

Proviso Scene of "The Way of the World"

In the Proviso Scene of the play "The Way of the World", we find Mirabell and Millamant meeting together to arrange an agreement for their marriage. The scene is a pure comedy with brilliant display of wit by both of them, but, above all, provides instructions which have serious dimensions in the context of the society. Here, Congreve seems to come to realise the importance for providing an ideal pair of man and woman, ideal in the sense that the pair could be taken for models in the life-style of the period.

The most noteworthy aspect of the Proviso Scene is Millamant's witty style in which she puts her condition before her lover Mirabell. According to her first condition, she wants equal amount of love and affection on the part of her would husband throughout her life. Behind her above mentioned condition we notice the pitiable condition of a wife after marriage. Just before marriage when men and women are lovers they declare full support and love for each other but things take a turn when they get married. So Millamant appears anxious because of this reason and that is why she puts this condition. Again, Millamant says that she hates those lovers who do not take proper care of their beloveds. She further wants that her husband must be a loyal and good natured man.

She further says to Mirabell that she wants her liberty after her marriage. She informs Mirabell that she can't forgo her independence, and says, "My dear liberty, shall I leave thee? My faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you adieu?... My morning, thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye douceurs, ... Adieu -- I can't do it, 'tis more than impossible." She also adds that "I will lie a bed in a morning as long as I please". Millamant on her part makes it clear that a lover's (Mirabell's) appeals and entreaties should not stop with the marriage ceremony. Therefore, she would like to be 'solicited' even after marriage. She next puts that "My dear liberty" should be preserved; "I'll lye abed in a morning as long as I please..." Millamant then informs that she would not like to be addressed by such names as "wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet-heart; and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar." Moreover, they will continue to present a decorous appearance in public, and she will have free communication with others. In other words, after marriage they maintain certain distance and reserve between them.

Mirabell listens to all the conditions of Millamant with patience. Although he is not very happy with some of the conditions, he doesn't raise any objection. Now he informs Millamant about some of his own conditions. When we go through his conditions we observe that it is a witty satire on the affectations of women in that society. Mirabell wants that after their marriage Millamant should follow some guidelines. Millamant should not be in company of any woman who has a notorious background or who indulges in scandalous activities. He says that "you admit no sworn confidant or intimate of your own sex; no she friend to screen her affairs under your countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No decoy-duck to wheedle you a FOP-SCRAMBLING to the play in a mask." The next condition is that she should not use the artificial things to cover her real appearance. Mirabell says that, "I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled skins and I know not what--hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and the marrow of a roasted cat."

Mirabell's conditions are quite different. They are frankly sexual in content, directed to his not being cuckolded or to her bedroom manners. "Just as Millamant's conditions are developed femininely" as Norman N. Holland points out, "Mirabell's are developed in a typically masculine way." Moreover, if we study the scene carefully, we find that these conditions, although they seem very funny and light-hearted at first, are actually a serious comment on the degradation of conjugal relation. At the same time they also convey a feeling of optimism that an ideal marriage is still possible. The conditions as set down by the two lovers, therefore confirm the sincerity of their motives and their wish to live a married life which is different from the kind which was prevalent at that time. Millamant expresses her wish to retain her liberty and independence after marriage, while Mirabell forbids her to follow the silly practices of aristocratic ladies. Both accept each other's

conditions and it is expected that an understanding has been achieved between them as far as such matters are concerned. In other words it is a guideline or memorandum of understanding between husband and wife. After following these guidelines there is not any possibility of misunderstanding. Although Millamant has put down some harsh conditions which would not be normally acceptable in an ordinary situation, Congreve, here, defines love in its true spirit. Mirabell loves Millamant without any reservations. His love for her is without any selfish motives. So he does not object to her extravagant demands and accepts them.

As far as the importance of Proviso scene is concerned, it is undoubtedly one of the most significant events of the play. In other words it can be said that it is the climax of the comedy. In this scene, Congreve exposes the follies and vices prevalent in a married life. We know that the love and marriage are the central theme of comedy of Restoration age; and in this scene we notice that playwright has elaborated the matter of love and marriage in a broad and clear manner.

The Proviso scene is significant event in the play because a thorough study of this scene presents a true picture of Restoral Society. Millamant and Mirabell are the leading characters of this comedy and both of them have been fully highlighted by playwright in this scene. Although such type of scenes are the part and parcel of the comedy of that age, but Congreve is undoubtedly unparalleled in his presentation. Dryden in his *Secret love* and *Wild Gallant* has presented such sort of scenes but Congreve is more lucid and vivid in his presentation. His wonderful depiction of wit and the boldness of the characters are some of the salient features of Proviso scene. So an overall analysis of this scene presents a clear picture of the contemporary society. It is, although full of comic elements, it also contains very serious suggestions for a happy conjugal life.

Through this scene appears very funny but it is a serious comment on the degradation of conjugal relations. The conditions as set down by the two lovers, confirm the sincerity of their motives and their wish to live a married life which was different from others. Both of them accept each other's conditions. It is a guideline or memorandum of understanding between a husband and a wife, which would enable them to spend a happy married life. After following these guidelines there will have no possibility of misunderstanding.