

Society in D. H. Lawrence**Priyanka Malik**Department of English
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David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930) was born at Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. He was the son of a miner and was educated at Nottingham University College where he qualified as a teacher. He taught at Croydon till 1913, when he had to resign because of his illness. Henceforth, he devoted himself to literature. He wrote poetry, but it is for his novels; mostly autobiographical, that he came into prominence. His personal experience which went into the formation of his novels is in itself an indication that Lawrence believed in the emotive aspect of literature which eventually came in for adverse criticism but his greatness lies in giving a touch of romantic nostalgia over the loss of age-old communal values, resulting in the loss of human identity. That is why he was rejected for what Wimsatt and Beardsley would call 'effective fallacy' of literature.

Lawrence indeed had an anti-academic temper. His criticism, likewise, went against New-Criticism. That is not to say that he had no defenders. For example, F.R. Leavis considered him one of great modern novelists. In his novels, as in his criticism, Lawrence offered a critique of industrial society. His brilliantly unconventional *Studies in Classic American Literature (1924)* condemned the American Sense of unfettered freedom without any sense of communal hold on it. In its opening chapter "The Spirit of Place", Lawrence bewailed that there is a different feeling in the old American classics, suggesting a shift from the old psyche to something new which he said was responsible for making Americans as a whole uprooted people, people who had left their homeland back in Europe and wandered in the west, lonely, without the sense of belonging. Lawrence believed in the spirit of the place one becomes what the place is:

Lawrence's novels beginning with *The White Peacock(1911)* and followed by *The Trespasser (1912)*, *Sons and Lovers (1913)*, *The Rainbow (1915)*, *Women in love (1921)*, *Aaron's Rod (1922)*, *Kangaroo (1923)*, *The Plumed Serpent (1926)* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928)*, underline the loss of communal life. The novelist repeatedly pointed out that we are free only in a living homeland, not when we are straying or breaking away from it. It is only in a community as against in a society that we, Lawrence said, can realize our whole self. And the whole self, the whole man alive and the whole woman alive - come into being 'when they obey some deep, inward voice .. obeying from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized, purpose"

What Lawrence believed was a study in the depth of the state of soul of an individual in harmony with a natural community, rooted in a soil for generations. In his *Studies in Classics American literature (1924)*, Lawrence praised a community that could make its real home at one place, particularly when its soul is in unison with the genius of the place. When it is so, living according to the prompting of one's soul, an individual yields oneself to what Lawrence called "The Spirit of Place'.

The World War 1st broke out in 1914 but the year 1913 saw the publication of Lawrence's first masterpiece Sons and Lovers. The novel was much more directly autobiographical than his first

novel, *The White Peacock* published in 1911. Therefore, one does not see the shadows of war on the horizon of the novel, though we do find the signs of ruin of the provincial culture, the repository of the organic community, following industrialization. The novel, in fact, begins with Lawrence's critique of industrial society of England, not because it offered community to the individual in which one could live his whole self in harmony with others, but because it frustrated it. He started the novel by picturing how industrialization has reduced workers or farmers, to colliers; the England countryside was now striven with coal pits around which lived the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits. The Morels -Walter Morel and Gertrude Morel-came from Bestwood to what symbolically is block of cottages called the Bottoms. The Place was good to look at from the front, but the dwelling room, the kitchen, was at the back of the house, facing inward between the blocks, looking at the ash-pits. So the actual conditions of living in the Bottom that was so well built and that looked so nice, were quite unsavory because people must live in the kitchen and the mchens on to that nasty alley of ashpits.

This is the first indication that the old provincial life which was available to him-rich and exciting was lost instead man became a commodity put on sale. It is uprooted from its soil and taken to where its labour is needed. Raymond Williams² drew our attention to the real tragedy of ugliness. Lawrence generally bewailed that so lovely a country is made ugly and vile by industrialization. It was ugliness which betrayed the spirit of man. According to Lawrence, the great crime which the moneyed classes and paranoters of industry committed in the palmy Victorian days was the condemning of the workers to live and work in ugliness. Mrs. Morel was not anxious to move the Bottoms, when she came to it from Betwood. But it was the only option she could take. That is not the only irony of the workers. She prided herself on having an end house in one of the top blocks and thus had only one neighbor; on the other side, she had an extra strip of garden. And, in having an end house, "she enjoyed a kind of aristocracy among the others women...." But "this superiority," Lawrence writes, "was not much of consolation to Mrs. Morel" (514)

She was thirty-one-year-old, and had been married eight years. Her husband was a miner, one who loved to drink and make merry. By this time, they had two children, William, a boy of seven and a daughter, younger to William. But Mrs. Morel was not happy, though theirs was a love marriage. She had come from a better family, both financially and in sophistication. In the opening scene itself, her frustration becomes visible. She waited for her husband late in the night, as he had gone to a fair. She was alone but she, during these eight years, has become used to her loneliness. Lawrence seems to blame the industrial life which had broken the old social and familiar bonds, affecting family life adversely. colliers, like other working class people, took to drinking in the absence of cohesion in family and social life. In place of organic society, a pure mechanization or materialism had set in, resulting in disintegration of whole, organic solidarity among people. Away from their roots, workers lived a nucleus family life. Lawrence was deeply concerned with the onset of industrialism. For him, it was something unfortunate that the tradition was lost.

