
TREATMENT OF RELIGION IN THE RAINBOW

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Lawrence showed a keen interest in specific elements of being such as mind and will, sympathy and spontaneity, spirit, flesh and intellect. His interest moreover, was moral and religious. He wanted a sort of balance of this entire element, a kind of achieved harmony which would enable men and women to live spontaneously out of the fullness of their instinctive selves; and he deplored an imbalance of these elements, since it led towards emotional atrophy and predatory behaviour. Lawrence preferred spontaneous living to any fixed principle. The protagonists in his novels achieve organic being through infinity of pure relation with the living universe.

Lawrence had described 'The Rainbow' as "The voyage of discovery towards the real and eternal and unknown land. The rainbow may be looked at as novel of exploration." [1] It is very different from 'Sons and lovers' and is "not a bit visualized but all analytical". The year 1914 was an important time when Lawrence achieved the new artistic vision. [2] He made an attempt to probe beneath the flux to the essential nature of life to create an art capable of discovering the deepest reality. The search to achieve self-fulfilment is not made by one character, but by all the characters.

The theme of 'The Rainbow' is "not carbon but salvation." [3] The Book is an attempt to show that the event and encounters of common life are charged with a life-giving, transforming potential, charged negatively also with the power of death, but here salvation does not refer to heavenly rewards, rather wholesome state of being attainable here and now. The condition can be reached only in relation with another person.

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Lawrence holds out the goal of transfiguration for the various characters who seek fulfilment in their lives. Salvation issues as a call from the: “unknown”. The most that any character can do is to recognize the call when it issues from some inscrutable heart of life which can neither be named nor cognitively known. The call is not from God, but the religious imagery and symbolism, taken from ‘The Bible’, with which the narration is saturated constantly, suggest that the mysterious mingling of the characters with obscure vital forces leads us to various religious interpretations. When asked about the message of ‘The Rainbow’ by Lady Cynthia Asquith, Lawrence wrote: “I don’t know myself what it is: except that the order, Word is done for, toppling on top of us: and that it’s, no use the men looking to the women for salvation, nor the women looking to sensuous satisfaction for their fulfilment. There must be a new world.”[4]

Out of the “unknown”, comes the demand that man must change, must abandon his ordinary self into a kind of death, and emerge reborn transfigured through his submission to the instinctive self. All the principal characters receive ‘this call’ to enter upon a transfigured relation to life. But their responses are various. Tom and Lydia Brangwen in the first generation submit to “unknown” and are saved; in the second generation Will and Anna Brangwen progress toward wholeness of being but fall short; in the last generation Ursula Brangwen, after a series of exhausting erotic experiences, is prepared for the final transfiguration and only awaits “the man out of the Eternity” with whom she can reach her goal.

This is what Lawrence in “A propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover” calls “the religious and ritualistic rhythm of the year, in human life”. The Brangwen people’s life of blood intimacy is a perfect example “living in ritual adjustments to the cosmos in its revolutions”. Their life of the body is in accord with the surging of the cosmos. As Frank Glover Smith has observed, they have a kind of “blood tie with the cosmos.”[5] With the meeting of earth and sky, human and divine, the creation here” is apprehended as one, life is pure being, man living in complete unity with all created things.” [6]

The phallic self of the Brangwens mingles and merges with the tremendous living flood forever flowing. Their blood-consciousness is indistinguishable and inseparable from their cosmic consciousness. Their naturalness and spontaneity is attuned to the teeming life of creation. But the conscious or subconscious level, the Brangwens feels the lack of something in their lives. They are not complete, not fulfilled.

The “other” distinct quality of Tom –Lydia relationship produces, at its best, a richly creative, fulfilling and mysterious harmony. It involves the consummation of the spirit as well as flesh and gives them a sense of completeness.

Charles Rossman finds Tom’s fulfilment partial, incomplete. His “completeness” remains forever “a reflection of Lydia’s inner strength”. Rossman goes a little wrong. The fulfilment achieved is not “incomplete” as both are reborn in their impersonal selves. The experience is incomplete at all levels- Physical, mental and spiritual. In the next generation, Anna and Will Bragwen continue the quest for twofold knowledge. Will brings together in imperfect union such family traits as “blood-intimacy” and religious aspirations. Both of them are incapable of giving themselves to each other. The battle of wills can also be seen in their response to religion. Anna is alternatively attracted by Will’s religion. Will love church services, she offended by the verbalizing of religious feeling. She shows her antagonism towards his passion for Lincon Cathedral. [7]

Will was interested in the “church architecture” but his talk was half articulate. Although not a Christian, Anna is nevertheless, get irritated by Will’s indifference to the conscious meaning of the church and its doctrines. She takes “modern” sceptical view because she wants Will to think, not only feel.

Ursula Bragwen fares better, than either of her parents, since she inherits the strongest qualities. In her “the otherness” and refinement of the Lensky strain is finally fused by blood with the sensual warmth and religiosity of the Brangwen’s. she answers the call of spirit. She accepted the passion of Jesus for her own physical satisfaction. To her, Jesus was “another world” beautifully remote. Ursula rejected the conventional religion as its teaching could not be practised in everyday life. The main question for every individual, Lawrence held, is not to “know thyself” but to “be yourself”.

Both the flesh and spirit are involved in Ursula’s relation with Skrebensky. The terms of this life are confused and inadequate in Ursula’s mind. She thinks of the self for instance, as the old, finite personal self which Lawrence had specifically abandoned in his conception of The Rainbow. “you must not look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character” he wrote to Edward Garnett: There is another ego according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable and passes through as it were, allotropic states which it needs deeper sense than any we’ve been used to exercise to discover are states of the some radically –unchanged element. This “radically - unchanged element” is the real self which Lawrence identifies, almost with the soul.

The novel ends on a note, Ursula's vision of the rainbow is a promise of the greater fulfilment, constantly leading the soul forward in its quest until she meets "a man whom she would not have to create," but who would be, created "with a complete otherness" of being that would be truly his own.

REFERENCES:

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2. Lawrence's Letter to Edward Garnett, CL 263.
3. Julian Moynahan, The Deed of life: The Novels & Tales of D.H. Lawrence.
4. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p 42.
5. D. H. Lawrence: A Critical Anthology, ed. H. Coombes (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1973), P104.
6. Frank Glover Smith, D.H. Lawrence: The Rainbow (New Delhi: Arnold – Heinemann, 1978), p9.
7. Ibid, p11.
8. David Cavitch, D.H Lawrence: The new world, p47.