



## FEMININE DOMINATION IN

### D. H. LAWRENCE'S *SONS AND LOVERS*

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## ABSTRACT

*The present paper deals with the feminine domination over man which is one of the main themes discussed in D. H. Lawrence's fiction, particularly in his Sons and Love. It shows the tools of female domination and its destructive impact on male characters. The present paper is composed of three sections. The first section briefly introduces D. H. Lawrence's definition and concept of female domination. The second section attempts to analyze the nature of female domination in Sons and Lovers, its tools and its problematic consequences such as male humiliation, depression, submissiveness and male inferiority and subordination to it. The third section deals with the symbols and images which are artistically employed by the novelist to enhance and cement his theme of female domination. The third section deals with the symbols and images which are artistically employed by the novelist to enhance and cement his theme of female domination. The paper ends with a concise conclusion that sums up what has been discussed in the body of the paper.*

D. H. Lawrence states:

The great relation, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary. And the relation between man and woman will change forever, and will forever be the new central clue to human life. It is the relation itself which is the quick and the central clue to life, not the man nor the woman, nor the children that result from the relationship, as a contingency. It is no use thinking you can put a stamp on the relation between



man and woman, to keep it in the status quo. You cannot. You might as well try to put a stamp on the rainbow or the rain.

D. H. Lawrence deals with various themes in his novels. Most of these themes recur in every book of his, but the most recurrent one is the man-woman relationship. This male-female relationship is considered the pivot of his philosophy which everything else is based on or arranged around. Lawrence is an attacker against the female domination in this dual relationship. He calls for an equilibrium in this relation between man and woman. The man has to respect the womanhood in the woman, and the woman has to respect the manhood in the man. That is every party has to respect the otherness of the other so that the relationship remains prosperous and unproblematic. He is deeply concerned with theorizing and dramatizing his vision of this relationship all his life and all his novella and almost all his writings. Thus, we always see his characters weave complicated relationships and are entangled in baffling situations.

He attacked savagely the hypocrisies and false sense of superiority in the civilized woman. He is considered as a social reformer as he always seeks through his novels a new unconventional relationship beyond the constraints and conventions of society. He had not only represented the theme of feminine domination, but he even commented on it, studied it and analyzed it. He portrays his female characters struggling to free themselves from the shackles and demands their female partners impose on them. He wrote that this relation would be his life's work:

The Whole course of life now lies in the relation between man and woman, between Adam and Eve. In this relation we live and die.

He is concerned with establishing a new relationship between man and woman that depends on respect of the other's individuality. This newness and novelty of Lawrence caused his severe criticism.

Lawrence believes that to achieve a healthy relationship between man and woman, both must treat each other as opposites, as equals, as similar but different. The two opposites must keep

some balance in their relationship so that no one dominate the other. According to Lawrence, there are three kinds of relations between living things. The first type is when in the two parties, each party seeks its own in the other and denies the other party any right, and then it is a fight to death, a failure. The second type is when in the relationship there is one party who yields utterly to the other, then this is called sacrifice, and it is also a kind of death, a failure. Lawrence does not defend these two extremes of relationships, rather he attacks them and is sure that they inevitably come to fiasco, for they lack the sense of balance. Lawrence believes in the relationship in which each party respects the otherness of the other. He is for the divine otherness and the divine individuality as well, and he is against merging and mingling. He is against that any party exercises “bullying” on the other, and against merging into the other. He does detest the idea of being identical to one’s partner, but similarly he is against the idea of one party being superior to the other. Lawrence says:

This is, however, the third thing, which is neither sacrifice nor fight to death: when each seeks only the true relatedness to the other. Each must be true to himself, herself, his own manhood, her own womanhood, and let the relationship work out of itself

Lawrence stresses the significance of the relationship itself, saying:

Men and women will be forever subtly and changingly related to one another; no need to yoke them with any “bond” at all. The only morality is to have man true to his manhood, woman to her womanhood, and let the relationship form itself in all honor. For it is, to each, life itself.

Lawrence deplores and criticizes the possessiveness in man-woman relationship. He thinks that the desire for possessiveness is generally found in woman, though it may also be found in man. Lawrence believes that the civilized woman is a great threat to man. She tries to bully and dominate him depriving him of his individuality and masculinity as will be shown in the second section of this paper. He sees man as the victim in the process of creation and destruction and recreation, as man is the instrument of creation, but he has to be devitalized when he has served his immediate end. He denounces the possessive woman as she robs man of his instinctive life. Ramji Lall comments:



In Lawrence's view the conflict between man and woman arises from the civilized woman's having become desperate antagonist of man, drawing from him his greatest possession-his manhood, his masculinity- and feminizing him and bringing him under the control of her will.

In Aaron's rod, Lawrence makes one of the characters say, speaking of woman in general:

I hate her, when she knows, and when she wills. I hate her when she will make of me that which serves her desire. She may love me, she may be soft and kind to me, she may give her life to me. But why? Only because I am hers.

