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Celebration of Womanhood in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*

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Abstract:

This research paper explores how Lawrence's women characters assume significance as he largely sympathizes with the qualities associated with the female. He is of the opinion that a woman gives the essential sense of stability to man. His novels deal with the soul of modern woman who is seen as an individual, self-responsible and is not subservient to masculine purpose. Lawrence depicts the vigor, dignity and vitality in his women characters who carry on the quest for the self.

Keywords: Feminine, individual, not subservient, quest for self, self-conscious.

D.H Lawrence was uniquely open to female influences on his life and work. He reacted sharply against established conventions and in his case, the primary facts are his personal experiences and convictions which at times correspond with the tendencies of his age. In the age in which he lived, a strong movement for the liberation of women was in swing. On a personal front, Lawrence was deeply influenced by different women in his life- his mother Lydia, his friend Jessie Chambers and Frieda whom he eventually married.

Lawrence has often been denounced as a sexist and misogynistic but there is a different side to the author. A Nottingham University English Lecturer has discovered a manuscript found among the papers of Lawrence's friend John Middleton Murry. This piece is a response by Lawrence to a vicious article entitled "The Ugliness of Women" where the writer argues that "in every woman born there is a seed of terrible, unmentionable evil. ... I have had moments when the most beautiful woman I knew appeared ugly and repellent to me." Lawrence, in his riposte argues that the hideousness seen by the writer "is the reflection of himself.... Even the most beautiful woman is still a human creature. If he (JHR) approached her as such, as a being instead of as a piece of lurid meat, he would have no horrors afterwards." (Flood 2013)

This discovery certainly debunks the general opinion about Lawrence's attitude to women and evokes a revisiting of his writings. The influence of his age and of the women in his personal life had made Lawrence identify himself with the female principle. Rather than being masculine,

Lawrence was more strongly feminine. Biographical evidences show that he preferred the company of girls. J.D Chambers, the younger brother of Jessie Chambers states:

As a matter of fact Lawrence was
a woman in man's skin... (Daleski 34)

Lawrence's women characters assume significance as he largely sympathizes with the qualities associated with the female. He stresses on the value of the female, on 'being,' not doing.

Lawrence is of the opinion that a woman gives the essential sense of stability to man. He writes in his foreword to *Sons and Lovers* that it is in the Flesh, in Woman, that we have our knowledge of God the Father, the Unknowable.

Lawrence's novels deal with the soul of modern woman. As in civilized Europe at that time, so in Lawrence's novels- *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*- Women are superior to men. The sphere of decision for women is wide. They do not just surrender to domesticity. Lawrence's woman takes into account her private existence. She is self-conscious and has abstract belief in love. She is an emancipated woman and is not subservient to masculine purpose.

Lawrence wrote to Russell in 1915, "The great living experience for every man is his adventure into the woman." (Sagar 51) Woman provides Man with the necessary stimulus and acts as a force behind all his actions.

Lawrence's personal relationships with women were intense. Despite his openness to female influence, Lawrence occasionally turned hostile towards women somewhat because of his idealization of male friendships and also because of his dread of 'possessiveness' in woman. But otherwise this complex influence of women in Lawrence's works also surpasses the usual biographical and psychological factors. In a letter to Edward Garnett, Lawrence writes. "I only care about what the woman is - what she is — inhumanly, physiologically, materially - according to the use of the word: but for me, what she is as a phenomenon (Clarke 28-29)

In his novel, *The Rainbow*, Lawrence brings out the theme of the supreme importance of human relationships through love and marriage of three couples. Lawrence himself described the theme of *The Rainbow* as "woman becoming individual, self—responsible, taking her own initiative". (Yudhishtar 121). This quest for the self is carried on by different women by entering into living and changing relationship with men in their lives. The novel starts with the life of the Brangwens at the Marsh. "There was a look in the eyes of the Brangwens as if they were expecting something unknown, about which they were eager" (41). The men are totally absorbed in cultivation and production. "The women were different. On them too was the drowse of blood intimacy... But the woman wanted another form of life than this" (42-43). And the Brangwen woman aspires "towards the further life of the finer woman" (45).

