

**Tribhuvan University**

**Quest of Prestige: Projection of Victorian Morality in Oscar Wilde's *Lady***

***Windermere's Fan***

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## Chapter I. Prestige, Morality and the Victorian Society

This research is based on Oscar Wilde's play *Lady Windermere's Fan* which was written in 1891 and produced on February 20, 1892. It examines Lady Windermere's family inwardly and the then Victorian society outwardly, and is basically concerned about the morality of women. The Victorian society is marked for its high emphasis on the concept of virginity, chastity, aristocratic, prestige and morality. *Lady Windermere's Fan* as the Victorian play captures these norms of Victorian society.

Through this play, the playwright intends to show how Victorian aristocratic society imposes the patriarchal norms and values over the females. Likewise, it also attempts to explore the Victorian obsession for the aristocratic prestige. That is to say, this project analyses the Victorian quest of prestige as the standard of high reputed life in the then society. Besides, it also attempts to expose how the life of women is confined within the prison of social status imposed by males.

Victorian society is internally corrupted and degraded while it pretends to be highly moral and intellectual from the outside. Similarly, the society is also ruled by the strict religious dogmas. The social and religious dogmas promoted the puritan and Victorian values where chastity and virginity is the prestige of a woman.

The major contention of the playwright is to throw satire on the notion of prestige and social status which he calls the pretension of Victorian people. He projects that the Victorian people were obsessed with prestige, morality, chastity and social status explicitly from outside but inwardly life of the then people is full of sexual scandals, affairs with multiple partners, and fake culture. In the play, Lady Windermere always advocates for morality but she herself violets the norms and values promoted by Victorian society. That is to say, Victorian society denounced

love affairs but in practice Victorian people themselves engaged in many scandals of love affairs. Similarly, another character Mrs. Erlynne seduced rich men like Lord Augustus to possess their wealth. Though, she also highly stressed for moral life, she shows her lust for money.

As the plot develops in the play, Lady Windermere's true character reveals gradually. Her inward philosophy is proved fake and her false faith on puritan norms and values are exposed in front of the society. She has the belief that puritan people are so strict and more concerned on the issue of morality. Pretending to be the upholder of puritan norms and values she refuses to marry Lord Darlington. But no sooner she discovers her husband's scandalous life, she turns to Darlington. Her pretention of highly moral character is revealed in the dialogue below.

Don't spoil it by saying extravagant silly things to me. You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? Well, I have something of the Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I am glad of it. My mother died when I was a mere child. I lived always with Lady Julia, my father's elder sister, you know. She was stern to me, but she taught me what the world is forgetting, the difference that there is between what is right and what is wrong. She allowed of no compromise. I allow of none. (15)

According to this dialogue, love affair is a silly thing for Lady Windermere. It suggests that Lady Windermere pretends to be confined within the strict norms and values of Victorian as well as Puritan society. For this reason, Lady Windermere clearly denies the proposal of Lord Darlington.

Oscar Wilde projects paradoxical role to Lady Windermere. Paradoxical in the sense that she denies Lord Darlington's propose initially but she seems to be leaned to him afterwards. That is to say, though married to Lord Windermere, she maintains

relationship with Lord Darlington. It is the sheer mockery of the fake norms and values trumpeted by the Victorian society. Initially, Lady Windermere is pure and innocent but as the play develops she denies the role of a wife and chose to enjoy the relationship with Lord Darlington. She denies her own husband and feels that Darlington could understand her feeling. Her refusal to her husband is explicit in the following dialogue.

Go back to my husband, Mrs. Erlynne. He belongs to you and not to me. I suppose he is afraid of a scandal. Men are such cowards. They outrage every law in the world, and are afraid of the world's tongue. But he has better prepare himself. He shall have a scandal. He shall have the worst scandal there has been in London for years. He shall see his name in every vile paper, mine on every hideous placard. (46)

The act of Lady Windermere's leaving the house is meaningful. She claims herself as a Puritan woman and she wants her house with no scandal. But to avoid one immoral act she is caught in another scandal. In the above dialogue, Lady Windermere asks Mrs. Erlynne to handle her house. She says that since her husband has conceded the relation with her (Mrs. Erlynne), she is the authorized person over him. As Lady Windermere pretends to be a typical puritan woman, it is not good for her to live together with a scandalous man. She quits a scandalous man and creates herself another scandal with Darlington.

According to her, her husband Lord Windermere pays lots of money to immoral woman, which is revealed in his paper and his placard. So, she considers it better to separate from him. But no sooner Lady Windermere moves out from her husband she grows passionate with Lord Darlington. That is to say, she deliberately breaches the feminine role which Victorian society adores and chooses the role of

mistress. But as the plot moves forward, she realizes her unconventional role and once again draws herself back from this immoral engagement. It is significant that as soon as she steps into the world of moral corruption, she is frequently haunted by the sense of guilt and finally decides to abide strictly by the social norms.

In the third act of the play, she is caught in dilemma. That is to say, neither she enjoy the relationship with Darlington nor could join her husband again. She denies “No! No! I will go back, let Arthur do as he pleases. I can’t wait here. It has been madness my coming. I must go at once” (45). With this realization in Lady Windermere, her paradoxical nature is revealed.

In Lady Windermere, we can mark the great trait of Victorian women. That is to say, Victorian women have a gap between what they believe and what they behave. Lady Windermere believes herself as the upholder of Puritan norms and values, and pretends to have impression of Christian morality whereas her behavior is always questionable. She dresses seven folded petticoat fully rapped skin with clothes but this seven folded petticoats could not protect her morality in society.

Similarly, paradox can be seen in another character Lord Darlington also. He is also a typical Victorian male who believes that it is always female who should sacrifice for the social norms and values. In his definition, males are the God chosen people who cross any limit but female should be strictly confined. It is explicit in his dialogue. He suggests to Lady Windermere “Oh, anything is better than being sacrificed!” (16).

Likewise, irony can be seen in Mrs. Erlynne too. Though she claims to be highly virtual woman, she is found to be the most morally degraded woman. She is denounced among the people in the society. She is charged that she has left her house and her child for the rich man named Lord Augustus. Lord Windermere calls her “a

divorced woman going about under an assumed name, a bad praying upon life” (62). She is presented as accomplished seductress in the play. In the sense of Victorian society, her behavior cannot be justified from any angle. In Mrs. Erlynne has left her daughter in the cradle for her sensual emotion and feelings. She totally departs from social responsibility, ruin her family value. Lord Windermere says her “You have no right to claim Lady Windermere as your daughter. You left her abandoned her when she was child in the cradle, abandoned for your lover, who abandoned in turn” (63). Lord Windermere questions about the activities of Mrs. Erlynne.

Oscar Wilde was born in 1854 in Dublin, Ireland. His father, Sir William Wilde was the eminent surgeon and his mother, Lady Francesca Wilde was a literary hostess who was also known as a writer under her pen name ‘Speranza’. He joined Trinity College in Dublin before going on Magdalen College, Oxford. He was especially influenced by his mother, a brilliantly witty raconteur, and as a child he was frequently invited to socialize with her intellectual circle of friends.

