



Gender and Oedipus Complex in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract

This study aims at exploring the perception of gender in the most brilliant novel in the English literature, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. In this paper, the issue of gender is contextualized in the writings of Lawrence. The meaning of gender is focused on in the novel under discussion. It describes the treatment of gender in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. The application of Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex is discussed as well. The paper also shows the conflict between the soul and body, mother and son, and mother and beloved.

1. Introduction :

Sons and Lovers is one of the most powerful psychological novels of the Twentieth century. Lawrence was influenced by the term "Oedipus Complex". He depicts his own psychic traumas through the character of the protagonist, Paul Morel who suffers due to his mother's domination over



his soul and his ability to find a way out of his struggle between the all-consuming spiritual nature of possessive love and sexual attraction that makes *Sons and Lovers* one of most important work of written art. He deals with the relationships between men and women, he also informs us that the relationship between parents and children with the influence of the disharmonious relationship between special man and woman-father and mother are very significant to children, family and society.

2. Gender:

As to Lawrence, sex is the symbol of the relation of man to woman, woman to man. He considers the relation of man to woman to be wide as all life consisting in infinite different flows between the two beings. Sex, to him, meant “the whole of the relationship between man and woman (Lawrence, 1988:182).”¹ He conceived of this relationship to be “a life-long change and a life-long travelling (Ibid:182).”² In *Apropos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover* Lawrence writes:

““Sex is the balance of male and female in the universe, the attraction repulsion, the



transit of neutrality, the new attraction, the new repulsion, always different, always new(Lawrence,1988:182)”³

Lawrence thought that at periods, sex-desire itself departs completely; yet the great flow of the relationship goes on all the same undying. Lawrence called it “the flow of living sex (Lawrence,1988:182)”⁴ the relation between man and woman, that lasts a life time, and of which sex-desire is “only one vivid most vivid, manifestation(Lawrence,1988:182).”⁵ The sexual relation between man and woman says Lawrence “consummates in the act of coition (Ibid: 183).”⁶ Lawrence regards the procreative purpose of sex as a side-show, and maintains that, to the individual, the act of coition is a great psychic experience, a vital experience of tremendous importance. The two individuals indulging in the sexual intercourse die from their old ego and are reborn to a new life, each one as master of one’s own soul, but united with one’s mate in profound tenderness, as to Lawrence. In the act of coition, all the elements of petty, vanity vanish, and the self-consciousness of pure maleness or pure femaleness is intensified. During the moments of climax in the act of coition, man and woman, the two individuals, the two separate entities, become one, wholly united. The act of coition as stated by



Lawrence provides only an experience which is healthy and rejuvenating. The blood

In sex relation, there is first the flash of pure sensation and of real electricity, then, there is the birth of an entirely new state of blood in each partner. And then there is the liberation. The main thing is the renewal of the blood, of the entire energy. In this renewal, Lawrence says lie the great magic of sex. After this the individual polarity changes, within the individual system. Woman gets complete fulfillment in the sexual consummation. Man now goes for the purposive activity.

A part of this paper is Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* in which he expresses the theme of sex and love. As to Lawrence, a man and woman find their fulfillment and development to their utmost in a perfect sex circuit and sex union, based upon greater hope of purposive, constructive and creative activity. When the individuals concerned find relationships exhausting, they develop into unhealthy human beings embroiled in conflicts, casting shadows upon their children who grow into stultified and lop-sided beings. Lawrence in his *Sons and lovers* wrote that man acquired the knowledge of the "unknowable" or God in the flesh, in woman, and a woman sought and attained her fulfillment through deep sensual love.



She expected her husband to respond to her vitally in sex in order to establish a dynamic relationship which could be the basis of mutual satisfaction and nourishment, renewal and re-integration. If the man evaded seeking warmth through flesh and remained confined within the shell of his own isolation, he disintegrated. The woman under such circumstances, either withered and wore away, or fought her man or sought some other man to take her. And if the man sought to be her son, he could never be her lover in the full and vital sense. He got withered and wasted himself in the flesh. If the son-lover got married, his wife became only bed-mate and their relation remained devoid of vital communion.

3. Oedipus Complex:

Freudian theories used by Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers* and might have given Paul Morel an Oedipus complex. The writer himself experienced such feeling in his life. Son and Lovers and Oedipus are different story. But it has the same illegal relationship. In *Sons and Lover*, Mrs. Morel takes her sons into her maternal fold and prevents her son developing any kind of emotional attachment with any other woman. The son Paul has a deep and strong affection for his mother, which is not only



abnormal but also unnatural and uncommon. In Oedipus, the king, the love is quite accidental because they do not know that they are mother and son. But Oedipus is seduced by his mother thus creating the Oedipus complex.

