

**STRAINED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN
IN LAWRENCE'S FICTION**

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D.H Lawrence (1885-1930) known as the 'the priest of love' is a renowned Modern writer famous for his sensitive and complex portrayal of Human nature. The age old unresolved conflict between the two sexes and incapability of being together as equals, prompt one to look back at Lawrence fiction which consist of the contemporary appeal to today's reader. He has portrayed the strain in many forms and has woven it as an intricate part of his fiction. While showing the enmity between man and woman, he has been attacked for misogyny; specifically by his Feminist critic for putting the blame on women characters. Various critics have given their arguments for or against his understanding or misunderstanding of women nature. Though it cannot be negated that he has a sharp insight of a psychologist into the human nature but his representation of contradictory women characters in his fiction, has compelled the critics to peep into his ambiguous mind and question further his prospective reasons to present women characters paradoxically.

In 1914 the outbreak of war Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) culminated the women's suffrage movement started in 1903. Lawrence's expectations from this movement were highly frustrated as Hilary Simpson in *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism* as rightly echoed his thoughts, "By the 1920s, Lawrence had become convinced that a feminist revolution had actually occurred, and had gone badly wrong. He believed that the dominant ideology of the post-war world was feminine- not, however, a true femininity of instinct and feeling, but a perverted femininity of will and idealism- and that a masculine renaissance was necessary to restore the balance." This questions Lawrence's expectations from women and asks what his idea of women's liberation is? This argument of Lawrence regarding the feminist movement would be discussed at the end of the paper.

In the light of this argument the reasons behind the tension between man and woman in Lawrence's fiction would be explored in this paper. For the purpose of this research Lawrence's four short stories have been taken *New Eve and Old Adam* (1934), *Sun* (1926), *Tickets, Please* (1918) and *England, My England* (1922). The disharmonious relationship between man and woman in these texts would be explored in the terms of Modernism (individualism, financial security, education, effects of war) patriarchal system (male centric society, institution of marriage, social construct, insecurity of each other, threat to family structure) and psychology (sadosomachistic approach, difference in physiology).

With the advent of Modernism the conservative and tradition were rejected and social structure began to change. The freedom of expression, experimentation and radicalism were the outcome of rapidly changing technology and further catalyzed by the horrific consequences of [World War I](#). The effects of war aggravated the discomfort in continuously changing social pattern. The war took a heavy toll on the lives and rendered financial crisis to England. Due to

this women were encouraged and offered jobs. In *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism* by Hilary Simpson in her essay “Lawrence, Feminism and War” has opined the post war situation where women workers were the need of an hour, “But the war also brought about some more fundamental and spectacular changes in women’s lives, some temporary, others more lasting. A highly industrialised nation faced with mass conscription of its active men had no choice but to look for an alternative labour force, and the employment of women was the obvious answer. The large-scale entry of women into the labour market did not take place overnight, and there was considerable hostility to it. But the exceptional requirements of the war economy swept aside some of the conventional notions about women’s place in society. The movement of women into the jobs previously held by men proved to be crucial factor in their changing status during the war. It gave them new social freedoms and a staggering new financial independence.”

According to Lawrence this new found security and stepping into the masculine shoes are the probable reason for the tension between the two sexes. The new competitive position of women in the mainstream developed the threat to men. To showcase the changing roles of women in the wartime short story, *Tickets, Please* is an excellent example. In this Lawrence seems to echo the insecurity of men by portraying the frightening new woman, “They pounce on youths who try to evade their ticket-machine. They push off the men at the end of their distance. They are not going to be done in the eyes- not they. They fear nobody- and everybody fears them.” He seems frightened of the balance in the society by the reversal of roles in a professional life. Women seem to be shedding their docile and submissive image which according to Lawrence is the probable reason for the enmity between the two sexes. According to Lawrence the denial of domesticated role by women will collapse the balance of the society and will tense up the relationship between the two sexes further. Lawrence has portrayed the fearless violent hardcore masculine women who are capable of avenging themselves. The way Polly and other conductress join in to beat John Thomas substantiate the frightening and threatening picture of ‘a modern woman’ painted by Lawrence. “She had taken off her belt, and swinging it, she fetched him a sharp blow over the head with the buckle end. He sprang and seized her. But immediately the other girls rushed upon him, pulling and tearing him. Their blood was thoroughly up. He was their sport now.”

