

## LAWRENCE'S *SONS AND LOVERS*: A DISCOURSE ON MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP

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The business of art is to reveal the relationship between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment.

-D. H. Lawrence (www.brainyquote.com)

It is said that writer is the product of his age. The same happens with Lawrence; he has shared an era which is called chaotic, full of confusions and wars. His novels also depict his psyche that is confusion and at the core of it has imbibed the spirit of his age. He was from a middleclass, coal miner's family and the estranged relation between his illiterate father and educated mother affected the lives of their children. Lawrence's powerful masterpiece *Sons and Loves* is an autobiographical work so one can observe a lot of resemblance in his life and that of the hero- Paul. He tries to trace a kind of moral confusion and the experiences of his time. He has successfully depicted the spirit of his age imbibed by him. He has tried to analyze his relationship with others. He was also interested in Psycho-analytical theory of Freud and critics often read this novel by applying the theory of 'Oedipus Complex' to understand it perfectly. They often read the novel to introduce the revolutionary idea of sexuality and the sexual freedom introduced by the novelist into British literature. In the modern age of interrogation, the rise of scientific spirit and rationalism led to the questioning of accepted social norms, beliefs, conventions and traditions. The age is characterized by rapid change; the century ushered in an era of more perplexity and uncertainty which is further accentuated by Freud, Jung and Bergson which has had a profound influence on 20<sup>th</sup> century moral attitudes especially in matters of sex. The repressed sex instincts are the root of much neurosis and other signs of abnormality. Freud's theory of the 'Oedipus complex' is being freely exploited by the contemporary writers like Lawrence. Bonamy Dobree aptly observes: Mal-adjustments of life, the suppressions, the deformities: his distinctive material is really the same as that of Dr. Freud, and the modern Psycho-analytical school. (42: quoted in Tilak: *Sons and Loves*)

The study of sub conscious even unconscious has become the major theme of modern literature. Human concern is major concern for Lawrence's novels. As the novel applies the theory of Oedipus complex that the sons are naturally attracted to mothers as the opposite sex, the hero's relationship with his mother is the main theme of the novel. The novel presents young Paul's failure in regards with his relationship with various women being a victim of mother fixation. He could not love these ladies mainly because of the possessive nature of his mother and that creates a psycho-analytic block for him. The novel puts forward the idea of conflict that is happening within the mind of the characters and a kind of opposing pulls in the mind of his mother and other ladies. He develops a style of writing like famous Russian writer Dostoyevsky, tries to present confrontation that happens within the mind as well as outside side by side and poses several questions about contemporary morality. It's true that he argues for sexual freedom.

The novel centers around a simple story of lower-class Morel family living in Nottinghamshire, England. A rough coal miner and his educated and highly intellectual wife comes together by attraction and get married but soon turns into an unhappy marriage throughout the novel. The shrewd wife channelize her affection and feelings towards her sons, she searches for the feeling of love to fill the vacuum of her life. Her elder son frees himself from her clutches but being sick, frail and sensitive her second son remains with her and both share emotional bonding to such an extreme level that he is not successful in attaining the lady

love in his life. He serves her and gets frustrate in the end after her death.

As the novel dictates the development of personal relationship, the paper aims to study the man-woman relationship depicted in the novel. The novel focuses man-woman relationship handled by the novelist who is champion in depicting the relationships in his novels and considers man-woman relationship as the great relationship for humanity than any other relationship. Being an explorer of human relationships, in this novel Lawrence has studied sex relationship from different angles, his powerful relationship with his passive mother, his passionate love affair with his beloved and his intense liaison with a married woman and the effect of his love for his mother on his relationship with the two women a manifestation of Oedipus complex. The relationship between son and mother can't be called as man-woman relationship because they are neither husband wife nor lovers nor live in relationship but apart from being her biological son they cross the limit of being son and mother and enter into man-woman relationship. Of course, their relationship as male and female is on psychological level and never on physical plane.

