
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 14:3 March 2014
ISSN 1930-2940

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Dynamics of Human Relationships in the Novels of D.H. Lawrence: *A Study of Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow and Women in Love*

Dheifallah Ibrahim Shlash Mohammad

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David Herbert Lawrence and the Theme of Balance between Opposites

David Herbert Lawrence is one of the most versatile and leading figures in twentieth century literature. He was not only a great novelist but an accomplished poet, short story writer, essayist, critics, and travel writer. Most of his writings, both fiction and nonfiction, deal with the theme of stable equilibrium or sense of balance between opposites.

Relationship between Male and Female

It should be noticed that Lawrence's use of the term 'equilibrium' is not restricted to its literal sense only but it depends on an active, varying, shifting relationship between opposites, a constant struggle for power. One of the major, most encompassing relationships of opposites which Lawrence writes of is the relationship between man and woman, male and

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female. He has been called a misanthrope, a homosexual, and a feminist's nightmare, but Lawrence, who you either love or you hate, helped to change the topography of English literature forever.

A Three-fold Framework of Relationships

Lawrence's philosophy of human relationships assimilates a comprehensive set of elements which can be generally traced to be rooted in three fold frame work. The first stage comprises mainly of the coming together of partners in response to the call of 'Holy Spirit' by which Lawrence indicates towards the power of 'intuition' within us. The second stage incorporates mutual understanding between the partners. It is in this very stage that the resolution of their conflicts establishes itself. The final stage involves the amalgamation of the spirit with the flesh and mind which consequently helps them to achieve the stage of harmony, bliss and fulfillment. These three stages are inter-related as they create space of one another and help in the growth of a sound human relationship.

Inquiry into Relationships

If we critically examine the novels of Lawrence, we find that almost all his novels have the ambience of in-depth analysis of human relationships. His novels are for the most part an inquiry into human relationship, especially with man-woman relationships. Although Lawrence seems to be concerned primarily with man-woman relationship in his novels yet it cannot be denied that he has dealt with other facets of human relationship.

Oedipus Complex and Its Opposite Electra Complex

For instance, parents-children relationship has also been analyzed very precisely and acutely in his novel *Sons and Lovers*. While dealing with the parents-children relationship, Lawrence generally presents the sons as victim of mother fixation which is technically known as *Oedipus complex* and its opposite *Electra Complex* which stands for the over attachment of a girl with her father. Lawrence aptly provides a psycho-analytical assessment of human relationships and critiques the set conventional notion of sexuality prevalent in his time.

Fight between Body and Mind

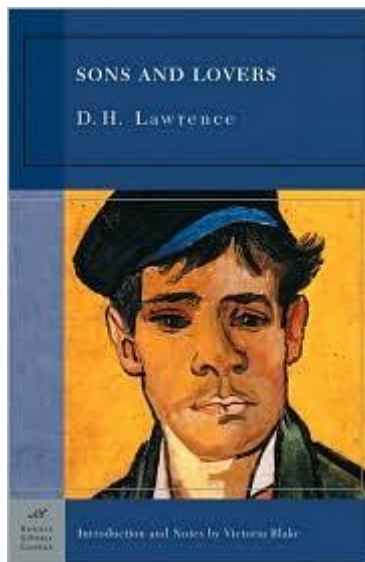
In many of his works, as mentioned above, Lawrence critically evaluates the holy fight specifically between the mind and the body and between males and females. H.M. Daleski explains that the male and female are the basic elements in any opposite pair:

“The two wills (in the holy fight) are embodied in man and woman and serve as a pair of attributes in Lawrence’s formulation of the male and female principles” (Daleski:7)

In addition to this relationship, on another level these two sets of opposites are tied tightly together because it the state of the first pair which, to some extent, determines the state of second because there cannot be harmony between man and woman unless and until there exist concord between each individual’s body and mind.

Thus Lawrence establishes the idea that the holiness, the sanctification and unity of all life only exists in balance between the two opposites. Holiness only exists when there is balance between the body and the mind, when neither side is dominant.