Wilde was a playwright, poet, essayist, and wit he is now as famous for his flamboyant lifestyle and idioms as for his plays, poems and fiction. He was well known by ‘art for art sake movement’. With his talent, wit, charm and instinct for publicity, Wilde soon become a familiar name in the literary world. His first collection, poem, was published in 1881 before he was on the tour of North America.

Wilde was married to Constance Lloyd in 1884. Then he published several books of stories for children, originally for his own sons. He has achieved theoretical success from prose comedy. His masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) is the comedy as well as on wit. Along with this, his famous drama and novel are *Salome*, *A Woman of no Importance*, (1893) *An Ideal Husband*, (1895) *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891).

Hugh Walker “Miscellaneous Prose” in *The Literature of Victorian Era* narrates that Wilde had tremendous artistic and poetic mind from his early phase which he justified through many masterpieces. According to him, Wilde gives the bitter satire to fake norms and values prevailing in the then society and wish to change the vile aspects of society.

Oscar Wilde mournfulness of the deepest is linked with his name but so also is genius in a degree rarely surpassed in this generation. He is the gleaner of *fleurs de mal*. He brings to mind and creation of Hawthorne’s weird fiancés, fungus brilliant but fatal, which can only grow from a dead man’s heart. The son of distinguished parents, Wilde seemed from boyhood to be marked out for a great career. At school at Trinity College, Dublin and at Oxford, he took without effort that foremost position which other win with sweat of brain. It would have been well for him had success been less easy. (744)

According to Hugh Walker, he might have concerned on the psychological disclosure of a shameful secret which is not so common in the Victorian theatre. He also bring into these pictures of fashionable society that other well-worn figure, a woman with a past – Mrs. Erlynne (*Lady Windermere’s Fan*, 1892), Mrs. Arbuthnot (*A Woman of No Importance*, 1893) and Mrs. Cheveley. (*An Ideal Husband*, 1895) .

Similarly another critic, Cecil J. L. Price in his criticism “The Victorian Theatre” in *The Victorians* is with the opinion that Wilde is different than his contemporary literature that he uses wit and exploits the characters to put bitter satire over the society.

Oscar Wilde is content to make use of the usual human furniture of the comedies of his day and of some of its more melodramatic

conventions, but he is different from many of his contemporaries in being more interested in dialogue than character and in wit rather than situation. This sometimes leads to an uneasy sequence of ideas that weakens the theme. (490)

In his drama, *A Woman of No Importance*, Mrs. Arbuthnot's secret was that she had been seduced by Lord Illingworth and that Gerald, her son by him, know nothing of his parentage. Mrs. Arbuthnot only divulges the information at the end of Act III, when Gerald threatens to shoot Illingworth. At this point the reader is entirely in Gerald's side, and is pleased when it learns, in the following act, that he is to marry the wealthy Hester. In the plot Gerald and Hester stand for right thinking and Mrs. Arbuthnot represents right feeling: in theatrical terms, they must be adequately rewarded. Illingworth illustrates that 'Nothing is serious except passion'.

*A Woman of No Importance* has less unity of tone than *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). The latter shows the same command in form, but this time the handling of the theme is masterly. It is considered the original modern comedy of manners. *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, a Faustian tale about beauty and youth, as well as a string of highly successful plays, *Salome* is the symbolist melodrama. By this time, Wilde's extravagant appearance, refined wit, and melodious speaking voice had made him one of London's most much demanded dinner party guests.

Wilde became infatuated with the beautiful young poet Lord Alfred Douglas in 1891. The dynamic between Douglas and Wilde was unstable at the best of time, and the pair often split for months before agreeing to reunite. Their sexual nature of friendship had become a matter of public concern. Douglas's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, strongly disapproved of his son's friendship with the notorious playwright and after he publicly insulted Wilde a quarrel ensued which eventually led



to Wilde's imprisonment for homosexual offences. He was sentenced to two years with hard labor, which left him on his release in 1897, bankrupt and weakened. Relying on the generosity of friends, he went to live in France, adopting the name of Sebastian Melmoth. While there he wrote his most famous poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Wilde died in exile in France in 1900. Letters he had written to Lord Alfred while in prison were published in 1905 under the title of *De Profundis*.

David Daiches in his book *Some Late Victorian Attitude*, thus writes about Oscar Wilde:

When Oscar Wilde in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Grey* asserted that 'a art is quite useless' he was not merely indulging in his fondness for starting paradoxes. In terms of the aesthetic creed there is no way in which to define useless. Usefulness is the term depends on some system of objective value, some view of means and ends. The aesthetic view of value is entirely solipsistic all the aesthetic seeks is to multiply and diversify inward personal experience (40).

Oscar Wilde violates the rules and regulation of the then literary trends. He does not follow the traditional writing pattern. He does what he likes. So, in the field of writing he becomes an anarchist.

Oscar Wild as a dramatist, follows comedy of manner and uses wit, lyrical verse in the prose, use of paradox, follow pattern of aestheticism –art for art shake – attracted much attention. David Daiches point out skeptics tendency about the Wilde's writing trends in his book *Some Late Victorian Attitude*:

The curious paradox about Wilde is that even when preaching of the creed at its most extreme and hailing the useless and solipsistic nature of art, he is led by some lurking Puritanism in his nature to sneak in a

traditional moral. Charles Wribley no doubt overstated the case when he said that *The Picture of Dorian Grey* contained ‘lots of morality and no art’. Wilde continually sniped at Victorian conventions and preconceptions, Wilde’s sniping was not, however serious warfare because he need those convention for the proper play of his wit. No writer ever needed an artificial society more than Wilde. The Wit of his play plays depended on it. In his more serious writing he tended to assume that a life of upper- class well endowed hedonism was the most worth living. (53 -54)

Comedy of manners is widely recognized as the popular genre of literature. The term ‘comedy of manner’ is generally used in the literary history and criticism, and more specifically applied to the restoration dramas mostly by William Congreve and William Wycherley. In the play of Wilde some Victorian features can be explicitly found. Constancy in love was boring, sex should be tempting, love thrived on variety, genuine sexual feeling had no place on stage, characters clashed with each other in situations of conflicting love entanglements and intrigues, country life was considered boring clergy and professional men were treated with indifference or condescension. Allardyce Nicoll in his book *British Drama* describes:

The Comedy of manner, as its name implies, concentrates upon the depiction of men and women living in a social world ruled by convention. Its ‘manner’ are not simply the behavior of humanity in general but the affections and cultured veneer of developed self conscious group. (158)

The Lady Windermere’s Fan, as a comedy of manners revolves around the above features. Oscar Wilde satirizes Victorian society for its obsession to showy culture

and moral pretensions. This play creates humor to the folly nature and comic aspects of human character.

Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* gets the chance to be popular after its performance in February 1892. After the performance of the play, it won the great fame and recognition because it vividly captured the contemporary society as a corrupt and immoral where morally innocent individuals especially females are always questioned. While this play became famous among the people, many scholars and critics have view this play from different perspectives. Among various critics and scholars, literary critic Epifanio San Jaun: JR in his critical essay "The actions of comedies" in *The Art of Oscar Wilde* argues:

The development of the play as a whole involves the gradual clarification of Mrs. Erlynne's identity. Bit by bit human relations are particularized and objectified in action. If this process depicts the complexities of human nature, it also exposes the hollowness of social relations. As hard Augustus intrigued by Mrs. Erlynne identity puts it: "None of us men do look what we really are. Dimmed good thing, too, what I want to know is this. Who is she?" (144)

Here, Epifanio pays his attention towards the relations among the characters of the play which are particularized and objectified in the then society. He throws the light to the hollowness of the social relations which is vividly shown in the play.