## I

### Mrs. Morel and Paul

The relationship develops to the limit when they act as lovers on occasions. Being a woman of a bulk of complexes Mrs. Gertrude Morel is haughty, proud and unyielding. She is an erudite woman but dominant in nature as her education has expanded her thinking capacities, she considers her husband as 'a whole package' (physical as well as spiritual). But to her dismay her savage and rude husband exploits her as a sexual object merely for his carnal desires. His animal like mating fulfills her physically (of course against her wish), but her greatest thirst of having him on a spiritual plane remains unquenched. Being an intellectual and sophisticated person, her emotional side is always neglected. He is totally unaware of her desires. Naturally she begets a chain of issues within a short period and she starts to focus on her children. Her first son is her first prey for her emotional gratification. She starts to exploit him emotionally but her second son suffering from bronchitis is physically weak and frail by nature so she starts to bind him around her. Equally both the sons are sharing her emotional appetite, but she is more interested in William her elder son because he is growing and can understand her but in a course of time, he leaves the home for his career and settles down in London leaving her deeply upset. Now Paul the only prey is also growing up and the only substitute left to her. Being dependent due to his illness he can't develop friendship with his same age neighboring children and all the time is available to her and eventually develops an emotional bond with her. Bronchitis often strikes him and he often sleeps with her during his illness. Her physical movements please him, which is a passionate joy for him. The warmth, the security and peace of soul, the utter comfort from the touch of other heals him. It develops even in his teens, "he stuck to her as if he were her man". He loves her almost like a lover and observes every physical movement of hers with delight. She has no objection to that and he is brought up in such a way. She shares lot of incidents with him as if he is her lover and she the beloved- the Nottingham outing of Paul and his mother, "they feel the excitement of lovers having an adventure". They go to an expensive restaurant which they can't afford, they don't bother that they don't have money but rather enjoy their emotional bonding. Both of them find incredible happiness in each other's company, when they are coming back from a farm of her friend, "his heart was full of happiness till it hurt. His mother too wanted to cry with happiness" as if she has got her lost love. In the meanwhile, unfortunately William meets his death, due to being left by his beloved; the broken-hearted mother learns a lesson that emotional boding other than her will crush her sons so she starts to take extra care of Paul. They develop a certain kind of enmity with Mr. Morel and her life is rooted in Paul. Inevitably young Paul develops his love relationship with Mirium- a young religious girl who wants Paul's spiritual love. Once again, a dominant woman comes into his life like his mother; both women want to suck up his soul. She is aware of Mirium's love for him (being close to his mother he discloses everything to his mother and she too can understand his changed behavior) she considers Mirium as her rival in Paul's love. She

never wants to free him from her clutches, eventually his love for Mirium withers.

His next relationship with Clara- a married woman also blooms and withers, it's a relationship based on physical pleasure, she has nothing to do with his spirituality. In the meanwhile, his mother is diagnosed with cancer which is incurable; he nurses her obediently but at a certain point unable to tolerate her horrible pain and he consults a doctor, ends her life by giving an overdose of morpheme. Grief gnaws at his heart; he feels lost without the mainstay of his life. Lawrence considers that a relationship between sexes must be one of reconciliation and not domination. Paul is frustrated in his life just because of dominations. Being a victim of the Oedipean situation he accepts the fact and blames her in the end, "And I never shall meet the right woman while you live". Lawrence regarded woman as a dominant sex and was suspicious of female supremacy that's why a female character is depicted as a carbon copy of his life experience. The man-woman relationship between them is marked by female supremacy; she not only occupies him being alive but frustrates him after her death. According to Raghukul Tilak:- Lawrence sees the male and female principles in the universe involved in a continual conflict, a battering and tearing of each other, a devouring of each other, and hence so of much suffering and misery all around. (42:Tilak: *Sons and Lovers*)

His attitude to sex was conditioned by his early home environment- an environment of conflict between the parents and his marriage to an aggressive dominant female. As Ravindra Rakesh aptly observes: Mrs. Morel constantly trying to improve her husband, reacts violently to what he is, instead of accepting him. Although we see the story entirely from Gertrude Morel's point of view, it seems that Walter Morel is, in fact, being harshly treated by his wife. There is some sympathy for him, but Lawrence is biased in favour of Mrs. Morel. (203:Prakash: *Sons And Lovers*)

That's why he regarded woman as a dominant sex; he was ever suspicious of female supremacy. It is observed that in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. His novel is the best attempt in applying Psycho-analytical theory where many incidents of the novel take place in the characters mind as well. On the whole, the relationship is the main source of the tragedy that occurs in the novel.

## II

### Paul and Mirium

The relationship is important in the development of the novel. Mirium-a sixteen years introvert being, cut off from ordinary life by her religious intensity, is the heroine of the novel. She is the daughter of Mrs. Morel's friend. She and Paul always meet and talk about nature, religion, literature and art at her farm for hours which leads them to bind in a relationship. It is she who is the source of artistic inspiration to Paul. She was brought up in the atmosphere of neglected childhood so the nearness and privacy of her farm bring them spiritually together but unfortunately not successful because of both. It is very clear that because of their different personalities they are bound to clash in some way, in spite of their attraction for each other. Young Paul tormented by his developing sexuality groping for satiating his carnal desires but Mirium longs to establish a spiritual union between them. Being spiritually engaged with his mother he can't develop a spiritual relationship with Mirium, as he is a victim of mother fixation, his mother's figure is imprinted as an ultimate woman on his mind so he finds drawbacks with any woman. Mirium wants Paul on both levels spiritual and physical as well but spirituality in relationship is her prime demand. A famous critic Ravindra Prakash opines: The truth is that both Mirium and Paul are unable to accept passion as essential to man-woman relationship. Their love of purity is fierce and destroys all possibilities of their ever achieving a balanced relationship. (159:Prakash: *Sons And Lovers*)

