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Dehumanising Effects of Industrialisation on the Familial-Relations in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract:

The present paper is an attempt to portray the dehumanising effects of industrialisation on the familial-relations in D. H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*. The novel focuses on industrialisation, and explores the battle between the intellectual mind and the sensual body, drawing from Lawrence's personal experiences and influences. Due to excessive materialism in the society, the gradual deterioration of love, culture and nature is very minutely shown through the story of the Morel family. Through the plot and characters of the novel, Lawrence reveals the psyche of the post-war frustrated generations who are caught in the vicious circle of the industrialism. I, in this paper, endeavour to analyse the variegated aspects of industrialisation through different relations in a family and their gradual destruction in the novel.

Keywords: Industrialisation, Materialism, Relations, Destruction, Psychology, Sophisticated, Disintegration.

D. H. Lawrence is the perfect representative of his age as his works candidly reveal the dehumanising effects of industrialisation and modernity. He lived in the time when Britain was trying to emerge as a capitalist nation and the whole country experiencing a great economic revolution due to industrialisation and commercialisation. His works are psychological studies of the restless minds due to the excessive materialism of that era. He presents the inner psyche of the people who lived through these tumultuous times of rapid transition. Lawrence was not a radical modernist like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, who had set structured interpretations of what they wanted to do with the works they produced, but he shared similar views with them regarding the moral sterility of society after World War I. But the biggest threat to the modern society, according to Lawrence, was the Industrial Revolution. Agrarian England was destroyed for coal mines and factories. Beautiful nature was reduced to something cold, harsh and dead. Not only was the land exploited, but the industrialisation had also created so much materialism in the minds of the people that it destroyed the basic fibre of the society. Personal and familial relations were also affected in a very dehumanising way.

In the novels of Lawrence, the impact of industrialisation is explored through the battle between intellectual mind and sensual body. He feels a devilish spirit in the machines, which he has laid bare in his works. He very effectively presents the clash between man and technology how technology does change the whole social structure and affects each and every relation of society. Lawrence does a significant job of showing the reader what it takes to have fulfilment from a relationship and what a person must sacrifice to obtain it. In all his novels, Lawrence portrays industrialisation as the biggest threat to the mankind as it devastates the natural love and warmth of relations. His novels are symbolic studies of the different relations from all perspectives but the problem of industrialisation looms large at the background of each of his novel. This paper is an endeavour to portray the dehumanising effects of industrialisation on the familial relations in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*.

At the turn of the century when the British Empire was a huge empire militarily and industrially, Lawrence appeared on the scene. In the empire, there were many factories, and energy for these factories used to come from coal. Therefore, a great many big industries were founded before the close of the nineteenth century. Coal fields along with iron fields in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire were discovered. People working in mine-pits were living there and dust along with grime became part of their lives. D. H. Lawrence was the first among the modern novelists who brought to light the dark visions of life as the devastating effects of the modern sophistic progress which had polluted the serene idyllic environment and the uncontaminated innocent, simple society of Pastoral England. "As a critic of industrial society Lawrence justifiably questions the validity and the ultimate meaning of our present day life. What matters for Lawrence and for ourselves in a work of literature is the discrimination with which these views are realized. Lawrence is clearly at his best as a novelist when he is concerned with his vital study of relationships." (Cura-Sazdanic 105). Unlike the others realist writers of his era who just focussed on the effects of industry on the peasants and the economic exploitation of the workers in the factories, Lawrence was the only writer who brought to light the destructive effects of industrialism on the familial relations and the spiritual well-being of the people. Lawrence writes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, "If things go on as they are, there's nothing lies in the future but death and destruction, for these industrial masses." (Lawrence, 2013:302). *Sons and Lovers* is considered as a masterpiece of Lawrence. It is a vehicle to convey the dehumanising effects of industrialisation on a family because it portrays the lost love of a wife, discontented lovers and neglected children as a result of the ugly side of industrialism.

Published in 1913, *Sons and Lovers* was regarded as a critical commentary on the industrial era of England in a very realistic way. It was the

first successful novel of Lawrence which shows how the industrialisation castrates a family and making all of its members the victims of the situation. They become incapable of love and the whole tragedy falls in the form of a chain of the shattered relationships. Our innocent hero, Paul Morel, bears the biggest jolt during this and throughout his life, he suffers with a series of the broken relationships and unusual mishaps which ultimately destine his misfortune during the course of the novel. Eventually, the other characters like Walter, Gertrude, William, Miriam and Clara all become the victims of the ruthless claws of industrialisation.