Some of the critics analyzed this play in relation to Oscar Wilde. Wilde himself was an anarchist and longing for individual freedom. Similarly, Cecil J. L. Price "The Victorian Theatre" *The Victorians* explores:

The disclosure of a shameful secret might be of much psychological interest in the story of Wilde himself, were this device not so common

into Victorian theatre. He also brings into the pictures of fashionable society that other well-worn figure, a woman with a past-Mrs. Erlyne from *Lady Windermere's Fan*. In fact, he is content to make use of the usual human furniture of the comedies of his day and of some of its more melodramatic conditions. (490)

According to Cecil J. L. Price, Wilde was not happy with the writing trend of that time because personal matters are not included in the theatrical works. He gives more priority to the psychological interest of the characters. In this play too, he focuses on the characters' interest like in Mrs. Erlynne and *Lady Windermere*.

Richard Allan Cave makes a thematic study of this Wilde's play. He is of opinion that Wilde succeeded in de-anglicizing Englishness in *Lady Windermere's Fan* through the technique of using language in terms of binary opposition. He suggests:

Wilde is perfectly in control of his dramatic artistry. What he is depicting is a society that is all surface in respects of manners and mores; there are no secured values for emulations behind the façade.

*Lady Windermere's Fan* takes this technique to even more subtle lengths from the opening remarks of individuals with highly developed senses of their self importance. Ideally they wish to conduct themselves with decorum... But everyone has a secret life. (226-27)

According to Allan, the play *Lady Windermere's Fan* is a play which is perfectly in control of dramatic artistry. Self importance and individual emancipation is forecasted in this play. It is the lesson that every human being should construct their codes and for the smooth life and bias in the society.

In the same line, another critic Arthur Ganz says that this play is of course piece of nineteenth-century stage rhetoric. If there is no this rhetoric in the play, the audiences will definitely ignore it and it will not be famous as it is now. Arthur Ganz in his criticism “The Divided Self of the Society: Comedies of Oscar Wilde” in *Modern Dramas* argues:

Mrs. Erlynne is easily recognizable as that stock figure, the woman-with-a-past, one of the innumerable progeny of Marguerite Gautier the lady of camellias. But Wilde uses this figure for his own purposes. Played off against Mrs. Erlynne is a cold and unforgiving moralist, her daughter, Lady Windermere. The real action of the play is Lady Windermere’s education. She learns that a single act is not a final indicator of character and that a sinner may be a very noble person indeed. At the end of the play, Lord Windermere tells Lord Augustus who is about to marry Mrs. Erlynne, that he is getting a very clever woman. Lady Windermere knows better now. (17)

According to Arthur, Mrs. Erlynne is the woman with the secrets sin in her past. But now she is living life of pleasure and wickedness. Here, the essential point to be remembered is that though she is a sinner, she has remained pure in heart and therefore, according to Wilde, deserves to be pardoned.

Another critic, Christopher S. Nasser reviews the play *Lady Windermere’s Fan* by comparing with Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Nasser opines that Dorian Gray is fragmented and reincarnated in the four main characters, each of whom embodies one of the four mentioned stages, but within the framework and atmosphere of social comedies. In *Lady Windermere’s Fan* the same drift is shown in

the juxtaposition of four main characters, but it is simultaneously obscured by being cast in the mold of social comedy. For this Nassar describes:

Dorian's first stage, childlike innocence, is embodied in Lord Windermere. Although he exists in a corrupt late Victorian environment, Windermere is wrapped in a cocoon of early Victorian morality that is never penetrated by his immoral surroundings. He is the object of much slander in the play and even his wife becomes convinced that he is having an affair with Mrs. Erlynne. (20)

This extract suggests that Windermere's circumstances are immoral. Though she attempts to remain out of the immoral society she could not. Her belief and pretensions of Puritan society is proved fake and corrupted.

This research is based on the quest of prestige and morality on Oscar Wilde's drama, *Lady Windermere's Fan*. It is mainly concerned on how prestige and morality can bind the Victorian people. And on the other hand, this research is on the quest of how the Victorian falls on the immoral act by degrading their personal and family prestige. Many critics show their critical views on this drama as a quest of identity, psychological interest of the Wilde and his character, dramatic artistry, and as the social comedies.

Epifanio San Jaun: JR relates *Lady Windermere's Fan* for the quest of identity. He associates the hollowness of the social relation with the character. The development of the play as a whole involves the gradual clarification Mrs. Erlynne's identity. Similarly, Cecil J.L. Price views this drama from the perspectives of psychological interest of the Wilde. Here, through the characters like Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne, he has presented the mother and daughter relationship and their departure which leads to the sense of loss and psychological disclosure.

Likewise, another critic Arthur Ganz interpreted this play as dramatic artistry.

According to him, if there is no this rhetoric in the play, the audiences will definitely ignore it and it will not be famous as it is now. In the same line, next critic

Christopher S. Nasser reviews this play as a social comedy. In this play, the same drift is shown in the juxtaposition of four main characters, but it is simultaneously obscured by being cast in the mold of social comedy.

This research departs from above criticism in the sense that because the quest of prestige and morality is used as new tool. The research assumes that the major contention of the playwright is to throw a biting satire on the notion of prestige and social status which he calls the pretension of Victorian people. He projects that the Victorian people were obsessed with prestige, morality, chastity and social status from the outside but the internal life of the people is full of sexual scandal affair with multiple partners and fake culture.

The Victorian Period revolves around the political career of Queen Victoria. That is to say, it refers to the period from the Queen Victoria's emergence to power in 1837 to 1901 which put a definite end to her political career. Beside the change in power of the Kingdom, this period was also marked for some significant ups and downs in political, cultural as well as social scenario. In history, this period is also marked for the development of industries and rise of capitalist values. It has brought the great change in the social structures and saw great upheaval in economic sectors. Victorian period is highly marked for the rise of middle class people. With the economic rise of middle class people, their standard of living and way of dealing with other was changed. That is to say, they forgot their background and start to imitate aristocratic norms and values. For this newly rose people material prosperity has had upper hand to intellectual prosperity. Besides, this period was also marked for the

female suppression and domination. Females were the victims of male's hegemony. Males imposed them the values what they prefer. So women were more coquettes. That is to mean, physical appearance is always adored. They were always confined within the four walls of the room.

Quest of prestige is another trait in Victorian middle class people. That is to say, Victorian middle class people were highly sensitive for their personal prestige. They were offering birthday party, tea party to their friend and relatives for the personal and family prestige. However, they hired parker, cook man, foot man in their house because they wanted to show their houses as a higher class.

The Victorian period was the time where novels and poetry well known and documented, however in the field of drama, it can be somehow difficult to find the specific resources. Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw were the prominent figure of Victorian drama. They basically focused on the social issue and family issue in their writing. Both focus on the technique like paradox, wit, melodramatic style in their writing.