Lawrence was trying to explore the nature of true love. If the relationship fails, it fails because of its own inadequacy; Paul ignores the female in her and she ignores the male in him. The novelist opines, "Relationship of the sexes must be a reconciliation of opposites and not a domination of one by other." This is the main reason that the relationship comes to an end due to domination and both of them fail to

understand that reconciliation is necessary for a lifelong and healthy relationship. Lawrence also believes in the Law of Polarity in which he observes: - Antithesis or the balancing of opposites is the law of nature- night with day, light with darkness, the sun with moon, and the male with the female. Man is the sun and woman is the moon, and the two must balance each for their mutual fulfillment. However, a satisfactory balance or adjustment can be achieved only when Men and Women recognize the essential 'otherness' of each other. Each has his or her own unique self: this 'uniqueness' or 'otherness' must be recognized and respected. *Without such recognition there can be no satisfactory polarization or coming together of opposites, which the male females are by their very nature.* (43: quoted in Tilak: Sons and Lovers)

The novelist wants to state the same by this relationship; no polarization is there as she wants to draw all of him into her while he had devoted himself to his mother and not at all himself as well. This is the basic reason that this relationship is tinged with positive and negative polarities. Once again Lawrence wants to prove his point by this relationship that both body and mind are important. Either one of them is not sufficient Raghukul Tilak points out: Men and women can develop integrated personality, first by recognizing the rival claims of the mind and the body, the spirit and the flesh, and then through sex-relationship with each other. Paul and Mirium relationship fails because it is too spiritual. It is the love of mystic saint for a mystic nun. But the flesh cannot be denied; the body must have satisfaction along with the spirit. (167: Tilak: Sons And Lovers)

Finally, even after the death of his mother they meet but once again it can't work out. The shadow of his mother's temptation leaves grave marks upon his mind and follows him after her demolition too. Eventually Paul is lost totally and doesn't want to stick up into any relationship. This relationship ends in the failure because they fail to achieve a well-balanced relationship.

### III

#### Paul and Clara

The relationship is totally contradictory to that of Paul and Mirium. Clara is a married woman separated from her husband and comparatively aged than Paul. The relationship begins with fascination. It is Paul's natural youthful attraction towards her physical beauty as it is neither fulfilled by both the women who came earlier into his life; it is never possible with his mother and Mirium is not ready for that without spiritual love. Now separated Clara is the easy target for him. He wants to fulfill his physical appetite with her. They are both attracted towards each other merely for sexual gratification. For some days he is deeply absorbed in her so that he even forgets Mirium. There is neither love nor spirituality in the relationship and naturally it withers as speedily as it grows as it is ruined also speedily. They meet several times and make love but both return disappointedly; he was expecting something grand and new and she was expecting something much more exciting than her husband's proximity with her.

Mrs. Morel has no objection to Paul's relationship with her; being a shrewd woman she knows that it's a mere attraction and moreover Clara is not like her rival Mirium in Paul's love. As the relationship is merely physical and superficial it fails to satisfy both Clara and Paul for any length of time. The writer of the book 'The Atlantic Critical Studies' observes: Paul and Clara relationship helped make Paul open-minded and more social. As he was his 'Mamm's boy' stick up to family and don't know much about outer world. (69: quoted in 'The Atlantic Critical Studies')

Lawrence wants to suggest by both the relationships that man is both; body and spirit, flesh and mind so he seeks both physical and spiritual satisfaction. Mirium is 'soul' while Clara is 'flesh'. In this regard Ravindra Prakash rightly observes: Unable to reach satisfactory relationship with Mirium Paul turns to Clara. But this relationship is as unsatisfying as the previous one. Clara can give only physical love, just as Mirium could give only spiritual passion. But man is both body and soul, and both must be satisfied. (115: Prakash: Sons And Lovers)

His relationship with Clara offers him only physical satisfaction and his relationship with Mirium offers him only psychological gratification. Both relationships are failure because of their lacunas, for a



lasting relationship both the things are needed. Paul's failing in these relationships with his lady love becomes a big success of his mother who enjoys his love until her death.

