

## Exploring Different Dimensions of Love in the Novel *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence

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### Abstract:

*Sons and Lovers* is repeatedly analyzed along the lines of the well known Freudian theory of Oedipus complex, and mother fixation was claimed as the central problem of the protagonist, Paul Morel. The novel is in fact an exploration of the different dimensions of love. It is largely an autobiographical novel, based on the complex psyche of the protagonist, who was trying to find the real love in his life. The Indian philosophy also explores the different facets of love. In the land of Krishna and Radha, Mira Bai, Ram and Sita, where various shades of love are explored, perhaps D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* would be understood at a different level. Physical love, Spiritual love as well as the amalgamation of the spiritual and physical love is portrayed in Indian mythology and philosophy in various manifestations. In the Hindu mythology there are various dimensions of love, and it is believed that true love can very well be a path towards salvation. Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers* is in search of an ideal love, which he fails to attain till the end, and consequently becomes a lonely and pathetic figure. My paper attempts to analyze the various facets of love in the novel *Sons and Lovers*.

**Key words:** D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, Philosophy, mythology, love, Oedipus complex

## INTRODUCTION

D. H. Lawrence was one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most important and controversial writers. His novel *Sons and Lovers* was published about a hundred years back, yet it continues to intrigue the critics. D. H. Lawrence published *Sons and Lovers* in the year 1913, and it still remains the best known of his ten full length novels, and of all these novels, it is the only one that is persistently and almost literally autobiographical. Lawrence was a prolific writer who in the nineteen years between his first published novel and his death produced over forty volumes of novels and short stories, poetry and drama and treatise and essays. Lawrence's opinions earned him many enemies and he endured official persecution, censorship, and misrepresentation of his creative work throughout the second half of his life, much of which he spent in a voluntary exile which in his letter to J. M. Murry, he called "his savage pilgrimage". At the time of his death, his public reputation was that of a pornographer who had wasted his considerable talents. E. M. Forster, in an obituary notice, challenged this widely held view, describing him as, "The greatest imaginative novelist of our generation." Later, the influential Cambridge critic F. R. Leavis championed both his artistic integrity and his moral seriousness, placing much of Lawrence's fiction within the canons of "great tradition" of the English novel. Aldous Huxley also defended Lawrence in his introduction to a collection of letters published in 1932.

"The writing of *Sons and Lovers* involved enough false starts, interruptions and sweeping revisions to suggest that the writer met with some serious difficulties during its composition and it is reasonable to assume that the latter were not merely technical. Lawrence started work on it in September or early October 1910, the final period of his mother's illness, then abandoned it. In March 1911, with the trauma of his mother's death still with him, he began a new draft which was also

abandoned. Yet another attempt was made in November 1911, and it was almost a year later, in late autumn 1912, when, strengthened by Frieda's important input and support, and after extensive revisions suggested by Edward Garnett, his editor at Duckworth, he finally finished the novel and changed the title from Paul Morel to the far more significant *Sons and Lovers*. By then he was well aware that he had written a quasi-autobiographical novel which would have deep and disturbing personal significance for a great many people. "It's the tragedy of thousands of young men in England," (*Letters i.* 476) he wrote to Edward Garnett." ( Haritatuou 2012: 129)

### **Mother's Love for Her Son: Oedipus Complex and Beyond**

The accepted critical interpretation of *Sons and Lovers* is that of the Freudian concept of Oedipus complex. Almost all critics accept the central theme to be mother fixation. The idea of the Oedipus complex is derived from the legend of King Oedipus of Thebes in ancient Greece. Oedipus unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. He begot two sons and two daughters from her. Freud, a German psychologist, used the term Oedipus Complex to signify the manifestation of the sexual desire of the child for the parent of the opposite sex i.e. sexual desire of the son for mother and conflict with father. Webster's Dictionary explains the Oedipus complex as, "the unconscious tendency of a child to be attached to the parent of the opposite sex and hostile towards the other parent: its persistence in adult life results in neurotic disorders."

