



THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE FICTIONAL WORLD OF D.H. LAWRENCE: AN ANALYSIS

Dr. S. Chelliah

Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages,
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamilnadu

Cite This Article: Dr. S. Chelliah, "The Portrayal of Women Characters in the Fictional World of D.H. Lawrence: An Analysis", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, Page Number 148-150, 2016.

Abstract:

"In the contemporary literary scenario, D.H. Lawrence has a very important position as a writer of talent and artistry. As a keen observer of human relationships, he frequently portray the intricate relationship between prurience and love and boldly examines the futility and meaninglessness of physical love. Every characters and work of D.H. Lawrence delights readers with the force of sensuous images which seems aesthetically sound and the ultimate transformation to visual delectable imagery enralls and arouses quiescent feelings of love and zealousness among readers. This article proves that he is a pioneer who gives clear, frank and straight forward expressions to human feelings in all its varied manifestations"

D.H. Lawrence was temperamentally and artistically romantic writers, sharing many characteristics with the poets of the early nineteenth century like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. Like them, he was a subjective writer whose writings are generally based upon his own experiences, problems, complexes, ideals and notions. Moreover, he prized, above everything else, the sanctity of self, the dignity and inviolability of every individual. He was naturally critical of all institutions and organizations, social, religious, political and economic, which reduced the individual to a mere unit, without personal dignity or freedom. No doubt, Lawrence was a prophet of the 'blood' conscious and of free spontaneous life of individuals alone are in relationship with other individuals. He is said to have had a literary career of about 20 years but during this brief period, he produced ten full-length novels, seven short stories and a few poems. His reputation as a novelist rests upon his **White Peacock, Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, Women in Love, Kangaroo and Lady Chatterley's Lover.**

Lawrence is a keen observer of human relationships. He studies them realistically and psychologically. His thesis is that effort of dominance or possession on either side between man and woman is the cause of the destruction of human relationships. However much Lawrence might be telling a story or presenting the life of today, there is one theme that interests him most, the problem of human relationships. He is deeply concerned at the maladjustments of life, the suppressions, and deformities of modern life. He once wrote,

"I can only write what I feel strongly about; and that, at present, is the relation between men and women. After all it is the problem of today, the establishment of new relations, or the adjustment of the old ones, between men and women"

The one essential feature of life, as it is lived, is the constant change in judgements and attitudes. The attitudes and judgements of men and women towards each other are ever changing and shifting, and it is this shift, this change or conflict in human attitudes that Lawrence presents in his novels. No doubt, his characters are drawn psychologically while his heroes are by and large his own projections, his heroines are drawn from real women whom he met and experienced in his life. As Alan Friedman put it, "Lawrence's women are some of the most interesting women in all fiction" (P 390) Thanks to the dominant character of the feminine Element in his own nature, Lawrence possessed a greater insight in the mysterious depths of feminine ways than is the case with most other male writers. Generally, his criticism and appreciation of women bear out the famous inconsistencies of his views. "He disapproves what he himself invents... he approves what he himself invents..." (Hardy 90). In a letter written in 1913, Lawrence has stated some startling facts about women:

"It seems to me that the chief thing about woman who is much of a woman – is that in the long run she is not be had..."

Lawrence, however, all through his works, fiction and non-fiction, remained a staunch champion of union between the sexes, a union he characterized as 'freedom together'. This relationship between man and woman is seen as 'a flux'. Sex is the link, the great uniter. One can agree with Simone de Beauvoir who feels that "what Lawrence says of sexual love is generally valid" (P 216).

