

The Struggle between Spirituality and Sexuality in Sons and Lovers by D. H. Lawrence

Fatima Sultan Shaikh

Research Scholar at Barkatullah University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract: *Sons and Lovers is one of the most powerful psychological novels of the Twentieth century-intensely autobiographical. When it first appeared in 1913, it was immediately recognised that Lawrence knowingly or unknowingly, was influenced by the term 'Oedipus Complex' coined by the Austrian Psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Lawrence depicts his own psychic traumas through the character of the protagonist, Paul Morel who suffers due to his mother's domination over his soul and his inability to find a way out of his struggle between the all-consuming spiritual nature of possessive love and sexual attraction that makes Sons and Lovers one of Lawrence's memorable work of written art. It speaks of a strange triangular love tension between Paul-Miriam-Clara relationships that turns out to be hopeless and futile.*

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1. The Onset of Oedipus Complex

Sons and Lovers is said to have gained immense popularity due to the unbreakable bond between Paul Morel and Gertrude Morel that slowly converts from beautiful a mother-son relationship into the demonic form of possessiveness and domination crippling Paul's relationship with other women in his life when he turns into a youth. His mother, Gertrude provokes psychic complications in Paul that culminates into an abnormality of behaviour in him that leads to an unhealthy emotional and sexual growth. This abnormality of personality is the result of his over attachment with his mother since childhood. Consciously or unconsciously, it is Gertrude who leads Paul towards the disastrous impact of Oedipus Complex i.e. Mother Fixation. After failing in her relationship with her husband, Gertrude finds herself all alone and dejected in life. She becomes emotionally insecure and tries to find support in her sons. First, her eldest son, William and then after his death, Paul becomes her only hope for survival. For her there is no other world than Paul and she succeeds in influencing his whole being without any difficulty.

Both, mother and son get so much used to one another that they become almost inseparable. They two share almost every moment of their life, they suffer pain and feel joy together. "And in the end she shared almost everything with him without knowing" (S & L: 99). Gertrude unconsciously substitutes Paul for her husband as he reduces to an outsider in her life. It is Paul who plays the role of a 'man' in the house and "directed his mother, what she must see and what not. And she was quite content" (S & L: 139). Paul was loved by his mother to such an extent that, "The two knitted together in perfect intimacy. Mrs. Morel's life now rooted itself in Paul" (S & L: 158).

2. Negative Impact of Mother's Bondage on Paul

This intimacy started ruining Paul's emotional and professional life because it soon took the shape and form of possessiveness and domination obstructing the natural growth and development of his individual personality. When Paul grew up and felt the urge to establish a life outside the

dominion of his mother, he was unable to establish a healthy emotional and sexual relationship with the other women in his life-Miriam and Clara. He always felt his mother pulling his strings and holding him to her shadow where he felt choked and yearned for freedom of being.

3. Miriam's Abstract Spirituality

Despite of his psychological struggle, he feels inclined towards Miriam at Willey Farm. She is young and romantic who prefers to stay aloof even when she is with her family. Paul finds her sensitive and profoundly religious. She was shy and always ready to sacrifice things and yet feel happy. She always wanted to absorb the spirit of things. She was too similar to Gertrude in her ways of dominating over the soul of Paul. He hated this tendency of possessiveness and domination that was sickening. Though Paul and Miriam loved one another, they could not come closer and enjoy natural physical relationship. "She was cut off from ordinary life by her religious intensity which made the world for her either a nunnery garden or a paradise, where sin and knowledge were not, or else an ugly, cruel thing" (S & L: 170).

Paul realised that he could not belong to her and started developing anger for her soul absorbing nature. Even Gertrude hated her because of her holding on things. "She is one of those who will want to suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left" (S & L: 183) Gertrude echoed her own characteristic in these words that she said about Miriam.

The intimacy between Paul and Miriam became so abstract in nature that there was no chance of any normal and natural relationship between them. Paul hated her for this. He soon realised that they were not lovers but just friends whom he always went for support and encouragement for his painting. He considered her a nun and thought that he does not talk to Miriam through the senses, rather through the spirit. So they could not love one another in common sense. Paul thought that one person would never be able to monopolise him, be everything to him, never. He found Miriam perfectly amiable but rather too hard. He never found himself free and independent in her company. He started getting more and

more restless. She could not satisfy him and his old desire to be with her weakened day by day.

4. Clara's Weak Sexuality

Feeling broken and dejected he turned towards another lady much older to him and separated from her husband. He finds Clara Dawes sensually appealing, bold and robust in attitude. He gets attracted to her due to her sense of mystery which he found exciting. He wanted to know lot about her. She seemed to possess knowledge of life and gathered fruit of experience which he could never attain. Meanwhile, he had given one more chance to Miriam to help him gain natural physical relationship where she failed again and now Paul fully frustrated, went straight to Clara who was found to be strong and different. They enjoyed ultimate passion and satisfaction which Paul longed for. He felt sexually rejuvenated and alive in Clara's company. It was a perfect natural physical harmony. But when he was with Clara, he still went to see Miriam at Willey Farm. This made situation more strained. "There was a triangle of antagonism between Paul and Clara and Miriam" (S & L: 281).

Paul was swinging between Clara and Miriam like a pendulum. On and off, he went to see Miriam because he needed her badly and would depart realising that she wanted to guard his soul all the time. Then he immediately turned to Clara who started dominating sexually and submitted herself when Paul needed. But slowly and gradually, Paul realised that this sexual perfection had turned into an obsession, almost a burden to him which started irritating him. Clara became sexually demanding and Paul reprimanded her saying, "But what do you always want to be kissing and embracing for?"... "Surely there's a time for everything" (S & L: 398).

They both started hating each other and a battle went between them. They knew, they never had hold over one another and had to separate. Clara was unsatisfied and wanted something permanent which Paul failed to give. "She had not got him; she was not satisfied" (S & L: 397). Paul also knew that Clara is still Mrs. Dawes, wife of Baxter Dawes and her passion for him was a reassurance of a certainty that she still wanted to belong to her husband. Thus he helps her to get united to her husband realising that he is now tired of her bodily demands. She was too big a stature for him to handle. Hence, ends Paul-Clara episode.

5. Paul Torn Between Soul and Body

In reality Paul was not able to think of another woman in his life apart from his mother. He always found his mother besides him and tried to see her in Miriam and Clara. When he failed to see her image in them, he shuddered. He knew that he can never separate from his mother because she possesses his soul and would not leave him even in her death. He confesses to his mother that he will not be able to love any women till she is alive. He says, "And I never shall meet the right woman while you live" (S & L: 394).

Moreover, Miriam was too religious to take her love for Paul at a normal physical level and Clara was too passionate to keep him away from getting worn out. In fact, for Paul, "...there was something else, something outside, something

he wanted" (S & L: 281). Torn between two directions- Miriam and Clara, he found the relationship of love and hate swinging between them all the time. His relationship with both the women in his life proved utter disaster due to his unbreakable bond with his mother.

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Author Profile

Fatima Sultan Shaikh received her B.A and M.A in English from University of Mumbai in 1998 and 2000 respectively. She has worked in India and in Middle East in various roles like Lecturer, Acting Principal, Head of the Department etc. She has more than a decade of rich teaching experience. Currently she is pursuing her Ph.D. from Barkatullah University.