The Victorian Period has occurred unpredictable change. The improvements to steam engine technology led to increased factory production. That is to say, for the more production, more coal to be mined from the ground which to the economic expansion of the whole Europe. As a result, huge amount of wealth were created, and the spirit of the times discouraged the regulation of business practices. Similarly, the scientific development altered the belief of the Church. It means before Darwin published the book *The Origin of Species* there is a belief that man is created by God. After the time of Darwin, it is proved that Ape is the forefather of human beings. That is to mean, for Victorian People Church and the religious thought must me necessary to be a moral one. In other words, they were not able to go against the Pope and the



church. Charles Dickens, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Oscar Wilde, and others are the prominent writers of this period.

The Victorian age was the age of reform and change. Reform could be seen in ruling system, education, religion and also in science and technology. At that time, democracy is in practice. Reformative acts made democracy more and more realistic, education system was institutionalized and science and technology made the human life easy. The prominent scientist of this time, Charles Darwin comes up with his revolutionary book *The Origin of Species* where he encountered the thought of Christian World. Charles Darwin with his scientific, realistic, materialistic and rationalistic notion challenges the notion of Christianity. Arthur Pollard

“Introduction” in *The Victorians* clarifies:

If progress is one Victorian watchword, freedom is the other. The two fold (and opposed) inspiration of the period Utilitarianism, secular and rationalistic and Evangelicalism, other- worldly and fideistic, agreed at least in their stress on individualism. Men must be free. As a result free trade replaced protection, government , interference in industry and social organization was resisted, competition was extolled the Dissenters opposed the claims of the established Church, the Evangelicals emphasized the necessity of personal salvation. Some people found courage to espouse agnosticism. (viii)

It means Victorian age is the age of progress and prosperity where freedom is necessary for the human being. The Victorian people mainly focus on the Utilitarianism in the education, economic sectors. That is to say, people belief on the doctrine that actions are right if they are useful or for the benefit of the majority. A

religious belief is secular and they practice rationalistic way in their day to day life.

Men must be free.

The Victorians people are hunger for sensation and power. They dream of being powerful, rich and advanced while living their life. They do not concern about their family love and affection. In this regard, O. F Cockshut “Victorian Thought” in *The Victorians* narrates:

The early Victorians were seldom dreamy, and not markedly introspective. The feelings they cultivated were social, beginning with the primary family affection and stretching out to the unknown man at the bottom of the social pyramid. They did not always understand this man very well; the remedies they suggested for his lot were not always well-advised. (2)

According to O.F Cockshut, the feelings that capture the mind of Victorian people keep away from their family love and affection. They give low priority to such things. They are conscious about the importance of time and most of the time is spend in their works to get more money which enables them to live the life of success and prosperity. The Victorians lack of heart, lack of natural feeling and focus on Utilitarianism.

Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* criticizes the notion of prestige and morality that Victorian society laid high emphasis. Though, he belongs to the same society and culture he is highly critical of the hypocrisies of the Victorian society. To attack the notion of morality and prestige that the then society trumpeted, he puts light over some incidents in the play which shows the fake and hollow ideology of people.

Wilde as a nineteenth century dramatists, has great influence of Queen Victoria. That is to say, Queen Victoria was popular for her manner, way of behaving

and way of speaking. She is popular for her manner, morality and devotion to hard work. Her devotion to family life, public and private responsibility morality, prestige and social status is widely renounces. She shows her graduate to low class people, shows her politeness to every people. So, Wilde wishes to see these characters in the women of society. In other Words, the social and moral values of the nineteenth century were influenced greatly by Queen Victoria. In the same regard, Robert Langbaum in “Introduction” *The Victorian Age* persuades that:

The point is that in the early nineteenth century the upper middle-class elite believe in piety, reform of Church and State, moral action and laissez-faire economics. Their early twentieth descendants, however, as represented by the so-called “Bloomsbury circle” (Leslie Stephen’s four children formed the nucleus; Lytton Strachey and J. M Keynes belonged; Forster was a frequent visitor), disbelieved in religion and moral action, and did believe in government regulation or ownership of industry and in refinement of sensibility. (9)

It means Robert Langbaum also takes Victorian age that stress on morality, prestige. Even there is no any interfere to the public market by the government which shows the notion of human morality. He focuses on the religion and moral action that lead people to avoid from the immoral works and evil deeds.

Similarly, Victorian people focused on the habitual practice of good manners. That is to say, the then people gave moral training to their children, which is regarded as the duty of the parents. They urge them to follow the proper rules and on politeness. At the same time, the Victorian people think a woman should be polite, cultured, have a positive thinking towards other. Likewise, the Victorians think women should clothed beautiful garments of modesty, gentle speech and ease of

manner. A lady should be quiet in her manners, natural and unassuming in the language, careful to hurt no one's feelings but be generous. G. M. Young, another critic, highlighting the issue of morality and prestige on his critical essay, "Victorian England: Portrait of an Age" *The Victorian Age* opines, "The Evangelical discipline, secularized as respectability, was the strongest binding force in a nation which without might have broken up, as it had already broken loose. For a generation and more the static conception of society had been dissolving because society itself was dissolving." He further writes:

Evangelicalism had imposed on society, even on classes which were indifferent to its religious basis and unaffected by its economic appeal, its code of Sabbath observance, responsibility, and philanthropy; of discipline in the home, regularity in affairs; it had created a most effective technique of agitation, of private persuasion and social persecution. On one of its sides, Victorian history is the story of English mind employing the energy imparted by Evangelical conviction to rid itself of the restraints which Evangelicalism had laid on the senses and the intellect; on amusement, enjoyment, art; on curiosity, on criticism, on science. (25)

That is to say, The Christianity in the Victorian period motivated people to be morally virtuous. Lesson of morality was at the heart of Christianity. Its sole aim was to inspire people towards morality and discipline.



## II. Quest of Prestige and Morality in *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

The play *Lady Windermere's Fan* revolves around the notion of morality. Prestige, social status, women's submissiveness, virginity, and cultural norms and values are highly trumpeted in the play. The speeches, actions, ritual performances and other activities depicted in the play are concerned with the quest of social status rather than the practical use in daily life. Victorian people tend to be highly virtuous, and moral. People feel proud to show their wealth in society. To follow Christian values in front of society and to throw parties and gatherings to show the wealth in society is the best way to be prestigious in society. No matter how congested family life people live, but they tend to be liberal in front of society. Though the people have nothing to feed the family but they have to throw parties to show their wealth in front of others.