Chaman Nahal recognizes and brings out the supremacy of women in this novel. He described it marvelously as "the greatest prose hymn coming from a man in praise of the mystery of woman. The span of the rainbow covers both man and woman, but it is the woman who lends the arc its glittering colors. The man is a restless wanderer, It is the woman who sits serene and quite, poised on the center of her being... the sign invariably comes from her. It is she who comes forward, she who withdraws, she who sets the pace of their common pulsation; the man must just wait (141-142).

The Rainbow does take into account its men characters but "more sharply it is the story of Lydia Lensky, Anna Brangwen, and Ursula Brangwen—in short, of 'women', The novel begins and ends with meditations on womanhood. In the middle as well, It is womanhood it deals with."(Nahal 142)

Lydia, the woman of the first generation "is strikingly different from the traditional Brangwen women. It is not merely that she is a lady and a foreigner; she represents a new conception of 'woman-being'. (Daleski 84). Lydia's "curious, absorbed, flitting motion" (64) arrests Tom's attention and it gives "him a profound satisfaction that she was a foreigner"(67). Lydia appears to him "'strange, from far off, yet so intimate" (67). Tom hopes to get "completeness and perfection" (76) from Lydia,

Marriage gives a new meaning and makes a great difference to Tom. Lydia's relation with Tom is characterized by a love-hate rhythm. Tom produces the strain in their relationship because though he feels satisfied at her foreignness yet he fears that she is "still foreign and unknown to him" (95). Lydia appears "an amazing thing to him" (98) and he develops hostility towards her. He does not change to her outwardly but develops "underneath a solid power of antagonism to her" (98) and this irritates Lydia. Lydia lapses "into a sort of sombre exclusion" (98) and Tom resists her. But the connection between them again establishes because Lydia is always "sure to come at last, and touch him" (99). "Lydia, it is seen, becomes the first pronouncedly 'female' Brangwen woman at the Marsh, indifferent to the outside world and separate from it, living predominantly through her senses." (Daleski 89)

Tom's misery is of his own creation because he fails to appreciate and admire "the value of the very quality that had originally attracted him to Lydia--her 'otherness'. "(Nahal 159) Tom begins to dread "the unknown, the unaccountable and incalculable" (96) in Lydia.

Lydia is a woman who wants Tom's active participation and does not want his submission to her. She waits "for him to meet her, not to bow before and serve her" (132). Lydia is always "there, if he could reach her" (132).

Lydia maintains a constant and growing relation with Tom "The intensity of the struggle between Tom and Lydia is due to the special nature of the demands he makes on her" (Daleski 86). Lydia makes Tom learn that his total dependence on her could not be permitted. "Love between man and woman in the three generations of *The Rainbow* is most successful in the

first."(Leavis 124) In making it a success, Lydia gets much of the credit. She makes the move to bring about reconciliation between them by having an open talk with Tom. She makes it clear to Tom that he does nothing to make her want him and he comes to her "as if it was for nothing," (131). Tom becomes aware that Lydia is "very intimate, compelling" (131). He begins to approach her and draws near her. Lydia's 'unknown' and 'otherness' gets acceptance from Tom. Lydia emerges as a winner, succeeds in making her relation with Tom a success as she makes Tom recognize that she is "with him, near him, that she was the gateway and the way out, that she was beyond, and that he was travelling in her through the beyond" (134).

Anna Brangwen is the chief figure in the second generation of the Brangwens discussed in the novel. Anna has "a new independence" (153) in her. She acts independently where as Will follows Anna "like a long, persistent, unswerving black shadow."(153). After their marriage Anna and Will live in a state of bliss for a few days. The honeymoon frees the sensuous self of Will and there is something unmanly about the unwillingness to return to the outer world. "He wanted to go on, to go on as they were. He wanted to have done with the outside world, to declare it finished forever" (191). And it is Anna who is "sooner ready to enjoy again a return to the outside world" (191).

