



The female voices in D.H. Lawrence: Critical study of Women in Love

Monika Gill
Asso. Prof. English
Govt. College for Women, Sirsa
monicagill8059@gmail.com

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The present paper attempts to highlight the resonance of the female voice in the works of D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence created characters that highlight the nuance of female individuality in the age of patriarchal dominance. He is the pioneer writer who shows his women in search of their identity. His females are original creatures who pave the way through their own struggle to touch the essence of the feminine core.

D.H. Lawrence, born on September 11, 1885, is regarded as one of the most significant writers of the 20th century. He was a novelist, poet, and painter. Lawrence was raised in a working-class family; his father was a coal miner and Lydia Lawrence, his mother was a well-educated, middle-class woman and a great lover of books. Lawrence has a formidable influence of his mother on him. Lawrence encountered a young woman named Jessie Chambers who encouraged him to begin writing. When he fell ill with tuberculosis after returning to Italy, he penned his most famous and notorious book, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Lawrence was famously denounced as a sexist by Kate Millett in the 1970s¹, but the author of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has a different side, as he believed that even the most 'beautiful' woman is a human first and she should not be considered only as a lurid piece of flesh.

Fiona Becket observes that "gender remains the key issue for Lawrence critics" (Becket 149)². Gender, as defined by Peter Brooker in *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*, "is a term for the social, cultural and historical construction of sexual difference" (110)³. Feminists

¹Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970.

²Beckett, Fiona. *The Complete Critical Guide to D.H. Lawrence*. London/New York: Routledge, 2002

³Brooker, Peter. *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*. 2nd ed. London: Arnold, 2002

between the 1960s and the 1970s believed that sex is biological while gender is socially created. Gender acts as approved roles in society for men and women. Men are associated with the physical world of the public sphere in general whereas women are associated with the sphere of the home where they are to play double roles as a mother as well as the object of male desire. The “heterosexual matrix”⁴ works in the patriarchal society that assigns roles to men and women. Lawrence had profoundly touched the core of feminine concerns in his works much earlier than the feminists challenged the restrictions assigned to women and form their theories. Lawrence’s concept of gender is contingent and fluid. It is not a fixed identity. He doesn’t believe in the heterosexual matrix that dictates fixed roles to men and women in the name of gender. We only know a few crude forms—mistress, wife, mother, sweetheart. The woman is like an idol or a marionette, always forced to play one role or the other: sweetheart, mistress, wife, and mother. If only we could break up this fixity and release the un-sizable reality of real woman: the woman is a flow, a river of life, quite different from man’s river of life. (“We Need One Another,” Phoenix 194)

Females in search of self in Women in Love:

D.H. Lawrence emerged as one of the founder authors who refer to many defining mental and behavioural features that differentiate a man and a woman. The mere presentation of the two sisters Ursula and Gudrun as the main protagonists was in itself an act of unconventionality as leading roles in art were traditionally assigned to men during the age of D.H. Lawrence. The conservatism and realism of the Victorian era were challenged by seminal works like *Women in love*.

D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) created two apparently identical yet opposite characters Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen in his novel *Women in Love* (1921). The difference between the sisters is quite apparent by the end of the novel though they seem close in the beginning. Gudrun and Ursula discuss the institution of Marriage at the beginning of the novel. They find the ritual of marriage dreadful and undesirable. The idea of spending their whole life with one man and bearing the children is annoying to them. The Brangwen sisters are searching for a soul mate and don’t want to be in the bondage of married life but belong to a traditional background in which marriage is essential for safety and respect. In this discussion, Ursula comes across as a dreamer, who lives in her world of imagination that

⁴Butler Judith p. *Gender Trouble: feminism and subversion of identity* London: Routledge Chapman & Hall inc., 1990

marriage would probably end whereas Gudrun is more practical and wants to have an experience. Gudrun is disturbed by the common folk and feels out of place. Lawrence compares them to nymphs of the natural world who confront the laws and standards of civilization. They dance among a group of cattle and escape the confines of the party. When she sees Gerald Crich come out naked from a lakeside boathouse and dives into the water. Gudrun tells her sister that she envies his gender which makes it socially acceptable for him to shed his clothing and swim in the lake.

Though there is a visible difference of opinion between the sisters. The sculpture by Loerke the figure of a proud, erect stallion and a young girl is found repulsive by Ursula because she connects art and life deeply and believes that the work implies Loerke is the proud stallion, and the young girl is someone he once loved and discarded without a second thought. But Gudrun believes that art and life must be strictly separate. still, they have respect for each other's views and 'have an unspoken bond. Ursula admired Gudrun with all her soul. We sense that they understand each other from the uncomfortable direction of this conversation.

Primal Desires and Social Conventions:

Lawrence's main emphasis lies on the theme of the conflict between primal desires and social conventions. Here, Ursula is presented as aligning with social conventions while Gudrun longs secretly for primal desires. Gudrun first feels a compulsive attraction toward Gerald while he tries to control the mare as the train passes. She feels herself falling under the grasp of his will. Ursula has the opposite reaction and calls out that Gerald should ride away until the train passes. Gerald becomes even more violent with the horse, driving his spurs into her side until she bleeds. Ursula's reaction in particular represents the idea that human attempts to master and control their natural instincts are a form of unnecessary aggression against the primitive self. Her response is to cry out to Gerald to let the horse flee. But Gudrun finds the display of Gerald's will appealing, and she feels that she cannot get out of his grasp. The gatekeeper responds that a show of power is a necessary part of the horse's training. The author demarcates the dilemma faced by the women by comparing them to the horses who at once want to break free from the control of their riders while at the same time wishing to be ruled by the force of love.