Sons and Lovers



In the semi-autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence provides readers with living examples of his concept of conflict between the mind and the body and very consistently, between man and woman. He creates Paul Morel, the young man perched between innocent, pure Miriam who represents thought, and sensual, experienced Clara, representative of the body. Lawrence places Paul in a middle position, causing him to struggle for a choice

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between Miriam and Clara; and, largely because of his close ties to his mother, he eventually ends up choosing neither. This theme of obsession with mother provides additional fictional value to the narrative.

William and Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers* have been presented as the victim of Oedipus complex, that is, mother-fixation. The narrative of *Sons and Lovers* is weaved with the multiple strain of family situation but the theme of Oedipus complex is at the centre of the narrative. The umbrella term Oedipus complex takes its name from the title character of the Greek play Oedipus Rex. In the story, Oedipus is prophesied to murder his father and have sex with his mother (and he does, though unwittingly). Freud argued that these repressed desires are present in most young boys. (The female version is called the Electra complex.)

D.H. Lawrence was aware of Freud's theory, and *Sons and Lovers* notably uses the Oedipus complex as its base for exploring Paul's relationship with his mother. Paul is desperately devoted to his mother, and that love often borders on romantic desire.

Lawrence writes many scenes between the two that go beyond the bounds of conventional mother-son love. Completing the Oedipal equation, Paul murderously hates his father and often fantasizes about his death. Paul assuages his guilty, incestuous feelings by transferring them elsewhere, and the greatest receivers are Miriam and Clara (note that transference is another Freudian term). However, Paul cannot love either woman nearly as much as he does his mother, though he does not always realize that this is an impediment to his romantic life. The older, independent Clara, especially, is a failed maternal substitute for Paul. In this setup, Baxter Dawes can be seen as an imposing father figure; his savage beating of Paul, then, can be viewed as Paul's unconsciously desired punishment for his guilt. Paul's eagerness to befriend Dawes once he is ill (which makes him something like the murdered father) further reveals his guilt over the situation.

But Lawrence adds a twist to the Oedipus complex—Mrs. Morel is saddled with it as well. She desires both William and Paul in near-romantic ways, and she despises all their girlfriends. She, too, engages in transference, projecting her dissatisfaction with her marriage onto her smothering love for her sons. At the end of the novel, Paul takes a major step in releasing himself from his Oedipus complex. He intentionally overdoses his dying mother

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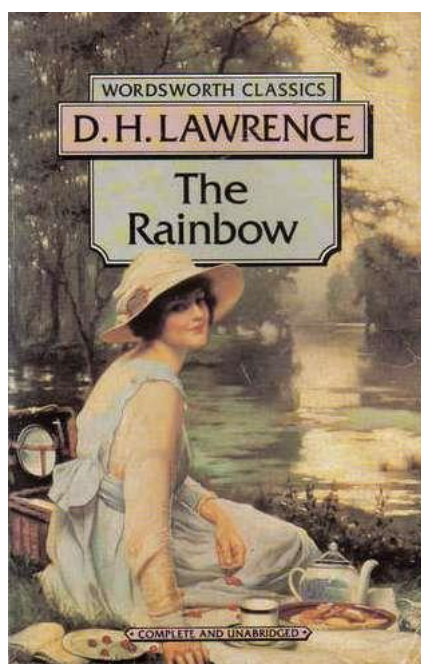
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with morphia, an act that reduces her suffering but also subverts his oedipal fate, since he does not kill his father, but his mother.

Lawrence points out how contradictions come into view so easily in human nature, especially with love and hate. Paul vacillates between hatred and love for all the women in his life, including his mother at times. Often he loves and hates at the same time, especially with Miriam. Mrs. Morel, too, has some reserve of love for her husband even when she hates him, although this love dissipates over time. Lawrence also uses the opposition of the body and mind to expose the contradictory nature of desire; frequently, characters pair up with someone who is quite unlike them. Lawrence presents this conflict between the two sexes both on the sexual and spiritual level. Mrs. Morel initially likes the hearty, vigorous Morel because he is so far removed from her exquisite, sophisticated, intellectual nature. In the same way Miriam falls in love with Paul Morel's mental accomplishment not with Paul. Moreover, Paul Morel who is so much under the influence of his mother's over possessive love fails to achieve any satisfaction in love with both Miriam who is all spiritual and Clara who is all fire and flesh. Thus Lawrence finds the maladjustment in human relationship as the root cause of unhappiness and suffering along with people's being cut off from one another in modern life.