Blake Morrison writes in *The Guardian* in his article "Sons and Lovers: A Century On"

"The sexual bond between mother and son is established early on." Paul loved to sleep with his mother," we're told. When she accompanies Paul to the interview for his first job, at Jordan's factory, she behaves "like a sweetheart" and both of them feel "the excitement of lovers having an adventure

together". "Why can't a man have a young mother?" he exclaims, "I'll never marry while I've got you." The incestuous undercurrents come to the surface in chapter eight, with a "long, fervent kiss". If we're unsure what to make of the kiss, the drunken Walter Morel, returning home, leaves us in no doubt: "At your mischief again?" he snarls. In the aftermath, father and son nearly come to blows. But Mrs. Morel forestalls them by fainting, and while Paul comforts and revives her Walter stumbles off to bed. "Don't sleep with him, Mother," the son pleads, and in doing so recognizes that "he still loved his mother best".

Though Lawrence chose to describe his mother's love for her sons to his publisher in the words "she selects them as lovers – first the eldest, then the second," it is somewhat shocking that Lawrence openly proclaimed mother fixation as the basis for Paul Morel's mother's love and also accepted that the novel was an autobiographical one. Lydia Lawrence, D.H. Lawrence's mother is depicted in the character of Gertrude Morel. Some critics believe that he was trying to sell his work by shock value.

However another interesting point regarding Mrs. Morel's character is that it is very clear in the beginning of the novel that she found her husband physically attractive, at least in the early days of her marriage.

"She has had a passion for her husband, so the children are born of passion, and have heaps of vitality"

### **Psychological Aspect**

The mother's love for her sons does not have only one dimension, that of Oedipus complex. The mother's tender love is well expressed right after the birth of Paul Morel:

"She no longer loved her husband; she had not wanted this child to come, and there it lay in her arms and pulled at her heart. She felt as if the navel string that had connected its frail little body with hers had not been broken. A wave of hot

love went over her to the infant. She held it close to her face and breast. With all her force, with all her soul she would make up to it for having brought it into the world unloved. She would love it all the more now it was here; carry it in her love. Its clear, knowing eyes gave her pain and fear. Did it know all about her? When it lay under her heart, had it been listening then? Was there a reproach in the look? She felt the marrow melt in her bones, with fear and pain.” (Lawrence 37)

Since Mrs. Morel felt a deep sense of guilt for this unloved and unwanted child, she is all the more attached to Paul, and her attachment is part of her repentance - “She had dreaded this baby like a catastrophe, because of her feeling for her husband.” (Lawrence 37) The novel is predominantly psychological as well as realistic. As Sigmund Freud opined that human consciousness has very deep layers and buried under the conscious, are the sub conscious and the unconscious. This subconscious guilt of Mrs. Morel for bringing the unwanted child to this world is at the basis of her complex relationship with Paul. The psychology behind the Oedipus complex is expressed very realistically with layers of emotions. The emotion of love between mother and son is not presented in glaring black and white – it has various shades of grey. The mother’s love is as much a torment for her as it is for the son.

"All day long, as she cleaned the house, she thought of him. He was in London: he would do well. Almost, he was like her knight who wore her favour in the battle." (Part 1, Chapter 4: 79)

When a critical moment arrives, Mrs. Morel cries to Paul, "My son." (Part 1, Chapter 6 : 141)

It is very obvious to the reader that the mother is also undergoing bewilderment and complex emotions for her son.

### **Selfless Love of Mother**

A mother’s love and concern for her son is very well illustrated in the novel through various scenes. A mother’s love, in general,

is selfless, and we find Mrs. Morel's love to be selfless too. She does not have any expectations from her son. The only thing that is uppermost in her mind is the well-being and happiness of her son Paul. Even when Mrs. Morel is suffering from cancer, and bearing enormous physical pain, she is concerned about the wellbeing of her son. She hides and downplays her pain so as not to frighten Paul when she says,

“It was yesterday it began” she answered submissively.

“Pains”

“Yes; but not more than I've had at home. I believe Dr. Ansell is an alarmist.” (Lawrence, D.H. 434)

It was Paul's sister Annie who tells Paul the truth about their mother's tremendous suffering.

“The pain she had yesterday – I never saw anybody suffer like it!” (435)

This behaviour of Mrs. Morel is typical of an Indian mythological mother who hiding her suffering from her children.