As a consequence of the loss of organic society, colliers were left to somehow, live on meagre resources. Mrs. Morel felt wretched in binging up the family on scanty resources. She was already pregnant with the third child in her womb. The world seemed to her a dreary place, where nothing else would happen for her-at least until William grew up" (516).

It is a significant pointer to Mrs. Morel's state of mind. She had started looking forward to the day when William would earn. She did not want the third child. she could imagine Walter Morel serving

bear in a public house, "swilling himself drunk. She despised him, and was tied to him." (516). She had already cast off her husband, at least in her mind. Her struggle with Poverty and ugliness and meanness had left no romance in her life.

We do not need critics to tell us that *Sons and Lovers* is Lawrence's most autobiographical novel, for his own father was a collier and that there was no love lost between his parents. Critics like Mark Schorer have taken exception to the autobiographical strain in *Sons and Lovers*. His main argument in his essay "Technique as Discovery" Schorcer has affinities with New Criticism. He is a formalist in this regard. develops and evaluates a text. He thus makes a difference between content and achieved content. In his view, Lawrence remained stuck with his life and therefore failed to rise above the raw content of his life. Technique, according to Schorer, "alone objectifies the material of art".⁵ Since Lawrence wrote his own life in *Sons And Lovers*, he could not objectify his material. Hence Morel and Lawrence were never separated. The third child threatening to come in the world, as Mrs. Morel felt, was Paul Morel. After the early death of William, Mrs. Morel was left with the hope that Paul would grow and earn and thus improve the financial position of the family.

One of the banes of New Criticism is that in searching for objectification, it forgets that it sacrifices the value of content. Lawrence's purpose in telling this tale was not whether it was his own life or not, but that he had intimate understanding how the loss of cohesiveness of organic society created problems for family together, William had to go to London for a better job and eventually lost his contact back at Bestwood. Lawrence hoped to recover the organic society and within it the organic family, As Schorer himself concedes in another essay "Lawrence and The Spirit the destructive mass, always seemed to him (Lawrence), a portion of the industrial process, and it is not accidental that Lawrence's hatred of industrial England seemed to have reached its height during the war years"⁷... Indeed Lawrence, like Mrs., Morel felt during the war years, sick. In a letter to Catherine Carswell, he wrote that he finds it difficult to live in England, that he would die of foul inward poison. It is the same sickness and nausea that Mrs. Morel had felt living on the pit-ash of Bestwood.

Gertrude Morel was very ill when the boy Paul was born. Her husband was good to her, but she felt very lonely, "miles away from her own people. She felt lonely now, and his presence ony made it more tense." (522) In these early intimations, Lawrence underlines the loss of family life-her people and his people. She was utterly alone, more so when he was around. She searched for others and found none. The image of a woman absolutely alone is the one that Lawrence underlines:

He (Paul) came just when her
own bitterness of disillusion was
hardest to bear; when her faith in
life was shaken, and her soul felt dreary and lonely.
She made much of the child, and the father
was jealous.(522)
Her longing to belong was most acute at this

moment-to have the power of communicating with others, identifying and defining the individuated quality of life, the physical essences of things outside the personality, the not-me, the very ding an sich." Gertude Morel, she was unable to remove her loneliness. It not only persisted but even grew many fold in his company. The Freudian is wrong in saying that marriage removes

endemic loneliness of mankind. This is what happened with her as it also happened with her as it also happened with Walter Morel. If ever we are able to overcome our alienations, it is only in the organic social order, a kind of community which Lawrence envisaged. Lawrence wished to establish his identity not only with the social order but also with the whole universe which he called circumambient universe. One of his chief motives of artistic creation was the need for feeling that we are in relationship to the whole world. It is in such a relationship that one feels at home. Mrs. Gertrude could not feel at home with her husband:

There began a battle between the husband and wife--a fearful, bloody battle that ended only with the death of the one. She fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfill his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. She tried to force him to face things. He could not endure it - it drove him out of her mind.(522)

We have already referred to Lawrence's moral position, that in the absence of a pure relationship which we all search for, human life becomes a battle of wills. We wish to reconstitute the other in our terms, as Gertrude Morel tried to do with Walter Morel. Obviously it hurts their relationship. We would not allow the other to pursue his or her own nature. The quest for identity is attained when the artist considers communications as one of his main aims and his denial that he is at all influenced in his work by a desire to affect other people results in the breakdown of communication. It is not that the artist has consciously to concern himself with communication, for part of it is an unconscious activity. However, a spontaneous give and take results only in a believing and organic community, fulfilling some unfulfilled purpose, as Lawrence said in the 1st chapter "The Spirit of the Place" of *Studies in Classic American Literature*.

Thus Lawrence's quest to harmonize all disagreeable will come to fruition only in a communal world. Bereft of it, people would clash for supremacy.

References

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