The women characters in the novels of Lawrence cover the whole gamut of female sexual consciousness. The God's variety is there: women who freeze at the prospect of sex, contrasted with those who behave like nymphomaniacs during moments of extreme sensual thrill; lesbians who represent the decadence of the machine-dominated, sterile age, contrasted with women who find heavenly release in wholesome heterosexual sex; long suffering women, contrasted with aggressive types, possessive types and son-lovers. The

following is the representative of the portrayal of women. Helena stamps herself on our imagination. One probable reason is the biographical validity, the fact that she is drawn from life, from an early sweetheart of Lawrence in his Croydon days, Helen Corke, who figured prominently in some of his early poems. But there is another important reason for our interest in Helena. She is the first study of a female who is called in medical terms 'frigid'- first of the class of 'dreaming women' one meets again and again in the novels of Lawrence. Such women can do havoc to their lovers. There are indications of Helena's 'spiritual' nature throughout the novel **The Trespasser**. 'White' is the dress that she wears. Siegmund taking rest on the white sand after a strenuous swim says to himself, "It is like Helena" (PP 46 – 47). The two love-birds were shut alone in the dense wide fog. He crushed her to him with masculine tenderness and ferocity. She was hurt but it was "pain delicious to her". She swooned in a kind of intense bliss". She strained madly to him.

Then came the startling, unexpected reaction from Helena. When Siegmund tried to kiss and "taste" her throat in sexual excitement, her heart "leaped away in revulsion". Even then she clung to him desperately to achieve the supreme moment for her, equivalent to the attainment of orgasmic thrill for a normal girl in the zenith of sexual love. Helena was completely satisfied, physically. As the novelist himself pointed out, "she belonged to that class of 'dreaming women' with whom passion exhausts itself at the mouth".

Miriam Paul, Lawrence's sweetheart of the autobiographical novel **Sons and Lovers**, is another female protagonist of Lawrence who can be justifiably called frigid. The two girls, Miriam and Helena, have one thing in common: both are portraits from life, based on two early romances of Lawrence. Helena is modelled on Helen Corke, while Miriam is a fictional representation of Jessie Chambers, who more than any other woman, raged a relentless struggle against the mother of Lawrence for the possession of his soul. There is, however, one significant difference between the two dramatic characters. Helena's frigidity can be only guessed at as the evidence of the tale is not too strong to uphold a valid plea. In the case of Miriam, the novel offers plenty of explanation for the coldness of Miriam's reaction in love-making even when the two lovers were able to reach a kind of consummation. The first cause of the lack of physical animation during sexual excitement is her puritanical background and her over-anxious mother's inhibitive advice. The other reason is Paul's incestuous love for his mother. His mother's shadow darkens his sunny love affair with Miriam. As such, it is impossible for him to have true physical relation with any other woman. The only thing possible between Miriam and himself is spiritual communion and mutual stimulation of the mind. In the novel, Paul makes real efforts to give Miriam confidence. But her inhibition is too strong for her. The novelist gives symbolic representation of Miriam's female fear of Paul's sexuality in the incident of the swing (PP 187 – 88). As pointed by Pritchard,

"her fear of his thrusts, pushing her on the swing, foreshadow
her fears when he at last makes sexual demands on her" (P 39).

Neither Miriam nor Helena is a sexless creature. But both of them remind one of Hardy's sue Bride head who surrenders her fortress of Chastity to Jude in order to please him. What Paul needed was not the conquest of Miriam's body but sexual release. He appealed to the tender woman in her. Middleton Murry is right in his contention that "Miriam strove to subdue her body to her spirit, Paul strove to subdue his spirit to his body" (Salgado 102).

"Suddenly she gripped his arms round her, and clenched
her body, stiff 'You shall have me', she said, through her
shut teeth (P 354).