Violating the otherness of the other leads to failure in the relationship between man and woman. It also leads to frustration and spiritual death. According to Lawrence, relation, in which the partners treat each other as two equal and different partners, will be the ideal relationship. In such a case, no one will dominate the other and both will achieve self-fulfillment through a "unity in separateness".

#### **Female Domination in Sons and Lovers:**

Female domination in Lawrence's Sons and Lovers is represented in the relationships between the central female characters and their male counterparts. It takes the aspect of feminine powerful action versus masculine submissive reaction.

In portraying the female characters in his Sons and Lovers, Lawrence idealizes them in order to prove their superiority to the male characters. This is truer in the mother Gertrude Morel than any other female character. Mrs. Morel is the central character in the novel, who embodies the over possessive woman. She leaves no space for others in his family to exercise their choice. She is delineated as a hard unbending woman whose love ruins the life of her sons and destroys her husband.

Demanding a higher standard of culture and despising the husband seems to be the facet that has colored women's image in the late Victorian age. Women sought a new dignity and even potential freedom for themselves as women. As a matter of fact, for Mr. Morel, a miner married to a woman with higher social standing, home is not the place where he can freely rest and dictate as the master of the house as the patriarchal idea of home usually presumes.

On the contrary, he is the most isolated figure in the house. He feels “the only real rest to be when he was out of the house”. (p. 25)

It is because her sense of superiority due to her background that she could not be content with the little she has in her conjugal life. She tries to reform her husband according to her standards of life, but she destroys him. She exploits her conservative education and her marital state in her treatment of her husband. Descending from a conservative educated family, she despises her husband. She remains detached and alien to her surrounding, quite unable to see the values of the working class environment. She wanted her husband to be that he ought to be. So in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. She comes from the famous Coppard family and she is conscious all the time that she has married beneath herself.

A short while after her marriage, she discovers about the social economic position she put herself in. The poverty of a miner’s life is too much to her. She has to do all the household chores herself. She finds that Mr. Morel’s profession is ugly and undignified. She is hateful to his paucity of interest in intellectual things. The life of drudgery leaves her little time for the intellectual activities such as reading and writing which she likes so much. The economic situation of the family often compels her to borrow and depend on the charity of the neighbors. The values of Mrs. Morel are too hollow. She thinks herself superior to other women in the neighborhood. Thus, she strives hard to reform her husband, Mr. Morel.

*“The pity was she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be. So in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him” (p. 56).*

In order to prove her superiority, she deliberately discusses religion, philosophy and politics with the clergyman. Mrs. Morel’s love is too possessive. Her love for her sons has crippling effect on the sons. She could not stand her sons to be independent of her and turn to other women for fulfillment. It is her possessive love that frustrates William’s desire to achieve an adequate relationship with Lily and Paul’s love for Miriam. Mrs. Morel does not hide contempt of Lily and advises William against marrying her. Paul has the same dilemma. Mrs. Morel wants to hold Paul’s soul his thought and his affection. She is actively hostile to



Miriam for she fears that her love might draw Paul out of her range. She is afraid that Miriam would leave her no room, not a bit of room.

It is very sad that Mrs. Morel fails to realize the principle of polarity in her relationship with her husband or her sons. She is too bullying and possessive. She fails to realize that in order to achieve a successful relationship, the divine otherness of the other has to be respected. She also does not understand that her husband and her sons have their own personalities with individual emotional requirements. All these factors lead to disintegration and disharmony in the whole family.

The dominating possessive nature of Miriam is clearly revealed in her relationship with her counterpart male character, Paul. She wishes to possess the soul of Paul and Mrs. Morel is afraid that she will leave nothing of Paul for her. She feels insecure and that leads her to have a possessive attitude towards things in life. She loves everything as if she wants to possess it. She is unable to love things at an ordinary level. She seems to suckle the soul out of things. This attitude of possessiveness is one of the reasons which cause failure to her relationship with Paul. She fails in her relation with Paul because the identity of each other is not respected and not allowed to flower. She, with her over-possessiveness, does not allow Paul to keep his own identity intact.

While Miriam wants to possess the soul of Paul, Clara tries to possess his body. That is Miriam's love for Paul is spiritually possessive, but Clara's love is physically possessive. This makes their relationship fruitless. She fails in her relationship because of her over sensually possessiveness. She satisfied Paul's body but she is unable to satisfy his soul. Thus their relationship remains too trivial and superficial, for Paul never feels the tenderness which a man normally feels for the woman he loves. She is not the woman who can "keep his soul steady". Thus, in the end, he hands her back to her husband.

**Symbols and Images in Sons and Lovers:**

D. H. Lawrence makes an extensive use of symbols and images in his *Sons and Lovers*. A proper understanding of these symbols and images leads to a better understanding of the novel.