Here the financial freedom gives women the licence to strike back and avenging themselves at their own expense. The age long dependence on men for money is now no longer their matter of concern. This individualistic attitude of women, according to Lawrence seems to provoke them to be more masculine and dominant than men to win the power game.

According to Lawrence the hope which women showcase before the pre war time meet with heavy frustration in post war time. The advent of individualism and education has provided woman the food for thought other than the household chores. The ambitious dreaming woman is distancing herself from the social construct by shedding her femininity. But according to him this reversal of gender roles and position will disrupt the entire system and would widen the breach between the two.

Patriarchy is a well formed hierarchal structure and when it is challenged the whole balance of society gets changed. Since time immemorial the superiority of men over women has lent the way to the insecurity to creep in the mind of women which eventually professes itself into the action and thought. The age long exploitation by male dominated society and insecurity of women of being a weaker sex has rendered them destructive and rebellious nature. This can be

one of the reasons for the discomfort between the man and woman. Now the modern educated woman for her own space has tried to overthrow the institution of marriage which seems a prison to her. The wifely and motherly duties seem nothing to her but the excuse for suffocating them. In the story *New Eve and Old Adam*, Paula displays this attitude, “By – by following me about- by not leaving me alone. You give me no peace- I don’t know what you do, but it is something ghastly.” She has been represented as a threat to well established power structure of patriarchy.

Perhaps change in the psychology of women has lent them sadomasochistic approaches and they are deriving pleasure out of nagging and irritating their husbands. Paula is also nagging and accusing her Husband Moest for not comprehending her feelings and position. She echoes this opinion in a letter to Moest that, “Your idea of your woman is that is an expansion, no, a rib of yourself, without any existence of her own.” Lawrence here subtly by showcasing the nagging modern wife and overbearing husband has perhaps tried to show how the undefined tension created by Paula may be the reason of strain between her and Moest. He echoed his thought by the letter of Moest which says that “For my side, without you, I am done... Bu you lie to yourself. You wouldn’t love me, and you won’t be able to love anybody else- except yourself.” This story poses questions whether there can be individuality in marriage? Whether the absence of individuality in marriage arouses tension between man and woman?

The transformation and narcissistic love in the psychology of both man and woman seems to be one of the possible reasons of the sourness between man and woman by Lawrence. The biological difference in the physiology makes them feel different and alien to men. The sexual attraction and need of both turn the attraction into repulsion and hatred. But men are more jealous of woman as they are threatened of the moment when their claim of equal rights will harm their dominant position of as a master. Women’s transformation into a masculine being would deny men the access of their body. The dilemma of woman and the insecurity of man regarding his threatened privileged position in the society seem to raise the tension between them. According to Lawrence this would not only disrupt the natural balance but also estranged them further.

In the story *Sun* the character of Maurice shows the patient, loving, caring and submissive husband. But the nature of his wife Juliet is presented as complex and eccentric who already dominates the relationship still wants more freedom and space in the form of extra-marital affair. Lawrence directly points at the compromising and helpless situation of Maurice in the text, “He was the soul of gentle timidity, in his human relations, and her silent, awful hostility after the baby was born, had frightened him deeply. Because he had realised she couldn’t help it. Women were like that. Their feelings took a reverse direction, even against their own selves, and it was awful-awful! Awful, awful to live in the house with a woman like that, whose feelings were reversed even against herself! He had felt ground down under the millstone of her helpless enmity. She had ground even herself down to the quick and, the child as well. ” The hostility of Juliet towards her marriage and child gives rise to the tension and raises question like is there fear on the part of women, of losing one’s identity, freedom and individuality after marriage and motherhood?

Juliet as a threat to the family structure seems to be one of the greatest concerns of Lawrence. As she does not want the inhibition of institution of marriage and motherly duties as she wants the liberty in sexual relationship. Juliet’s son seems a load on her as, “The child irritated her, and preyed on her peace of mind. She felt so ghastly responsible for him: as if she

must be responsible for every breath he drew. And that was torture to her, to the child, and to everybody else concerned.”