Lawrence, is undoubtedly, a psychological novelist, who is appeared to be influenced by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory of unconscious and repression while writing *Sons and Lovers*. Freud's psychoanalysis deals with the child's emerging sexuality. "Freud finds sources of childhood impressions, and increasingly in the part played by early and intense sexual attachment within the family, as well as in traumas or emotional shocks and in the course of sexual enlightenment." (Jastrow 168). Freud links the tragedy of Oedipus to the ordinary human being who also suffers the same curse before his birth which was suffered by Oedipus and it is the fate of every human being. It is the curse to direct his first sexual impulse towards his mother, also his first hatred and first murderous wish against his father. Jastrow in his book, *Freud: His Dream and Sex Theories* says in this regard, "the incest assumption, as love of mother, entails *envy of father*, and that in turn generates *hostility* and the desire to *displace* him" (Jastrow 178). In *Sons and Lovers* Paul, time and again wishes for his father's death. The young Paul Morel also lying in bed waiting for his father's return at night and praying "Let him be killed at pit" (Lawrence, 2014:76) is probably the exact reproduction of this theory.

Lawrence has wrapped the novel in many unconscious layers which by their turn reveal many unconventional situations. The novel opens up with the description of Bestwood village, where the workers in the coal pits are described as 'Donkeys' (Lawrence 1). Here, Lawrence gives a realistic portrait of the lives of miners and the difficult situations in which they work. The miners have to work very hard in order to fulfil their family needs. In their world, they seem to be enjoying their lives but in reality they are lost in their daily activities like gossiping, drinking and smoking in order to have an escape from their horrible reality. It is the ugliness which surrounds them everywhere that disheartened them. They want beauty, but they get only ugliness. Their houses are ugly, their surroundings increasingly become more and more ugly, and the atmosphere is smoky and dark. Therefore, they are frustrated and the result is more clashes at their working places in the form of agitations and also in their domestic lives. Eventually, they are deferential and lead a monotonous life. In order to escape

from such tensions they take the way to taverns and drinking-houses, like Mr. Morel and his colleagues. It is their greatest recreation and entertainment. They often indulge in it even at the cost of domestic peace and harmony though it drains out most of their income too. This may be the reason of Walter Morel's careless and nasty attitude towards his sophisticated wife, Gertrude and consequently their mutual relations fall apart. He often complains that in spite of his hard work his wife does not treat him properly and he finds some compensation in drinking at the end of the day. "The industrial production prevents workers from obtaining pleasure from their labour by making their work more and more dull and mechanic. The work in the mine extracts every bit of energy out of the colliers, and what's more, such work dulls the mind of colliers. As a result, mutual communication cannot happen in the family, and this is just the case for the Morel family. Mr. Morel is always too tired and frustrated to appreciate his wife's taste in tidying the house; Mrs. Morel's pride and knowledge prevents her from understanding her husband's insensitivity. The family is harmony is destroyed and hot and cold wars begin to take its place. And that's what happen in Morel family." (Wu 1516)

Lawrence emphasizes mechanization and ennui caused by industrialism. According to him, along with stripping humanity out of emotional and creative impulses, industrialism also disturbs the institution of family and its relations. All the colliers like Walter Morel go to the pits quite early and come home late in the night after having their drinks at the tavern. As a result, they spend very little time with their families and their familial relationship ties get weaker day by day. Such an attitude of Morel, "a prisoner of Industrialism" (112) is the symbol of his escapism from the realities and sufferings of day to day lives, which is also the consequences of materialism. Thomas L. Jeffers, comments in this regard, "In a typical working-class household, then, the father earned the money out in rough-and-tumble worlds of men, where long and exhausting hours necessitated the refreshment of drink and camaraderie in the pub. When he finally came home, it was often as a tired, grimy, tipsy intruder." (Jeffers 292). Paul hates his father because of his habit of heavy drinking. The whole family waits for him for dinner but he lays drink in the pub. "The sense of his sitting in all his pit-dirt, drinking after a long day's work, not coming home and eating and washing, but sitting, getting drink on an empty stomach, made Mrs. Morel unable to bear herself." (76). Gertrude does not suffer it alone but the children also suffer with her. Paul almost hates his mother's habit of waiting such a man for dinner. It makes him very bitter towards his father.