Similarly, this play also locates about the issue of marriage in the then society. Victorian people celebrate the marriage ceremony as well as it is the means to show their property and wealth in society. Marriage is the main theme of the play, the whole four acts of the play revolve around the ideas of marriage. There are four different states of the marriage process explored; courting, early love in marriage, marriage in later years, and an escape from a restrictive marriage. In the play, Douchess of Berwick makes her daughter as a puppet and her daughter only replies only 'Yes, mamma'. Douches of Berwick wants to establish the relation of her daughter, Agatha with Mr. Hopper, an Australian lad. It is so because she is fond of kangaroos country. At the initial phase of the Mr. Hopper's meeting, she is trying to persuade Mr. Hopper with Lady Agatha. Her intension flashes out in the following dialogue spoken by Berwick:

Ah! We know your value, Mr. Hopper. We wish there were more like you. It would make life so much easier. Do you know, Mr. Hopper, dear Agatha and I are so much interested in Australia. It must be so pretty with all the dear little kangaroos flying about. Agatha has found it on the map. What a curious shape it is! Just like a large packing case. However, it is a very young country, isn't it? (30)

Douchess of Berwick is trying to convince Mr. Hopper to get marry with Lady Agatha, a daughter of her own. She praises all about Mr. Hopper. She creates conducive environment for Mr. Hopper and Lady Agatha to run their relation. Douchess of Berwick takes her daughter as a puppet and says to Mr. Hopper to make her daughter more appealing perspective wife. Douchess of Berwick takes her daughter as a chatter box and tells to take care of her to Mr. Hopper. In this stage, we can see the activities of the character which can be seen in courting stage or of marriage.

Lady Windermere has got the two years marriage experience. At the beginning of the play hers is a perfect marriage, no infidelity, they are in love, they have produced an heir, and they have no secrets from each other (this is actually an unusual marriage in this era), Windermere and I married for love'. By the end of the play the damage has been done and the marriage has altered; they are still in love, it's been proved that there's been no infidelity. This stage can be known as an early love stage in the marriage.

Similarly, Victorian morality can be seen in Berwick's marriage. Berwick who runs after her wife before their marriage but after the marriage he damn cares her existence. Through the relation of Berwick and his wife, we can able to examine the two standards of the Victorian people. People respect their wives in the public place

and don't pay any attention in the private place. The marriage of Douchess of Berwick can be taken as an example of later marriage of the then Victorian people:

Douchess of Berwick: Yes, we begin like that. It was only Berwick's brutal and incessant threads of suicides that made me accept him at all, and before the year was out, he was running after all kinds of petticoats ,every colour, every shape, every material. In fact, before the honeymoon was over, I caught him winking at my made, a most pretty, respectable girl. ... (22).

Douches of Berwick recalls her past time. Previously her husband cares her lot and pay attention to her. Now there is a huge change in all these realities, her husband is running after other girls. He even winks to house maid.

Mrs. Erlynne runs away from social and family responsibility. To quest for freedom, she shows her escapist tendency. She has left her daughter in the cradle and went with her beloved. As a result, she has got bitter punishment from society. Society charges her as a fallen woman and compels to live twenty years alone. Similarly, another character Lady Plymdale refers to the skepticism of the society, incorporating the theme of marriage when she tells Lord Windermere 'The world has grown so suspicious of anything that looks like a happy married life'. Marriages are not meant to be happy; the typical marriage is based on hypocrisy.

There is a huge gap between what the society attempts to maintain and what the characters practice in reality. That is to say, Victorian society is full of contradictions. People mainly concerned on the family prestige, moral norms and value for the high regard of the family in society. But at the same time their internal



life is corrupted and degraded. A woman is obliged to show her devotion to their family and society.

Victorian society is mainly characterized as the society of dual standard, especially in family values and gender roles. That is to say, on the one hand it privileges males as the custodian to uphold the Christian values and at the other males themselves are violator of Christian values. But the males are always outside the question. Christian values and norms always come to restrict and control females. Here, males enjoy the 'public life' and females are confined to 'private life.' Deborah Gorham in essay "Woman and Girls in the Middleclass Family: Images and Reality" collected in the book *The Victorian Girls and the Feminine Ideal* clarifies the nature of two spheres.

Throughout the period, it was customary to refer to public and private life as two separate spheres. Each of the two spheres was thought to be inextricably connected either with women or with men. The public sphere of business, politics and professional life was defined as the male sphere. The private sphere of love, the emotions and domesticity was defined as the sphere of women. The public sphere was the male's exclusive domain, whereas the private sphere was seen as presided over by females for the express purpose of providing a place of renewal for men, after their rigorous activities in the harsh, competitive public sphere. (4)

Gorham stresses that male's domain is comparatively free and liberal but female's domain is rigid and harsh. Males associate feminine qualities with females. Females are characterized as meek, coward, coyness, etc. These characters are termed as 'morality' in Victorian society.

The play *Lady Windermere's Fan* also dramatizes the issue of morality.

Victorian women are confined within the periphery of a home. They are subdued to the wishes of the males. Their submissiveness is termed as morality in Victorian notion. These features of Victorian society can be seen clearly in the characters of the play. Excessive emphasis to the notion of morality has created a huge gap between internal life and external life of the characters. Though, life seen from outside is virtuous, the life of most of the characters is scandalous. That is to say, most of the characters engage to multiple love affairs and sexual relations. Though people tend to be wise, intellectual, and moral, their corruptions come explicit in case of sex and money. They are not what they seem to be.

As the play opens with the venue of birthday party of Lady Windermere in Lord Windermere's house in Carlton, she is seen arranging the room which is historically associated as the compulsory work of a daughter. Lady Windermere's sudden encounter with Lord Darlington and his wishing for her birthday are the common traits of Victorian society as well as Victorian novels and dramas. Darlington's attempt to persuade her for his love affair can be explicitly seen in the play.

The moral behavior in the play revolves mainly around the female character, Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne. Likewise, male characters like Lord Windermere, Lord Darlington and Lord Augustus are also around question of morality.

As in other Victorian texts, Windermere family tries to protect their social prestige by organizing the parties and gatherings. It is a gathering of the prestigious and economically empowered people. That suggest Victorian people worship not the virtue but the wealth and power.

The Victorian norms and value forced the people for the mediocre behavior. That is to say, the people wanted to see the rise of the middle class society. Deborah Gorham in his essay “Early-Victorian Girlhood Experience” collected in the book *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* writes that females of the middle class background are seen most subjected to the norms of the society. The middle class values and norms are mostly carried on the back of morality and prestige which is recognized by Gorham:

The mid-Victorian decades have been characterized as the period when English prosperity was at its height, and when the dominance of middle –class values was most visible and least subject to question. The worst of the misery, dislocation and class antagonism that accompanied the first phase of industrialization had passed, giving way to relative prosperity, and to a consensus about moral, social and political values. In the words of one historian, the mid- Victorian period was ‘The Age of Equipoise’. (153)

The mid-Victorian people focus on the moral, social and political values. The people try to make a balance in the society by making the balance between two forces: morality and immorality. That is to say, by talking about the social harmony they undermined the ongoing practices in the society.

*Lady Windermere’s Fan* is also about the question of morality. The characters want to prove them as a moral being but internally they fail to prove their moral value in the later parts of the play. In the play, Lady Windermere questions about the previous behavior of the Lord Darlington when Darlington is giving the complements to Lady Windermere. Windermere wished moral and virtuous life of her partner. She says:

I hope not. I should be sorry to have to quarrel with you, Lord Darlington. I like you very much, you know that. But I shouldn't like you at all if I thought you were what most other men are. Believe me, you are better than most other men, and I sometimes think you pretend to be worse. (14-15)

It means Darlington makes her in the grave mood but she does not want to quarrel with him. However, she respects and urges him to be like 'other men'. By the word other man she is trying to hint moral men. Lady Windermere wants Darlington to be a moral man who abides by the social norms and values. On the same line, Darlington also replies Lady Windermere:

Oh, nowadays so many conceited people go about Society pretending to be good, that I think it shows rather a sweet and modest disposition to pretend to be bad. Besides, there is this to be said. If you pretend to be bad, it doesn't. Such is the astounding stupidity of optimism. (15)

Here, Darlington rightly comments on the general trait of the Victorian society. He means that so many people pretend to be good and moral where their life is full of scandals.