#### IV

##### Mrs. Morel and Mr. Morel

The relationship is a best example of doomed marriage in the novel. Mrs. Morel marries Mr. Walter being fascinated by his robust personality and gentleman's smile in a Christmas party. He betrays her about his being the owner of the house and marries her. Just after some days she comes to know that he owns neither the home nor he is a gentleman. The relationship is marked by his male chauvinism. It is commonly observed that men enjoy every kind of freedom in the orthodox society. They can express their views and feelings about everything. On the other hand, women are supposed to be always mute and submissive. They have to mould themselves according to the needs and instruction of the family. Sensitive, educated and high-class origin Mrs. Morel is brought to lower level by every possible means by Mr. Morel. Betty Friedan asserts: For a woman, as for man the need for self-fulfillment-autonomy, self-realization independence individuality self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted. Women's sexual problems are in this sense, by products of suppression of her basic needs to grow and fulfill her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystic of feminism fulfillment ignores. (quoted in Sharma:2005:6)

He mates with her like an animal, beats her like an animal and behaves like an animal. He takes advantage of her predicament that she can't go back as he is a man of her choice so now, she has to tread the path. She tolerates marital rapes often. The relationship worsens day by day until she turns her focus towards her son to gratify her emotional need. She comes to know that it is of no use to expect it from her husband. Her husband being savage prefers beastly life where as well trimmed, educated high class Mrs. Morel possesses typical vanity and intense urge like over possessiveness. Conversely her husband being careless, from working class poor and drunkard is not even aware of simple values, manners and etiquettes. Having low origin, he was nurtured in typical patriarchal social surroundings where his male chauvinist nature developed. He wasn't even aware of the liberal atmosphere in which she has developed. Rift in conjugal life has many reasons right from social status to the mindset of either of the spouses. The different attitudes are bound in wedlock so disillusionment in relationship is inevitable. The marriage is marked by tense relationship which frustrates the whole family, their issues and leads the novel towards a tragic end.

#### IV

##### Mrs. Morel and William

The relationship begins as soon as she turns her focus to her sons. Being elder son William is her first prey for her an emotional satisfaction which is curbed in marital relationship and which is essential for emotional and educated woman like her. She starts to look at William like her husband substitute on emotional level. William was going mature and can understand rather than Paul who is comparatively immature by age. William is smart and brilliant kid at school that is proud thing to his mother. Mr. Morel's becoming ill for a short period and losing his position of being head of the family and simultaneously William's emerging as a head and breadwinner of the family soothes her which is a proud feeling to her for her choice. She foresees her unfulfilled marital desires will be fulfilled by William. She now becomes ambitious for her son. Soon he gets a job at London on an attractive salary and the news brings mixed feelings for her as his progress makes her happy but at the same time his absence makes her sad. In the mean while the distance plays its trick, she starts to take interest in Young Paul and being away from her William is involved in his 'world' but cannot casts away his mother's spell. He spends a lot of money on his friends and beloved Gyp. He even visits his home with Gyp who poses herself as superior during her stay, but shrewd Mrs. Morel comes to know that this marriage would not survive, she is anxious about her beloved son William, who loves her like anything. In reality, jealous Mrs. Morel cannot tolerate that her

love is shared by someone else. Soon he frustrates himself in his love and writes an emotional letter to his mother in which he is gloomy and even talks of death. In response, Mrs. Morel encourages him. But soon she has to see him on death bed and dying in her lap. About the emotional mother the narrator says, 'she could only brood on her dead son; he had been left to die so cruelly'.

The relationship shows its destructive effect on William; being unable to choose between mother and Gyp he dismantles himself. Lawrence is once again successful in depicting the fatal effect of woman in man's life. In her research article Neha aptly observes: William was deeply attached to his mother, therefore, he was torn with conflict between his love for his mother and his passion for his beloved. The inner conflict becomes unbearable for him. He falls ill and dies in the arms of his mother. (6: Paripex: A Study of Man and Woman Relationship in D. H. Lawrence's novel 'Sons And Lovers').

Self-centered Mrs. Morel destroys the life of her son and soon forgets him because a new 'love' is waiting for her. The relationship once again is marked by female influence.

All the relationship depicted in the novel revolves around Mrs. Morel and Paul being central figures. Being an explorer of human relationship Lawrence has studied sex-relationship from different angle in the novel. The spiritually over possessive woman like Mrs. Morel and Mirium, physically over possessive are total failure hence the relationship as well. All of them are unsupportive to Paul as an individual entity and want to suck either his soul or to gulp him physically to an extreme level that they don't want to leave his 'self' even for him too. These are the basic reasons of the failure of these relationships where as gulf between socialization of Mr. and Mrs. Morel and her authoritative nature is the basic reason for the failure of a healthy relationship. In the novel the novelist has dealt with man-woman relationship essentially in term of conflict between husband and wife, between mother and son between lovers and beloveds and between two women for the same person. And the novelist suggests that his primary concern is with the establishment of a new relationship between men and women, true to his principal that satisfactory sex experience is one which results both in physical and spiritual gratification.

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