His mother Gertude provokes psychic complication in Paul that culminates into an abnormality of behavior in him that leads to unhealthy emotional and sexual growth. This abnormality of personality is the result of his over attachment with his mother since childhood. Consciously or unconsciously, Gertude who leads Paul towards the disastrous impact of Oedipus Complex (Sultan, 2014:vol.231-32).⁷

4. Sons and Lovers:

D. H. Lawrence himself was the victim of Oedipus complex. *Sons and Lovers* can be read as the catharsis of his experience with his mother. His mother Lydia Lawrence had a very strong influence on him. Each and everything related to him was under the direct shadow of his mother. When his mother was on death-bed, Lawrence wrote to his publisher *The White Peacock* soon so that his mother could see it before her death. Lawrence also celebrated his strange fascination for his mother in many poems. He loved his mother like a young



lover. She also injected a sense of hatred for her husband in him. As a result of his deep attachment with his mother, Lawrence-Jessie relationship failed. So long as his mother was alive, Lawrence had to face many sexual difficulties. Harry T. Moore remarks:

“And each time he warned to Jessie, seemed to find her attractive, his mother tried to chill that feeling. During the August 1906 holiday at Mablethorpe(Shruti,1990:120) .”⁸

Thus, Lawrence failed to enjoy his friendship with other girls because of the mother fixation.

Lawrence brings the notion of the Oedipus complex in him through Paul-Mrs. Morel relationship and the effect, therefore, is cathartic. But at the same time, it must be pointed out that the projection of his experience in the novel has an artistic appropriateness and it shows how an intimate connection exists between his experience and his writing. In the very first chapter of the novel Lawrence presents the emotional dissatisfaction between Walter Morel and his wife. Before marriage they were in love with each other but after marriage Mrs. Morel saw the wide gulf between her husband



and herself. Lawrence describes the whole estrangement between the two:

The pity was, she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be, she would have him the much that he ought to be (Lawrence:1948:25).⁹

To reiterate, this mother-son relation is for Lawrence a cultural development rather than a biological datum or fact. Yet since it entails the suppression of the great lower centres, the love and benevolence ideal, like the Freudian Oedipus complex, has pronounced sexual consequences. Lawrence further explains the sensual suppression in childhood. Bound by "the idealism of love and the spirit," the child experiences

"a steady and persistent starving of the lower centres, particularly the great voluntary centre of the lower body. The centre of sensual, manly independence (Ibid.117) ."¹⁰

Accompanying the sensual suppression is an overvaluation of the necessarily upper spiritual relation of parent and child:



“ . . . between parents and children a painfully false relation grows up: a relation as of two adults, either of two pure lovers, or of two love-appearing people who are really trying to bully one another. Instead of leaving the child with its own limited but deep and incomprehensible feelings(Ibid:118).”¹¹

Lawrence goes on, if the Word is no longer vital, and the man cannot return home to the woman to

“become simply her man of flesh, entered into her house as if it were her greater body, to be warmed, and restored, and nourished, from the store the day has given her, then she shall expel him from her house, as a drone(Ibid:472).”¹²

This is the state of affairs in the marriage of Walter and Gertrude Morel. The sexual polarity having failed, the man

"must consume his own flesh, and so destroy himself, either with wine or other kindling while the woman endlessly fights



her man, or turns to her son for a lover(Ibid:473)."¹³

According to Lawrence when the husband fails to find

"some passionate purposive activity... the unhappy woman beats about for her insatiable satisfaction, seeking whom she may devour ...She turns to her son with her now necessarily ideal and spiritual love (Lawrence,1971:125)."¹⁴

She feels disgust with her husband's habitual drunkenness. She starts seeking emotional satisfaction through her son William. William also responds to her extraordinary affection. When he was seven years old, he brings two egg cups with moss roses on them from the fair. He presents them to his mother almost like a lover. Lawrence throws various hints of incestuous relationship between the son and the mother. Mrs. Morel is highly possessive and cannot tolerate William dancing with girls. When William falls in love with a passionate girl, Mrs. Morel disapproves this relationship. William finds himself unable to cope with the seemingly absurd and repellent attitude of his mother. However, he cannot oppose his mother but the unhealthy over-attachment to his



mother ruins him mentally. He becomes a subject to periods of psychosis and finally dies.

In the second part of the novel, Paul has been shown as the victim of Oedipus complex. Freud, in the words of Albert Mordell, has shown us that

“psychoneurosis, like hysteria and obsessions, have their origins in infantile overattachment to the parent of the opposite sex(Shruti,1990:122).”¹⁵

In Paul’s case this infantile over attachment with the mother persists even when Paul is grown up. It is shown that Paul loves to sleep with his mother. He also asks his mother not to sleep with his father. He hates his father and finds himself extremely comfortable in the company of his mother. “Once they walk like lovers. They are in ecstasy together.” Mrs. Morel shares everything with him. She waits for his coming home in the evening. Albert Mordell is of the view that

“one who is over attached to his mother looks unconsciously for her counterpart, among women, in seeking his mate (Shurti,1990:122).”¹⁶



Paul, too, wants to seek his mate in Miriam. But it is the incestuous nature of the mother that shatters his idea of living with Miriam. He loves Miriam from the core of his heart but his Oedipus complex makes his life unpleasant. The unhealthy attachment which claims to possess him completely prevents him from enjoying sex. And finally when he enjoys physical consummation with Clara he is told by his mother:

“you haven’t met the right woman.” Paul quips: “And I never shall I meet the right woman while you live (Lawrence,1948:157).”¹⁷

This shows that Paul now has come to realize that obnoxious and hateful attachment to his mother and he wants to take refuge in the heart of a girl who is for his age. But the irony in Paul’s case is that he has become the husband substitute and is unable to break off with his mother even after her death. However, Lawrence shows that Paul ultimately rejects all the three women because of his dream of a happy physical union remains only a repressed wish. The vicissitudes of his life make him realize that infantile attachment and intense emotional fixation always come in the way of sexual gratification.