The effect of industrialisation can also be seen on the life of Gertrude as she is the daughter of an engineer who was living in an end-house, where she could enjoy a kind of aristocracy among other women. But after marrying Walter, she feels uncomfortable in mixing up with the other women of the same

locality which shows her class-consciousness, another outcome of industrialisation. The life for Gertrude after marriage is not so easy. She has to do a lot of work from morning till late night in order to run her home smoothly. But being a woman of dominating nature, she tries to impose her own sophisticated middle-class way of life on her uneducated collier husband. She refuses to accept the distinct personality and emotional requirements of her husband for love and care after a hard day at pit. This leads to disharmony in their relationship. “The pity was, she was too much opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be; she would have him the much that he ought to be, so, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him” (20). Because of the difference between this soft non-intellectual man, and his curious, intellectual and sober wife, there is bound to be a conflict. In this way, industrialisation destroys their bond completely and any type of mutual understanding can never be developed between them. Consequently, a state of alienation and estrangement grows between them and they can never find fulfilment in their relationship. And Lawrence presents this dissonance in a very realistic manner, “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 responsibilities, to make him fulfil 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 his mind.” (18).

Mrs Morel, because of her intellect and sophistication succeeds in winning the affection of her children. Mother becomes everything for the children but they gradually get distanced from their father. Even the existence of their father in the home creates the atmosphere of misery and anxiety for them. As it is portrayed in the novel “there was a feeling of misery over all the house. The children breathed the air that was poisoned, and they felt dreary. They were rather disconsolate, did not know what to do, what to play at.... Both children hushed into silence as he entered....When he had gone, they sighed with relief.” (52). The children share all daily events and problems with their mother only. She makes the children her allies and her husband’s enemies in her battles against her husband. Mr. Morel is also aware of the fact “His wife was casting him off, half regretfully, but relentlessly; casting him off and turning now for love and life to the children.” (58). Disappointed from her husband, Gertrude turns to her sons and substitute them in the place of her husband. “She took her sons as husband-substitutes. The moment they grow economically independent, they instinctively stepped into the role of their mother’s husband.” (Gogoi 50). They become her purpose to live. Initially she fret for Morel but after her sons’ birth, Lawrence writes, “Now she ceased to fret for his love; he was an outsider to her. This made her life much more bearable.” (20). Gradually, Gertrude’s affections get transferred to her two sons; first towards William because “William gave her a sense of relief, providing her at last with someone to turn to if Morel failed” (77).

He becomes the hope of his mother and the embodiment of her dreams. "She was very proud of her son" (65). But he could not survive the tragedy of living without his mother after his engagement with his lady-love Lily. In her blind love for William, Mrs Morel turns him into an emotionally imbalanced lover. He always expects the kind of love and warmth from his fiancée Lily which he has received from his over-protective mother. But Lily is unable to do this. He could not bear the tragedy to part with his mother and dies.

After William's death, Paul was the only comfort to Gertrude. He is the only child of hers, who is able to share his mother's pains and sufferings. Consequently, he suffers more than the other children. Through the character of Paul Morel, Lawrence seems to present the post-war frustrated youth who feels alienated due to the growing industrialism and also the suffocated atmosphere of his home. He needs a support to survive and he gets this support in the form of his mother's love. This leads to his unnatural attachment with her. "Freud's Oedipus complex is the source of all repressed desires, the emblem of all that is repressed because even love is antagonistic in nature when triangulated between the boy, the mother and the father. The Oedipus complex enabled Freud to argue that all desires, repression and anxiety are based on the condition of prohibition, or what he is termed taboo. The child never really overcomes the complex, but merely shuts it away."(Nayar 64). His mother completely dominates him and creates a psychologically paralyzed individual out of him. The abnormal intimacy between her and Paul spoils the whole love-life of Paul. His mother unconsciously moulds him into what she wants, so that he can take the place of her husband. She protects him from the outside world and in the process, makes him an emotionally crippled lover. He was so attached to his mother that he was not able to develop any love-relationship in his life. He becomes a son-lover. According to Freud, all male children have an erotic attachment to their mothers and they are jealous of the relationship the father has with the mother. "The male child fears he will be castrated by the father so he represses the sexual desire for the mother and waits for his own sexual experience. However, if the boy does not fulfill this, then he will carry the Oedipal Complex with him into his adulthood." (Literary Articles). As a result, it becomes difficult for the male child to form any sexual relationship like Paul Morel. He is not able to accept Miriam as well as Clara as his beloved. He compares both his lovers with his mother. Neither the spiritual Miriam nor the sensuous Clara could match the intensity of his mother's love for him. He does not approve anyone and every time returns to his mother. "Instinctively he realized that he was life to her. And after all, she was the chief thing to him, the only supreme thing" (264).

