is the antagonist of the play. He is insecure, sneaky and insidious fellow and has not so good reputation. He has all the negative qualities that Mirabell has not. He is the second husband of Mrs. Arabella Fainall . He does not like his rich wife and has an affair with his wife's friend , Mrs. Marwood. Mrs. Marwood and Fainall have developed a plan to cheat Millamant out of her dowry, Arabella out of her property and Lady Wishfort out of her entire fortune. In spite of his suspecting and jealousy, Fainall believes that Marwood loves Mirabell. He is unable to hide his anger. Fainall hides his dislike of his wife. Towards the end of play, when Mirabell has triumphed, Fainall unleashes all his anger on his wife, threatens her with physical harm.

Marwood: — Marwood is an experienced liar mainly around in her female friends such as Mrs. Fainall and Lady Wishfort . She is cunning and manipulative. She is able to convince Fainall that she only loves him while making him feel incredibly guilty for doubting her. Marwood gives very candid advice to those who would follow fashion trends at the expense of following their hearts. She advises Millamant to stop pretending to be interested in other men and without to acknowledge his step brother Wilfull, rather than treat him like a stranger.

Lady Wishfort: —She is a wealthy, old widow and aunt of Millamant, Witwoud and Sir Wilfull. She is the mother of Arabella Fainall. She tries to act younger than she actually is. So, she wears various types of make up to hide her age. She is also silly and vain woman. She falls in love with Sir Rowland

and wanted to remarry him. She is the leader of "cabal -night". This club consists of mostly women who gather at her house to gossip. She trusted the opinion of Marwood who is betraying her. She is in charge of organizing her niece's marriage and protecting her dowry until she gets married. This work is threatened by Fainall. Later she is not wanted to remarry her daughter with Fainall.

Mrs. Arabella Fainall: —She is the daughter of Lady Wishfort and cousin of Millamant, Witwoud and sir Wilfull. She was once married with a rich man, Languish who died early. After her husband's death, she began an affair with Mirabell. Mrs. Fainall admires the steady and clear thinking of Mrs. Fainall and tells her full details of his plan. She never reveals that she still loves Mirabell and does not ruin his plan. Mrs. Fainall, does not like her husband but does not learn about the affair of her husband until Foible reveals it to her.

Foible: — She is Lady Wishfort's servant. She was once a beggar and homeless before Wishfort saved her and gave a job. She is very smart and eloquent woman. Mirabell pleased with her work and promised her to reward with land and money. She deeply respects Mrs. Fainall who understands and is sensitive to the sufferings of poor woman.

Sir Wilfull Witwoud:— He is the forty years old nephew of Lady Wisfort. He is not only unrefined and ignorant but also very sweet and good sense of humour. He wants to improve himself by travelling to France. He has come to England to learn French but is corrupted by the debauchery that life in London offers. Being drunk at Wishfort's house, he makes an evil impression on Millamant. He is also protective of Arabella Fainall. In the end of the novel, he has made friendship with Witwoud and Petulant who later agree to his travel companions to France.

Petulant: —Petulant is boisterous, foolish, and naughty fellow. He is Witwoud's best friend and also wants to be known as a ladies' man. He likes to start arguments over trivial matters and usually has no real substantive points to make. He thinks Millamant is beautiful as one might think a vase is beautiful but has no real interest in formally courting her.

Minor Characters: —

Waitwell: — He is Mirabell's hard working servant. Mirabell allows him to marry Foible.

Sir Rowland: —Waitwell's alter-ego, connected by Mirabella in his plan to blackmail Lady Wish for into allowing him to marry Millamant.

Betty: — Waitress of the chocolate house.

Mincing:— Loyal servant of Millamant. She testifies against Garwood about her affair with Fainall.

THEMES: —

Jealousy, Deceit and Intrigue: — In " The Way of the World " jealousy, deceit and intrigue are important plot devices that drive the action of the play by creating conflict between characters. Each character is assisted in his plan to outdo other. Jealousy has a huge motivator for the adulterers. Marwood, Fainall and lady Wishfort scheme a plan against Mirabell. Fainall is jealous of Mirabella because he fears to loss his popularity with women, particularly that Marwood still loves Mirabell. Because of jealousy, Mirabell threatens to gain some fortune of Wishfort by marrying Millamant. In the end, all jealous characters end up not getting what they want i.e. revenge against Mirabell.