These are not the only deliberate contrasts between Miriam and Mrs. Morel. When Miriam leads Paul to a white rose bush



in a pine-wood, she seeks a soulful, ecstatic, holy communion. A few pages later Mrs. Morel makes a similar discovery, finding three blue Glories of the Snow in her garden; but her response, by contrast, is one of insouciant elation. Paul finds that in Mrs. Leivers' household everything took on a religious value, whereas his own mother was logical. And soon Miriam's

“intensity, which would leave no emotion on a normal plane, irritated the youth into a frenzy(Ibid:184).”¹⁸

It is true that *Sons and Lovers* explains the subtle nuances of Oedipus complex. That is why this book has been described as the first Freudian novel in English. But it must be pointed out at once that Lawrence's interest in Freudian psychology was aroused only after the publication of *Sons and Lovers*. No doubt Lawrence's contact with Freudian ideas came in 1912 when he met Frieda. Gamini Salgado has a point when he observes that:

“Lawrence's relationship to Freudian ideas is not a simple matter of explaining *Sons and Lovers* in terms of Oedipus complex(Shruti,1990:123).”¹⁹

When a review of this novel in terms of the Oedipus complex appeared in the *American Psychoanalytic Review*, Lawrence hated it. What is important is to describe that



Lawrence describes certain human conditions which obviously require flexible interpretation. What he attempts to describe is a livelier, more organic, more complex relationship between man and women that hitherto has been dealt with by the creative artists. It would be wrong to assume that Lawrence wrote this novel with the idea of Oedipus complex in his mind. In his *Forward to Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence wrote:

“The pseudo philosophy of mine ‘pollyanalytics,’ as one of one of my respected critics would say- is deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse(Ibid:123).”²⁰

Lawrence, in fact, has a contagious interest in the more ebullient aspects of human consciousness and individual psyche and thinks the true unconscious as the foundation of real motivity. In his case, unlike Freud, he views sex in the real sense of dynamic sexual relationship. One may find a very vital disagreement between Freudian theory and Lawrentian idea of sex. For him the unconscious is the principle source of creativity. He asserted:

“And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite



conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man.(Lawrence,1971:15) ”²¹

Lawrence has no preconception in mind when he wrote *Sons and Lovers*. And he examines the predicament of Paul Morel with an intense yet detached sympathy. At one level the novel may be read in terms of Oedipus complex .

Paul, the Lawrence figure in *Sons and Lovers* was devoted to his mother. “His soul always seemed attentive to her(Lawrence,1948:75)”²² and the “deepest of his love belonged to his mother(Ibid:64)”²³. Again and again he went back from his sweet hearts to his mother. “Hers was the strongest tie in his life(Ibid:272-273)”²⁴. Between Miriam and Paul there was an intense spiritual communion, and mutual stimulation of the mind. With Miriam Paul was always on the high plane of abstraction, when his natural fire of love was transmitted into the fine stream of thought. “She seemed absorbed in him and by him, when he was present(Ibid:216)”²⁵ but she could scarcely stand the shock of physical love, even a passionate kiss...(Ibid:221)²⁶.” Paul felt that “she wanted the soul out of his body, and not him(Ibid:239)”²⁷. To Miriam the simplest contact seemed repellent; to Paul her nunnery was nauseous. Besides, this Paul's mother's intervention creates



further complications. She felt jealous of Miriam. She considered Miriam to be:

“one of those who will want to suck a man’s soul till he had none of his own left(Ibid:119)”²⁸

She was afraid the Miriam would absorb her son completely and would not leave her share in him. She therefore, battled against Miriam. Paul who instinctively realized that he was life to his mother and that “she was the chief thing to him, the only supreme thing(Ibid:261)”²⁹ could not become the cause of his mother’s suffering. “If Miriam caused his mother suffering, then he hated her(Ibid:238)”³⁰ The conflict between Mrs. Morel and Miriam results in the split between Paul and Miriam. According to J. M. Murry,

“each was a divided and a tortured being. Miriam strove to subdue her body to her spirit. Paul strove to subdue his spirit to his body(Hukum,1988:77).”³¹

In the opinion of Dorothy Van Ghent,

“Miriam is a cerebral type, and the mother senses in her an obvious rivalry for domination of Paul’s sensibility(Spilka,1963:16).”³²

Jessie Chambers, the Miriam of *Sons and lovers* felt bewildered and dismayed at the Paul and Miriam portion of the



book and remarked sharply that the hero's bondage to his mother was "glorified and made absolute." She felt that "his mother had to be supreme, and for the sake of supremacy every disloyalty was permissible(Ibid:201)".³³ "The Miriam part of the novel is a slander-fearful treachery(Corke,1948:33)",³⁴ wrote Jessie Chambers to Helen Corke. Mark Spilka holds Miriam responsible for the split. Spilka remarks:

"The chief 'split' between Paul and Miriam comes from the abstract nature of their love not from the mother's hold upon the young man's soul. And the final responsibility of the split belongs to Miriam(Hukum,1988:78)".³⁵

Spilka characterizes Miriam as frigid and observes that....

