

Feminism in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Pratiksha Dixit¹, Chaya Malviya²

Department of English, Nehru Gram Bharti University, Prayagraj-221505, India

Corresponding Author: Email: drchhayamalviya@gmail.com

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Abstract

Lady Chatterley's Lover, the last work of D.H. Lawrence was lauded as a great achievement in the portrayal of tender love as the foundation of an emotionally satisfying life for men and women, especially after the 1960 trial. The novel started getting critical attention after 1970 from the famous feminist critics. A thinly disguised patriarchal ideology, as endorsing only the male-centered view of sexuality and heterosexual relationship as the only emotionally satisfying sexual preference was perceived by them in the novel. Womanhood means seeking pleasure and mothering as the only means of emotional fulfillment has also attracted attention of some critics. The current study intends to throw light on the novel from psychoanalytic feministic perspective with the view that since Lawrence spoke openly against British mainstream culture, especially presenting in his novels a clear and direct criticism of the prevalent colonial and capitalistic outlook and the prejudice of the capitalist class against English working class people, he does stand for women's freedom as well, and therefore, a patriarchal ideology is not endorsed by him. Thus, the present study is a modest attempt to show that the feminist reading of Lawrence's novels, especially of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, is certainly a misreading

which doesn't take into account Lawrence's views on the capitalistic industrialist world, the world torn apart through World War I and his anticipation of the stress on the unconscious, the body and the irrational motives in various areas of contemporary criticism. The present study, through a critical reading of the novel from the psychoanalytic and feminist perspective, arrives at the conclusion that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is an attempt to search a solution to the issues related to man-woman relationship which Lawrence felt, had gone completely out of focus and thus scattered.

Keywords: D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, class, sex, censorship, obscenity, feminism, harmonious relationship

Introduction

Lady Chatterley's Lover the novel written by D. H. Lawrence's published in 1928-29, caused huge controversy and attracted criticism for the next forty years. This novel was written as a critique on the calamitous and devastating effects of the First World War and newly inducted industrial revolution on the psychostate of Clifford, the husband of *Lady Chatterley*.

Representing the changing landscape of British society, while advocating the right to sexual freedom and desire, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* undergoes a transformation of interpretation. Since these novel violets the set rules of that time civic and social societies, the novel was banned after the first publication in Italy in 1928. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was so controversial that when Penguin Books published it in 1960 to mark thirtieth death anniversary of D. H. Lawrence's, the publication was declared illegal and the Penguin Books company had to face one of the most famous obscenity trials of the twentieth century.

Lawrence was troubled by humanity's excessive relationship with its mental consciousness. He determined two basic consciousnesses in humans: one stemming from the intellect and the other from the body itself. Forms of government, cultural traditions, laws, and religions come under the first category i.e. mental consciousness. The second category comprising blood consciousness, deals with instincts and emotions, aspects of humanity which in the opinion of Lawrence was neglected. Lawrence severely criticizes the preference of humankind for customs that violates the very nature of humans, such as the logic of obscene words for natural bodily functions.⁽¹⁾

Lawrence has also shown his strong awareness of feminism and mental consciousness in his novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by exploring the relationship between woman and man, woman and nature and man and man. This was expressed in his lines "As Connie

Chatterley drives through Tevershall-where her husband runs the mine and where most who work there live-she observes the state of the people, who are representative of the England of today" (LCL, 153). She wonders, "Ah God, what has man done to man? What are the leaders of men doing to their fellowmen? They have reduced them to less than humanness, and now there can be no fellowship anymore! It is just a nightmare"(ibid.).⁽²⁾

Feminism in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

The oppression and struggle of women for love, sex and freedom were presented by Lawrence in the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Janice H. Harris mentioned that Lawrence was the supporter of woman's liberation through the recognition of her sexual self."(Janice, 1990, p.70).⁽³⁾ According to Bridget Pugh, *Lady Chatterley's Lovers* embodies Lawrence's statement about a negation of the power-urge as industrialism similar to his theories in "*Lawrence and Industrial symbolism*".⁽⁴⁾ The men and women relationship is one of the most prominent themes in Lawrence's works. According to him it is not only the harmony of the natural world which is ruined by the industrialization, but also the harmony of the human world is broken up. "But didn't you say the other day that you were a conservative-anarchist, "she asked innocently. "And did you understand what I meant?" he retorted. "All I meant is, people can be what they like and feel what they like and do what they like, strictly privately, so long as they keep the form of life intact, and apparatus." (Lawrence, 2009, p.193) From the above conversation we can feel

Clifford's superiority to the working class in industrialization and his cruel treatment to them. Clifford is depicted by Lawrence, as a representative of the ruling class, who is selfish, ugly, cruel, heartless and greedy half-man, even a half-machine monster, fully demonstrating Lawrence's hatred to industrialization that results in alienation of human beings.⁽²⁾

In Lady Chatterley's Lover, Clifford Chatterley's is shown as a typical victim of industrialization with his humanity being alienated. He is wealthy and enjoys a high social status for being the owner of real estate and coal-mine. Unfortunately, he never stops pursuing money, fame and social position in his life. Being deeply under the influence of the capitalist industrialization, he gets his larger profits from the mining industry, treating the miners cruelly. After he comes back from the war, Clifford has become crippled and impotent which makes him unable to have a child. Feeling of being surrounded by the power and money reduced his inferiority caused by disability and male sexual dysfunction.⁽⁵⁾ In that scenario Clifford was considered a modern man as he believed in the process of industrialization. Eventually his physical paralysis affected his psychostateas influenced by the highly industrialized world he lived in. In Lawrence words "The gay excitement had gone out of the war...dead. A man needed support and comfort. A man needed a wife" (Lawrence, 2009, p.8)⁽²⁾. So, Clifford chooses to marry after losing his male power, as he wanted to get rid of his spiritual emptiness. He believed that in his married life sex is not an

important part, contrasting the Lawrence's viewpoint that for maintaining a harmonious relationship between men and women sex is an utmost necessity and the key for a their relationship. This has been the reason that Clifford's asexual marriage finally became a tragedy.