Lady Windermere seems to follow the puritan norms and values of the society. Such values are stemmed to her by her father, elder sister and Lady Julia. So, she pretends to follow the norms and values promoted by the then society. She followed the female responsibility in the family. She thinks that life is full of sacrifice. That is to say, she has given up her personal feelings and emotions for the sake of her family in the name of social morality.

In this regard she says "yes. Nowadays people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is love. Its purification

is sacrifice” (16). It means everything cannot be seen through speculation. Hidden things make the different changes in our life. Life is not what we see and what we feel. We must be ideal in love. That is to say, we must show our devotion to love. When love turns into sacrifice, then there is purity. Lord Darlington presents the one instance and asks her about the morality of the male.

Lord Darlington (still seated) : Do you think then – of course I am only putting an imaging instance – do you think that in the care of young married couple say about two years married, if the husband suddenly becomes the intimate friend of a woman of - well, more doubtful character – is always calling upon her, launching with her and probably paying her bills – do you think that the wife should not console herself? (16)

The doubtful character of the young couple is the form of immorality. Lady Windermere always advocates for the openness among the couple and wishes her husband communicates about his private affairs. She wants informal relation with her husband. She believes the communication and informal relations between wife and husband creates mutual understanding. But Darlington is with different view. Darlington believes that having dinner together and flirting together is not the measuring rod to determine their happy conjugal life. That is to say, a moral man is good if he is inwardly and outwardly correct. A man cannot be moral by paying bills, and having lunch together. He is good if he is inwardly good.

At the same discussion between Lady Windermere and Lord Darlington, they have turned their issues on the mercenary people. They reject the mercenary people who are primarily concerned with making money at the expense of ethics. That is to

say, mercenary people are only concerned with money and forget the social ethos in their money making process. Lord Darlington and Lady Windermere discuss:

Lord Darlington: ...I admit most women, for instance, nowadays, are rather mercenary.

Lady Windermere: don't talk about such people.

Lord Darlington: well, then setting aside mercenary people who of course are dreadful, do so think seriously that women who have committed what the world calls a fault should never be forgiven?

Lady Windermere: I think they should never be forgiven. (17)

Lady Windermere, being mercenary should not be the goal for the modern people. As a Victorian woman, she is always concerned with the morality and ethics. For her, morality is much more expensive than money. So, she rejects the mercenary people. In Lord Darlington's questions about mercenary, she is firm and determinative for the punishment. That is to say, they should never be forgiven.

In the Victorian time, many scandals were committed however they were taken as outcast and immoral. The members of the family try their best to protect their family from scandals. Scandal for woman is a social curse. The following dialogue also suggests this ethos.

Lady Windermere: I will, Duchess, I will have no one in my house about whom there is no scandal.

Lord Darlington: Oh, don't say that Lady Windermere. I should never be admitted!

Duchess of Berwick: Oh men don't matter, with women it is different. We are good. Some of us are, at least. But we are positively elbowed into the corner. Our husband would really forget our existence if we

didn't nag at them time to time just to remind them that we have a perfect legal right to do so. (18-19)

The above dialogue represents the situation of the Victorian women, how they were haunted by the Victorian morality. They live with the fear that if society found any wrong in their part they would be punished severely. So they try their best to maintain the scandal free image. But at the same time scandal for male is just the simple matter. That suggest dual standard prevailed during the period. Women are confirmed in the feminine quality. They were always chained by the morality and Victorian ethos where for male morality is the weapon to subdue women to their favor.

Victorian society attempts to maintain this morality through dress, gestures, coyness etc. It can be recognized in the dialogue of Duchess of Berwich:

Duchess of Berwich: Oh, on account of that horrid woman. She dresses so well, too, which makes it much worse, sets such a dreadful example. Augustus – you know my disreputable brother – such a trial to us all – well, Augustus is completely infatuated about her. It is quiet scandalous for she is absolutely inadmissible into society. Many a woman has a past, but I am told that she has at least a dozen, and that they all fit. (20)

Here, Duchess of Berwich exemplifies Mrs. Erlynne as a horror woman who sells her body for money. Berwich assumes that horror dress is an inadmissible feature in the society. But the rich and so called virtuous people like Lord Augustus are infatuated with such woman. In that sense, Berwich warns Lady Windermere to save her husband from such woman.

The economic transparency is another feature of moral society. Earning money from illegal work is not accepted in the society. The society questions on the

economic empowerment to release the society from immoral works. They also reject being imaginative in the ugly things. Here, Duchess of Berwick questions economic transparency and immorality in the following dialogue with Lady Windermere.

Duchess of Berwick: ...My dear nieces – you know the Saville girls, don't you? – such nice domestic creature – plain, dreadfully plain, but so good – well, they're always at the window doing fancy work, and making ugly things for the poor, which I think so useful of them in these dreadful socialistic days, and this terrible woman has taken a house in Curzon Street, right opposite them – such a respectable street, too! I don't know what we are coming to! And they tell that Windermere goes there four and five times a week – they see him. They can't help it – and although they never talk scandal, they – well, of course – they remark on it to everyone. And the worst of it all is that I have been told that this woman has got a great deal of money out of somebody. (20-21)

In this dialogue between Berwick and Lady Windermere, Berwick comments about Mrs Erlynne. They question about the conduct of Mrs. Erlynne, who has come Curzon Street just six month ago. Lady Windermere suspects her relation with her husband. Mrs. Erlynne had come to London six months ago without anything but has a charming house in Mayfair. Her drastic change in lifestyle raises a question among the people in the society that how Mrs. Erlynne earns such property to buy a house in Mayfair? The woman like Lady Windermere and Duchess of Berwick charge Mrs. Erlynne as an immoral woman because her property may be the collection of immoral works. In Victorian society, economic transparency is also the measuring rod for morality.



The Victorian males invest money to immoral girl for the sake of sex and immoral works. They are infatuated with prostitute or fallen woman. As a result, their family is ruined and wives question for their activities and spy on their husband's wrong act. In the absence of communication between the conjugal relation between the wife and husband takes the wrong turn. So, husband's private life is always around the curiosity of wife.