"Miriam's frigidity is rooted in her own nature, and not in mere ignorance of sex. Her purity is nullity rather than innocence(Ibid:66)".³⁶

Quite contrary to this, Sigrid Undset, the Norwegian novelist writes in her *Lawrence the Artist and Mythmaker*, that Miriam,

"was a perfectly normal and healthy young woman and that never thought or felt that there was any opposition between the physical and the spiritual in love(Ibid:53). "



The last two sentences of Sigrid Undset, far from being fully convincing seem to suffer from shallow syllogism. If the observation of A. L. Rowse that “no women understood Lawrence as Miriam did” carries any weight, it is apparently clear that she becomes too sure of herself and in her cocksureness defeats herself. She, therefore, brings him in contact with Clara Dawes,

“independent, emancipated, experienced, and physically uninhibited(Hukum,1988:79)”³⁸, “the first imperfect version of Laurentian woman, the ‘lost girl’ in search of true womanhood(Lawrence,1948:337)”³⁹.

Miriam was sure that Paul’s

“feeling for Mrs. Dawes...was shallow and temporal, compared with his love for herself... and that he would come back to her(Lawrence,1948:337)”⁴⁰

Miriam wanted to test him. “A triangle of antagonism between Paul and Clara and Miriam(Ibid:305)” was established. Miriam was bitter when she saw that

“Paul could choose the lesser in place of the higher... and that he should throw away his soul for this flippant traffic of triviality with Clara(Ibid:306)”⁴¹



Paul on his part feels that Miriam

“was his conscience...He could not leave her, because in one way she did hold the best of him. He could not stay with her because she did not take the rest of him, which was three quarters(Ibid:307)”⁴²

Paul gets tired of Clara also. She also wants possession which Paul repudiates. He goes back to Miriam. He is shocked to hear from Miriam that their love had been a conflict. ‘The Test on Miriam’ ends in fiasco. Although Miriam agrees to Paul’s demands but again to submit herself religiously, as if to a sacrifice. Clara and Paul were passionately in love with each other but Paul’s theory of a time for work and a time for love stands in sharp contrast with a whole time love. He tells Clara:

“I do not want to do anything with love when I am at work...the night is free to you. In the daytime I want to be myself(Ibid:437)”⁴³

Lawrence discusses this theory at length in his *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. And so

“together they had received the baptism of life, each through the other; but now their missions were separate(Ibid:439).⁴⁴



Paul hands over Clara back to Dawes. The death of his mother brings Paul untold miseries. Paul is now free from all entanglements. He is free from all the three types of ‘counterfeit loves’ of which Spilka talks so elaborately in his *The Love Ethic of D. H. Lawrence*. Spilka remarks:

“it is here in the final pages that debilitation is most clearly the result, not of any split between mother and sweethearts, but of his powerful, sterile, obsessive and mechanistic love for his mother(Hukum,1988:80)”⁴⁵

On the whole, Paul is at one time involved in the whirlpool of spiritual love with Miriam who would have a communion of the soul but deny the consummation of love, at another time he gets immersed in the dilemma of passionate love with Clara who would have with Paul ‘the baptism of life’ but would fail to bear the full burden of his tormented soul, Miriam aspiring for the possession of his spiritual and intellectual self, and Clara for his physical self. And in between there is the mother ,the most vital woman in the novel, who would never loosen her grip over her son-lover even if her mechanistic and abnormal love would lead the object of her love to utter frustration and destroy him. Although at the end of the novel Paul seems to have achieved a sort of half realized success consisting of



“mixed elements of life-warmth, creative vision, recipient manhood, and most important of all, a belief (almost) in life itself(Ibid:80)”⁴⁶

Moreover, in the coming pages I will explain two main ideas: how sons play as lovers to their mother and how they are eager to get rid of their mother’s influence in order to enjoy physical consummation with their girls. The way their love for their mother is introduced shows clearly that their love included sexual element. When William, the eldest son, brings from the fair two egg-cups with moss roses on them and presents them to his mother, he does so almost like a lover. Mrs. Morel is shown highly over-possessive. The bond of passion between Mrs. Morel and her husband has become very feeble. She starts seeking emotional fulfillment through her sons. She does not approve his relation with his girl. She herself wants to possess him completely. William finds himself torn with conflict between his love for his mother and his love passion for Gyp. He cannot bear the burden of this strain. His emotional world is broken into fragments. Finally he dies.