Apart from that intrigue and deception played an important role to raise action that makes the play engaging and suspenseful. Almost all the characters have something to hide. Deception is practiced in obvious way such as disguise. Congreve examines subtler forms of deception including self-deception. In the case of Lady Wishfort who uses so much make up to hide her age. Another form of deception is psychological deception. In this deception utilized by Marwood as she pretends to be Wishfort's best friend while scheming to steal her fortune.

Congreve uses deception and intrigue to structure his play. The secret marriage between Foible and Waitwell (explained in Act 2 Scene 4) and even Mrs. Fainall's secret deed of conveyance to Mirabell revealed at the end of the play. Deception and intrigue not only affect other characters in the play but also delight the unsuspecting readers.

Men Vs. Women:— Congreve's play would have taken the attention of the Restoration audience so much interested to know the gossip of what really goes on between married and unmarried men and women inside the doors. "The Way of the World" does not merely titillate the audience with the possibilities of physical union between man and woman.

His work suggests the existence of an ever-present tension between men and women that does not always manifest itself as sexual tension. He explores how love/hate relationships tend to develop between men and women. It has no problem that how complacent their personalities are. Congreve develops a broad spectrum of these tensions between various male and female characters such as the relationship between the absurd Wishfort and the flirtatious Mirabell. At first, Wishfort is in love with Mirabell, spends most of the time to gain revenge against him for pretending to be interested in her. At the end, it is discovered that her intense hatred for him is born from unrequited love. The relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Fainall is marked by mutual hatred between husband and wife. Both characters spend much of the play telling others around them how much they hate their spouse. They expend much of their energy trying to ruin the others.

Wits and Fools: — "The Way of the World" opens with a prologue that outlines the general struggle of playwright to satisfy the audience. He suggests that this is a foolish endeavor. This type of instruction is exactly what he proceeds to give through the witty dialogue of the fools of the play mainly by Witwoud, Sir Wilfull and Petulant. These minor characters often grasp the significance of the drama going on between Mirabell and Fainall. But teasing on the other characters, they provide comic relief by using puns and good humours. All three men are unintellectual, excessively concerned with fashion and vulgar. Mirabell is the foil to all three men and explores the highest standards of wit and decorum. Congreve makes it clear that the true wit like Mirabell is never foolish. Fainall represents as the villain or rogue of the play by Mirabell and his half-wits such as Sir Wilfull, Petulant and Witwood. Fainall is neither wit nor a fool. He occupies his own category.

Love and Money: — Congreve draws a more important connection between familial and romantic love and the desire for money as a means of financial security. Money is an exclusive concern of the several characters in Congreve's play. Greed exists in the play "The Way of the World". For example, Fainall wants all fortune of Lady Wishfort. As money provides a comfortable life, it is also essential ingredient of love. Financial security is an interesting addendum because it suggests that the sentiment of love is not enough to build a romantic relationship or to protect family bonds. For example, Fainall needs to acquire Wishfort's fortune to support his mistress, Mrs. Marwood. Lady Wishfort has control over the accounts of her daughter Mrs. Fainall and her niece Millamant and is not above forcing their compliance by reminding them of this fact, specifically Millamant.

Foible and Waitwell's marriage is also an example of this theme . Their marriage benefits from Mirabell 's financial incentives. He gives money to Foible for her help and promises to buy some land and stock their farm if his plan succeeds. Waitwell's marriage to Foible assures Mirabell that he can trust Waitwell to play the role of Sir Rowland. Waitwell will reveal his true identity to Wishfort when Mirabell is ready to blackmail Lady Wishfort for exchange Millamant's hand, for destroying the evidence of her false marriage with Sir Rowland.

Female Independence: — Congreve portrays the characters in "The Way of the World " positively specially female characters. They are intelligent and independent and contributed their own ideas to the schemes created by Mirabell and Fainall . Foible is noted for her quick and sharp mind. Mrs. Fainall is tried to destroy the plans of her adulterous husband before she finds out he is false. Mrs . Marwood demands better treatment from Fainall and also coerces him to spend his money on her.