Lady Windermere: How horrible! I understand now what Lord Darlington meant by the imaginary instance of the couple not two years married. Oh! It can't be true- she spoke of enormous sums of money pay to this woman. I know where Arthur keeps his bank book – in one of the drawers of that desk. I might find out by that. I will find out. No, it is some hideous mistake. Some silly scandal! He loves me! He loves me! But why should I not look I am his wife, I have a right to look. (23)

Lady Windermere doubts her husband's conduct. She discovers that her husband's promises are false and she is sure that her husband's activities are against her wish. At first, she can't believe it but when she peers through her husband's bank book, she finds that her husband invests money for Mrs. Erlynne. That is to say, the cheque drawn to invest for the immoral woman does not have any place in the Victorian society. A woman does not want her husband engage with some women who is morally defamed. Lady Windermere says "I am not interested in her – and – you should not mention this woman and me in same breathe. It is an error of taste". (25) It means a moral prestigious woman rejects the comparison of the moral and degraded one. Here Mrs. Erlynne is tagged as a fallen woman because the society assumes that she sold her body for lively hood. The then Victorian society rejects the woman like

Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Windermere says “No! If a woman really repents she never wishes to return to the society that has made or seen her ruin”(25). The Victorian women could accept fallen woman, if they really repent to the society.

Victorian society rejects the identity of women like Mrs. Erlynne because they assume that she sold her body. That is to say, the Victorian women’s husbands are infatuated with many other women and undermine the social norms and value. The males also forget the family responsibilities being engaged with other women.

The Victorian people are very conscious about morality. But the question of morality is mainly concentrated over the women. The males are given privilege over the females. They are guided by the moral ethics. Though they tend to be moral in public places, their actions in private sphere are always questionable.

Lady Plymdale: Oh, you must not dream of such a thing. It’s most dangerous nowadays for a husband to pay any attention to his wife in public. It always makes people think that he beats her when they’re alone. The world has grown so suspicious of anything that looks like a happy married life. But I will tell you what it is at supper. (33)

Lady Plymdale presents the condition of the women who have freedom in the public but in the private place their condition is very miserable. That is to say, the Victorian society trumpets slogan of morality but in private sphere their life is full of scandals. With the above line, we can assume that morality of the Victorian society functions only in the theoretical form but in practical the society is full of hollowness and immorality. Furthermore, Lord Windermere says “Mrs. Erlynne is coming here, and if you in anyway annoy her or wound her you will bring same and sorrow on us both. Remember that! Ah, Margaret! Only trust me! A wife should trust her husband”(33). In the above dialogue, Lord Windermere tries to make Lady Windermere trust him.

He further says that wife should trust her husband. It means wife is an inferior being and she should subdue to her husband. Here, female is made a docile being. She should be respectful towards her husband.

The Victorian morality makes a woman feel degraded. The woman who gives their whole life for their family and society for the better future is always under the questions. This suppressed feeling can be felt in Lady Windermere's dialogue.

I did not ask her. He insisted on her coming – against my entreaties – against my command. Oh! The house is tented for me! I feel that every woman here sneers at me as she dances by with my husband. What have I done to deserve this? I gave him all life. He took it – used it spoiled it! Am degraded in my own eyes and I lack courage – I am coward. (37)

It means Lady Windermere who gives her whole life for her husband and her family but her whole life is full of mourn and troubles. A woman is compelled to see her husband with other woman. For an instance, Lord Windermere invites Mrs. Erlynne in the ball room party where Lady Windermere strictly opposes his act. Every woman in the party makes the mockery to the dance of Lord Windermere with Mrs. Erlynne. A man dancing with immoral woman is simply the question of morality in the then society. In a dialogue, Lady Windermere expresses her frustration to the act of Lord Windermere and says that she devoted her whole life for him but he is found fraud in the relation. Similarly, she felt that her husband used her throughout her life.

The Victorian people define morality through their personal interest. They question the extramarital relationship of the couple. Those who question the extramarital relationship, themselves fall on such relation. In this regard Lord Darlington's remark is worth to be quoting:

Yes you have the courage. There may be six months of pain of disgrace even but when you no longer bear his name, when you bear mine, all will be well. Margaret, my love, my wife that shall be some class – yes, my wife! You know it! What are you now? This woman has the place that belong my right to you. Oh! Go – go out of this house, with head erect, with a smile upon your lips, with courage in your eyes: All London will know why you did it; and who will blame you? No one. If they did, what matter? Wrong? What is wrong? It's wrong for a man to abandon his wife for a shameless woman. It is wrong for a wife to remain with a man who so dishonors her. You said once you would make no compromise with things. Make none now. Be brave! Be yourself! (38)

Lord Darlington, who talks about the morality of the people, is himself a fallen man in the eyes of society. In the opening scene of the drama, he presents himself as a moral man and questions about the immoral characteristic of the human. His pretention of moral man could not long last. Darlington is infatuated with Lady Windermere so that he is following her. He forces her to leave her husband and elope with him. He incites her by wrongly motivating her about her husband's conduct.

Finally, she decides to leave with him. In this context, her decision to elope with Darlington leaving her husband behind is itself her immoral character. In this regard, the Victorian morality runs through the personal interest. It means appearance and reality have huge gap. Victorian society is guided by sensuality. In this regard Mrs. Erlynne's dialogue is remarkable.

No! No! It would be impossible! Life doesn't repeat it tragedies like that! Oh, why does this horrible fancy come across me? Why do I

remember now the one moment of my life. I most wish to forget?  
 Does life repeat its tragedies? [Tears letter open and reads it, then  
 sinks down into a chair with a gesture of anguish.] I wrote to her  
 father! And how bitterly I have punished for it? No! My punishment,  
 my real punishment is tonight, is now! (43)

This dialogue suggests that Lady Windermere is unknown of her mother. Following the gossip between her husband and Erlynne, she comes to the wrong conclusion. She decides to leave her husband and house to free from his immoral act. She wrongly assumes her mother as her husband's lover. In a discussion with her mother, she comes to know that her mother is living a divorced life and facing a charge of immoral woman. That is to say, she discovers that she has immorality in blood. This suggests that the then Victorian society called a woman degraded when she left her house. Lady Windermere who is chanting morality and assumes herself as a puritan stern woman finally discovers she is the blood of same woman whom she calls a fallen woman.

The Victorian society is mainly concerned with the family responsibilities. The society forced woman to be dutiful to her husband and her children. When the relation between Mrs. Erlynne and Lady Windermere unveils, Mrs. Erlynne preaches her the lesson of morality.

...But spoil your beautiful young life on my accounts : you don't know what may be in store for you, unless you leave the house at once. You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at to be outcast! ...No! Go back, Lady Windermere, the husband who loves you whom you love. You have a child, Lady Windermere, Go back to that child who even now in pain

or in joy, may be calling to you. ... But even if he had a thousand loves, you must stay with your child. If he was harsh to you, you must stay with your child. If he ill – treated you, you must stay with your child. If he abandoned you – your place is with your child. (49-50)

It means Mrs. Erlynne preaches the lessons of morality. She, with her daughter, shares the experience how a woman suffers who left her house. She shares with her daughter about her experiences how she fell on the brink of ruin, mocked her by the society, and husband's abandonment. Mrs. Erlynne opines that a woman only understands the felling of another woman and a child. With this opinion, Mrs. Erlynne tries to connect her relation with her daughter. At the last of her consolation, she says if the husband leaves her, she will still choose to live with her own child. If he ill-treated her, she would live with her own child. She wants to make her position secure with the child.

It is clear that morality prevents a person from being socially outcast. It makes a female more responsible towards family. In the conversation with mother Erlynne, Lady Windermere also expresses her relation with her husband and the notion of morality.