Now Mrs. Morel concentrates on Paul. Paul, like his mother hates his father. He trots after his mother like her shadow. He is fond of sleeping with his mother. His heart contracts with love. When his father is in the hospital, he



expresses his happiness and delightfulness for his being the man of the house. He shares his mother's trouble to lighten it. "And in the end she shared almost everything with him without knowing(Lawrence,1948:111)". He walks in her company like a lover. In a way he becomes her sexual cynosure.

In my point of view, the real trouble starts when Paul comes into contact with Miriam. Both of them fall in spiritual love with each other. Paul is not able to enjoy physically with her partly because his mother does not approve of Miriam and Paul is highly attached to his mother. No doubt, Miriam is sexually inhibited but as far as Paul is concerned it has been shown that Paul's soul is completely in possession of Mrs. Morel. An internal schism dominates his emotions and Paul has to withdraw from Miriam as a result of his mother's stronger influence. No doubt, he unconsciously tells her: You are old mother and we are young. This remark is highly irritating and Mrs. Morel is squarely sharp when she quips:

'Yes, I know it well-I am old.

And therefore I may stand aside;

I have nothing more to do with you(Ibid:261)".⁴⁷

As a result Paul has to tell his mother that he does not really love Miriam. He stoops to kiss his mother and she throws her



arms round his neck. Lawrence's main intention here is to show how the son plays a lover and he becomes the husband-substitute for her.

When Paul comes into contact with a highly sensual girl Clara, Lawrence makes it clear that there is a positive value in this love-making. But at the same he shows that love-making is insufficient. No doubt, Paul has a gratifying sexual union but there is something lacking. There is something in Paul which Clara hates:

“but Clara was not satisfied. Something great was there she knew; something great enveloped her. But it did not keep her. In the morning it was the same(Ibid:431).”⁴⁸

Thus, we find that the relationship between Paul and Clara is merely physical and it fails. The lover in Paul is also not completely free from the bondage of his mother. He suffers tortures of humiliation and self consciousness. He cannot speak to his mother about sexual life:

“Then sometimes he hated her, and pulled at her bondage. His life wanted to free itself of her. It was like a circle where life turned back on itself, and got no farther(Ibid:420).”



What is significant here to observe is that Paul wants to get rid of his mother but he fails to get out of it. No doubt, he kills his mother and it means his partial release from her influence. The way he touches her dead body shows that she still has a command over his soul. After the death of his mother his soul oscillated, first on the side of death, then on the side of life, doggedly.” In case,

“the real agony was that he had nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to say, and was nothing himself(Ibid:501)”⁵⁰

Thus the mother fixation in him makes his life extremely miserable. *Sons and Lovers* shows how a woman struggle to bring up her children makes her believe that her sons are her true lovers. It also shows how the mother clings to Paul jealously and he, in turn, loses the value of his life after her death. In other words, *Sons and Lovers* unfolds the story and of Paul Morel’s attempt to escape individuality-blighting and neurosis-precipitating circumstances thrown up by series of conflicts between his father and mother, symbolic of nature and culture, and between his mother and woman he made love, to secure a wholesome man-woman tie. It is an intimate record of his struggles and conflicts to emerge as a whole man. The society, Lawrence felt had been estranged from its natural



environment, and industrial revolution damaged the individuality of man, effecting drastic changes in human relationships and stresses and strains upon human beings. Three distinct stages corresponding to his relationship with three women in the novel comprise Paul's effort and development to secure his release from the circle of unhealthy relationship and internecine conflict. A new dimension is added to the portrayal of the conflict in Morels mind by the heavily loaded symbolism associated with protagonist. As a consequence his predicament assumes the proportions of the predicament of a whole generation and the novel gains an element of universality.

Walter Morel may be equated with the flesh and nature and Gertrude with the spirit and culture. Morel's nature is purely sensuous and natural, while Gertrude's moralistic and cultured nature is scrupulously rigid and required. They failed to resolve fundamental conflict between their opposite natures and within their respective selves. If they had succeeded in attaining equilibrium and balanced individuality, their lie story would have been one of fulfillment at personal and socio-cultural levels. The life-marring and shocking deterioration in their relationship may be traced through such incidents as Morel's turning his pregnant wife out of home, at his return after a



drinking bout. Earlier the hair-cutting incident and the sharp reaction of Mrs. Morel and her venomous and explicit hatred, in a way, prelude the bitter violent scenes between husband and wife. The hair- cutting incident is implicative and indicative of Morel's loss of his manhood, the surrender of his rights as husband, and further the unambiguous interpretation is that Morel had his own "hair-cut" in and by the very act through which he had his son's recognition. The hitting of Mrs. Morel by her husband with drawer causing profuse bleeding is a pointer of further deterioration of the relationship. Morel intensely suffered; his inner consciousness inflicted on him a terrible torture which fretted at and corroded his spirit and which he could only alleviate by drinking. The relationship between Morel and his wife is neither life-renewing nor life-promoting; it is rather exhausting and disintegrating, life-denying and full of conflicts and hostility. Each forgets everything else except the hatred and animosity to the other. If they could reconcile the fundamental opposites in their nature and to each other, they would have kept themselves in direct communication with the unknown, matured into fullness of their beings and taken upon them the responsibility for the next step into the future. It is interesting to note that both Morels are responsible for the failure of their marriage, though Morel is



presented as feeling guilty of having brought about the ruin. The major part of the responsibility squarely lies on Mrs. Morel; the body counts far more than she could realize and through her failing to make the most of Morel's physical glow, she forfeited not only the loveable husband but also her own transfiguring blaze of passion, which for a moment, lighted her up in middle age.