Millamant is the most independent of all the women characters. She is the Belle of the town . She is not the type to rush into marriage because she feels that she needs a man to support her. In the famous "proviso scene " between Mirabell and Millamant , Millamant profiles the term of her marriage to Mirabell and stakes to maintain her independence after marriage. This scene is an important passage from the symposium of the marriage plot. In this period, most of the comedies are end with the engagement or marriage of hero and heroine.

In spite of this independence, the women characters of the play are not completely free from the inhibits of male dominated society. They are not as independent as they seem. Mrs. Fainall needs the help of Mirabell to save her fortune. Lady Wishfort is almost a victim of Fainall 's plan to blackmail her by exposing her affair with Mirabell.Fainall demands to keep quite about Lady Wishfort 's ignominious involvement with the disguised Waitwell would have restrained her power as matriarch, as well as cut down her finances.

SYMBOLS:

Masks:— Masks symbolize dishonesty in the play "The Way of the World " . During the 17th century , masks were worn as fashion in Restoration period plays , specially in scenes of infidelity. In this play characters wear mask to hide their feelings and original identities. Masks were failing out of fashion. Mirabell demands on Millamant that she never wear masks in their marriage - " that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall" . Millamant would wear a mask which she calls "detestable imprimis " . At the end of Act II Marwood wears a mask as she attempts to hide her affair with Fainall but the tears bring her original identity and fails to hide her emotions. Similarly, Petulant wears a mask in a vain attempt to hide his identity as he flits around town. He is trying to make himself look more popular. But his friends recognize him and mock him behind his back. The characters who use mask to hide their identities but their failure assure audiences that good will prevail in this farce.

Characters Names: —The names of the characters in the play "The Way of the World " used by Congreve symbolize their true nature. Some of the names define their personalities. For example , Petulant means "trifling " or "superficial" which precisely characterizes the silly fop. Witwoud means "would have wit " which perfectly characterizes his desire to be seen as a "wit" like Mirabell. Foible means "the weaker part of a sword blade between middle and the point" which helps to define the relationship between Foible and Lady Wishfort. Although she does not have the power but Foible's intelligence makes her powerful.

The name of the other characters rely on romance language to understand their meaning. For example, Millamant reflects her countless admirers. In French "mille" means "thousand" and "amant" means "lover". In Spanish, "mira" means "look" and "belle" means "beautiful". Mirabell's name hints at his own attractiveness and his love for Millamant. In Biblical times the word "fain" means "fix one's heart upon". With this Fainall means "desire for everything" which hints the greedy nature of the character. Marwood divided into two parts - "mar" which means "destroy" and "wood" or in this case "would" suggesting her "sneaky" nature which would destroy you if given the chance.

House of Lady Wishfort:—The fact that so much of the action is taken in one physical location demonstrates the closed and near-incestual nature of upper class Restoration Society. Because the action is so contained, gossip spreads quickly and fights can occur suddenly. Secret romance is also harder to hide in confined quarters, leading to situations like Ms. Marwood's spying from the closet, something that could not have happened unless the plot was largely confined to a single house.

Waitwell's disguise as Sir Rowland: —There are not specific notations on the requirements of Waitwell's disguise as Sir Rowland. It can be assumed that his costume is the exact embodiment of an upper class fashion. Since Mirabell outfits him, it can be assumed that it will follow Mirabell's style to some extent. But as he supposed to be Mirabell's uncle it will also have to be appropriate for an older age group. This physicalization of the costume of fashion as all fashion is just real-world costuming. It draws attention to the silly and theatrical nature of the society and physical societal signs of status.

Alcohol: — As a symbol, alcohol represents the desire or ability to escape some rigid propriety but can also be wielded in the scheme of others for this very reason. Alcohol is sometimes seen onstage such as Lady Wishfort's dressing room and sometime implied to have been imbibed offstage. However, the effect of so much alcohol seems to be lower people's level of propriety which is so important to social status in Restoration England.