The Rainbow



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The Rainbow epitomizes, to a great deal, Lawrence's whole concept of the human relationship. Marriage and Sex relationship not only becomes the central idea of the novel but also forms the kernel of his theory about the man-woman relationships. Lawrence views marriage as a sporadic rhythm of love and hate, attraction and repulsion, squabble and resolution. The stereotype, prevalent throughout the nineteenth century, was still widely held at the time Lawrence wrote both *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*.

H.M. Daleski gives an extensive list of the traits Lawrence believes to fit into his male or female categories. Lawrence considers the male attribute of *knowledge* the opposite of the female *feeling*, male *consciousness* opposite female *feelings*, and male *mind* opposite female *senses*. This gives incentive to providing the logic of this replacement of body for emotion. I cite the pairing of the male idea opposite female body (Daleski:9).

Lawrence also views the woman as child-bearer in variance with the woman as wife which establishes the "tension between woman as—mother and man—as lover is inevitable" (Daiches:154).

Lawrence critiques the idea of adjustment in which one partner has to sink his individuality altogether for the sake of the other partner. As already mentioned above, Lawrence promotes the concept of 'equilibrium' and suggests that both partners of a relationship must attempt to gain mutual benefit thorough adjustment. In the novel, *The Rainbow*, we find that William's adjustment is not spontaneous. His tuning carries the elements of strain and dismal surrender on his part. It is this tension in adjustment which makes William fails in achieving conjugal fulfilment with his wife and consequently turns towards his daughter, Ursula, for emotional fulfilment.

Lawrence also ponders the issues of establishing balance between mind, soul and body, also giving insight into his perception of the gender harmony, both between woman and man and within the individual. According to Lawrence 'Will', 'Mind', 'Intellect' and 'Idea' are the principal obstacles in the way of the accomplishment of the fullness of individual being because they obliterate the vital centres of living. Lawrence believed that physical love must collapse if it is unsupported by the soul because there is no body distinct from soul.

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Lawrence is concerned with the 'total' human being; to be man alive, to be whole men alive, and the balance of both body and soul. Two of his essays, 'Morality and the Novel' and 'Why the Novel Matters' seem to form a theoretical base for his moral vision of the human relations. He explains:

"The whole is greater than the part and therefore, I who am man alive, am greater than my soul or spirit, or body, or mind, or consciousness, or anything else"

Lawrence had been a keen observer of human relationship, which has been a topic of panoramic interest among the most literary figures of his time. Although Man-Woman relationship is only one aspect of the whole relationship between a human being and his crumbliest universe, but it is the main subject of Lawrence and he traces this relationship over three generations of Brangwens.

In *The Rainbow*, there are three major relationships that have been depicted—the relationship between Tom and Lydia, Will and Anna and Ursula and Skrebensky. But the third generation, that is, Ursula and Skrebensky has managed to gain a special attention of both Lawrence and of the reader. Besides Lawrence's treatment of man-woman relationships in his novels, there are strains of man to man friendships also. Lawrence says,

"The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his crumbliest universe, at the living moment" (Lawrence, *Morality*: 128)

Lawrence has brought out a fundamental lack of understanding between man and woman in his novel *The Rainbow*. This lack of understanding is often complicated by the intense sexual relationships. Ursula and Skrebensky have a difficult time forming partnerships, sharing their thoughts and feelings with each other. The central figure of Ursula becomes the focus of Lawrence's examination of relationships and the conflict they bring, and the inextricable mingling of the physical and spiritual.