. Mrs. Morel started sharing her troubles with her son by opening her mind to him and the intimacy developed. For instance, when Paul went to Nottingham for interview, she accompanied him and their journey betrayed the tones and shades of an escapade of the mother and son-love:

“Mother and son set off together...she was gay, like a sweetheart...As she saw her hands in their old black kid gloves....his heart contracted with pain of love for her.

She was quite excited and quite gay...He was sensible all the time of having her opposite him. Suddenly their eyes met, and she smiled to him...(Ibid:92)⁵¹

Paul played the role of the little husband, the son-lover to his mother by doing and feeling that he had done something for her who found a life rich with promise in his distinctions. On growing into manhood, Paul miserably struggled in



establishing independent adult relationship with another woman who was his mother and felt restive like a bird caught in the net of mother-love. In the poem *Monologue of Mother*, Lawrence describes the predicament of such a person:

Like a thin white bird blown out of the
northern seas,
Like a bird from the far north blown with a
broken wing
Into our sooty
garden(Wadhawan,1993:97).⁵²

So long as Paul was contained by the mother-tie restraints and constraints, he could only remain off balance even in his approach and love-making to Miriam and could not have come to terms with any woman.

What to talk of Miriam, a romantic soul with a propensity to be mystical and sacrificial in her approach to love. Miriam, like Emily in *The White Peacock* and Helena in *The Trespasser*, believed in Christian- platonic idealism and evaded physical contact. She was impervious to and cut off from ordinary life by her religious intensity which reduced the world either to nunnery or exalted to a paradise where sin and knowledge had yet to gain entry. She, too, like Paul, was held and inhibited by her mother's possessive love and bound by virginity, both were late in attaining to maturity. Miriam was



exceedingly sensitive, and even the slightest “grossness made her recoil in anguish (Lawrence,1948:24)”⁵³ Their intimacy went on in an “utterly blanched and chaste fashion(Ibid:162),”⁵⁴ neither of them could acknowledge the existence and growing of love between them, since Paul regarded him too sane for such sentimentality and Miriam’s loftiness could not stoop to grossness and vulgarity: they could never acknowledge and accept that they are lovers:

“The intimacy between them had been kept so abstract, such a matter of soul, all thought and weary struggle into consciousness, that he saw it only as a platonic friendship. He stoutly denied there was anything between them. Miriam was silent or else she quietly agreed(Ibid:172-3).”⁵⁵

Their abstract spiritual intimacy continued to ignore expression of natural instincts and life of the body, or life as a whole. Miriam felt disgraced and found herself writhing in an agony of shame on being loved. Paul has no aversion for Miriam, but it was the opposite: a strong desire battled with a still stronger shyness and virginity which sounded to be positive forces and which fought and won in both of them. Lawrence presents Paul’s dilemma in the following words:



“He told himself it was only a sort of over strong virginity in her and him which neither could break through. He might have married her; but his circumstances at home made it difficult, and, moreover, he did not want to marry... (Ibid:278-279)”⁵⁶

According to D. H. Lawrence, people like Paul and Miriam are diffident and shy and prefer to writhe in the misery of celibacy and thus deny and deprive themselves of the means of self-culture. Both of them struggled to liberate themselves from inhibitions of their mother and purity holds, but they were unable to do so. Paul grossly misconceived that Miriam wanted soul out of his body and not him and that she sucked his strength and energy into herself, whereas he was utterly unable to give her anything by his own hindering limitations. Paul rightly suggested that she craved to be abnormally loved without responding; her attitude towards love was neither positive, nor based upon the concept of reciprocity and mutually. Paul was shattered between his mother and Miriam, between instinct and desire. He wrote to her:

“You see, I can give you a spirit love, I have given it to you...but not embodied passion. See, you are a nun. I have given you what I would give a holy nun ... (Ibid:251)”⁵⁷



The extract illustrates the exact nature of their relationship and established Paul's realization that if he wanted to be fulfilled. He should break away from her. Paul-Miriam relation was bound to end in fiasco and its doom was signaled by the short and significant scene immediately preceding their disastrous sexual engagement to which Miriam submitted in a sacrificial attitude and which has been recognized as self-defeating and negative attitude. Paul felt disappointment and despair, dull pain in his soul and feeling of failure gnawing in his heart:

“They went back the house, hand in hand...He locked the door... First he saw only her beauty,...And then he wanted her, but as he went forward to her, her hand, lifted in a little movement, and he looked at her face, and stopped, she lay as if she had given herself up to sacrifice: there was her body for him, but the look at the back of her eyes, like a creature awaiting immolation... (Ibid:289-290)”⁵⁸

The emotional encounter in which her soul had stood apart, instead of bringing them closer, threw them apart and, the sense of failure gripped Paul with greater and greater intensity and he desired to run away because he just could not go on. The Paul-Miriam relationship devoid of complete mutual and



reciprocal response as complete human beings failed completely and in rejecting Miriam, Paul accepted the impossibility of establishing a satisfactory relationship with her and revealed his determination not to be sacrificed to her. Miriam and Mrs. Morel contented with each other for Paul, but both, in the final analysis, symbolize the same destructive force, and Paul's abandonment of Miriam was as positive an action as his repudiation of his mother.