Mrs. Marwood's Letter: — Mrs. Marwood's letter is unseen until late in Act IV but lingers as a symbolic element of the climax since the time she promises to write it after overhearing the scheme early in the play. When it arrives in Lady Wishfort's hands, it physicalizes the gossip and backstabbing that floated throughout and drives the plot of the play.

Acts and Scenes: — Although all the major characters in the play are either directly or indirectly introduced to the readers in the very first act, it is only because of the true nature of the characters are revealed. Congreve used this trope in his earlier plays in order to complicate the responses of the audience. It was the only reason for which the play did not successfully staged in the theatres. Congreve writes in his dedication to the Earl of Montague that "little of it was prepared for that general taste which seems now to be predominant in the palates of our audience"

The true nature of the characters, except a few characters such as Lady Wishfort, Petulant, and Witwoud who remain the same throughout the play. According to Harriet Hawkins, they are "gradually revealed" in the play as opposed to the earlier restoration comic dramas of Wycherley and Etherege where the true nature of the characters are revealed to the audience at the very beginning of the play. This overt reliance on maintaining a facade, a disguise for the benefit of the society was an important aspect of restoration comedy. This facet of the restoration comedy was part of a larger conflict within the period between the individual and society. The true nature of the characters is perverted by social conventions. It turns human beings into fools and hypocrites. In this play the hypocrisies of Lady Wishfort and the foolishness of Witwoud are apparent. For example, the sexuality

of Lady Wishfort is contrasted by the presence of important puritan works in her room while Witwoud affects a wit for the benefit of the society. In this case, the institution of marriage is a part of this convention. In the first act, Mr. Fainall comments on the deceptions inherent in marriage by suggesting Mirabell to marry Millamant which would "free him of emotional bondage and give him the freedom to have affairs". These loveless, arranged marriages also led people to find alternative means of satisfying their sexual urges. Of that age arranged marriages arranged on the basis of property and reputation, were often loveless as in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Fainall. The most exclusive concentration on the importance of property was in consonance with the "values of the Whig mercantile class of the eighteenth century".

The most influential philosopher in the context of eighteenth century was John Locke. Congreve was working with the theme of property in keeping with the touch of political and economic philosophy of John Locke. He anonymously published "Two Treatises of Government" in 1690 in which he upholds man's natural right to liberty as well as property whose preservation is the duty of the government. Thus, in this play we found two characters such as Millamant and Mrs. Foible that how carefully they preserve their fortune or property. If the true nature of the characters are gradually revealed then the dynamic between various characters and major plot within the play hatched by Mirabell. The conversation between Fainall and Mirabell in the first act, the conversation between Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Fainall in the second act, the conversation between Mrs. Marwood and Millamant are all cases in point. At the end of each conversation we realize the real dynamics between the characters and their true feelings towards each other are revealed to us.

Critical summary: —

Act I: — Act I begins with a conversation between the protagonist, Mirabell and the antagonist Mr. Fainall who is one of the villains of the play. In the play, whether it is villains or fools, they are presented humanly. According to Maximilian E. Novak, "Congreve humanizes the emotions of his villains". At the beginning of the conversation we get a lot of similarities between the two characters. They are both witty, urban, and smart people. As the scene progresses the readers or the audience realizes the vast difference between the two characters. Mirabell has the moral integrity which is lacking in the other character. Fainall is someone who has wit without morals. The difference between Mirabell and Fainall is incidentally also the difference between the heroes of the earlier Restoration comedies of Etherege and Wycherley and the heroes of Congreve and Vanbrugh.

Eugene Waith distinguishes between two comic views of human nature - one is the hard view and the soft view. The hard view is found in the comedies of Etherege and Wycherley where social behaviour is little more than animal instinct partly hidden by hypocritical morality. On the other hand, the soft view could be seen in the comedies of Congreve and Vanbrugh who see some basic goodness in humanity which can be made to prevail. In the very first scene, Mr. Fainall is revealed to be a predatory personality and as such is not much different from Horner or Dorimant. Mr. Fainall finally reveals in the thrill of a hunt when he declares, "I'd no more play with a Man that slighted his ill Fortune, than I'd make Love to a Woman who undervalu'd the Loss of her Reputation". On the other hand Mirabell has a moral sense not "to interpret a woman's good Manners to her Prejudice; and think that she who does not refuse 'em ev'ry thing, can refuse nothing."

