

## EXPLORING AND SCRUTINISING MIND MATRIX: A STUDY OF *SONS AND LOVERS*

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### **Abstract:**

*The beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century marks the beginning of Psychoanalytical fiction. Psychoanalysis has been used by authors to explicitly portray characters mental state. It can also be seen as a justification for weird behaviour of individuals that author has either experienced or observed in his surroundings. Sons and Lovers is an autobiographical novel that presents impressions from the life of Lawrence. D.H. Lawrence has been much influenced by Sigmund Freud and found in Freud's psychoanalytical theory a way to explore the layers of mind through his writings. Lawrence through his characters attempts to present an intricate play of multiple conflicting passions that are results of experiences, hesitations, suffering and trauma that are buried deep down in the subconscious and lies much beneath the realms of conscious surface lives; but has the tendency to influence people surrounding them. This paper attempts to psychoanalytically study the characters of Gertrude and Paul and identify the psychological reason for emotional and physical imbalance of their personalities.*

**Keywords:** *Psychoanalysis, passion, dilemma, trauma.*

### **Introduction:**

Human behaviour is a complicated process an outcome of coordination between conscious, unconscious and subconscious mind. Psychoanalysis is a way to bring out repressed unconscious experiences and thoughts to the level of consciousness. Sigmund Freud an Austrian physician came up with a model of human mind after an encounter with his colleague's patient whose physical suffering was a result of mental trauma. According to Freud the three layers of mind are:

Conscious: This is where our current thoughts, feelings, and focus live; Preconscious (sometimes called the subconscious): This is the home of everything we can recall or retrieve from our memory;

Unconscious: At the deepest level of our minds resides a repository of the processes that drive our behavior, including primitive and instinctual desires. (McLeod, 2013).

Later on Freud further refined his theory and put forward a more comprehensive model in which three regions of previous model get intertwined and are collectively presented through individual's behaviour. This model further suggests three metaphorical parts of mind:

**Id:** The id operates at an unconscious level and focuses solely on instinctual drives and desires. Two biological instincts make up the id, according to Freud: eros, or the instinct to survive that drives us to engage in life-sustaining activities, and thanatos, or the death instinct that drives destructive, aggressive, and violent behavior.

Ego: The ego acts as both a conduit for and a check on the id, working to meet the id's needs in a socially appropriate way. It is the most tied to reality and begins to develop in infancy;

Superego: The superego is the portion of the mind in which morality and higher principles reside, encouraging us to act in socially and morally acceptable ways. (McLeod, 2013)

Freud came forward with the point that these three parts are in constant conflict because each represent a different primary need. Most of the people in world are able to establish a balance between three and take decision considering the best thing to choose as per society norms; however, anyone who fails to strike this balance faces challenges and dilemmas in order to live a happy and satisfied life. Greek myth of Oedipus fits well in Freud's psychoanalytical theory as both presents the assumption that a bulk of human activity is governed by unconscious drives; for Freud has understood that story of Oedipus subtly represents inner voice which is very basic to human nature.

Lawrence through *Sons and Lovers* portrayed England's shift from Victorian to Edwardian age and this shift was far away from smooth as the onset of modernisation has come at the expense of happiness and psychological instability of younger generation. Novel finely presents identity formation and self realisation process by placing individual in a detailed environment. *Sons and Lovers* stresses upon the point that freedom is not only restricted by society but also by inherited traits. *Sons and Lovers* is considered one of the finely observed and moving works of Lawrence. Novel drew much of the criticism because of its aesthetic control as the flow of novel is interrupted by Lawrence attempts to manifest thought process of characters. Mark Schorer believes that "psychological tension, disrupts the form of the novel" (167).

#### **Psychoanalytical Study of Gertrude Morel:**

Gertrude Coppard Morel, the first protagonist of novel is a deeply moral, religious and sophisticated intellectual lady. The very first chapter of novel presents anguish of Gertrude on losing her individuality and authenticity when she ponders: "And looking ahead, the prospect of her life made her feel as if she were buried alive... She seemed so far away from her girlhood, she wondered if it were the same person walking heavily up the back garden at the Bottoms, as had run so lightly on the breakwater at Sheerness, ten years before. "What have I to do with it!" she said to herself. "What have I to do with all this? Even the child I am going to have! It doesn't seem as if I were taken into account." Sometimes life takes hold of one, carries the body along, accomplishes one's history, and yet is not real, but leaves one's self as it were slurred over" (Lawrence 14). Judith Arcana owes "wholesale mother blaming" criticism in *Sons and Lovers* to our culture at large which is tied to "Oedipal mother-blaming". Lydia Blanchard's portrayal of Gertrude as: "a woman trapped in a marriage she does not want, hemmed in by a world that allows her no positive outlets for her talents and energies, who must live a vicarious existence through her sons" (Blanchard 146).