### **Quest for True Love**

Though Lawrence sold his novel to his publisher as a novel based on the theme of mother fixation; equally pertinent theme of this novel is Paul's quest for love, his encounter with various shades of love, his dissatisfaction with the love that he encounters, his failure to find a satisfying love relationship and his final realization that the only person who loved him unconditionally was his mother. Paul Morel's journey of life is in fact his journey for the quest for true love. The novel may be referred to as *Bildungsroman* or a “developmental novel” - a novel that traces the psychological development of the protagonist. In *Sons and Lovers* the psychological development includes Paul Morel's progression and experience of various facets of love.

Lawrence famously said “Never trust the teller, trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the

artist who created it.” In *Sons and Lovers* this means the reader should derive the meaning of the novel by interpreting the text and not by being led by the leads that the author or publisher puts up. Interpretation of the “tale” depends upon the culture and the orientation of the reader. *Sons and Lovers* is more about quest for true love and less about mother fixation, though mother fixation is always at the background of the protagonist’s psyche. The first book is devoted to the domestic life of the Morel family, where the conflicts, trails and tribulations of the family relation are shown by D. H. Lawrence. Book II turns the focus to the real protagonist, Paul Morel and the reader is introduced to the autobiographical overtones. Paul is not stagnant in his relationships. He moves on in his journey of life, trying very hard to find stability and true love. Unlike William, he is not the centre of attraction for all the young girls of the mining town. He is rather a recluse, who moves forward alone in his quest for love. First he finds the meaning of love in his relationship with Miriam, and later with Clara. Both are unable to satisfy his thirsty body and soul. His mother is on her death bed, ailing with cancer. She ultimately dies, leaving him forlorn. The novel ends with Paul on his own, turning away from the darkness and walking “towards the city's gold phosphorescence”.

Even after her death, Paul’s mother holds and grips his soul:

“She was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this. And she was gone, intermingled herself. He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her. But no, he would not give in...He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her.” (Part 2, Chapter 15: 420)

### **Journey of Love – Different Shades**

There are many different relationships in this novel, like Fiona Becket said:

“...D.H.Lawrence’s novel mainly talk about relationships... especially the relationship between man and woman...”(Fiona Becket, 134)

What was Paul searching for in his life journey? And why could he not get satisfactory love in his life? Was it only *Oedipus complex* or mother fixation, or was it something beyond that. The notion of love is as old as humanity. In the Hindu Philosophy there are various aspects of love and the supreme kind of love is one in which there is a fusion of physical and spiritual love. Love is a central concept in the novel *Sons and Lovers*, an emotion that the protagonist, Paul explores in various situations, making an effort to find an idealized, fulfilling, satisfying and complete relationship in his life. He is a lost soul, who goes from one relationship to the other in search of total bliss in love, but in the end finds himself utterly alone. Mother’s love is the only satisfying love that he ultimately acknowledges. After his mother’s death, he is despondent and alone.

**Miriam’s love** for Paul is totally spiritual, which is very similar the love of Mira Bai, a 16th century Hindu mystic poet and devotee of Krishna. Incidentally the names Miriam and Mira are very similar, as is their approach to the emotion of love. Mira’s devotional poems indicate that Mira’s love for Krishna, just like Miriam’s love for Paul was totally spiritual. As a child Mira started loving the idol of Krishna and continued her spiritual love throughout her adult life. She wrote many songs about her spiritual love. Mira had the beautiful cosmic vision. She saw Krishna in the tree, in the stone, in the creeper, in the flower, in the bird, in all beings—in everything. Similarly about Miriam, D. H. Lawrence says:

“The tree was dark as a shadow. She lifted her hand impulsively to the flowers: she went forward and touched them in *worship*” (Lawrence, 1951: 190)

Later on Lawrence says “...she walked home slowly, feeling her soul satisfied with the *holiness* of the night”



Mira is celebrated as a poet and has been claimed by the North Indian Hindu tradition of Bhakti saints. She is a romantic in her soul, very similar to Miriam of *Sons and Lovers*, who was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leivers and lived with her parents on their small farm known as Willy Farm. Willy Farm has great natural beauty which is reminiscent of the natural surroundings of Mira's abode. The physical union for her is a kind of sacrifice, as her concept of true love is totally spiritual.

