



Review of Critics and Lawrence Views about His Novels

Neha

D – 118, University Campus, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra -136119 (INDIA)

ABSTRACT

Lawrence views on sex, Christianity and modern Civilization remain the subject matter of criticism. Among critics, he has his sympathetic admirers and hostile detractors. Thus, his novels remain controversial to this date and many problems implicit in his work have not been settled yet. As a novelist he always perplexes and disturbs the readers. The present study, thus, seeks to examine some of the important critics of Lawrence's novels and analysis of man's vital relationships between himself and the Universe around him as depicted in the novels of D.H. Lawrence.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, Relationship, Soul, Spiritual.

D. H. Lawrence's novels have been a highly controversial subject. After reading the manuscript of his first novel, *The White Peacock* (1911), F. M. Hueffer had said to him: "You've got GENIUS". But in Hugffer's opinion the novel had "every fault that the English novel can have"¹. *The Trespasser* (1912) was called 'erotic' and 'bad art' by Hueffer². *Sons and Lovers* (1913) was well received by reviewers. The next novel, *The Rainbow*, was suppressed in 1915 by G.W. De Tunzelmann as "hopeless failure"³ as a work of art because of treatment of sex in the novel was regarded as unhealthy. He accused Lawrence of salaciousness. In 1921, M. Murry, who had been an admirer of Lawrence's sensitive and impassioned apprehension of natural beauty and "understanding of the strange blood bonds that unite human beings", described his *Women in Love* (1920) as "sub-human and bestial"⁴. But Murry had unreserved praise for *Aaron's Rod* (1922) as "drink of the fountain of life"⁵. The next novel, *Kangaroo* (1923), was described by J.D. Beresford as a search for the soul of humanity⁶. Edwin Muir (1926) praised the *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) and called the book 'garrulous'⁷. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) was banned in England and America immediately after its publication. The novel was declared obscene.

After Lawrence death in 1930, his works were almost neglected by critics for a decade. There was, however, a revival of interest in his novels during the fifties. T.S. Eliot, charge that Lawrence lacked "intellectual and social training"⁸. F.R. Leavis⁹, his most sympathetic critic, refuted the charge of T.S. Eliot and stressing the moral value of fiction, Leaves placed Lawrence in the tradition of great English novelists, like Jane Austen, George Eliot etc. D. V. Ghent¹⁰ stressed the importance of innovation that he made in the novel and the profundity of his vision of modern life. M. Spilka¹¹ illuminated the Lawrencean idea of responsibility for the quality of one's being. R. Williams, highlighted his conception of close spontaneous living as opposed to the sterile living in the industrialized societies¹². J. Moynahan acclaimed his major novels as great works of art¹³. Keith Sagar, in his *The Art of D.H. Lawrence*, demonstrated how Lawrence's vision strips away appearances and penetrates to being¹⁴. R.K. Sinha, in *Literary Influences on D.H. Lawrence*, traced the growth of Lawrence's genius by placing him against the artistic and intellectual background of his times¹⁵. E. Vivas, in his book *D.H. Lawrence: The Failure and The Triumph of Art*, calls Lawrence a victim of inferiority complex and accuses him of "yearning for a homosexual relationship"¹⁶. According to Vivas, he disregards artistic distancing in his novels. Other critics have also criticized him for lack of objectivity. Even his sympathetic critics, like H.T. Moore and F.R. Leavis, criticize his later novels on artistic grounds. Leavis opines that the later novels are marred by the 'direct involvement' of the author in them¹⁷. Some critics even refuse to treat Lawrence as an artist. Echoing the view held by Middleton Murry¹⁸ and Anthony West¹⁹ holds that art was not Lawrence's aim and that primarily he was a moral teacher.

Lawrence's involvement with his art was total, he was not interested in art for arts sake. His main concern was human life. He wrote in *Studies in Classic American Literature*: "The essential function of art is moral and not aesthetic, decorative, pastime and recreation". Lawrence stands by himself among all the English novelists in his approach to human life. While the other English novelists view human actions in the light of Christian values or social desirability or inexorable fate or as mere absurdities, Lawrence views them in relation to the whole cosmos, thus

examining their potential for making man's life happy.

Man's life is of greatest importance to him. He believes in 'whole man alive'. All material and non-material things such as manners, morals, ethics, values, are all for human life existence. However, merely to exist is not life. Right and wrong are to be faced all time in life but there is no ideal right or wrong. Right and wrong are related to the person, place and time. What is right in a particular case may be wrong in another case. Hence, the joy of life may be destroyed by so called goodness or a man may become a dead man in life. In the essay "Why the Novel Matters", he writes: "You may love a woman as man alive, and you may be making love to a woman as sheer dead man in life. You may eat your dinner as man alive or as a mere masticating corpse"²⁰. Thus, to be as man alive, man must follow the promptings of his own soul.

Lawrence distinguishes between the self (the unconscious soul), the spirit and the ego. Acc. to him, "soul is an inscrutable, undefinable, vivid quick, giving us off as a life-issue. While spirit is merely our mental consciousness, a finished essence extracted from our life-being, just as alcohol, spirits of wine, is the material, finished essence extracted from the living grape"²⁰. The ego is the "spurious self". Thus, the soul is not spirit, or mind, or intellect, or ego-the elements that the soul is practically composed of in the Western sense. Lawrence's concept of the dualism of material reality and spontaneous reality (soul) bears striking similarity to the dualism of soul and matter in the Sankhya School of Hindu philosophy. Acc. to which, a physical organism (matter) becomes conscious only when it get connected with soul. Thus, the soul is the vitalizing element which makes life possible. In his novels, Lawrence has attempted to examine the possibility of happiness in the life of man. Men and women whose lives are not in tune with their souls (inner self) and are entirely controlled by their minds cannot live happily. For authentic living man must listen to the voice of his Soul. One can listen to the voice of one's Soul only when the mind is silent and the psyche remains still. The suppression and distortion of the promptings of the soul results in perversion and neurosis. Lawrence refers to this neurosis in his book, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*²¹. The man who dives deep and gets into contact with his soul achieves real freedom.

Lawrence views people and their relationships in terms of the essential self. This approach to the life of man is consistent with his views on money, materialism, forms of society, moral values, and Christianity etc. In his writings, he condemns industrialism and warns man against showing too much reverence to the gods of money and materialism.

Lawrence regarded the social systems important only so far as they helped the individual to exist. He did not have a great respect for the State, the Nation and even the International organizations as these represent the material interests of people. They can never represent the human individuals. Political systems like Democracy and Socialism, Nation and the State to be viewed as large public contrivances for the adjustment/ supplying of the lowest material needs of the people for their existence.

The principle of 'equality' does not apply to the free spontaneous self. The term 'equality' is almost meaningless for Lawrence. In his view, every human being is a separate and has distinct identity. One man

cannot be compared to another man. "One man is neither equal nor unequal to another man. Comparison is possible only in the case of material mechanical entities i.e. only when one of us departs from his own Integral being, and enters the material-mechanical world"²².

In conclusion, the compulsion behind Lawrence's creative writing was his religious experience. He believed in the soul of man and not in the

Supreme Being of Christianity. For Lawrence the soul is God and God is in every living creature. If man succeeds in accomplishing pure relationship between himself and the Universe around him, he achieves fulfillment of life. Critics put their best efforts to understand the novels of Lawrence. His novels are a continuous search for the truth of human life, and deserve to be studied as such.

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