Relationship between the sexes:

Lawrence's writings focus on the mutual relationship between the sexes. Birkin is the alter ego of Lawrence who rejects the conventional models of love and marriage that became a hindrance to realizing the deeper and truer love in life. But his peculiar perspective disturbs

Hermione and Ursula, who remain cling to their more conservative views of marital union and love. He wants their connection to be founded on something “beyond [love], where there is no speech, and no terms of the agreement.” He wants their relationship to connect the truer aspect of their individual selves. He considers Hermione as the “perfect Idea” and Ursula as the “perfect Womb” – to which men are compellingly drawn. Birkin wants neither. He fails to understand why the two women seem unable to remain individuals. They do not want to inherit anything material and simply to live in their own separate world.

The relationship between Gerald and Gudrun is different. Gudrun sees Gerald arrive and is immediately attracted to him, comparing him to a smiling wolf. Gudrun unlocks the cage door to grab Bismarck, the rabbit. It kicks wildly and scratches her wrists. Gerald grabs the rabbit and tucks it under his arm. Gerald has animalistic desire to find liberation in the mastery of matter conflicts drastically with his inner spirit. He confirms the model of a patriarch who grew violent to show his power of dominance. He believes that “one should be master of one’s fate in dying as in living.” Gerald thinks marriage is a last resort. He wonders what direction one takes if not toward marriage. Gudrun does feel a “strong and violent love” for him. But she thinks of herself as a wandering outcast, ill-suited for marriage. Gudrun has a powerful ability to master the environment of the Bohemians. Gudrun is filled with pleasure and absorbed by the panoramic scene at the hotel. Gerald found her suddenly detached from him. She does not respond to his display of love. She while watching him asleep feels he is a “perfect instrument” who has wasted his life on material things and if he comes out of it they can create many perfect moments. She wonders if there is in fact room for her in his world. As time passes, Gudrun finds that Gerald pushes on her more and more, leaving her no room for freedom or privacy. she tells him “Try to love me a little more and want me a little less.” Gudrun’s striking modernity is enigmatic to Gerald while Gudrun finds Gerald’s masculinity attractive in the beginning but stifling for her quest for self-discovery. Gudrun imagines herself as Eve and Gerald as an apple on the forbidden tree of knowledge.

Gerald’s lingering attachment to the social world prevents him from truly connecting with the deepest part of Gudrun’s soul. She thinks that Loerke is capable of this connection because he does not care for the world. Gerald felt mad when he sees Loerke with Gudrun he attacks Loerke and half strangles her then he marches off into the mountains and slips in the hollow basin of snow and falls”. He sleeps the eternal death as something break “in his soul. Birkin feels that Death is the ultimate mystery that can create a new finer being.

The fruitful relationship is the love relationship between Ursula and Birkin, the schoolteachers, while Gerald and Gudrun have a destructive one that led up finally to Gerald's suicide.

Lawrence shows Ursula as a modern woman who knows what she wants in her life, and this is what makes Birkin interested in her and finally fall in love with her. He is attracted towards her unconscious bud of powerful womanhood. He was unconsciously drawn to her. The novel takes us on an adventure to reveal the characteristics of women through their discussions. Ursula and Gudrun are missing something vital in their life. Ursula knows people's emotions. She is naïve and perhaps innocent in comparison with Gudrun, but she holds power in her inner thought that the other character lacks. Lawrence in *Women in Love* presents Ursula as an ideal woman positive, aware of her decisions, fully liberated, intellectual, independent, responsible, and respectful to others. The author highlighted the role of women in a patriarchal society, being suppressed, marginalized and male-dominated. Ursula and Gudrun in *Women in Love* are aware of the inequality prevailing in their own society and they have a desire for freedom –longing to come out of it. They are opposed to male domination and inevitably they reject male superiority. Gudrun wants the kind of freedom that male enjoys in their society. Whereas, Ursula is strictly against male domination; she raises her voice against this inequality. They struggle against different obstacles to achieve their goals.

This complex and original delineation of the female has earned Lawrence accusations from critics that he shows the women as perverse, rejoicing in failure, unhappy and physically suffering 'all these states that allow the male to dominate' (Pullin 65)⁵. However, it seems fairly clear that the depiction of his female characters is scarcely stereotypically misogynistic. On the contrary, as Carol Siegel⁶ has put it, it stands in direct opposition to the Aristotelian tenet that only man has an essence. Lawrence seeks to discover the particular feminine essence, the female core in human existence. Lawrence believes in femininity as a universal principle and insists that it lies within the woman's instinctive wisdom to discover and preserve it as the most valuable gift of nature. The woman stands on her own with an awareness of people and things diverse from that of the dominant male. It is a real bliss for every female.

⁵Pullin, Faith. *Lawrence and Women*. Ed. Anne Smith. London: Vision Press Ltd., 1997

⁶Siegel, Carol. *Lawrence Among the Women: Wavering Boundaries In Women's Literary Traditions*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991

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