In the first act, we get the details of Millamant's inheritance which amounts to 12000 pounds half of which is in the possession of Lady Wishfort. If Millamant marries according to Lady Wishfort's wishes only then half of the fortune in possession will be released to Millamant. The emphasis on property

also represents the deep-seated economic insecurity of the age . The flaw in Mirabell is that he is as much a part of that society as any another character and also suffers from the same insecurity. In the play Mirabell's aim is not only to get Millamant but also to get that half fortune under the control of her aunt, Lady Wishfort.

Mirabell is also concerned of his 'own Frailties ' and it is only by accepting Millamant with all her faults accepts himself . In a crucial dialogue Mirabell says , " I like her with all her Faults ; nay , like her for her Faults ". Mirabell for all his passion is not blinded by it . He is aware of the faults in his love and he is also a discerning lover. This asserts to the possibility for honest and genuine love as artificiality. It is missing from the earlier restoration comedy. This possibility never occurred in Wycherley's " The Country Wife " while it remained in Etherege's "The Man of Mode " an unanswered question at the end of the play.

The first act also reveals the reason for what the ill-will between Mirabell and Lady Wishfort had misunderstood Mirabell's flattery . It was only done in order to hide his love affair with Millamant. This earlier plot was exposed by Mrs. Marwood who is also secretly in love with Mirabell . Her advances were neglected by Mirabell . Congreve's heroes are compulsive plotters who try to impose a rational order over the vicissitudes of life. The recent plot is already in motion in the first act with the wedding of Waitwell and Foible . With the mention of the "conscious-concern" towards Mrs. Marwood on the part of Mr. Fainall . The readers becomes aware of the tension between Mirabell and Mr. Fainall and also reveals the relationship between Mr. Fainall and also reveals the relationship between Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood.

Act II: —The second act begins with a conversation between Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Fainall . The conversation starts midway which further complicates the response of the audience. At the beginning of the dialogue they both talk about their hatred for the Vipers Men .Mrs. Fainall is revealed to be someone who is capable of loving someone genuinely as she once did Mirabell whereas Mrs. Marwood has passion without the capacity for love . At the end of the dialogue , Mrs. Marwood is exposed as being still in love in Mirabell. After that moment , the readers are aware of something of the artificiality of marriage when Mrs. Fainall and Mr. Fainall address each other publicly as "My Dear" and "My Soul" respectively. In reality they are heating each other which is revealed in the next two dialogues. The one dialogue in between Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood and the other in between Mrs.Fainall and Mirabell. In the conversation between Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood , it is confirmed that Mrs. Marwood is indeed the mistress of Mr. Fainall and she hates Mirabell and spoils his plans because he did not reciprocate to her advance. When Mrs. Marwood is accused of being in love with Mirabell , she is revealed as a passionate and ruthless woman . She does not care if she herself is destroyed or in the process of destroying or exposing others. Her language is an important aspect of her character. She speaks in by using words such as 'never' , 'forever' which foregrounds her high passion which in her case completely overtakes reason.

In the other conversation between Mrs. Fainall and Mirabell , the readers understand that Mrs. Fainall was once a mistress of Mirabell but holds no grudges against him. Mrs. Fainall and Mirabell are still on amicable terms so much so that he reveals his entire plan to her on how he is going to deceive her mother, Lady Wishfort which would have been impossible in an earlier restoration comedy.

Finally, the readers are introduced to Millamant whom Bonamy Dobree called, " many-faceted , spontaneous ". Millamant is a complex character and as the scene progresses we understand all the different layers to her personality. The first impression of her is that she is showey and artful .

According to Mirabell, " affects a cruelty that is not in (her) nature". In the discussion on beauty and lovers , we find her to be both witty and intelligent. She is also whimsical uncertain woman who like Mirabell must hide her genuine love for Mirabell by keeping company with the fools or surrounding herself with fools like Petulant and Witwoud. Without affects a wit that is not natural to him, who talks in similitudes and hides the fact that he was essentially country- bred. Mirabell calls him a fool with a good memory . Wit is nothing without judgement and understanding. On the other hand Petulant's folly is to lie and contradict everything hiding the fact that he feels so insignificant that he even pays people to call for him in public places.