Clifford being fragile by his paralysis rendered him alienated and motionless. In his opinion sex is just a "habit" of a couple which could only promote the mental intimacy between men and women. "We have the habit of each other and habit, to this thinking, is more vital than any occasional excitement." (Lawrence, 2009, p.46)⁽²⁾

Clifford turned his attention to the coal-mine industry, making money for escaping from his inferiority as a disabled husband. His disaffection is not only externalized in his married life, but he also became cruel towards working class. His greed was only to make profit from the coal-mining industry by squeezing every drop of productivity from the miners. This led to dissatisfaction among workers and strikes. Heated disagreements and arguments between the couple for Clifford's cold and heartless attitude became a routine which gradually increased the distance between Clifford and Connie. Clifford had poor mentality in spite of being rich materially. He tends to show off when he got his reputation, wealth and power as a modern industrialist, in order to hide his poor spirit. However, his such senseless concealing is doomed to failure.⁽⁶⁾ "The wallowing in private emotion, the utter abasement of his manly self, seemed to lend him a second nature, cold, almost

visionary, business-clever. In business he was quite inhuman.” (Lawrence, 2009,p.304) ⁽²⁾

Clifford is no doubt only the poor victim of industrialization physically and mentally. Lawrence makes every effort to criticize industrialization, showing his deep concern about the human being Lawrence criticizes the tragic influence of industrialization on both body and soul of humans. And the only solution to their getting back unconscious and instinctual self is to return to nature, providing with human energy to recover from the frustrating reality, which is like the pregnant mother giving nutriments to her baby. The healing effect of nature is therefore strongly evident and Lawrence himself is optimistic and hopeful for that. As he said once “It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future. But we go round, scramble over the obstacle. We’ve got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen” (Lawrence, 2009, p.1)⁽²⁾

Connie is soaked in her dull and lifeless life in Wragby. She can feel the essence of life only after she returns to the wild world. Connie identity is established by means of satisfying her sexual desire. A significant role is played by Mellors in establishing Connie’s identity. The passionate relationship between Connie and Oliver Mellors, Clifford’s gamekeeper, represents the possible solution for the country, one that is so ashamed of the body and is in touch with the blood consciousness. David Kellogg writes, "the relationship of Connie and Mellors is clearly represented as resistant to socialized forms of sexuality,

including those of other characters in the novel and thus as inclined toward a natural sexual expression.” ⁽⁵⁾ The couple’s relationship was not influenced by their mental consciousness, rather, they listen to their blood consciousness, their instincts in his essay, “A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover, Lawrence writes, But I stick to my book and my position: Life is only bearable when the mind and the body are in harmony, and there is a natural balance between the two, and each has a natural respect for the other. And it is obvious; there is no balance and no harmony now" (LCL, 310)

What has gone wrong between Connie and Clifford can certainly be misinterpreted by the reader. Connie is unable to have a sexual relationship with her wheelchair bound husband. Lawrence highlights the war wounds of Clifford, who had been paralyzed during the Great War, instead of placing the blame of the marriage's ills solely on Connie-who needs physical fulfillment of some kind, perhaps just physical touch.⁽⁸⁾ The narrator notes "that when the emotional soul receives a wounding shock, which does not kill the body, the soul seems to recover as the body recovers. But this is only appearance. It is, really, only the mechanism of assumed habit. Slowly, the wound to the soul begins to make itself felt... till it fills all the psyche" (LCL, 49)⁽²⁾. Clifford has not really overcome from the horrors of war and is emotionally cold. His system had undergone such a great shock that his emotional self is shut off. This is the reason for his inability to connect with Connie, not

because he is impotent Their relationship has been regulated to one functioning only in the unfeeling mental realm instead of fulfilling both of the human consciousnesses. The couple goes through the motions with "a habit of intimacy" (LCL, 50)⁽⁹⁾.

Connie's innermost sexual desire is aroused with the appearance of Mellors. The harmonious sexual relationship is an indispensable part in human beings.⁽¹⁰⁾ There is some descriptions in the novel about Connie's awaking self-consciousness: "She had come to the real bedrock of her nature, and was essentially shameless. She was her sensual self, naked and unashamed. She felt a triumph, almost vain glory. So! That was how it was! That was life! That was how one really was! There was nothing left to disguise or to be ashamed of. (Lawrence, 2009, p. 245)⁽²⁾ Connie achieves her individuality as a woman. She has the qualities of intelligence; independence and courage of changing are possessed by her. Connie is brave enough to fight against injustice and pursue her equality, security and happiness in a patriarchal society. These are the reflections of her eco-feminist, struggling for the equality and freedom. She is saved both physically and mentally from the dull and empty married life and finally constructs her own identity by her bold pursuing for love.⁽¹¹⁾

D.H. Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* suggests that women form their identity through men. "If men fail to be men, then women will not be able to be women." In D. H. Lawrence's vision of the two sexes, women are fundamentally

passive. Being active destroys their essential femininity.

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