Lawrence's view is that relationship on the level of friendliness can continue only when there is no endeavour at possession or domination by one over the other. The whole endeavour should be at mutual understanding and respect of the individuality of the other

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partner, and at balancing of opposites in both. Lawrence so meticulously recorded the tumult of the individual soul and its conflict with and desire of its love object. Lawrence shows both external conflicts, common to all stories of relationships, but also inner conflicts, the illogical contradictions of desire.

Women in Love

Lawrence achieves artistic magnificence when he weaves these themes into a character that is one of the most aesthetically brilliant literary creations of all time. In *The Rainbow's* sequel, *Women in Love*, Lawrence has presented incongruous situations and conflicting sets of lovers to present his ideal of human relationships. Besides Gerald and Gudrun's affair, there is also Birkin and Ursula's advancement towards fuller life. The story of frustrations and death in the love of Gerald and Gudrun is contrasted with the love story of Birkin and Ursula that brings fulfilment and happiness to both. It is through the relationship of Birkin and Ursula that Lawrence attempts to depict his idea of the possibility of true love and successful marriage even in the morbid and convoluted modern society. Lawrence asserted that "the joy of living lies in vulnerability, in being unformed and unfinished, in being open to the new." (Nahal: 167)

Lawrence emphasizes "receptivity to the unknown in all its manifestation" for fulfilment in any human relation. Ursula and Rupert take a long time before they can arrive at the mental level; it consists of the negation of certain mental curiosities and doubts which they have about the type of love the other partner wants to offer. Each, therefore, wants to insist on his or her ideal of love. As Rupert tells Ursula, "while ever either of us insists on the other, we are all wrong. But there we are, the accord does not come." (*Women in Love*, Page 328)

Finally, however, the harmony does come— when both come to realize the congestion in their relationship and consequently create proper space for each other's individuality. They restrict themselves from imposing each one's ideal of love upon the other and are happily married.

"There is not fulfilment in love itself. Fulfilment, indeed, must come through a perfected harmony between the lover and the beloved but this communion is wonderful as it is, by no means itself the fulfilment" (Yudhistar 170).

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Besides their relation with women, men in Lawrence's fiction seek completion in their own counter-parts by having a close intimacy with each other. Lawrence in his essay, "The Birth of Sex" in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* advocates man to man relationship for completion, fulfilment and happiness in life. It should be kept in mind here that Lawrence's idea of man-man relationship has nothing to do with homosexuality in its literal sense. On the contrary, Lawrence propounds a scheme of healthy and sound relationship between man and man where one stands as the complement of other and makes the bond a complete whole.

It is through the character of Birkin, who becomes a mouthpiece of Lawrence, that we find an explanation of the concept of brotherhood or man-man relationship. Birkin's statements at Gerald's death, clearly presents Lawrence's views on the necessity of such a relationship. He feels the need of another man as his counter-part so as to have a sense of completion in life. Birkin too believes that man-woman relationship is not whole and adequate by itself. Man needs friendship with another man to complete his own self. Birkin, therefore, is devoted to Gerald at an early stage of his love with Ursula. Birkin believes that the circle of existence is completed not only with man-woman relationship but along with man to man relationship too. For Birkin, love is not limited to only sexual relations. He very firmly favours and supports man to man relationship besides man-woman relationship as being the most natural expression of biological life. He feels intense desire within himself to love a man fully. Thus, according to Lawrence, man to man relation is as essential as man to woman relation in life. Moreover, man to man relationship in Lawrence's works as also man-woman relationship has been developed on similar lines.

Sons and Lovers, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* are based on the tangle of human relationships which Lawrence essentially sees in terms of relationship in which man and woman achieve fulfilment. It is important to note that this reverse gendering is not universal; rather, the women look out at other men who have "turned their back on the pulsing heat of creation" unlike the Brangwen men. Lawrence thus locates the primitive, the cyclical, the pre- and extra-historical in male bodies aligned with nature. Lawrence pushes back forcefully against the constructions that limit erotic possibilities and connections (at least between men and women). Lawrence believed that an extra ordinary man and an extra-ordinary woman can

create a new world. Only those relationships succeed which are not based on parts but the whole of man and the whole of woman.

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