Arthur, Arthur don't talk so bitterly about any woman. I don't think now that people can be divided into the good and bad as though they were two separate races or creation. What are called good woman may have terrible things in them, mad mood of recklessness, assertion, jealous, sin, bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, repentance, pity, sacrifice. And I don't think Mrs. Erlynne a bad woman – I know she's not. (60)

Lady Windermere talks about the morality inside the house. That is to say, those people who are regarded as a prestigious people in the society may have ruined character inside their house. It means, morality from outward impression can be wrong. In the same way, those people who are morally denounced by the society may have good character in their personal life and those people who are taken as the morally pure may have corrupt behavior in their personal life. So, the definition of morality depends upon the person himself/ herself. In this regard, morality can be seen outwardly and inwardly with different perspective. In this regard, Victorian context always search for the outward morality. It does not seek for any internal ethos to the people. During the period, powerless people became the victim of morality where powerful people enjoy the notion of morality to subdue others to their own interest. Such notions of moralities are imposed only for powerless, poor and female.

In Victorian society, people used to charge each other in the name of morality. Even though, they are themselves degraded. They want to show themselves pure. They interfere in others' characters by charging other people in the names of social norms and values which are provided by aristocratic society. The following dialogue uttered by Lord Windermere clarifies this fact.

Lord Windermere: [standing C.] I sometimes wish you had. I should have been spared then the misery, anxiety, the annoyance of the last six months. But rather than my wife should know- that the mother whom she was taught consider as dead, the mother whom she has mourned as dead, is living- divorced woman, going about under an assumed name, a bad woman preying upon life, as I know you now to be- rather than that I was ready to supply you with money to pay bill after bill,

extravagance after extravagance, to risk what occurred yesterday, the first quarrel I have ever with my wife. (62)

Lord Windermere is talking about the quarrel inside his house. Though there is misery, anxiety, annoyance in his family, he can is able to reunify his mother and daughter. That is to say, it is the reunification of Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne. Mrs. Erlynne is a divorced woman who does not forget her daughter to the end. At the same time, Lord Windermere regrets the presence of Mrs. Erlynne.

With the presence of Mrs. Erlynne the relationship between Lady Windermere and Lord Windermere comes to the problematic state. Mrs. Erlynne charges him as an immoral man whose has close relationship to prostitute woman. In reply, Lord Windermere also charges Mrs. Erlynne as a fallen woman and sinner. He also questions the life style of a divorced woman. It suggests that the characters exchange the charges and counter charges of morality and immorality to each other. One attempts to label other 'immoral' and tries to prove him moral.

In the same line quest of prestige is another prominent feature of Victorian society. Having big houses, organized family and submissive wife and children are the great prestige of Victorian man. In a dialogue Duchess of Berwick justifies this taste of Victorian male.

Duchess of Berwick: Of course it's going to be select. But we know that, dear Margaret, about your house. It is really one of the few houses in London where I can take Agatha, and where I feel perfectly secure about dear Berwick. I don't know what society is coming to. The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere. They certainly come to my parties - the men get quite furious if one doesn't ask them. Really, someone should make a stand against it. (18)



This dialogue also suggests that having house in London is a source of prestige. People worship those who own big houses and organized family. Rather than intellectuality, Victorian aristocratic regards to the wealth and possessions.

Victorian people wish to be praised by others. They live in false belief that they are liked by other members of society. None of the characters in the play are outside this belief. They think that by throwing parties they could earn fame and prestige in society. The central character of this play, Lady Windermere also thinks that she is prestigious in society because she has thrown grand party.

Lady Windermere: This is not a good woman in London who would not applaud me. We have been too lax. We must make an example, I propose to begin tonight. [Picking up fan.] Yes, you gave me this fan today; it was your birthday present. If that woman crosses my threshold, I shall strike her across the face with it. (27)

This dialogue also shows that materialism is also worshipped in Victorian society. The culture of material gift is prevailed during the then society. People try to win heart of other people by offering gifts and flattering. Lady Windermere is also seeking such flattering and gifts from her relatives and kens.

In conclusion, almost all the characters of the play are concerned with the issue of morality and prestige. Social status, Christian values, possessions, and organized family are their first concern. Besides, flattering and offering gifts also suggest the imitation of aristocratic culture in middle class people.

Victorian society confines women within the parameters of femininity. That is to say, the society believes that women should be submissive and obedient to her husband. It is the great morality of women as well as prestige of family. Here, prestige

and morality overlaps, as morality of wife and children are the prestige of a male. Finally, this play revolves around the notion of prestige and morality.

### **III. *Lady Windermere's Fan*: A Tracings of Contradictions in Prestige and Morality**

*Lady Windermere's Fan* is a Victorian play which demonstrates the love for social prestige and morality. It unveils the ironical behavior in Victorian people. On the one hand Victorian people stress on the morality and chastity but their life is full of scandals and corruptions on the other. This play explores the showy and pretentious life of the then people. The people do not do what they say. In speech they stress on the virtuous life and religious faith but in their private life they are full of sexual scandals and anti-religious activities. Rather than faith to God and to construct virtuous society their trumpet of moral society is found to exploit women. Most of the males impose this notion to female where their conduct is out of questions.

For Victorian people, morality and prestige in society is only the alternative to live in successful social life. To show power and property in society they throw parties and events. Donation to poor and beggar do not come as the sympathy but to show the society how wealthy they are. Moreover, lower and middle class people imitate the aristocratic outlook to show their prestige. Furthermore, women wear seven folded petticoats but prostitution is one of the source of lively hood. Similarly, mercenary ventures are also the means of prestige. A man who gets mercenary is

regarded as a prestigious man and woman. And who have a lot of property is regarded as the prestigious woman.

As morality, Victorian people stress on chastity, virginity, coyness, in women and economic transparency, responsibility to family affairs, faithful relation with wife, and hard labor in man. One who deviates from these values is regarded as the violator of social norms in society. Though, the Victorian people trumpet these notions in words they themselves do not pay heed to these norms in their own practice. That is to say, their words and actions contradict. For example, morally corrupted women counsel to their daughter to be virtuous. Here, Duchess of Berwick counsels her daughter Lady Agatha to be virtuous. Lady Windermere pretends to be moral but she has a boyfriend beside her husband. Similarly, Lord Darlington, Mrs. Erylne, etc have multiple partners where they frequently stress for the faithful relation with partners. Lord Augustus has many women as his playmates because he is wealthy man. It suggests morality of Victorian people is counted in terms of wealth and possessions. Morality for these people, are not to practice but just to gossip. In this sense, most of the male characters engage in such relations to hunt the mercenary and most of the female characters engage in multiple relations for their economic and physical security. So, in this way, Victorian people quest for prestige and morality.

In *Lady Windermere's Fan* most of the characters revolve around morality and prestige. Their struggle centers on how to preserve prestige and how to show moral outlook in society. In this competition, they apply multiple means such as aristocratic outlook, throwing parties, donations to poor, sympathy, solidarity and charity works. However, the image of public life contradicts with the practice in private periphery.

With all these evidences, this project argues that Victorian society locates all its strength to preserve prestige and morality however, fails to do so. This project

attempts to unveil this contradictions and paradoxes. It centrally focuses on the quest of prestige and morality of the then people but their practice in opposite order.

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