Anna realizes that they are opposites. Anna attaches importance to mind, and her own soul is "in quest of something" (198) but Will has a darkness in him and attaches no significance to mind. He does "not want things to be intelligible" (199). In church, he wants "a dark, nameless emotion, the emotion of all the great mysteries of passion" (199).

Anna feels "unsatisfied" (224) and she dances naked to "annul him" (225) and to assert "her right to singleness, to separateness of being. It is not in her feminine dominance that she exults but in her independence." (Daleski 98) Anna hates his desire to fuse with her, she hates his utter independence on her and at last succeeds in making him realize this. She gives "him a new, deeper freedom" (232). "Before he had only existed in so far as he had relations with another being. Now he had an absolute self--as well as a relative self" (232).

Anna and Will have different experience in the Lincoln Cathedral. Anna again resists Will's submission to the Cathedral. She "asserts the right of the individual to detach himself from the mass ... she clings to the gargoyles because -- as for Ruskin -- they symbolize individual freedom (Daleski 103) and Anna stands for individual freedom.

Will unsuccessfully tries to seduce a girl. In this critical moment, Anna keeps "herself aloof"(277). She does not admonish him. She likes him "better than the ordinary mute, half-effaced, half-subdued man she usually knew him to be" (277). Anna lets him blossom "out into his real self" (277). Thus Anna, who herself is a self-sufficient being succeeds in making Will also his real self. Anna does not try to "reduce him to what he had been before" (277). Rather she welcomes this strange man and likes him as she had liked him as a stranger in the beginning of their relationship. She becomes "another woman, under the instance of a strange man" (278). "The passionate sense of fulfilment, of the future germinated in her...All the future was in her

hands, in the hands of a woman” (250). Thus Anna liberates her husband and makes him fit to seek fulfilment through his work. She herself becomes the threshold, the source from which her children would march towards the glimmering future.

Ursula “a prefiguration of modern woman” (Hobsbaum 57) along with Skrebensky, the man in her life, carries on the establishment of a new relation between man and woman in the third generation. *The Rainbow* is a novel about “woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative” and Ursula’s experiences of her relationship with Skrebensky reveal “to her that beneath her outward, conscious, social self she has another true and real self.”(Yudhishtar 121)

Ursula indeed shows the most intense desire in her for an individual fullness of being. As Ursula passes from girlhood towards womanhood, she becomes “aware of herself, that she was a separate entity in the midst of an unseparated obscurity, that she must go somewhere, she must become something” (328)

In the third generation, “Ursula, the woman, becomes the protagonist; the man is secondary, an attribute of the woman.”(Clarke 74-75). Ursula is presented as the traveler and the wanderer. She feels trapped in her love affair with Skrebensky as he “is not sufficiently a personality in this eroded age, to impress himself on Ursula. Therefore her resistance to Skrebensky is all the more powerful.”(Hobsbaum 58) Ursula recognizes Skrebensky’s inadequacy as a lover. “Why did he never really want a woman, not with the whole of him: never loved, never worshipped, only just physically wanted her” (362-63).

Ursula wants to “leap from the known into the unknown” (364) Skrebensky is far from being the door into the unknown that Ursula for a time supposes him to be. Ursula feels “the, burden of him, the blind, persistent, inert burden. He was inert, and he weighed upon her” (365). Ursula wishes that he might overcome her but he seemed to be annihilated. Ursula wants to be Anton's servant, “But there was no core to him: as a distinct male he had no core” (369). Anton proves to be too limited a being to either love the whole woman in Ursula or help her to expand. He becomes “just a brick in the whole great social fabric, the nation, the modern humanity” (374). There comes over Skrebensky “a sort of nullity” (376). Ursula realizes that Anton has no genuine love for her and he induces the bodily desire in her by the force of his will only. He does not help Ursula in her self-realization because he remains chained in his own social attitudes. Ursula rejects Anton because he is “an isolated creature living in the fulfilment of his own senses” (467). What she discovers in Skrebensky is lack of self. Ursula has the quest for self in her and she seeks that in her relation with Anton who fails to fulfill Ursula's deep self because he just belongs to a matter of fact world. Ursula looks for 'unknown' and this unknown does not emerge from her experience with Anton. “In the end the man fails Ursula because he has no ideal beyond the existing state, it does not satisfy her nor him.” (Sagar 63). The man, Skrebensky fails to