Miriam is the childhood companion of Paul. In spite of her orthodox views on religion, she loves Paul unconditionally. With Miriam, Paul can have a chance to achieve spiritual wholeness but he rejects her every time under the influence of his mother. His mother feels very helpless at the thought of losing

Paul, “I can’t bear it. I could let another woman –but not her. She’d leave me no room. Not a bit of room, not a bit of room-----” “And immediately he hated Miriam bitterly. “And I’ve never-you know, Paul---I’ve never had a husband---not really” (264). Paul goes for the physical love of Clara, a separated but stronger woman than Miriam. She is his colleague at Jordan’s Surgical Appliance factory. They started a very passionate affair but he ends it by returning Clara to her husband because they are not able to get anything beyond sex from their relation. In order to get rid of Clara, he tries to reconcile her with her former husband, Baxter Dawes. In the end, he becomes aware of the fact that he cannot love any woman other than his mother in his life. “He had come back to his mother. Hers was also the strongest tie in his life” (275). The broken marriage of Clara-Baxter is another example of disintegration of relations caused by industrialisation. Paul compares their marriage with that of his parents which has obviously become the reason for his efforts to unite them.

Lawrence wants to convey that the thorny claws of industrialisation ruin each and every fibre of Morel family. Each character is seen lonely with his or her sufferings at the end of the novel. Suffering from cancer, Mrs. Morel is seen fighting to retain her control over Paul till her last breath. Paul is struggling to get himself free from the dominating influence of his mother. Miriam’s agonising wait for Paul seems endless and Mr. Morel is seen moving but marginalised and alienated from the family. Lawrence shares the common belief of all other modernist writers that the industrialism is the root cause of all the persistent evils of society in those times viz. self-alienation, ennui, boredom, monotony, disintegration, immorality and meaninglessness of life. He completely puts the blame on industrialisation, modern technology and intellectuality. He expresses that the modern Industrialisation has deprived people of their individuality and they have forgotten the value of family and its relations. This industry has reduced human beings to the level of mere cogs in the machinery driven by materialistic greed.

Lawrence is the spokesperson of all those who consider industrialisation with discontent. The growing materialism, selfishness and ugliness as a result of industrialisation in England fills him with horror and hatred. Consequently, he reacts against all with such works. Draper says “it is a novel about modern civilization and of course about other things as well. But, for Lawrence, problems of industrialisation must always be focused through the problems of personal relationship” (Draper 123). Lawrence always had a feeling in his mind that the contemporary society had been alienated from its natural environment. The industrial turbulence had further given another shock to the individuality of modern man which brought in hysterically dreary alterations in human relationships in the forms of stress and strain. Lawrence presents Paul as such modern alienated and estranged individual who could not comprehend his own situation.

Lawrence was a rebel against the machine age. He felt a wicked spirit in the machines, and an abominable force in the efficient organization that laid behind them. Lawrence presents in his many novels the detailed account of the life of colliers that the colliers led a wretched life. He informs us about the difficult conditions in which the miners had to do their work, and the rigors of the work to which they were subjected. They really had to work very hard in the pits. His criticism of industrialization is that it crushes even the simplest natural impulses as we find in the case of Walter Morel who is very kind and gentle. It is the lack of love and understanding between him and his wife that drives him towards drinking and makes their life wretched.

Lawrence believes that regeneration can only be possible in this dry and barren industrial world through love-relationship. "For, Lawrence, however a relationship between a man and a woman is a thing complete in itself and should not come into being on any other consideration than the basic desire of the self for the relationship itself." (Nahal, 100). If the relations between Mr. and Mrs. Morel were cordial, the tragedy of the novel would definitely have not been occurred. But the case is just its opposite. Industrialism has obviously become the reason of the shattered relationships in the novel. Lawrence believes that maintaining the healthy relationships is the only way to live with dignity and happiness in the dehumanising world created by modern greed and materialism. As Pablo Neruda says, "Lawrence's works impressed me because of the poetic quality and certain vital magnetism focussed on the hidden relationships between human beings." (93)

The novel appears as a significant comment on the devastation of the familial bonds due to industrialisation. It presents destruction caused by the cruel forces of industry as a psychological wound which can cause much harm to the institution of family. Lawrence appears to portray industrialism as a devil, which devours the affection and warmth out of every relation. It is the chief agent of destruction, not only at the physical or materialistic level rather on the psychological level. He suggests that alienation, monotony, materialism and mechanisation are all inter-related terms and caused by industrialisation and finally lead to the disintegration of the institution of family. His each character bears the brutal attack caused by it and eventually, becomes the victim in this modern and sterile world. But Lawrence does not accept defeat so easily and he throughout his works portrays all his characters as struggling in their own ways to find a path which may lead them to a world brighter and happier.

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