Paul's relation with Clara, after his turning away from Miriam, is earth bound and grounded on one extreme—an abandon in passion of expression of basic instinct. Clara merely provides a sexual outlet to Paul. Paul needed baptism of fire through Clara and went for passion and carnality in his association with her, but basically carnal-tie based upon gratification of the flesh cannot be wholesome and fulfillment yielding. Clara, therefore, after passionate sex encounter with Paul, looked 'heavy' and smiled sadly to indicate her dissatisfaction and lack of something vital in their relationship. The initiation and satisfaction that they had was only concerned with passion and animality. They had shared the deep sensual mysteries as blind impersonal agents of a great force and urge. Clara could never believe her life could belong to Paul or his to her despite a certain satisfaction that she derived from the



passion (Ibid:361). In the final count up, it may be suggested, that Miriam failed to respond to him sexually and provide gratifying opportunity for expression of nature, basic instinct, whereas Clara could cope with his physical, sensual needs alone, without possibility of attaining to the higher needs of mind and spirit. Miriam symbolized the spiritual aspect of relationship whereas Clara represented the sensual aspect. Though both essential to the growth of man, they in themselves fail to make Paul a complete man; yet both are needed. Lawrence wrote to Dorothy Brett in 1925:

□ “We are creature of two halves, spiritual and sensual—and each half is as important as the other. Any relation based on the one half—say the delicate spiritual half alone—inevitably brings revulsion and betrayal. It is the halfness, or partness, which causes Judas(Wadhawan,1993:102).”⁵⁹

It was the wholeness or completeness implying transcendence of internal conflict, which Paul sought but failed to find his fulfillment either in Miriam or in Clara because of his own inhibition and mother fixation, a “tragedy of thousands of young men in England(Ibid:102).”⁶⁰

Lawrence found in Paul a peculiar symbol of modern man, of all men who struggle to achieve a sort of balance between



sex and purpose in life, the flesh and the spirit, the nature and culture. The novel suggests that Paul could achieve wholeness by escaping from the crippling mother-influence and unbalanced ties with woman, with a stress either on spirit or on flesh. Lawrence brings out the central theme that conflict between cultural and nature be transcended through stable relationship to enable an individual to live wholesomely and fulfill himself and contribute usefully to the culture and the universe.

Paul's abrupt dismissive reply and his immediate attention to Clara constitute a prelude to "the Defeat of Miriam" and the "Christian":

"Yes," he said. "But no, you get 'em because you want 'em, and that's all. He held out his bunch.

Miriam was silent. He picked some more."

Look at these!" he continued; "sturdy and lusty like little trees and like boys with fat legs(Ibid:297) ”⁶¹

The intimacy deepens when Paul exclaims over the copious bluebells, which had flowed over into the field and stood there like flood-water:



"Look how they've come out of the wood I" he said. Then Clara turned to him with a flash of warmth and gratitude.

"Yes!" she smiled(Ibid:297).⁶²

Miriam is still out of the picture.

The last point to be mentioned here has to do with the liberation theory. In this regard, I want to say that while Sons and Lovers is for Lawrence the liberation from the past, a self-purgation, a catharsis, it is at the same time his emergence into the new present, self-assertion, the penultimate step towards 'otherness'. Eliseo Vivas has very rightly observed that

"Paul's mood of being is that of aloneness and that it was owing to this that even sexual completion could not bring Paul and Clara together in tenderness, mutual dependence, and understanding(Hukum,1988:74)."⁶³

Justifying the liberation theory Anthony West, Graham Hough and Daleski hold that Paul killing of mother with an over-dose of sleeping tablets is symbolically, a repudiation of what she stands for as well as a decisive act of self-liberation. His turning towards the city's gold phosphorescence is his final step as he

"would not take the direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards



the faintly humming, glowing town quickly”(Lawrence,1948:511).⁶⁴

The last word ‘quickly’, according to H. T. Moore,

“is not intended to signify RAPIDITY but is rather used in Lawrence’s favourite way to mean LIVINGLY. The last word in Sons and Lovers is an adverb attesting not only the hero’s desire to live but also his deep ability to do so(Hukum,1988:75).”⁶⁵

On the contrary, ignoring Lawrence’s own advice-‘Never trust the artist. Trust the tale’- Dorothy Van Ghent takes Lawrence’s words for granted and picking up the phrase ‘Drift towards death’ from his own analysis of his novel, observes that Sons and Lovers:

“ends with Paul a derelict in the draft towards death, which Lawrence thought of as the disease syndrome of his time and of Europe(Mark,1963:28)”.⁶⁶

Mark Spilka agrees with Moore but disagrees with Miss Van Ghent. The majority view, and which is also the correct view-is this that unlike Siegmund of The Trespasser who fails to cope with the conflict and commits suicide, Paul asserts his will-to-live freeing it from all the shackles that kept it in bondage.