Act II ends with an another major theme of Restoration comedy of manners i. e. contract. The theme of contractual relationships within a society is an important factor in the fourth act but it is introduced here in the contract between Mirabell and Waitwell , servant of Mirabell. Waitwell is an important part of the plot that Mirabell has hatched. According to the plan , Waitwell would act as the disgruntled fictional uncle of Mirabell Sir Rowland and marry Lady Wishfort in order for Mirabell to secure the hands of Millamant . Waitwell for his role in the plot would be rewarded in his turn with a well - stocked farm of his own.

Act III:— In this act the readers are introduced to Lady Wishfort sitting at the dressing table waiting for Foible. Though she has lacks of beauty and youth but still is a bundle of appetites which is in sharp contrast to puritan literature in her room and the social decorum she is adamant not to break. Like Mrs. Marwood, Lady Wishfort is also secretly in love with Mirabell. Mirabell rightly says in the second act that , " An old Woman's appetite is depraved." Lady Wishfort is not the villain of the play although she controls the fortunes of many characters . She is rather a sympathetic character. She wants to marry Sir Rowland in order to spite Mirabell and Foible provokes her to speed up the process. Another important aspect of her that acts as a metaphor for the artificiality of the Restoration Period society is her need to hide her real face , described as a peeling wall with "paint, paint, paint" . Her artificiality to cover her real face , wrinkle face with makeup also represent the hiding of true feelings behind artificiality prevalent in that period.

In the next scene Mrs. Fainall is revealed as a good , sympathetic but ultimately a tragic character. When she learns that Mirabell has entrusted the secret of the plot to Mrs. Fainall , Foible claims in this scene that "your Ladyship is the Pattern of Generosity". The climax of the play occurs when it is unknown to the other two characters . Mrs. Marwood hears the entire plot repeated by Mrs. Fainall . Mrs. Marwood makes a plan of her own to spoil the plan of Mirabell and also snatch away the fortunes of both Mrs. Fainall and Millamant. The plan is to gain the fortunes of both Millamant and Mrs. Fainall by threatening Lady Wishfort that he would part with her daughter. The jealousy that Mrs. Marwood feels for Millamant is quite apparent in their conversation where Mrs. Marwood says , " The Secret is grown too big for the Pretence " while Millamant responds by accusing her of exposing the affair to her aunt .

Another character that is introduced in the act is Sir Willful Witwoud , the nephew of Lady Wishfort. Sir Wilfull Witwoud within the play represents country manners which are uncouth outwardly. For example , he is trying to remove his shoes in front of everyone . He is an honest man who has integrity and helps Mirabell in the last act by brandishing his sword in order to ward off Mr. Fainall.

Act IV :—The most interesting scene of the "Way of the World" is the Proviso scene or the Bargain scene between Millamant and Mirabell which is consisted in the fourth act. Millamant is apprehensive

towards the honourable institution of marriage which ultimately destroys love. The scene begins with the couplet from Edmund Waller's poem "The Story of Phoebus and Daphne " which represents love as a game of chase and describes the God pursuing the nymph. The pleasure of the chase is important to Millamant . She does not want the pursuit to get over as she fears that surrender to marriage means the loss of her identity and more importantly love. In order to retrieve her individuality and autonomy even within marriage , she puts so many conditions which are described in the proviso scene.

Locke trusted that the only way one could live in this world is through binding contracts . In the play all the relationships are contractual such as the relationship between Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Fainall or, the relationship between Mirabell and his servant , Waitwell. They are all full of deceptions and deceit. The contract between Mirabell and Millamant based on consent and mutual trust . The objective of the contract is to preserve Millamant's personal freedom after marriage. Millamant demands to have closet inviolate ; to be sole Empress of Tea -table while Mirabell demands that there be no closet intrigues in this house. Millamant also demands that after marriage she would not tolerate the name such as "Wife, Spouse , my Dear, Joy, Jewel, Love, Sweetheart and the rest of that nauseous cant " in which the society of that time tried to hide the real indifference of the marriage couples towards each other. The most important enjoyment to the whole argument comes at the end of the scene when Mirabell promises to be a 'tractable and complying Husband ' . After the Bargain scene the vulnerability of Millamant is visible which she tries to hide behind her artful nature.