*Sons and Lovers* explicitly presents Mrs. Morel as stringent and dull but Lawrence justifies the reason for Gertrude's weird behaviour to her struggle of being born to a cold, unsympathetic parenter domineering father: "George Coppard: he is described as "proud in his bearing, handsome, and rather bitter; who preferred theology in reading, and who drew near in sympathy only to one man, the Apostle Paul; who was harsh in government, and in familiarity ironic; who ignored all sensuous pleasure" (Lawrence 18). Mind works in its own strange ways though Gertrude idealised her mother and "hated her father's overbearing manner towards her gentle, humorous, kindly-souled mother" (Lawrence 1516), still she unconsciously become a flag bearer of her father's emotional legacy: "She was a puritan, like her father, high-minded, and really stern" (Lawrence 18). So overall blame for the traumas and displacement Morels suffered because of Gertrude is a product of the conditioning she received in repressive patriarchal culture which subtly made her something she herself has hated in her father. Lawrence in the beginning of the novel has attempted towards the traumatic experiences Gertrude has undergone which has left her

shattered and torn. There is a mention of John Field, her first love whom she could not marry because of financial constraints and who later married an old lady for property but author affirms Field was never forgotten: "And still, Mrs. Morel preserved John Field's bible. . . . [She] kept his memory intact in her heart, for her own sake. To her dying day, for thirty-five years, she did not speak of him" (Lawrence 17).

Gertrude has piled up so much within her silence that her depression becomes a key towards understanding psychological problems of her sons. Gertrude chose Walter Morel as her husband as she found in him something she (and her father) lacked: "the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed from off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her" (Lawrence 18). So, in an attempt to fill her void through this spontaneous, emotional and expressive individual she married him, but Gertrude was completely shattered to know that Walter has lied to her and house or furniture nothing belonged to him this further heightened her disappointment and her last hope for reconciliation is shattered: "'Gertrude sat white and silent. She was her father now. . . . She said very little to her husband, but her manner had changed towards him. Something in her proud, honorable soul had crystallised out hard as rock" (Lawrence 21). The continuous emotional and mental trauma broke her completely she became cold as her soul is crystallised.

Lawrence through his texts has been successful in bringing to life cold characters whose souls are hardened and crystallized as a result of emotional trauma. Mrs. Morel's proud, unfathomable personality is a mask she used to hide her feeling of rejection that has completely shattered her and look forward to her sons as a ray of hope who can reconcile her soul by bringing back that lost pride. The condition introduces much of Lawrence's fiction which set that mind may look in for option to fill the gaps created by humiliation and emotional breakdown but another person can never fill in the gaps. On the contrary finding such resort in other person leads to downfall of relation and makes the other person involved deficient facing similar confusion and disappointment because of failure in providing relief to the traumatic mind. Gertrude's dependence on William and later Paul has similar aftermaths on their personal and social life which spoilt their lives as both attempted to soothe the tormented soul of their mother. Gertrude lost contact with emotional and physical life and therefore failed to affiliate her sons' passionate life with other women.

### **Psychoanalytical Study of Paul:**

Paul Morel is third child of Gertrude and protagonist of the novel. Paul resembles Lawrence in a sense that both could not break through the dominating relation of their mothers. Paul like his mother suffers from loss of self by remaining cold towards passion. Paul has inherited Gertrude's Sorrow, shame, rejection and embarrassment. Mrs. Morel notes: "the peculiar heaviness of its [the baby's] eyes, as if it were trying to understand something that was pain. . . . It had blue eyes like her own, but its look was heavy, steady, as if it had realised something that had stunned some point of its soul" (Lawrence 50). Mrs. Morel christened her son as Paul, which resonates her father's resemblance with Apostle Paul "who ignored all sensuous pleasure." The mother thus through name bestows on him her own narrow minded and deprived legacy. Incidence of Paul breaking Annie's Doll and then performing doll sacrifice ceremony brings to light Paul's psychological sense of guilt, a consequence of cold attitude of Gertrude. Michael Eigen describes this incident as a psychological process:

A kind of psychic explosion takes place in which one lets go as fully as possible. In the other's survival, otherness is born (or reborn) and the self-quickens. In such an instance fury or rage is deeper than hate. . . . The baby's wrath plays a role in exploding fantasy and reaching the realness of himself and others. An explosion clears the air. The discovery that the other continues to be alive in spite of one's fantasy of destruction creates or ratifies a joyous shock of difference. One is liberated by the other's survival and aliveness. (Eigen 17980)

Annie blames Paul for breaking her doll out of hatred but that was not the case the doll broke accidentally as it could not survive his intense passion and furious bodily assertion when he was jumping on sofa Winnicott describes presentation of doll breaking as symbolic of Gertrude failure to help Paul get through emotional and physical needs as an individual which results in Paul as a sadist drawing pleasure from pain of which doll burning ceremony is an evocative example. Paul has to believe that his mother is jolly and fulfilled as knowing opposite; something that text explicitly reflects is intolerable for him. Paul's psychic world like Gertrude is so brittle that he could not stand strong passion. Paul has received experience of emptiness and detachment from physical life of Gertrude; something that failed him in establishing relation with Miriam and Clara. Paul battles to free himself from mirroring his mother and become conscious of his authentic self. Lawrence through *Sons and Lovers* rejects the identification with the mother's shame and depression without denying maternal ties.

In the end, Paul feeding Gertrude morphine milk to free her from the pain her heart and soul bears as she herself won't let her diminish for the sake of her son. Though an act of almost unbearable empathy as letting her means like committing suicide for Paul and watching her die: "It was almost as if he were agreeing to die also" (Lawrence 436). However, the conclusion of the novel leaves Paul on the crossroad of deathlike state of hopelessness. "The real agony was that he had nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to say, and was nothing" (Lawrence 454). But towards the verge of this deathlike nothingness the thought of his mother brought him back to his senses and the fog towards darkness is removed when this thought flashes in the mind of Paul: "But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly" (Lawrence 454). However, two contradicting forces acting simultaneously in the end makes it ambiguous but this darkest thought of nothingness brings Paul back to his senses liberating his mind and soul from the world of his mother and embracing father's world. As in profound despair Paul finds seed of faith and discovers a bit of self. In an object relational study of religious faith, John McDargh asserts, "Faith is integrally related to the development of the capacity to be alone" (81), which includes the "capacity to tolerate dependency" (83) and "the capacity to tolerate ambivalence" (92). Lawrence's fiction dramatizes the exquisite struggle involved in developing the capacity to tolerate dependency, ambivalence, and aloneness.

### **Conclusion:**

The works of Lawrence are reaction against contemporary civilization and relied much on right personal relationships. He expresses vision of his brain through his texts. The most important take away of novel is that suppression of any emotion or experience willingly or unwillingly not only influences the individual but also mars proper development of his surroundings. In fact, speaking out or an out flow of emotions can protect oneself from crystallization of soul something that happened to Gertrude and then unconsciously got transmitted to William and Paul who failed to live a happy passionate life in spite of the fact that they never faced rejection or humiliation like their mother. Cowan points that: "There is little question that despite the dangers of the denouement and engulfment posed by the symbiotic merger with his mother, the imago of the nurturant and supportive mother was well established in Lawrence's internal representational world" (Cowan 94). The psychoanalytical deconstruction of novel clearly depicts that one cannot fill the void in self by depending on others and any such attempt creates the same void in the person which is confusing and makes the whole relation that inhibits the natural development process of individual. Such relation not only drains emotionally but also has physical consequences quite evidently portrayed in the text by the character of Paul who not only suffers from emotional trauma but also suffered physically. According to Fatima Shaikh:



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. (Shaikh 231)

However, it seems that going through the emotional and physical traumatic events is a destiny in human life but what matters is the determination to come out as a winner breaking the shackles that holds you back towards darkness. The last scene of *Sons and Lovers* gives a clear message that faith and optimism can always bring anyone back to life like Paul.

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