Mrs. Morel is a good example of the possessive type of woman, probably in all the novels of Lawrence. She is the strong-willed, ambitious kind of woman of moral tightness and puritanical strain that one often meets in life. Her major fault lies in persuading all who are closely related to her to make way for her plans and schemes. S. P. Prasad is not far wrong in comparing her ambitious spirit to that of Lady Macbeth. The name of Getrude is also significant. The story of Mrs. Morel is the sad story of a spirited, cultured, ambitious women who desperately tries to change the dismal circumstances of her life. She is projected as a possessive women in the sense that she smothers the men, closest to her through family bonds-her husband and her son- so that neither of them is able to be true to his own nature. The husband no longer rules the household. First William, and then Paul, becomes the husband- substitute. True love means attachment and selfless interest. It should not be of such a high intensity as to stifle the individuality of the loved object. According to psychologists, such a love is the possessive type which can only warp the emotions and stunt the true and spontaneous growth of the centre of such attachment. Mrs. Morel's interest in Paul far exceeds the normal degree of motherly feelings with its natural instinct for protection and possessiveness.

Hermione Roddice is in the line of Laurentian characters who worship a false divinity W. W. Robson considers her "a sort of feminine counterpart to Gerald in her blend of will-power and inner deficiency" (Ford 316). One can see Hermione for the first time through the eyes of Ursula. F. R. Leavis is undoubtedly right when he states "that her physical presence is vividly evoked" (P220). Hermione Roddice has class, money and fine taste. She is the apostle of 'Knowledge', 'the intellectual'. 'Spiritual woman that Lawrence does not approve of. She lives for and through the mind. For her, all the pleasure of life is knowing:

"To me the pleasure of knowing is so great, so wonderful

nothing has meant so much to me in all life, as certain knowledge..."

She had 'various intimacies of mind and soul' with men of capacity. Birkin was one of them. She was conscious always of her social superiority and was proud of the fact that she was accepted in the world of culture and of intellect. She burned with a fiery passion to find a place of honour among the first:

"All her life, she had sought to make herself invulnerable, unassailable, beyond reach of the world's judgement" (W L 17).

And yet her soul was tortured. She experienced a kind of inner deficiency. There was a terrible void within her. She looked to Birkin to give her completeness. Hermione suffered from a lack of integration between feelings and will. Birkin exposed her pretence of spontaneity in a discussion.

"You'd be very deliberately spontaneous. You want it all in that loathsome little skull of years... If one cracked your skull, perhaps one might get spontaneous passionate woman out of you, with real sensuality" (Ch iii)

The chapter entitled "Breadally" is crucial in the relationship between Hermione and Birkin. Finding him copying a Chinese drawing of geese, she urges Birkin to explain it to her. Birkin in this drawing intuitively apprehends 'unknown modes of being'. He also compels her to recognize the fact that "reality of life is something she can have no command over and cannot take into her possession". Hermione is completely flabbergasted and unnerved by Birkin's account of the drawing. She feels for the moment nothing but the play of chaotic forces. She is in a state of utter helplessness. She struggles in vain to gain control over herself. The tension only grows stronger and stronger. And then she realises that

"his presence was the wall, his presence was destroying her. Unless she could break out, she must die most fearfully, walled up in horror... she must break him down before her..." (P 117).

Finally the explosive forces break out. In a moment of fury, maddened by the desire to save herself, Hermione attempts to break the head of Birkin with a heavy stone paper weight. All critics opine that Hermione is one of Lawrence's most life-like creations. There is also the added fact that she is a well-known portrait from life. Graham Hough rightly considers her one of Lawrence's lasting and central symbols the type of intellectual - spiritual love.

References:

1. Friedman, Alan. *History of Ideas and Literature in Britain*. Ed. C. B. Cox and A. E. Byson London: Oxford University Press, 1972.
2. Hardy, Barbara. "Women in D. H. Lawrence's Works" D. H. Lawrence: Novelist, poet, Prophet London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1973.
3. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.
4. Pritchard, R. E. D. H. Lawrence: *Body of Darkness*, London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971.
5. Salgado, Gamini (ed). *D. H. Lawrence: Sons and Lovers*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1969.
6. Ford, Boris. *The Polican Guide to English Literature Vol -7*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1961.
7. Hough, Graham. *Modern British Fiction*, London: Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961.
8. Cock shut, A.O.J. *Man and Woman: A study of Love and the Novel 1740-1940*, London: Collins, 1977.