She wants to court the peasant but her responsibility as wife and mother are keeping her in check. The presence of her husband haunts her as an intruder and encroacher into her space. Earlier she is in dilemma, insecure of her freedom and space but at the end she subjugated her desires. The inability of the husband or man to understand the complex and ambiguous nature of his wife and the social constraints on women regarding sex can be seen as reason of the strain between them. Lawrence has tried to put the enmity between Juliet and Maurice in words, “And in their two lives the stroke of power was hostile, his and hers. Like two engines running at variance, they shattered one another.”

Interestingly Lawrence is not the only writer showing his concern of women anarchy, another writer Philip Gibbs in his text *Since Then* has also showcased his fear, “that men are losing as women are gaining, and that the natural balance of the sexes and their biologically relationship are being thwarted by the claims of women who are becoming unsexed, anarchical and rebellious against natural laws, while man, weakly acquiescing in his own destruction, is becoming emasculated, decadent and doomed.”

In the story *England, My England* the tension between Egbert and Winifred seems to be on the issue of money. As Egbert does not want work for money. He has no vice and is not idle. Winifred wants him to live up to her expectations but she is herself in dilemma of whether to take the man or reject him. As it has been stated in the text that, “Money became, alas, a word like a firebrand between them, setting them both aflame with anger. But that it because we must talk in symbols. Winifred did not really care about money. She did not care whether he earned or did not earn anything. Only she knew she was dependent on her father for three-fourths of the money spent for herself and her children, that she let that be the *casus belli*, the drawn weapon between herself and Egbert.” Lawrence here is pointing at the perplexed nature of a woman who does not know what does she want and expect from her husband. He seems to suggest that how complex and nagging wives are destructive and blameworthy. Lawrence is hailing the old values and customs where the balance of the gender specific roles used to be maintained. But with the rejection of traditional values by modern age seems to be creating the tension between the man and woman. The reversal of roles and the advent of individualism mark both the sexes to have their ways, Egbert does not want to work displays individualism and Winifred portrays the complex and confused wife. Lawrence opines this thought that “But no he would not let her have her way. Her dark, silent, passionate authority he would not allow. It was a battle between them, the battle between liberty and the old blood-power. And of course he won.” Lawrence after witnessing the feminist movement taking the destructive turn, starts acclaiming the old value system and fixation of gender roles. He echoes his concern regarding the dreaming and destructive women and the urgency to restore the system in a letter to Katherine Mansfield in 1918 that, “I do think a woman must yield some sort of precedence to a man, and he must take this precedence. I do think men must go ahead absolutely in front of their women, without turning round to ask for permission or approval from their women. Consequently the women must follow at it were unquestioningly.”

In these stories Lawrence has attributed the feminine qualities to male characters as all the husbands are not authoritarian and dominant. Rather they are submissive, adjusting and subservient. On the other hand he has carved female characters as masculine. They are

dominating and hard to subjugate. These women characters do not want to compromise and on the other hand do not want to resolve the problem if there is any. By showing this reversal of roles Lawrence seems to suggest that one has to retain the gender identity otherwise the conflict is bound to happen and the balance of the society will be lost.