Before the end, I want to mention the remark of Dorothy Van Ghent which is worthy of note. She says that *Sons and lovers*:

“has a structure rigorously controlled by an idea: an idea of an organic disturbance in the relation of men and women—a disturbance of sexual polarities that is first seen in the disaffection of mother and father, then in the mother’s attempt to substitute her sons for her husband, finally in the sons’ unsuccessful struggle to establish natural manhood. Lawrence’s development of the idea has certain major implication(Ibid:16-17).”⁶⁷

Moreover, Miss Ghent in her essay *The Narrative logic of the Book* makes some interesting observations and arrives at the conclusion that in *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence was using new techniques to fathom or clarify meanings of enormous consequence. She observes that in *Sons and Lovers*,

“only in Morel himself...does the germ of manhood remain intact...in his only does the biological life force have simple, unequivocal assertion. Morel wants to love, by hook or crook, while his sons want to die. indifferent to idiosyncrasies of culture and idealism(Ibid:21)”⁶⁸



Sons and Lovers has been declared by writers such as Graham Hough and Richard Aldington as the first Freudian novel in English. As to H. T. Moore, Sons and Lovers:

“was the first and has remained the most forceful of stores of what Freud called the Oedipus complex” and “Lawrence came to see the Oedipus complex not just as his own story but as the dilemma of his generation, a widespread condition that had reached fever-peak in the last of the long Victorian matriarchy(Hukum,1988:82).”⁶⁹

Paul Morel, the mouthpiece of Lawrence, saw that a good many of the nicest men he knew were like himself.

“being the sons of mothers whose husbands had blundered rather brutally through their feminine sanctities, they were themselves too diffident and shy(Lawrence,1948:341).”⁷⁰

Julian Moynahan remarks that “Sons and lovers presents the mother-fixation(Hukum,1988:83)” and that according to the psychological scheme, Paul Morel is a classic instance of Oedipal complex. However, Martin Jarrett is of the idea that

“Writers on Lawrence have...much exaggerated his Oedipus complex. The mother attachment once shaken off, Paul’s



mother once dead, he does grow into a separate existence which cannot be interpreted in terms of Mrs. Lawrence(Ibid:83).”⁷¹

Witter Bynner also wrote that although Paul’s mother

“obsessed his imagination;...he felt in his body the image of his father and was bound not to be subdued, destroyed, by any woman(Ibid:83)”⁷²

Ultimately I want to state that D. H. Lawrence is deeply autobiographical in all his writings. Lawrence could give exquisite artistic portrayal to his intense personal experiences with a remarkable degree of objectivity and make them acquire universal significance. Lawrence felt strongly about the peculiar domestic situation he had known and had a poignant and gloomy awareness of the tragic implications of that situation. His Sons and Lovers was undoubtedly a personal situation; but it had also a sense of universality about it and typified the tragic plights and obstacles of man in the modern industrial society. Though the theme of Sons and Lovers is love and human relationship, the book is an artistic representation of the author’s acute personal experience. Throughout the novel, Paul, the Lawrence figure presents the writer’s own experiences and sufferings due to what Freud called the



Oedipus complex. There are also many other ideas which are represented in the novel. Lawrence shows how the sons play as lovers to their mothers and how they at the end try to get rid of such attachment with their mothers. He also shows that due to the mother-son tie, the sons fail to establish any successful relationships with any other woman. In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul's relation with his mother and his relations with Miriam and Clara is a case in point. To sum up I can say that *Sons and Lovers* is after all a remarkable work of genius, a tragedy whose heart is in the very tension between aim and achievement, what is said and what is shown. That may sound like a sophistical defence of failure. It is only because Lawrence is so closely identified with Paul that the tension in the writing becomes the natural expression of the partial paralysis and blindness of the hero. Paul's tragedy is the corruption of spontaneous life in the service of an inflexible ideal, Lawrence's Jessie's in the impossibility of self-detachment from the forces which make the idea all powerful.

5. Conclusion :

The present study investigates the issue of gender and its socio-religious and cultural significance in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. In particular, it aims at discussing Lawrence



portrayal of gender in his novels *Sons and Lovers* in terms of religion. I use the term gender rather than sex to refer to the cultural, biological and other kinds of attributions associated with the term sex. In particular, the use gender as a cultural term that is dictated by the social norms of the English society at specific periods of times. Put differently, the use of gender in this study which is reflected by Lawrence and is conveyed in his works, stems from the social, cultural, political and religious contexts.

This study concentrates on Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. It deals with the tangled relations between man and woman. It represents a very great step forward in the art of novel-writing from *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser*. The novel opens with an account of the working class family life.

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