“He felt that she wanted the soul out of his body and not him. All his strength and energy she drew into herself through some channel which united them. She did not want to meet him so that there were two of them man and woman together. She wanted to draw all of him into her..... It felt to her as if she were fingering the very quivering tissue the very protoplasm of life as she heard him. It gave her deepest satisfaction. And in the end it frightened her. There he lay in the white intensity of his search and his voice gradually filled her with fear so level it was almost inhuman as if in a trance.” (Lawrence, 229)

Paul feels uncomfortable with the intensity and spirituality of Miriam's love, because he is not Krishna, the divine being. He is a human and has human needs.

**Clara's love**, on the other hand, is entirely physical, where she does not feel any psychological or spiritual connection with Paul. In Indian Mythology, physical love is not negated, and has its own significance. The physical union of *Radha and Krishna* has been celebrated in the legends as the purest form of love that can even lead to salvation. However, though Clara's love has mere physicality, it does not attain the height where through physicality one attains spirituality. In the land of *Kama Sutra* physical love is as essential for complete fulfillment as divine love. The physical love is the basis for all creation, and hence sacred.

Paul Morel, in his journey towards complete fulfillment, encounters Clara, is attracted towards her physically and

moves forward leaving Miriam behind. His search for real love continues.

“ ... the warmth he felt for Clara drew him away from Miriam” ( Lawrence 343)

True love that Paul is seeking must have an amalgamation of both spiritual and emotional love - a love that has been described in Indian mythology as the ultimate love. In his life Paul fails to achieve that kind of complete love, the ideal love, the ultimate love. In the end he is a dissatisfied and disillusioned man who can think of only one kind of love that is pure and selfless, that is the love for his mother.

In the idealized state, the Indian mythology describes the lover's endeavors to attain the state where the lovers are devoted to each other physically mentally and financially - the Hindi phrase “*tan, man and dhan*” denotes this amalgamation. There is a complete surrender to the lover, and the union is for “*seven lives*”, as Hinduism believes in reincarnation. The level of commitment between lovers transcends this world and goes beyond. Not only in this transcendental life but in all future lives, the lovers commit to each other, devoting themselves to each other unquestioningly, unconditionally, selflessly and devotedly. The physical union has a devotional component as well. Hindu philosophy believes that a complete devotion to love can lead to salvation. Perhaps, this is the kind of love that Paul Morel is searching in his journey of life.

A mother's love is beyond any comparison, it is praised by many poets and philosophers as the most selfless kind of love. Since Paul is unable to achieve the perfect union with any woman – a union that is a perfect fusion of physical and emotional love, he ends up accepting that the only love in this world that is worth aspiring for is a motherly love.

## CONCLUSION

Cultural, religious and psychological dimensions have a deep implication on one's expectations and reactions to the emotion of love. The Eastern cultures, especially Hinduism explored the emotion in various ways. Hinduism emphasizes four ends of life: Kama (love or pleasure), Artha (material possessions), Dharma (moral law or duties), and Moksa (final liberation or salvation). Kama, as one of them, is fundamental term in Hinduism. Like Cupid, Kama, also as a personalized god of love with flower-bow and five flower arrows, sends desire quivering into the heart. Kama, as a Sanskrit noun, denotes the mystical experience within the sphere of love and sex on a divine basis.

Gita describes godly love: "He who hates no living creature; who is loving and compassionate, without selfishness and self-seeking, who holds pain and pleasure equally; who is patient, contented, always loyal, full of self-control and steady determination; who fixes his mind and his reason on me and loves me; he is dear to me" (Gita, Xii. B, 14)

It is clear that the Hindu concept of love is all encompassing, and very difficult to attain. It is very different from the worldly concept of love between a woman and a man. The mortals need perhaps more than a life time to gain the ultimate love, therefore one life is not enough to attain it. In *Sons and Lovers* the life journey of Paul is an endless quest for the same. In the end he only acknowledges his mother's love as the ultimate kind of love.

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