According to critic the duality of his nature has given rise to paradoxes in his fiction and probing further whether he is a friend or foe of woman. In *The Forked Flame*, H.M. Daleski in his essay “The Tiger and the Lamb: The Duality of Lawrence.”, has delved on the idea of conflict between the masculine and feminine selves of Lawrence. He quoted Lawrence’s view from *Study of Thomas Hardy*, “For every man comprises male and female in his being, the male always struggling for pre-dominance. A woman likewise consists in male and female, with female predominant.” But apart from showing the duality in nature Lawrence seems to be expecting much from women and want them not to step into the shoes of men. Here he seems to contradict his own theory that both masculine and feminine are present in a being. As both elements are present in a being then they will definitely show those tendencies too. But here the problem arises in Lawrence who does not want them to leave their socially constructed identity. And if they would leave that identity behind then the discordance is bound to take place between the man and woman according to Lawrence. In *Fantasia of Unconscious (1922)* the warning of Lawrence to men by the reversal of roles has been displayed, “once man vacates this strong citadel of his own genuine, not spurious, divinity, then in comes woman, picks up the sceptre and begins to conduct a rag -time band.” Not only in his short story but also in his novel the disharmony created by the dreaming women has been the theme of his fiction. The character of Winifred can be compared to Mrs. Morel in *Sons and Lovers (1912)*, was the nagging and destructive wife. The tensed relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Morel act as a mirror to these stories. The character of Clara reflects the ambitious and dreaming woman who believes in her freedom. In the novella *The Fox (1923)* the character of March represents the emotionally detached woman who remains distant even after the marriage with Henry. The last scene in which she is forcing to keep her eyes open shows her distrust and her denial of being submissive to her husband. The shift in the nature and role of women from the emotional domesticated picture to the independent professionals have not been welcomed and accepted by the patriarchal society. This displacement has greatly affected the relationship of man and woman, which eventually results into the encountering of each other as their rivals. In the fiction of Lawrence, he has created these kinds of characters who are not only self- destructive but have been posed as a threat for the concept of the family. These stories do not present the picture perfect family irrespective of any adeptness and liberty given to women by men. The dead end situation of women stuck in marriage can give rise to the strained relationship between the couple. According to Lawrence in an attempt to gain equal and more than equal status in the society, these aspiring women might cause problem for the society and man in particular.

In the story *Sun* he seems to suggest that going back to the family and domesticated life is the only cure to avoid the disruption of the family structure. Juliet wants to court the peasant but remorsefully she has to accept that her next child would be from Maurice. This definitely saves her family from shattering away but she is not going wilfully. She has forced herself to be with her husband. This shows that even if Juliet would return back to family ties internally she has become indifferent and emotionally detached forever from the husband and the child. Would these indifferent and distant women be able to save the structure of the family or will they not

aggravate the existing tension between them and their family. Would Lawrence accept these internally distant women? It seems at heart he knows that nobody can recover these women fully and they are isolated forever. And that seems to be his concern and insecurity. It seems as if he has displayed his own insecurity as a man by portraying the insecure of woman characters.

After all these arguments and possible reasons for the disharmony in the fiction of Lawrence, it seems as if Lawrence has presented the characters as a victim of modernism. By depicting the dreaming and destructive women he is showcasing his concern how they are becoming distant and indifferent to the family and power structure. In the pre war scenario he himself advocated the liberation of women and the freedom of sex. But in post war situation when they seem to exercise their authority and raise voice for equality, that has come as a shock to Lawrence. But logically the individualism and anticipation would take anyone to extent of awareness of one's own right. Lawrence here seems to be looking for a middle path for woman in between the two role models of a domesticated and a dreaming woman. But can this middle path be possible as either a woman is domestic or indifferent one. He has also showcased his women characters confused and pondering over this same issue like Juliet in *Sun*. Here the question arises how a woman can be both submissive and conscious of her rights. It is inevitable that the path of education and individuality will only lead to the emergence of consciousness. Then how can women remain untouched by the new emerging consciousness. On the one hand Lawrence wants woman to be educated and intelligent and on the other he does not want her to claim her rights. It seems next to impossible to find a middle path for a woman. Does it suggest that he wants to limit the feminine within the boundary of domesticated life as he is accusing them of being masculine and a threat to the society? Lawrence here himself seems perplexed of his own expectations from women in the society. What is that middle path he wants women to follow to avoid his accusation of destructive dreaming women. Is it possible to have a middle way? Kate Chopin's *Awakening* seems to question Lawrence's view point regarding the moderate self. Chopin has portrayed the character of Edna as a dreaming and distant woman who cannot be domesticated. In the end Edna chooses her liberty when she finally succumbs to her inability to have both. This shows that there is no middle path and eventually one has to choose. The open ending of the novel leaves this open to discussion but at least Chopin has finally let Edna has her way by following her wish. But in Lawrence's stories apart from suggesting various reasons he seems find no solutions for the prevailing issue. Similarly the openness of the endings of the stories is also metaphorical of the quest that Lawrence has in his mind for a resolution of such conflicting relationship.

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