satisfy the mystical longings in her, her craving to go beyond. He just provides physical satisfaction and does not go deep into her real self.

Ursula discovers that she is with child and she feels "glad in her flesh" (536). She writes to Skrebensky to come and marry her. "Her self-deception, "however, does not last long, for the reassertion of the dark, unknown forces of life within her symbolized in her encounter with the powerful horses - brings the conflict again to the forefront." (Yudhishtar 155). Her inner turmoil manifests itself in her encounter with the horses. She remains seriously ill for some days which results in the loss of her child and thus she snaps the final bond with Skrebensky. She realizes "the ache of unreality, of her belonging to Skrebensky" (544). She has the birth of her new self "Anton belonged to the past" (546). Ursula sees a "rainbow forming itself" (548) in the sky. It gives the sign of hope and peace to her and she continues her search for an individual fullness of being, Skrebensky fails to make Ursula realize herself but Ursula through her own experience succeeds in attaining a consummated self and the rainbow "is a fitting emblem of her personal achievement." (Daleski 125)

So in all the three generations, women emerge as "independent beings". All the three women characters – Lydia, Anna and Ursula succeed in getting the recognition of their 'otherness' from the respective men in their lives. They take their own initiative and thus become individual and self-responsible – true to the theme of the novel.

The Rainbow came into being in Lawrence's second phase of writing. The first title of this book was "The Sisters," and this certainly gives a hint that Lawrence intended to give more importance to his women characters. The novel develops the theme of relationship between man and woman through characters of three generations of the Brangwen family and it also describes and explores "generation after generation of the wonder of womanhood, the magic of the secrets lying hidden behind fold after fold of female flesh." (Nahal 141) The novel clearly establishes the supremacy of woman in three successive generations. Lawrence depicts the beauty, liveliness, vigor, dignity and vitality in his women characters - Lydia Lensky in the first generation, Anna in the second generation and Ursula in the third generation. Tom in his relation with Lydia Lensky starts dreading the very 'unknown' in Lydia which initially attracts him to her. In the second generation, Will surrenders his individuality for his love and refuses to recognize Anna's independence of being and wants to dominate her. Anton Skrebensky offers nothing but physical love to Ursula. He doesn't desire the whole of a woman, her body and soul together. He doesn't think of the fulfilment of whole being and is thus incapable of satisfying Ursula – who symbolizes the search for an individual fullness of being. So in all the three generations, man has to finally except the 'otherness' and 'independence' of woman. *The Rainbow* "thereby is an acceptance par excellence of the otherness of woman, of her independence. It is this recognition of her separate independent existence that perpetuates the love...Acceptance of the woman's independence, her separateness, enables Lawrence to develop his point that love is something which should be there between two person, not because of this, that, and that, in a list of similarities, but in spite of the differences, in spite of the material disparities. It should just

happen, in spite of oneself; and once it does happen, it should enrich the self, make the self deeper, make one's whole outlook on life pregnant with understanding (Nahal 142-43). All three women emerge as characters of strong individuality. In this novel the women have their separate identities, have faith in their own ideas and their first criterion of success in love is the capacity of the man to satisfy them physically. So the women do not just surrender themselves to men in their life. Undoubtedly they are presented as self-conscious individuals who look towards another form of life beyond blood intimacy.

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