Another important scene is in between Lady Wishfort and Waitwell who is pretending to be Sir Rowland. During this particular scene Lady Wishfort received the letter from Mrs. Marwood and exposed the entire plot of Mirabell. This scene is important for the language which is used by Lady Wishfort. Her language changes in accordance to the space . We find two main voices in Lady Wishfort - one is what Meredith calls ' The Billingsgate ' scolding in "An Essay on Comedy " and the other that of elevated but fumbling decorousness. This former is often exhibited in the presence of her maids like in the beginning of the third, and the final act where the imagery is associated with the lower classes. She uses the words like Tatterdemalion , Gibbet-thief etc. Her images flow spontaneously and steadily without hesitation. She seeks out the longest words and piles them all together such as -Indigestion of Widowhood , Lethargy of Contenance , Vehemence of Compassion etc. It must be noted that she violates here her own pronouncements of decorum which is in this case the linguistic decorum.

Act V:— At the beginning of this act , one finds Lady Wishfort is using words to refer lower class occupation such as Ballad -monger, Trull (means prostitutes) etc. In this act , Mr. Fainall with the help of Mrs. Marwood threatens to expose the fact that Mrs. Fainall was the former mistress of Mirabell. The only solution to avoid it is to give him control of the fortune of both Mrs. Fainall and Millamant. On the other side, Mrs. Fainall counterattacks by proving with the testimony of Mincing and Foible that Mr. Fainall had committed adultery earlier. At this point of time Mirabell produces the Black Box which acts as a 'Deus ex machina ' which means 'god out of a machine ' or 'god from a machine ' . It is a plot device applied today to any unanticipated intervener who resolves a difficult situation. The final conflict of the play is resolved by the production of the black box or the production of the legal conveyance. The documents which are in the black box proved that Mrs. Fainall had made Mirabell the trustee of her property before marrying Mr. Fainall . Mirabell is proved to be a pragmatic with a shrewd judgement which allows him to safeguard the fortune of his former mistress and to get the hand of Millamant for marriage.

Congreve : The Critical Consistence :— A critical re-evaluation of Congreve's work took place with the publication of Montague Summers' "The Complete Works of William Congreve " in 1923 and Bonamy Dobree's " Comedies by William Congreve and Restoration Comedy " both published in 1925. In the introduction to Comedies Debree says that " Congreve must be ranked with the masters "

While Congreve is acknowledged to be one of the greatest Restoration comic dramatist in his own time , he was attacked by the puritanical minded middle classes. One of the most influential of these critics was the publication of Jeremy Collier's " A Short View of the Immortality and Profanness of the English stage "in 1698 which specifically attacked writers such as Congreve, Dryden and Vanbrugh etc. Congreve replied to the charges by publishing " Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations " which failed to convince the public.

Samuel Johnson in his "Life of Congreve " was acknowledged the originality of Congreve and convinced that his characters are commonly fictitious and artificial , with very little of nature and not much of life , his senses exhibit not much of humour, imagery or passion.

Other new readings of Congreve 's works followed from the 1950's onwards - Thomas Fujimara's " The Restoration Comedy of Wit" (1952) , Norman Holland's "The First Modern Comedies " (1959) , Aubrey Williams's " An Approach to Congreve " (1979) etc.

References and Further Reading: —

Congreve, William. *The Way of the World*. Oxford University Press,1977

Thomas, David. *William Congreve (English Dramatists)*. Macmillan,1992

Johnson, Samuel. *The Lives of the Poets*. Oxford University Press

Sample questions: —

1. How are the themes of money and marriage interlinked with each other? Discuss.
2. What are the major differences in between Comedy of Humour and Comedy of Manners?
3. Comment on the major characters in *The Way of the World*.
4. Write a feminist critique of *The Way of the World*.