The ash tree has been effectively used by D. H. Lawrence in the fourth chapter to describe the sinister and dark aspects of life in the Morel family. There is a sinister side to the symbol of ash tree. In the Irish folklore, ash trees have shadows that damage crops. The ash tree gives the feeling that something evil and dangerous is happening or will happen. It creates an evil atmosphere. It is symbolic of the dark, mysterious forces of nature which are the foreboders of tragedy in human life. It is symbolic of the discords and disharmony that exist between the husband and wife in the Morel family. It gives the children the sense of terror. The tense anxious atmosphere in the family is intensified by the shrieking and crying of the ash tree, and the wind and darkness in front of the house. In the sympathetic use of natural background, nature often becomes almost symbolical. The ash tree becomes a symbol of the inner terror of the children who shriek and moan inwardly, so the tree shrieks and moans at night as if it were an externalization of the terror of the children or a prophecy of approaching doom. It is symbolic of the father's violent, which dominates the household and instills a fundamental fear in the children. It also prophesies the future doom which is to assail the Morel family:

"In front of the house was a huge ash-tree. The west wind, sweeping from Derbyshire, caught the houses with full force, and the tree shrieked again. Morel liked it.

"It's music," he said. "It sends me to sleep."

But Paul and Arthur and Annie hated it. To Paul, it became almost demoniacal noise. The winter of their first year in the new house, their father was very bad. The children played in the street, on the brim of the wide dark valley, until eight o'clock. Then they went to bed. Their mother sat sewing below. Having such a great space in front of the house gave the children a feeling of night, of vastness, and of terror. This terror came in from the shrieking of the tree and the anguish of the home discord"(p.84). In the very beginning of the novel, Mrs. Morel has a quarrel with her husband, in an outrage of anger and she is hit with a drawer which is flung at her. The wound bleeds profusely and two drops of blood fall on the hair of Paul who is in the hands of Mrs. Morel at the moment. The blood is not cleared away but it

gets soaked into the scalp of Paul. This small incident is of much symbolical significance in the novel. It is pregnant with symbolic levels. It symbolizes the disillusioned and tattering relationship of the husband and wife and the subsequent reversal of attitude of Mrs. Morel towards her husband and the ultimate substitution of her sons in place of her husband. The scene is also symbolic of the odd contract of souls between the mother and son which is sealed with a blood tie.

The Swing at Willey Farm is symbolic of the 'love-hate' relationship that is characteristic of 'Paul-Miriam' relationship. The swing moves backward and forward, and, similarly, Paul loves Miriam for one thing but suddenly hates her for another thing. His hatred for her is also transitory and is soon replaced with love. Thus, the movement of the swing symbolizes the two extremes of their attitude towards each other i.e. love for one moment and hate the other moment. D. S. Dalal comments:

*"In all, their relationship is marked by the alteration between love and hate which is symbolized by the swing that advances to a point and then moves backward and so on but it makes no progress."*

One of the key events that symbolizes Paul's hatred for the dominant possessive woman is the sacrifice of Annie's doll, Arabella in Paul's childhood, in the chapter "The Young Life of Paul". It is the first episode in which Paul shows apparently motiveless violence:

"Let's make a sacrifice of Arabella," he said. "Let's burn her." She was horrified, yet rather fascinated. She wanted to see what the boy would do. He made an altar of bricks, pulled some of the shavings out of Arabella's body, put the waxen fragments into the hollow face, poured on a little paraffin, and set the whole thing alight. He watched with wicked satisfaction the drops of wax melt off the broken forehead of Arabella, and drop like sweat into the flame. So long as the stupid big doll burned, he rejoiced in silence. At the end, he poked among the embers with a stick, fished out the arms and legs, all blackened, and smashed them under stones.

*"There is the sacrifice of Missis Arabella," he said. "An' I'm glad there is nothing left of her."(82-83)*



This event shows a powerful anger against the mother. The word sacrifice reveals the act of desecration against a figure who should be revered. John Ramji Lal states that this is apparent in the building of an altar, the title "Missis Arabella," and the aura of "wicked satisfaction" that emanates from defying a taboo. The body of the mother is, in fantasy, dismembered and destroyed, disintegrating in a flash of fiery consuming anger, and liquefied into the wax and sweat of elemental fluids. When already blackened and "dead," the fragments are retrieved with aggressive phallic curiosity by means of a poking stick, and then further pulverized into nothingness, not "with" stones but "under" stones, suggesting both a final horror that cannot be looked at and the gravestones that cover the dead, which in turn have in their origins and impetus of aggression against the dead.

### **Conclusion:**

The present paper deals with the theme of the female domination in D.H.Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. This theme recurs in almost all his novels. It paper discusses Lawrence's own concept of the female domination and its destructive consequences on man in the man-woman relationship. It is considered the pivot of his philosophy. He is attacker against it. Then, it is studied and dramatized in Sons and Lover which is discussed in the second part of this paper. It is analyzed through a number of relationships, with special reference to Paul-Meriam and Paul-Loerke relations who are the main characters. The third part of the paper is dedicated for the main symbols and images that are used by the novelist to enhance his theme of female domination. Then, the paper comes to its conclusion.

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